

# **Transcultural Identity and Bhutanese Youth in Refugee Community Organizations**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2020

This study sheds light on the development of transcultural identity for Generation 1.5 Bhutanese refugees, the role organizations play in the process, and the agency adolescents and young adults bring to countering dominant narratives about immigrants in general and refugees in particular. Most of the participants in this qualitative case study research were born in refugee camps in Nepal and moved to the U.S. during childhood or adolescence. All of the participants have been involved in at least one of two refugee community organizations (RCOs) in Pittsburgh, the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP) or Children of Shangri-Lost (COSL).

In this study, I used interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis to address the following research questions:

- What challenges and opportunities do participants face in the development of transcultural identity?
- What role do organizations, including refugee community organizations (RCOs), play in the process?

Using Seidman's (2006) three-part interview structure, I conducted multiple interviews with each of the five participants regarding a) past experience, b) present involvements, and c) future plans. I also participated in or observed events at BCAP and COSL in addition to analyzing website, social media, and other text and images.

For my first question on transcultural identity, acculturation models developed by Berry (1997) and colleagues (2006, 2011) as well as Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) provided a useful framework for understanding/articulating the different responses to engaging with a new and unfamiliar culture. Adolescent and young adult identity is not worked through in a vacuum; social organizations and institutions play a significant role. In addressing this topic for the second research question, I relied on Coleman's (1988) conception of social capital as well as Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth.

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## **Abbreviations**

IOM	International Office of Migration (sometimes written as OIM, or Office of International Migration)
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
RCO	Refugee Community Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees
USCIS	United States Citizenship and Immigration Services

## Preface

Like (hopefully) most dissertation writers, I had a great deal of support during this process and would like to briefly thank several people.

First, to the young adults who participated in this study, many, many thanks for your time and your insights. In addition to these five extraordinary people, others in the Bhutanese community offered their time and resources to help me make this study the best it could be. Particular thanks to Khara Timsina, who brought me into BCAP as a volunteer and who has supported my academic work. I also owe debts of gratitude to Bishnu Timsina, Upendra Dahal, and Diwas Timsina for their insights and shared experience. There are many others in the community, and I will undoubtedly forget some, but I also want to thank the Acharya, Khatiwada, Uprety, and Rai families, my first friends in the Bhutanese community, as well as the many volunteers and students of all ages in these organizations.

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My first class at the University of Pittsburgh, Gender and Education, was taught by my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Maureen Porter. My last course in the doctoral program, Gender and International Development, was also taught by Dr. Porter. I am a better writer for having her

courses bookend my coursework sequence. In her classes, I wrote term papers, to be sure, but I also wrote one-act plays, opinion pieces, personal essays, and several variations on maps. I am a better writer and thinker for her.

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Finally, this is for Mom and Dad, Anna and Daniel Dawkins.



## 1.0 Introduction

While conducting fieldwork for this study, I attended a naturalization ceremony for one of the participants who arrived in the U.S. as a refugee from Bhutan. Like the other participants in this study, he is a Generation 1.5 refugee – born in another country (for him and those in the pages to follow, a refugee camp in Nepal) and relocated to the U.S. during childhood or adolescence (Suarez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015). He is a volunteer with a refugee community organization, where he assists with teaching citizenship material to community elders. Today is his moment to become a citizen.

As a minor, Niraj<sup>1</sup> did not have to take the citizenship test. Once his parents became citizens approximately five years after arrival, they were able to apply for his citizenship. One year, multiple forms, and \$1,200 in fees later, he was permitted to take the citizenship oath and formally become a citizen.

This politically aware young man chose not to wear the dress shirt and tie his father had provided. He compromised with a button-down shirt, beneath which he wore a T-shirt that read, “Build bridges, not walls,” a local rallying cry for social justice in Pittsburgh, known as the city of bridges. When we rose for the national anthem, he smiled and sardonically whispered, “Should we kneel?” But he rose quickly and solemnly placed his hand over his heart as the anthem played.

The naturalization ceremony, the first I attended since the election of 2016, began with a video, “The Faces of America,” with images of Ellis Island black and white images of hopeful,

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<sup>1</sup> Names and other identifying details are changed, per Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements.

smiling, new (mostly white) arrivals. Over black and white stills of individuals, families, and crowded ships arriving at Ellis Island appeared statements attributed to immigrants both famous and unknown:

*“I am grateful to give back to my adopted country.”*

*“America is my peaceful refuge.”*

*“Whatever I have dreamed, America has always fulfilled.”*

A U.S. flag then took over the screen, fading from black and white to color to mark the transition to the present. The video continued with smiling families, soon transitioning to images of soldiers and government monuments. Several images featured earnest looking newcomers taking their oath, flags in hand, interspersed with photos of national monuments, including the White House, the Supreme Court, and the Lincoln Memorial. Nature scenes from national parks dominated, interspersed with inspirational quotes from new citizens. The images faded back to sepia, ending with a mother, father, and child standing, facing Ellis Island.

The speaker, director of the local U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office, rose to say a few words. He acknowledged the unique contributions immigrants have made to the fabric of the U.S. He spoke of his own family, including his immigrant ancestors and his appreciation of his family history and cultural heritage. He emphasized that when new citizens take the oath, in becoming Americans they do not give up that heritage. He encouraged those in the audience to share their stories with the larger group. When no one volunteered, he encouraged all of us to share our stories as we moved forward throughout the day.

He then introduced a video message from President Trump, who delivered an entirely different message, beginning with a stern invocation of the privilege immigrants receive in becoming U.S. citizens: “There is no higher honor.” He, too, invoked the image of families,

speaking of Americans united as brothers and sisters, and stating forcefully, “America is our home; you have no other.” After this dismissal of new citizens’ personal histories and national identities (as well as ignoring the concept of dual citizenship), he invoked the heart: “We share one American heart – and one American destiny.” In President Trump’s vision, transactional obligations accompany citizenship:

You now share the obligation to teach our values to others, to help newcomers assimilate to our way of life, and uplift America by living according to its highest ideals of self-governance and its highest standards. All Americans are your brothers and sisters. And each of us must do our part to keep America safe, strong, and free. America is our home, we have no other. You have pledged allegiance to America. And when you give your love and loyalty to America, she returns her love and loyalty to you.

He maintained a stern visage throughout the speech, and concluded with the requisite “God bless you, and God bless America” (Associated Press, 2017).

Then we watched another video montage, with a vocalist singing “America the Beautiful” to images of Mt. Rushmore, soldiers, and new citizens taking their oaths in front of beautiful outdoor scenes as well as indoors. We saw soldiers again, along with civilians holding U.S. flags. And more flags – still images of flags and of racially and ethnically diverse women, men, and children waving flags. The Statue of Liberty appeared once again. The phrase “We the People” came onto the screen. More national park service sites appeared, and the second video concluded with the final words of the song.

Niraj, along with another refugee from the camps in Nepal and with immigrants from Mexico, China, Syria, and other countries then stood in line alphabetically according to nation of origin, repeated the oath of allegiance, and received their citizenship certificates and flags.

## **1.1 Refugees Are Welcome Here – Unless They Aren’t: Framing the Study**

I began with Niraj’s citizenship ceremony because it is emblematic of the mixed welcome that new immigrants, including refugees, experience upon arrival. On the one hand, the USCIS staff who hosted the ceremony were welcoming in their words and actions. On the other hand, the sitting president’s words cast the United States as charitable in “giving” citizenship that comes at the price of obligation. In between, a video montage incorporated text and subtext that was both welcoming, with images of diverse people finding themselves “home,” as well as transactional, with statements emphasizing giving back to one’s new country.

The participants in this study – Arjun, Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep, as well as Niraj – provide a window into the experiences of Generation 1.5 refugees, born in one country and migrating to another in childhood (Arjun, Niraj, and Kiran) or adolescence (Manisha and Pradeep). In addition to their status as Generation 1.5 Bhutanese refugees, the participants also have in common their involvement in local Bhutanese refugee community organizations (RCOS). In order to explore their experience with refugee resettlement, I frame this dissertation with the following questions:

What challenges and opportunities do participants face in the development of transcultural identity?

What role do organizations, including refugee community organizations (RCOs), play in the process?

I rely on several concepts and distinguishing foci, outlined in the following sections.

### 1.1.1 Generation 1.5

Immigrant adults, including refugees, who resettle in another country are considered first generation. Their children are often referred to as second generation immigrants. However, the experience of children who are born to immigrant parents after migration are quite different from those of children who experience migration with their parents. For the latter, Rumbaut (2012) coined the term Generation 1.5. He acknowledges that even the more specific term of Generation 1.5 has limitations:

Primary-school-age children (ages 6-12) typically arrive having learned to read and write in the mother tongue at schools abroad, but their education is completed in the host country; classic “1.5’ers,” they are most likely to adapt flexibly between two worlds and to become fluent bilinguals. Adolescents (ages 13-17 at arrival) may or may not come with their families of origin and either attend secondary schools after arrival, or, in the older ages, may go directly into the workforce; their experiences and adaptive outcomes are closer to the first generation than to the native-born second generation.

The limitations of the 1.5 category are reflected in the variety of definitions, with researchers assigning age ranges for Generation 1.5. Some say Generation 1.5 are children who leave their home country at the age of 10 or above (Ellis & Goodwin-White, 2006), while others say they arrive at or before age 12 (Suarez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015). In earlier work, Rumbaut (2004) broke down the Generation 1.5 category even further, defining Generation 1.75 as those who arrive before starting school (age 5 or younger) and therefore closer to the second generation, and Generation 1.25 as adolescent arrivals (ages 13 through 17). The latter, he argues, have experiences closer to those of the adults in their family.

Others avoid numbering systems altogether. Suarez-Orozco makes a distinction between children of immigrants (second generation) and immigrant children (those who experienced migration and the transition to a new homeland as children or adolescents). In spite of the utility of the different decimal categories, I follow the lead of scholars who apply the term Generation 1.5 to all of those who arrive during childhood. Generation 1.5 has “stuck” as a category to describe the range of young people who migrate after spending some number of years in their home countries. The participants in this study technically fit the classic definition of Generation 1.5 or the 1.25 category. Upon arrival, they ranged in age from 10 (Arjun and Niraj) to 17 (Pradeep), with other ages in between (Shankar and Manisha). (See Chapter 3, Table 4 for participant demographics, including age at arrival.) However, as we will see in Chapter 4, those who arrived at an older age experienced resettlement very similarly to their Generation 1.5 peers, in spite of Rumbaut’s assertion that their experience would be closer to that of adults.

### **1.1.2 Refugee Community Organizations**

Refugee community organizations (RCOs) are not refugee-serving organizations like the resettlement agencies that assist families with the transition. Rather, they are organizations founded *by* refugees in order to advocate for their communities in myriad ways, including with immediate needs and cultural maintenance, among others (Griffiths Sigona, & Zetters, 2005; Trieu & Vang, 2015). The participants in this study are involved in one or both of two local Bhutanese RCOs: the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP) and Children of Shangri-Lost (COSL).

RCOs provide resources and support for the communities of which they are a part as well as for the host society, bolstering the image of refugees as agents and resources rather than objects

of pity or derision (Gold, 1992). To borrow Putnam's (2000) language on social capital, RCOs provide intra-community *bonds* as well as *bridges* to host and other communities. For both organizations in this study, bonding occurs through events such as cultural celebrations, women's empowerment groups, and youth soccer teams. RCOs also help to create bridges between the refugee community and other institutions and organizations, for example, by teaching citizenship classes and facilitating meetings with neighborhood governing boards. RCOs' simultaneous foci on supporting community members' access to resources and navigating connections to host society institutions benefit both refugee and other communities in resettlement locations.

RCOs also experience and sometimes even present challenges. Like other non-profits, they experience funding challenges and difficulties finding volunteers to enact needed programs and interventions (Griffiths, Sigona, & Zetters, 2005; Trieu & Vang, 2015). They can also further marginalize vulnerable members of their own communities, including elders, women, and minorities (Gold, 1992; Griffiths, Sigona, & Zetters, 2005). Finally, in a time of mixed reception toward immigrants in general, RCOs can struggle to find allies in the host culture.

Throughout the United States, Bhutanese refugees, like others resettled groups, have created community organizations to support one another with urgent needs (e.g., physical and mental health education, elder care), cultural maintenance and celebration (e.g., home language lessons for children, religious festivals), and involvement with the host society (e.g., citizenship test preparation classes). The participants in this study have participated in programs and initiatives that address each area of focus.

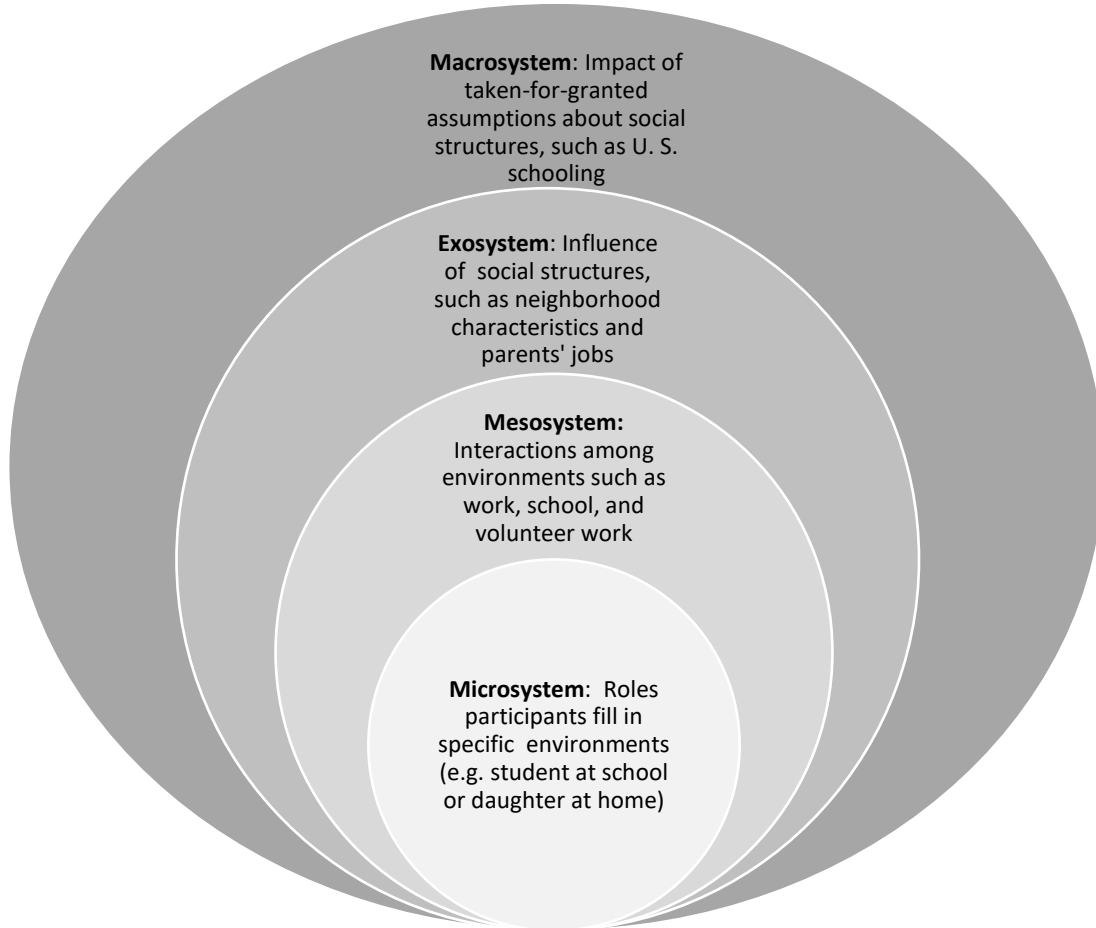
### **1.1.3 Transcultural Identity**

Nordin, Edfeldt, Hu, Jonsson, and Leblanc (2016) define transcultural identity as “the formation of multifaceted, fluid identities resulting from diverse cultural encounters” (p. 11). In moving from displacement to resettlement, Generation 1.5 youth continue their work of framing transcultural identities – continue, not begin. To be a refugee is to navigate borders and “diverse cultural encounters,” rarely by choice. Before being displaced from their Bhutanese homes, however, the participants’ families and ancestors had crossed geographic, cultural, and social borders as part of their lived experience. The participant experiences as refugees in camp and in resettlement reflect the continuation, not the onset, of transcultural identity work. As explained in section 1.2 below (Context of Origin), the participants’ families were Bhutanese citizens who kept their Nepalese ancestors’ language and customs, thus maintaining identities not limited to geographic boundaries. As “borderlands people” (Evans, 2010b), the Bhutanese already had transcultural identities. Generation 1.5 Bhutanese youth move through adolescence and young adulthood while incorporating new experiences, cultures, and languages as their ancestors had done a century before.

### **1.1.4 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory**

In describing their experiences in refugee camp, during the transition to the U.S., and after arrival, the participants spoke of systems with which they engaged, reflected in Bronfenbrenner’s germinal ecological systems theory (1977). Bronfenbrenner’s work (1977) addresses the multiple contexts in which identity development takes place and provides a useful frame of reference for this study. (See Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory.)





**Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory**

The first is the *microsystem*, a participant's role in an immediate environment, such as Manisha's role as the oldest daughter in her home or Kiran's role as an RCO volunteer. Next is the *mesosystem*, which includes interactions among environments, such as Pradeep's involvement in his community college, where he founded an organization to bring together students from different nationalities, including his own – thus overlapping home and host communities. Third is the *exosystem*, which includes social structures such as the nature of work and neighborhood characteristics. An example for this study's participants would be the impact of living in an

environment with few other immigrants for Arjun, or, more positively, the accessibility of refugee support services in the neighborhood where Teena lived upon arrival. The last category in Bronfenbrenner's model is the *macrosystem*, which incorporates taken-for-granted beliefs about how systems are ordered, which Bronfenbrenner calls "blueprints" (1977, p. 515) for systems such as schooling. Macrosystems can come into conflict for immigrants – for example, the status Niraj's family enjoyed in Nepal due to their caste largely disappeared upon arrival to the U.S.

To address my research questions about transcultural identity and the role of organizations such as RCOs, I focused on participant *mesosystems*, where the boundaries between home, school, work, service, and recreation intersect in participants' daily lives.

Before exploring this work, though, it is important to know how they came to become U.S. citizens in the first place. After a brief overview of the Bhutanese refugee crisis, I will provide additional context on the resettlement process, particularly as it pertains to Generation 1.5 refugee youth, those who were born in another country but moved to a resettlement site during childhood (Rumbaut, 2012).

## **1.2 Context of Origin: The Bhutanese Refugee Crisis**

In research and practice with immigrant children, Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, and Chuang (2011) caution researchers and practitioners to understand the *context of origin* (i.e., situations in the home country that led to migration) as well as the *context of reception* (i.e., the environment in the new country, including "national integration policies, the legal framework, political climate, and media representations about immigrants" (p. 9). The Bhutanese refugee context of origin

mirrors that of displaced populations who are often minorities accused of being in their countries illegally.

For generations, Bhutan's kingdom counted among its many ethnic populations a southern Nepalese-speaking Hindu population known as Lhotsampas, or "people of the south." This group had immigrated to Bhutan from Nepal in order to farm land in the south of Bhutan. While they considered and consider themselves Bhutanese, most maintained their Hindu religion and cultural identity, including their Nepalese language and customary dress. Bhutan's Nationality Law, passed in 1958, formally granted them full citizenship (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007; Hutt, 2003; Rizal, 2004).

Three decades later, Bhutan's king, observing intranational conflicts in neighboring countries, was concerned by the growth in the Lhotsampa population and feared that the country would lose its national and religious (Buddhist) identity (Hutt, 2003). Thus began Bhutanization, a process aimed at "unifying" the national culture. Policies included imposing the language, dress, and Buddhist religion of the majority Druk culture (Evans, 2010b). Nepalese could not be spoken or taught in schools, and many Nepali teachers lost their jobs (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007; Rizal, 2004).

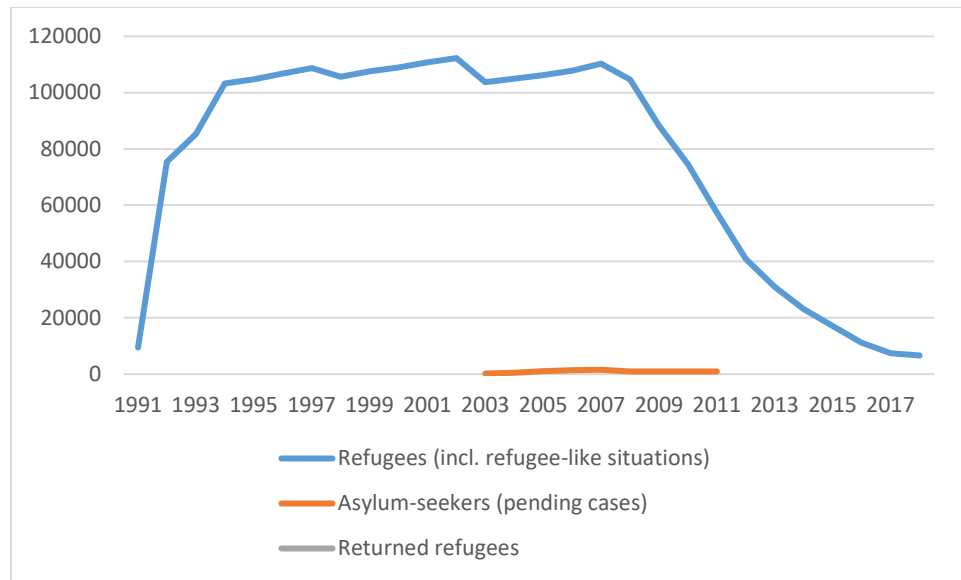
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, some Lhotsampas, particularly university students, had begun protesting (Evans, 2010b; Zeppa, 1999). One impetus was the 1985 revision to the 1958 Royal Edict on Lhotsampa Citizenship Act, which had provided citizenship to the Lhotsampa. The new law stated that citizenship would be granted by birth, registration, or naturalization. For the first, both parents, rather than just one, had to be Bhutanese. Registration meant proving permanent residency as of 1958. However, even those who did have such proof were not recognized as citizens. (See Figure 2: Bhutanese Refugee With Bhutanese Passport.)



**Figure 2. Bhutanese Refugee With Bhutanese Passport**

Naturalization involved passing a test – extremely challenging for a linguistic minority, many of whom could not read and write the national language, Dzongkha (Rizal, 2004). After a 1990 protest, the government resorted to stronger measures with the requirement of a “No Objection Certificate” in order to access basic rights accorded to other Bhutanese, such as “children’s admission into schools, promotion in the civil service, a passport, a state scholarship, eligibility to take civil-service examinations and even to apply for jobs in the government service” (p. 160).

With the erosion of fundamental rights and the threats to citizenship and land, thousands were forced to flee and seek asylum in Nepal, where the Nepalese government and United Nations (and refugees themselves) built refugee camps for temporary shelter (Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal, 2007; Rizal, 2004; Zeppa, 1999). For over a decade, as the Lhotsampas and their families found the situation in Bhutan more and more intolerable, many sought asylum in Nepal. (See Figure 3: Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal, 1991-2017.)



**Figure 3. Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal, 1991-2017**  
(UNHCR, 2019)

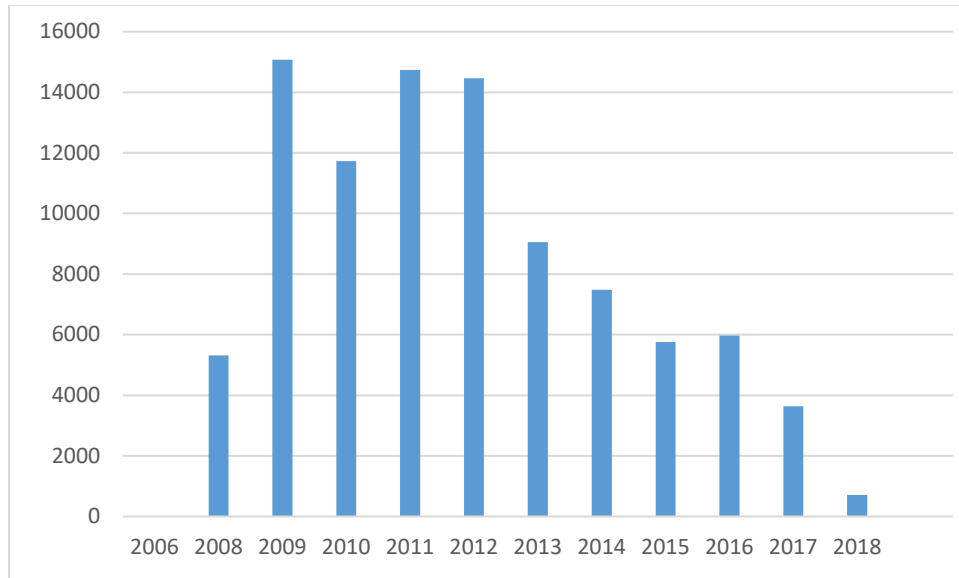
In 2003, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced that it would seek resettlement rather than repatriation for Bhutanese refugees. By 2004, while most media stories on displaced people focused on the Middle East, Bhutan had the highest numbers of refugees anywhere in the world (Rizal, 2004).

The participants in this study share this context of origin – most were born stateless, beginning their lives in a refugee camp while their parents and grandparents hoped for a diplomatic solution that would allow them to return to their homes. They did not know the wait would be nearly 20 years. The elders, while waiting, created lives and communities in refugee camp. They built homes and schools. They worked when they were able, although refugees weren’t generally permitted to obtain jobs in Nepal (U. S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009). Others created their own sources of income through selling food or bartering. Some worked “under the table,” sometimes by crossing the border to India. Those with more formal educational attainment,

like Niraj's father, might have been able to work for one of the non-governmental organizations who staffed the schools. Children grew up, married, and had their own children. When the diplomatic efforts of India and Nepal did not succeed, the UNHCR began to plan for resettlement rather than repatriation.

### **1.3 Context of Reception: Resettlement to the U.S.**

Many refugees were disappointed by the prospect of resettlement rather than repatriation to Bhutan. Some refused to pursue resettlement options in order to stay and agitate for a safe return to Bhutan. Negotiations, however, did not progress in spite of effort from the United Nations and the government of Nepal (Hutt, 2003). In 2006, the U.S. announced a plan to resettle up to 60,000 Bhutanese refugees (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007). As of May 2016, over 90,000 Bhutanese refugees had resettled in the U.S. ("Bhutanese Refugees Find Home in America," 2016; Himalayan Times, 2016). (See Figure 4: Bhutanese Resettlement to U.S., 2006-2018.) The national numbers nearly mirror resettlement trends in Pennsylvania, with the peak years occurring from 2009 through 2012 (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 2020).



**Figure 4. Bhutanese Resettlement to U.S., 2006-2018**  
(UNHCR, 2019)

The Bhutanese resettlement process mirrors that of other refugees. Once refugees apply for resettlement, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) conducts interviews and background checks. The Department of State Bureau for Population, Refugees & Migration handles assignments to cities (such as Pittsburgh) and resettlement agencies (such as Jewish Family and Children’s Services, an agency that several of the participants worked with) “in conjunction with nine national voluntary agencies that oversee a network of some 250 affiliates in 49 states plus the District of Columbia through the Reception & Placement Program” (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019). A representative from the designated resettlement agency meets new arrivals, takes them to their new home, and helps them with the necessities such as finding a job, enrolling children in school, scheduling medical appointments, and accessing food assistance for the first eight months. In sum, the process is as follows:

1. Department of Homeland Security, USCIS – interviews and background clearances in or near refugee camps.
2. Department of State Bureau for Population, Refugees & Migration – assigns resettlement sites (e.g., Pittsburgh) and agencies (e.g., Jewish Family and Children's Services)
3. Department of Health and Human Services - Office of Refugee Resettlement – helps with the first eight months of resettlement through cash assistance, medical exams, matching to English as a second language classes, and job placement (ORR, 2019)

It is important to note that the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) stops providing individual assistance (at the *microsystem* level with individual families) after the first months of resettlement. However, it does provide assistance at the community level (the *mesosystem*) by working with groups and organizations: “ORR supports additional programs to serve all eligible populations beyond the first eight months post-arrival, including micro-enterprise development, ethnic community self-help, agricultural partnerships, and services for survivors of torture” (ORR, 2019). This additional support helped BCAP to expand their services. Support for refugees, while limited, did not end so much as change to focus on refugee mesosystems rather than microsystems.

For all the study participants, the family microsystems are expansive. Throughout the resettlement process, none of them experienced separations from parents or siblings. Presently, all five study participants live with or near extended family, including parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and great-aunts and uncles. The eldest generation often has limited literacy skills, having grown up in farming families with little access to schooling. They are generally the parents of large families, with several children belonging to the generation of the participants' parents. This group varies in their language ability; the older ones (in their 30s and 40s upon arrival) did



not attend school in refugee camps but may have had formal schooling in Bhutan. Their younger siblings, often aunts and uncles to the participants in this study, are likely to be more fluent in English and to have obtained some years of formal education, with many completing high school and, in some cases, college (Trieu & Vang, 2015). Participants and their siblings (and cousins) learned English in refugee camp school and often are the most linguistically proficient of the three groups (Hutt, 2003). The general pattern is one of adults with limited formal educational attainment and children whose educational attainment outstrips that of their elders.

Approximately 35 percent of the Bhutanese population was under the age of 18 during the early years of resettlement (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007). In terms of acculturation, the younger generations have some advantages. The youngest children speak English, not always with ease, but with more facility than their parents do. The language differences between the generations are typical of many immigrant families. Such a situation can create dissonance within families, although I observed the Bhutanese parents to have an easy rapport with their children while also engendering authority and respect. Children do not generally appear to take advantage of a parent's lack of English to miss school, spend family money, or behave inappropriately.

Bhutanese refugee youth have some advantages compared to other displaced youth around the world. First, schooling for refugees in Nepal has some benefits not seen in other refugee camps. Students attend refugee camp schools through tenth grade, and they have the option of continuing their education in Nepal's public schools, unusual for refugees in other countries. Camp schools, however, are overcrowded, and teacher turnover is high. Materials are also limited, particularly in science, where lab work is difficult to support (Brown, 2001). In addition to schooling opportunities, Bhutanese refugee families are usually not separated throughout flight and

resettlement, which is not always the case for other displaced populations (Watters, 2008). Extended families lived near one another in refugee camp and, often, in resettlement, as the participants in this study explain (see Chapter 4). Resettlement with extended family, including siblings and cousins, helps to offset some challenges, including low socioeconomic status and limited employment and housing options.

This is not to minimize the many difficulties of displacement: Refugee camps are crowded and often unsafe, and food and other necessities are scarce. In addition, mental health problems are as great a concern as physical health challenges: Refugees in Nepal are four times more likely to attempt suicide than Nepali citizens (Evans, 2010b Human Rights Watch, 2003); suicide, addiction, and mental and emotional health problems remain serious concerns after resettlement (Ellis et al., 2015).

The young adults in this study have worked through childhood and adolescence by navigating multiple languages, cultures, and nationalities, even before entering the U.S. Most of the participants were born in refugee camp, not in their families' home country. The simple question, "Where are you from?" is not easily answered for them – when it is, that answer is often contested. When asked about nation of origin, some say they are from Nepal because that is where they were born. Others counter by affirming that they are from Bhutan – they argue that to say they are from Nepal would legitimize the Bhutanese government's rejection of them and their families. Some then argue back that they do not wish to claim a country that rejected them. In the U.S., this complex negotiation of identity occurs in a place and time of mixed and contradictory receptions – not the only time in U.S. history, but definitely one such time.

## **1.4 Local Bhutanese RCOs**

Identity work takes place in systems with which youth are required (e.g., school) or choose (e.g., after-school programs) to engage. The common element for this group of participants is their involvement with RCOs, sometimes in combination with other nonprofit service organizations, all of which influence their identity work in fascinating ways. This study focuses on how the different institutions and organizations with which participants interact (vis-à-vis Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem framework) influence their development.

One type of organization in refugee mesosystems is the refugee community organization, or RCO. In their work on immigrant children and families in Canada, Este and Ngo (2011) speak to what children need from their communities: "Specifically, communities can support children directly by supplying lively and healthy neighborhoods, quality care in the community, access to mentors who can guide them, and enriching youth development programs" (p. 30). RCOs have little control over the neighborhoods to which refugees are resettled, as those decisions rest with NGOs who organize resettlement. However, they can and do provide mentoring and programming to support youth. The participants in this qualitative study have varying levels of involvement in local RCOs: the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP) or Children of Shangri-Lost (COSL). RCOs like these are formed to address the needs and interests of refugee communities from particular nations or regions. They are typically small and run entirely or mostly by volunteers with little or no funding (Amas & Price, 2008), which is the case for BCAP and COSL, described below.

### 1.4.1 Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh

*Our mission: To ensure a high quality of life for all members of the Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh and to support their integration into American society through culturally-informed services and activities.*

Pittsburgh is not unique in hosting a Bhutanese RCO. The Bhutanese have created community organizations throughout the U.S. In addition to the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh, or BCAP, similar organizations can be found throughout the United States, such as the Bhutanese Community of Iowa, Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio, Bhutanese Committee Maryland, and Bhutanese Community Association of Erie, among others.<sup>2</sup>

One of BCAP's founding officers, Khara Timsina, described the history and formation of BCAP after I had known him for quite some time. Khara and his family moved to Pittsburgh late in 2009, a peak year for Bhutanese resettlement in the U.S. He attended an event, organized by Bhutanese Community members who had arrived a year or two earlier, at one of the local Hindu temples. It was the first Bhutanese-organized event he attended in the area. The following spring, he went to another social event at the same temple, this one to thank area volunteers who had helped some of the refugees. Khara and I were both at this event, but we would not meet for a few

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<sup>2</sup> Websites: Bhutanese Community of Iowa (<http://www.bhutaniowa.org/>); Bhutanese Community of Central Ohio (<https://www.bccoh.org/>); Bhutanese Committee Maryland (<http://www.baltimorebhutanesecommittee.org/>); Bhutanese Community Association of Erie (<http://www.bcaerie.org/>). In addition, the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh website maintains a list of organizations and resources throughout the country ([www.bcap.us/resources/](http://www.bcap.us/resources/)).

more years. These events were his first point of contact with others like him who wanted to organize events to bring the community together.

Soon after this event, the community was brought together by tragedy, the suicide of a local Bhutanese man. As well as grieving, the surviving family members had to navigate complicated and unfamiliar systems, such as what to do with the body of the deceased. The group that would later organize as BCAP now had a different mission, to help with urgent and emergency needs. They went door to door, seeking donations for the family of the suicide victim. They continued to raise funds for emergencies and urgent situations, which included soliciting donations for Bhutanese refugees still in Nepal, where those living in the largest camp survived a massive fire and needed help rebuilding.

By the summer of 2010, the organization was sought out by different Pittsburgh organizations for social and educational events. Khara was approached by organizers of a neighborhood fall festival, who wanted to arrange for a Bhutanese dance performance. He began seeking space for rehearsals. He went to a library to reserve space and was asked for the name of his organization – there wasn't an "organization" as such; rather, several individuals comprised an informal network to help the community. To reserve space, he had to provide the name of an organization. The group decided to form a nonprofit, with help from a resettlement agency and other advocates within and outside of the community. With officers and a board in place, they began approaching foundations for grants to support operations.

A local foundation provided a small grant but required them to contribute some of their own money. Five officers, including Khara, "reached into our own pockets" and came up with \$700, which allowed them to obtain the \$5,000 grant. They used this funding to subscribe to a telephone communication system, RoboCall, so they could communicate local events and

information, ranging from weather-related school closings to programs of interest to the community. As Khara was describing the program to me, Manisha, one of the study participants and an intern at BCAP, was updating the call list – a challenging process as residents very frequently switch phone plans and phone numbers.

In its early years, BCAP had to respond to emergency situations. Suicides, particularly among men, regularly occurred in the camps and among those resettled in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control, 2013; Ellis et al., 2016), and Pittsburgh has been no exception (Beras, 2014). BCAP has led efforts to work on mental and emotional wellness in the community, facilitating mental health training sessions and attempting proactive as well as reactive responses to both prevent and respond to suicides (Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh, 2016; Jones, 2016).

Another need preparation for citizenship interviews. Refugees receive green cards upon arrival; after five years, they can apply for citizenship. Preparing for both the interview and the exam is a challenge for many older refugees, as most had little formal schooling and many cannot read and write in their home language, or can only do so at a rudimentary level. BCAP provides citizenship review classes in several neighborhoods with Bhutanese residents.

Finally, while BCAP continues to respond to urgent and emergency situations, they have increased their work with youth development. Like Children of Shangri-Lost, they sponsor Bhutanese soccer teams and help find spaces for practice. Two years ago, they received a grant from the Office of Public Art to fund the salary of a local artist who worked with the organization on arts projects for children and youth. They also work with school districts and other area nonprofit organizations to help students prepare for college and careers.

Three participants in this study, Niraj, Kiran, and Manisha, are affiliated with BCAP. Niraj has volunteered as an interpreter and co-instructor for the citizenship classes BCAP provides for elders. He occasionally attends other programs, as does Manisha, who also interned in the office one summer to assist with administrative work and general programming. Kiran assists BCAP in multiple capacities, sometimes helping with citizenship classes and sometimes helping with community events. In the pages that follow, they speak to the influence that community involvement has had in many dimensions of their lives.

#### **1.4.2 Children of Shangri-Lost**

*“We are a group of youth in Pittsburgh who want to show the world that despite being displaced and sometimes forgotten, we have not forgotten who we are and what we have to offer the world. Our story is one of survival and of hope. We may be the Children of Shangri-Lost, but we have found ourselves in our new homes around the world.”* (Children of Shangri-Lost website)

Children of Shangri-Lost, or COSL, was founded by a Bhutanese college student, Diwas Timsina, and continues a tradition of activist youth organizing to help their communities and themselves (Jenkins, 2016). COSL was founded by youth for youth. Outreach and in-reach are emphasized equally in their mission statement: “Our mission is to raise awareness and to educate people about the history and challenges faced by the refugee and immigrant population through short films and blog posts. We hope to engage youth in community issues and programs as well as inform the public about the experiences of refugee and immigrant communities.”

In their outreach to the non-Bhutanese community, COSL participants have engaged in many media forms, both digital and non-digital. To educate others, they rely on their website,

with text written by youth themselves. They also post images and links on social media platforms to highlight their own engagement as well as their work with other organizations. Creative expression is highlighted in their work, with one member's digital photography and video projects highlighted on the website. In addition, the group has hosted events to invite those outside the Bhutanese community to engage with them and to learn more about the Bhutanese refugee collective past and present.

Two examples are striking. First was a panel event, "Talk to Me," which included two panel sessions at a local library. The first presentation included COSL members, and the second was comprised of friends and advocates, such as nonprofit and area college administrators who spoke of their involvement in the community. Each group spoke of the refugee experience from their perspective and sought to counter negative stereotypes. The audience was mixed, with Bhutanese parents and others in the community as well as friends and advocates from the area. Questions were engaging and sometimes trenchant – for example, one frustrated parent asked the college admissions counselor on the panel why Bhutanese students had a hard time gaining admission to certain universities.

For another event, the group presented a one-act play at the City of Asylum, a local nonprofit dedicated to helping internationally displaced writers and other artists. Here I met Pradeep, one of the participants, who participated in the play, which reenacted the Bhutanese refugee crisis. This event blended community in-reach as well as outreach: a multigenerational Bhutanese audience attended, and other community members learned about the causes and effects of Bhutanese displacement through engagement with theater arts.

COSL shares many similarities with BCAP, including engaging Bhutanese youth through athletics (mainly soccer) as well as academic and career preparation. When asked what



differentiates COSL from BCAP, Diwas explained that there is occasional overlap. Both, for example, value intergenerational connections. BCAP's citizenship classes encourage high school students to volunteer as interpreters, and COSL hosts intergenerational cultural celebrations in order to help younger Bhutanese maintain home culture customs and language. Diwas identified one area of difference as urgency: BCAP, particularly in its early days, focused on urgent needs of families and elders, such as citizenship preparation, housing problems, physical and mental health interventions, and other critical issues. COSL has focused primarily on youth development from middle school through college, less on urgent needs and more on long-term personal and community development.

Two participants in this study, Pradeep and Arjun, have been involved in COSL programs, including community outreach programming (Pradeep) and the group's very active soccer program (Arjun). Both speak to the importance of engagement within and outside of the Bhutanese community when they relate their stories in Chapters 4 through 6.

## **1.5 Organization of the Dissertation**

The next chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study. Findings will be analyzed through a dual lens, informed by acculturation theory (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006) and social capital theory (Coleman, 1988; Linn, 1999) as well as responses to and expansions of both of those theories (Small, 2013; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Ward, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

In Chapter 3, I describe my process for data collection and analysis for this case study; chapters 4 through 7 include findings, implications, and recommendations for research and

practice. To present my findings, I followed an interview protocol based on Seidman's (2006) multiple interview strategy of interviewing participants first on past experience, then on daily life in the present, and finally with future plans and hopes. I spoke with participants first about their past childhood experience in Nepal (Chapter 4), then their present circumstances in the U.S. (Chapter 5), and finally on their future hopes and plans (Chapter 6). In addition to conducting interviews, I also attended events, visited participant homes and workplaces, and observed physical and digital artifacts, which are discussed throughout chapters 4 through 6. Concluding thoughts and possibilities for future practice and research comprise Chapter 7.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

In this literature review, I begin with a brief overview of research on the Bhutanese refugee experience, with particular attention to the experience of Bhutanese refugee youth in refugee camp. I then move to the theoretical framework that supports my study. Acculturation theory provides a helpful lens for exploring my first research question on the establishment of transcultural identity, and social capital theory does the same for my second research question on the role that organizations play. Both schools of thought have limitations, which I will also address.

### **2.1 The Experience of Displacement**

Generation 1.5 refugee youth navigate multiple cultures and systems as they grow up. Four of the five participants in this study were born in refugee camp, while one was born in the family's homeland of Bhutan before moving to Nepal at a young age; all of them experienced life in at least two countries before they entered their teens. This experience is generally underrepresented in scholarship on displacement but is important to consider. Extended stays in refugee camp have been the norm for many years, with the decades-long experience of the Bhutanese the new rule rather than a harrowing exception (Dona & Berry, 1999). In addition, the numbers of displaced children and youth are alarmingly high, with half of the world's refugees being children (Edwards, 2017). In the Bhutanese case, over one-third of the population was under the age of 18 during the years of escape to Nepal's refugee camp (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007). More scholars are studying the refugee student experience in U.S. schools (McBrien, 2005; Sullivan &

Simonson, 2016) and in the host culture in general (Watters, 2008), and some remarkable field work has been done in refugee camps; including Evans' fieldwork (2008, 2010a) on children and youth in Nepal refugee camps. However, the study of immigrant (including refugee) youth is still relatively underdeveloped. As Parke and Chuang noted in 2011, "We are out of infancy and well into preschool in terms of our development as a field" (p. 271). Regarding the transition from refugee statelessness to resettlement, we are still in preschool.

Some background on daily life for Bhutanese refugees during displacement, with particular focus on children and adolescents, provides helpful context before considering their acculturation experience upon resettlement. When refugees arrived from Bhutan to a refugee camp, they were interviewed in order to determine their refugee status. From there, families were assigned to living quarters. Extended families often lived in huts near one another. At the peak of displacement, over 100,000 refugees lived in seven camps in eastern Nepal (Amnesty International, 2002; Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007; Spiegel & Qassim, 2003; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009).

Opportunities to work were virtually nonexistent in refugee camp, although "small cottage industries, such as making sanitary napkins, chalk, blankets, and jute roofing materials" were permitted (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009). Some refugees, like Manisha's parents, ran more expansive businesses selling food or other materials and never ran into any trouble with the authorities. While the 1990 Constitution prohibited non-citizens from working, some business activity was allowed, and exceptions could be made for areas with work shortages, such as teaching in remote areas (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009); the latter allowed Niraj's father to obtain teaching work. In addition to selling handicrafts and food, some

adults would travel for undocumented work, such as in construction in Nepal or India; Arjun's uncle was able to work in this industry for some time.

Children and youth had more structure in their days, as schools were built and staffed from the earliest days of displacement. Some went to schools in Nepal (including Kiran and Pradeep in this study, as well as Manisha for a brief period) while others attended in camp. Schooling was organized through a combination of motivated refugee adults at first, followed by international government (specifically the UNHCR, which provided schooling through grade 8); non-government organizations (e.g., Caritas, one of many NGOs that respond to international crises), which provided schooling for grades 9 and 10; and a combination of NGO and Nepali government assistance, which allowed students to continue schooling in Nepal's education system in order to complete high school (U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009).

Outside of school, NGO and government-sponsored organizations provided opportunities for youth development. Literature on this subject is limited, particularly on the Bhutanese experience. Evans' (2008, 2010) fieldwork is an exception. She describes youth participation in the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum (BRCF), the most entrenched of the co-curricular programming offered:

All refugee children aged between seven and 17 are considered members, and can self-nominate for election to committees. The seven camps are divided into sectors and units, with each unit containing approximately 100 huts and each sector consisting of four units. Four children from each unit are annually elected to represent their peers at sector- level and camp-level forums. Elected members receive training on the UNCRC and participatory arts techniques, such as photography, journalism and art. The BRCF helps the UNHCR

fulfil their duty to protect all refugee children since representatives monitor and report relevant issues. (Evans, 2010a, p. 308)

One of the participants, Manisha, was actively involved in this organization as well as others and describes her experience in Chapter 4.

There is little scholarship on daily life in refugee camp, but the participants in this study speak to routines of school; helping families with work, child care, and/or elder care; and playing with friends and cousins. After several years, their families applied for resettlement when the option arrived. This is a difficult choice, and one where refugees have limited agency. They can choose whether or not they apply, and they can request a specific resettlement location. That request, though, may not be granted (Lindsay, 2017, p. 12).

Experiences during displacement set the ground work for how refugee youth adapt to resettlement. Acculturation theory provides a helpful frame of reference for exploring how refugee youth adapt to and engage with new nations and cultures, and how they frame their identities as transnational and transcultural citizens.

## **2.2 Acculturation Theory**

Acculturation theory provides a helpful framework through which to explore the topic of identity development, the focus of my first research question (*What challenges and opportunities do refugee youth face in the development of transcultural identity?*). Much of the scholarship on acculturation is rooted in Berry's (1997) work, so I will begin by describing his work as well as responses and re-articulations of his framework.

*Acculturation* is the process of change that occurs when individuals and groups encounter a new culture; people respond, or adapt, to this process in different ways (Berry, 1997). One understanding consistently reflected in the literature is the importance of an acculturation response that values both home culture traditions of newcomers as well as those of the new (or host) cultures (Berry, 1997; Gibson, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Several terms are used to describe this adaptation response. In his four-part acculturation typology, Berry (1997) describes an *integrated* form of acculturation, in which immigrants participate in the host society without rejecting their home cultures. This integrated response differs from *separated* (from host culture and primarily identifying with home culture), *marginalized* (from both home and host cultures), and *assimilated* (into the host culture without maintaining home culture) responses, which are all considered to be less functional than integrated responses. Similar to Berry's integration response, Gibson (1997) describes *accommodation and acculturation without assimilation* to identify behaviors encouraged by Sikh families who wanted their children to succeed in U.S. culture without sacrificing their home culture identities (p. 266). Portes and Rumbaut (2014) similarly use the phrase *selective acculturation* to describe engagement with the host culture without the loss of home culture.

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) developed their own typology to explain the different forms of identity of children of immigrants. They describe a *transcultural* identity that results when one takes elements of home and host country characteristics and embraces global citizenship. In discussing immigrant children's success and failure in school, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) agree with Gibson (1997) that those who embrace an attitude of "accommodation without assimilation," or an integrated acculturation response, have the most academic and economic success. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) also speak to less

adaptive responses in their typology: They define ethnic flight as an identity that rejects the home culture, which Berry defines as assimilation. The opposite is an adversarial identity, which rejects the host culture, similar to Berry's separation response. (See Table 1: Berry and Suarez-Orozco on Acculturation Response and Identity.)

**Table 1.** Berry and Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco on Acculturation Response and Identity

	Engagement with home culture		Disengagement with home culture	
	Berry Acculturation Model	Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco Ethnic Identity	Berry Acculturation Model	Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco Ethnic Identity
Engagement with host society	<i>Integrated</i>	<i>Transcultural</i>	<i>Assimilated</i>	<i>Ethnic Flight</i>
Disengagement with host society	<i>Separated</i>	<i>Adversarial</i>	<i>Marginalized</i>	<i>n/a</i>

### 2.2.1 Challenges to Acculturation Theory

Berry's theory and responses to it are helpful in understanding what has more simplistically been termed culture shock (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). In application, however, his widely used acculturation model poses some challenges (Ward, 2008). Little attention is paid to the two-way nature of acculturation and how new immigrant populations influence host societies as much as adapt to host society norms and institutions. In addition, some scholarship conflates acculturation with assimilation (Berry, 1997), focusing on how newcomers adapt (or do not adapt) to their new homes.

In a way, focusing on newcomers' adaptation to the host society over the host society's adaption to newcomers is logical. The need for newcomers to learn to navigate host culture institutions is urgent and immediate. Newcomers have to manage school, work, homes, medical appointments, and other basic needs very soon upon arrival. Thus, they are under more pressure and encounter more expectations to change (Berry, 1997). Acculturation, however, is not a short-



term process but is ongoing, lasting for years and over generations (Berry & Sabatier, 2011; Ward, 2008). It is also a two-way process between newcomers and host society individuals and organizations. Ultimately, newcomers also influence host society institutions and individuals, such as the people and organizations that populate a neighborhood where refugees are resettled.

In addition, individual acculturation approaches are complex and evolving. One person could have an integrated approach in some domains (e.g., after-school programs) and a separated response in others (e.g., choice of clothing). A high school student might appear to have an integrated response due to involvement with multiple cultures enrolled in the school district. However, before and after the school day, the student might opt to stay at home with relatives and home culture friends as much as possible. When she has the choice (in the absence of logistical barriers like transportation), she opts for separation. Acculturation responses, as well as being influenced by context, may change over time, with initial separation or marginalization, followed by responses with more involvement in the host society.

One limitation to scholarly discussion of transcultural identity is the assumption that transcultural identity development begins after resettlement – however, the conditions for transcultural identity development for refugees occur before resettlement. Transcultural identity development can coincide with transnationalism (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014), which entails movement between borders, including physical travel between home and host countries:

Transnationalism highlights the possibility that preserving ties to the home culture and language may be compatible with acculturation. Indeed, economically successful immigrants have commonly practiced this mix of the old and new. The practice of selective acculturation has not been inimical to their structural economic advancement but has generally supported it. For first-generation immigrants, regular contact with their places of

origin often translates into the possibility of accessing unique economic resources. As recent studies have shown, most successful businesses established by immigrants include a transnational component. (p. 137)

Here, Portes and Rumbaut focus on the economic aspects of transnationalism, which are evident for Bhutanese refugees, many of whom own businesses in the U.S. that require maintaining contacts in Nepal.

Transnationalism is not limited to economic survival and advancement, however. Even before being displaced and forced into statelessness, the Lhotsampas were a “borderland people” (Evans, 2010b) – residents of Bhutan who shared language and cultural customs with Nepali-speaking populations in India as well as Nepal. Their transborder status and transcultural way of life, along with other intranational conflicts in the region, likely contributed to the Bhutanese government’s perception of them as a threat:

Since the Lhotsampas are part of a ‘transborder’ group of Nepali-speaking people, regional political developments involving members of this ethnic group in Sikkim, India, and Nepal intensified the perception of the southern Bhutanese as a threat. (Evans, 2010b, p. 30)

For displaced refugees, travel back to Bhutan wasn’t usually possible (although two of the participants in this study managed it safely multiple times). However, transborder and transnational identities were established through the Lhotsampas’ status as “borderland” people not only before they resettled in the U.S. but even before they were displaced from southern Bhutan.

Finally, the social environment plays a role in acculturation responses but is sometimes overlooked (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Berry & Sabatier, 2011). Consider, for example, the refugee adult who wants to participate in the host society but cannot

get to English classes due to transportation difficulties and work schedules. He does not “choose” a separated response, any more than his friends who experience harassment from their American neighbors. Similarly, a refugee may not fit in with co-ethnic neighbors because of caste differences. She does not choose an assimilated or marginalized path but has it forced upon her.

In their work on immigrant youth and acculturation, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) of UCLA’s Institute for Immigration, Globalization, and Education foreground environmental influences in acculturation. They discuss institutional shortcomings that contribute to immigrant (including refugee) children’s struggles, such as low-ranked school districts and schools and neighborhoods with “cultures of violence.” The context of reception that newcomers encounter informs acculturation responses. An integrated response requires a welcoming and multicultural environment (Berry, 1997) and is not exclusively a matter of individual choice. Social capital, or relationships and networks within and outside of the home community, informs acculturation responses and is discussed in the following section.

### **2.3 Social Capital**

Social capital theory and responses to it inform my second research question (*What role do organizations, including refugee community organizations (RCOs), play in the process?*) In addition to their status as Generation 1.5 refugees, the participants share involvement in at least one local RCO. How (or if) this involvement impacts young adult identity development is an important aspect of the acculturation process for this group. Coleman’s (1988) seminal work on social capital informs much of the scholarship on this topic. Some elements of social capital theory have been contested over the years and led to the creation of other ways of understanding the

impact of social relationships within and outside of communities of origin. Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth is one response that is applicable to this group and will be discussed below.

Social capital theory defines relationships as resources that advance individual and collective human capital; such relationships and resources are garnered through personal and organizational networks (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Networks are defined as groups of individuals who are connected, or tied, in some way (Daly, 2010). Ties can be *strong*, or dense (e.g., immediate family), or they can be *weak*, or loose (e.g., acquaintances) (Granovetter, 1983).

In his theory of social capital, Coleman describes two types of networks, *closed* (in-group networks, such as ethnic enclaves, characterized by strong ties) and *open* (networks that include people and organizations outside of one's group, such as multi-ethnic work environments, characterized by weak ties). Putnam (2000) defines closed networks as *bonds* that hold together communities and their traditions, and open networks as *bridges* that connect individuals and communities to resources outside of those communities. Closed networks are useful in maintaining in-group relationships and support, while open networks provide access to resources and opportunities outside one's home community (Lin, 1999).

The concepts of "bonding" social capital for in-home networks and "bridging" social capital to describe connections between home and host cultures provide a useful framework for my study, but they do have limitations. First, the dualistic nature of the framework (closed versus open networks, bonding versus bridging capital) risks oversimplification of complex lived experience. An organization or an individual can provide bonds to the home community *and*

bridges to other communities (as RCOs do). In addition, some forms of engagement lend to a both/and approach to bonds and bridges rather than either-or.

While Putnam's framework of bonding and bridging social capital is frequently cited, it is just as frequently contested (Arneil, 2006). One point of contention is the presentation of bonding social capital in deficit terms. For refugees and other non-dominant populations, this privileging of bridging social capital over bonding social capital is problematic. Some researchers have responded by identifying the benefits of in-group networks for refugee newcomers (Hope, 2011), a point Putnam (2000) mentions only in passing.

Other researchers have complicated the simplistic dichotomy of closed networks versus open networks in the acculturation process (Portes, 1987; Small, Jacobs, & Massenill, 2008; Small, 2013). Small and his colleagues (2008, 2013), for example, discuss local organizations in low-income communities as important sources of information for community members. Portes (1987) discusses the importance of ethnic enclaves as resources for rather than barriers against employment and economic advancement. For these writers, the boundaries between bonding and bridging networks are porous.

For non-dominant populations, including refugees, discussions of social capital attainment imply that success in the host culture (including but not limited to economic mobility) is up to individual choice and attitudes. Similar to the limitations of acculturation theory, such arguments do not take into account the many structural barriers non-dominant populations such as refugees face. Fine (2010) captures the limitations of social capital theory succinctly:

However good or bad things might be, they could be better if people interacted more, trusted one another, and co-operated. Social capital offers the golden opportunity of improving the status quo without challenging it. Everything from educational outcomes

through crime prevention to better psychological health can be improved if neighbours and communities would only pull together and trust one another. (p 125)

In the case of the resettled refugees, if they “would only” talk to their American neighbors, go to English class, and apply for better jobs, the resultant social capital would remedy their acculturation ills. Inadequate support structures and unwelcoming environments are rendered secondary, or even nonexistent.

### **2.3.1 Community Cultural Wealth: A Response to “Capital”**

In the dichotomy of bridges versus bonds, bridges are privileged over bonds. Putnam (2000) cautions against dependence on bonded intragroup networks, only briefly mentioning their benefits. In contrast, many researchers call for a strengths-based approach to studying immigrants and refugees, one that focuses on resilience (Este & Ngo, 2011; Pipher, 2002; Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011). Yosso’s (2005) alternative to social capital theory does just that in her framework of *community cultural wealth*, which includes the following six forms of capital:

#### **2.3.1.1 Aspirational**

Aspirational capital is the “ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77). Refugee parents throughout the world over speak of wanting a better future for their children and making present-day sacrifices to ensure a better future for the family. This goal creates an omnipresent subtext in children and adolescents’ daily lives, as noted in the participant interviews for this study; they discuss plans for careers and academic achievement in thoughtful and specific detail.

### **2.3.1.2 Linguistic**

Linguistic capital is the ability to communicate in multiple languages (pp. 78-79). All of the participants in this study, at the time of the interviews, were fluent in at least two languages (including English), and most had some experience with a third and fourth language. Linguistic ability, in Yosso's framework, is not limited literally to world languages but includes many forms of expression. For example, most of the participants are fluent with multiple forms of media, including not only social media but fine arts that include drawing, photography, other digital media, and more.

Linguistic ability is not just an individual attribute but a communal form of wealth. Research in the field of English language learning (Auerbach, 1995) highlights parent and community involvement and investment in children's learning. In this study, the participants' parents, aunts, and uncles vary in their own English acquisition – however, they track their children's academic progress and reinforce the importance of doing well in school. Linguistic community cultural wealth recognizes the multiple forms of literacy in non-dominant cultures.

### **2.3.1.3 Familial**

Familial capital involves family ties and recognizes the possibilities of broader and more inclusive concepts of family than is seen in the dominant host society culture (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Strong family ties are core to Bhutanese identity; all of the participants in this study live with or near extended family. Non-dominant cultural groups' concepts of family are often not acknowledged by host society institutions as well as international resettlement organizations, which define family as the nuclear family of parents and children. This practice has the temporary effect of separating refugees from relatives who could provide them with support.

#### **2.3.1.4 Social**

Yosso defines social capital in the same way as Coleman (1988) and others: “networks of people and community resources” (p. 79). A refugee’s social capital can include access to groups and organizations (e.g., RCOs) but also to individuals. Portes and Rumbaut (2014), in their longitudinal research, describe a particularly interesting type of relationship that is helpful to immigrant youth:

A constant in our interviews, in addition to authoritative and alert parents, is the appearance of a *really* significant other. That person can be a teacher, a counselor, a friend of the family, or even an older sibling. The important thing is that they take a keen interest in the child, motivate him or her to graduate from high school and attend college, and possess the necessary knowledge and experience to guide the student in this direction. Neither family discipline nor the appearance of a significant other is by itself sufficient to produce high educational attainment but the combination is decisive. (p. 413)

Several respondents in this study spoke to friends, relatives, or mentors who helped them. Yosso (2005) reinforces this point by citing access to people who can help with processes such as completing college applications or financial aid paperwork as an example of social community cultural wealth (p. 80).

#### **2.3.1.5 Navigational**

Navigational capital includes “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (p. 80). Navigating host society organizations and institutions requires individual qualities such as resilience and tenacity, but it also includes accessing resources and relationships in order to find one’s way in complex systems such as health care, higher education, and more.



### **2.3.1.6 Resistant**

Resistant capital is comprised of “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (pp. 80-81). It takes the form of questioning systems and advocating for oneself. Similar to the previous five forms of community cultural wealth, resistant capital can be activated by individuals as well as organizations or communities as they question the institutions with which they engage.

Yosso’s model provides a helpful, strengths-based framework for considering the importance of social networks and relationships for immigrant youth. While social capital theory has definite affordances for considering my research questions, the community cultural wealth framework counters the deficit approach sometimes embodied in social capital theory.

## **2.4 RCOs and Acculturation and Social Capital**

The participants in this study have had different experiences and different interests, but they share the experience of local RCO involvement. RCOs, including those with which this study’s participants engage, play an important role in newcomers’ acculturation experiences. The mission statements of both BCAP and COSL speak to this role. BCAP’s mission is very direct:

To ensure a high quality of life for all members of the Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh and to support their integration into American society through culturally-informed services and activities.

The goals of the organization, which includes a board of host society stakeholders as well as Bhutanese community members, center on Berry’s (1997) integrated response to resettlement with “culturally-informed” services and “integration into American society.”

COSL uses similar language in their mission statement:

Our mission is to raise awareness and to educate people about the history and challenges faced by the refugee and immigrant population through short films and blog posts. We hope to engage youth in community issues and programs as well as inform the public about the experiences of refugee and immigrant communities.

Their statement more directly reflects the two-way nature of acculturation with their dual focus on reaching *out* to the host society as well as reaching *in* to their community of Bhutanese youth. On its webpage, COSL emphasizes the maintenance of their home culture (“we have not forgotten who we are”) as well as outreach to and connection with U.S. institutions (“our mission is to raise awareness and to educate people”). In practice, both BCAP and COSL engage in programs and initiatives that reach out as well as within, often simultaneously. (See Chapter 5 for further discussion of specific RCO programs and activities.)

In his discussion of social capital, Coleman (1988) describes the role of community organizations. He explains that organizations are formed to serve a specific purpose, the need for which may pass over time. If the organization doesn’t adapt and change, it folds. This is true of refugee community organizations (RCOs) as well. One impetus for BCAP to register as a non-profit was to help in addressing urgent needs. As the community has been in Pittsburgh for nearly a decade, urgent needs still exist but are fewer. BCAP has adapted to expand their engagement with personal, academic, and leadership development programs for women, elders, and youth. COSL, which was formed later than BCAP, has consistently focused on not only helping community youth but also facilitating multigenerational engagement as well.

Without using the term RCO, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) speak to the importance of such organizations for immigrant youth:

While the character of family parenting or the emergence of a significant other is largely in the private realm, the presence and effectiveness of special assistance programs for minority students is a public matter, amenable to policy intervention. The programs and organizations that proved effective in our case were grounded, invariably, on knowledge of the culture and language that the children brought to school and on respect for them. They are commonly staffed by coethnics or bilingual staff.

Unlike the full assimilation approach advocated by many public schools, these programs convey the message that it is not necessary to reject one's own culture and history to do well in school. On the contrary, these roots can provide the necessary anchor to strengthen the student's self-esteem and aspirations for the future. (p. 415).

While the authors are speaking of school programming, they describe what effective RCOs do: offer culturally respectful programming, led by Bhutanese community members, that contributes to an acculturation process that respects family past as well as assists in engagement with a new country.

## **2.5 Application of Theory to This Study**

In my study, I draw from acculturation research in part to explore the challenges and opportunities Bhutanese youth experience in their transcultural identity work. Because much of that work happens in social contexts, including through organizations, social capital theory (and responses and challenges to that theory) also informs my analysis of the data. The methodology I used to address these research questions is described in the following chapter.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Case Study**

Working with diverse populations is best served by “mixed-method designs, linking emic (insider) and etic (outsider) approaches, triangulating data, and embedding emerging findings into an ecological framework” (Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011, p. 18). Case study, therefore, with its implicit reliance on multiple methods and multiple data points, is an ideal approach for a study on refugee youth. Qualitative case study research also relies on in-depth description, important for research with populations like the Bhutanese, about whom little is known or written (Parke & Chuang, 2011). In this study, I worked to meet the criteria Suarez-Orozco and her colleagues outline as important in working with diverse populations.

First, in writing this case study, I utilize a mixed-method design by conducting multiple individual interviews with five participants, studying documents and web archives, and observing programs and events. These multiple data points serve to triangulate my findings – in other words, to provide “rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth” to my research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 10). Emic perspectives are provided by Bhutanese refugee participants, while etic perspectives are provided by scholarship, local media materials, and my own past participation in the community. Finally, I analyze findings in their present-day contexts, or ecological framework, including the contexts of refugee individuals and organizations, host society reception, and refugee resettlement locations.

### 3.2 Positionality

Because of my past and current involvement with the Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh, I was well positioned to undertake this case study. I met four Bhutanese families for the first time approximately a decade ago, when I volunteered as a tutor with a local literacy organization. While the class was designed for adult learners, they brought their young and teenage children to class with them – the former because they didn't have child care options and the latter to assist with translating while they were waiting to enroll in school. After a few shy weeks that summer, we instructors were regularly invited to the families' apartments next to the church where our lessons occurred.

A few months later, due to the demands of my job, I regretfully let go of this volunteer commitment. One day, one of the high school students called me:

*Hi, Susan, where have you been?*

*Hi, Maya! Well, I had to stop teaching because of my hours at work.*

*So what? Come over; we're cooking!*

And so began a new phase of my relationship with my Bhutanese students and friends. Rather than teaching ESL to the seniors in weekly classes, I continued my engagement in a more informal way with multigenerational families of children, teenagers, parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. We went shopping, drank tea, deciphered paperwork such as bills and report cards, and drank more tea. In the small apartment complex near the church where we first met, doors were open more often than not, and Bhutanese children frequented apartments where their Bhutanese peers lived.

Over time, I engaged more and more with the children and teenagers. They knew that my profession involved teaching and advising university students, so they and their parents asked

questions about how-things-work in U.S. schools and colleges. As they moved between districts in order to be closer to relatives who had resettled in other area neighborhoods (described below in Section 3.4.2: Neighborhoods), I helped them navigate the process of changing schools and neighborhoods as we chatted over tea and curry. I was often welcomed to family and community events that spanned home and host cultural traditions, including weddings, birthdays, baby naming ceremonies, graduations, and festivals such as Teej, Dashain, and Tihar (Diwali).

Over the years, I met more families as the United Nations continued resettling Bhutanese refugee families in Pittsburgh as well as many other U.S. locations. Several families were relatives of those first four families I met in church ESL classes. As I spent more time helping community youth navigate transitions to the U.S. (upon resettlement) and in Pittsburgh (changing schools and applying to college), I made a number of observations that led to several questions:

- Other than assistance scheduling medical exams and school enrollment, resettlement case workers do not provide Bhutanese youth with structured support when they arrive to the United States. Who outside of their families help them transition to a new schooling system in addition to other systems?
- Bhutanese youth provide cultural and language brokering (Pipher, 2002) for their families, thus taking leadership roles in their families' adjustment. Who supports them in these roles? How do they become so adept in navigating processes that are just as new to them?
- Most of the Bhutanese refugee youth I met started school at grade level or no more than one year behind. How did refugee camp schooling in Nepal prepare them to enter U.S. schools?

These observations led me to my research questions about Bhutanese youth acculturation processes and the systems and organizations with which they engage. I began by trying to find Generation 1.5 (Rumbaut, 2004, 2012) teenagers and young adults who had begun their lives and schooling under conditions of displacement and then moved here. I was particularly intrigued by the role refugee community organizations played in this community and decided to recruit Bhutanese youth who were involved in one of the two local RCOs, the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP) and/or Children of Shangri-Lost (COSL). I wanted to speak with refugee youth who were in at least eighth grade at the time of interviews and who had arrived in the U.S. in the middle of primary school or during middle or high school. Youth and young adults who arrived in the U.S. at preschool age or younger would not have strong memories of refugee camp, which is a critical element of my research questions.

### **3.3 Participants**

Five young Bhutanese adults in the Pittsburgh area agreed to participate in a series of interviews for the study. To find participants, I engaged in a few different strategies. First, I asked contacts in the Bhutanese community to recommend high school or college students who might be interested in participating in interviews. They allowed me to visit the office or attend events to invite participation. I also accessed my own network to generate a convenience sample of potential participants. Seven (three women and four men) agreed to participate. Two of the women withdrew before interviews were completed due to scheduling demands, leaving five participants for the project. They are introduced below in order of age at arrival in Pittsburgh.

*Arjun* is a secondary migrant, having arrived in Pittsburgh at 10 years of age from Syracuse. He is working on a computer science degree and enjoyed playing soccer with COSL before work and school took over his schedule. *Niraj*, whose citizenship ceremony introduces this work, is also a secondary migrant who first moved to the U.S. before his tenth birthday and then came to Pittsburgh at age eleven. He became involved in BCAP due to his high school's requirement that he complete community service hours as part of his graduation requirement. He remained involved after finishing the required number of hours and continues to volunteer as a citizenship tutor. *Kiran*, too, is a secondary migrant, having first settled in Chicago at the age of 10 before moving one year later to Pittsburgh. He volunteers his technical skills at BCAP events as well as helping with tutoring community elders for citizenship interviews, as *Niraj* does. *Manisha* and her family were resettled in Pittsburgh when she was 14, after she had finished eighth grade in refugee camp. Her history of active involvement in the classroom as well as through co-curricular activities began in Nepal, where her family encouraged such involvement while she also helped them with daily responsibilities. She helps with and attends BCAP events and was completing a summer internship for BCAP when we met. Finally, *Pradeep*, also a secondary migrant, came to Arizona at the age of 17 but soon moved to Pittsburgh for better opportunities. He is an active professional and academic as well as volunteer, with COSL as well as other organizations. See Table 2 for participant profiles.



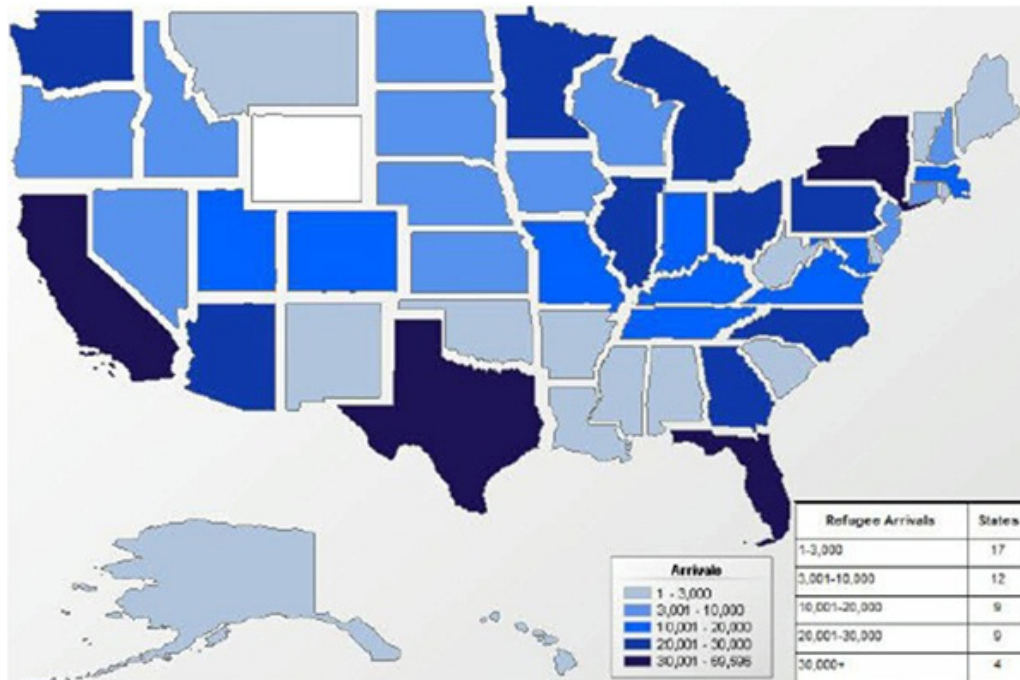
**Table 2. Participant Profiles**

Participant	Current	Years and locations in U.S.	Organizations
Arjun, 19	Community college student	Age at resettlement: 9.5 (2008) Secondary migration to Pittsburgh at age 10	COSL
Niraj, 18	University student	Age at resettlement: 8.5 (2008) Secondary migration to Pittsburgh at age 10.5	BCAP Local nonprofit Government internship
Kiran, 19	University student	Age at resettlement: 10 (2008) Secondary migration to Pittsburgh at age 11	BCAP Local nonprofits High school organizations
Manisha, 17	High school graduate entering community college	Age at resettlement to Pittsburgh: 14 (2015)	BCAP High school organizations
Pradeep, 24	University student	Age at resettlement: 17 (2011) Secondary migration to Pittsburgh at age 18	COSL Local non-profits High school and college organizations

### **3.4 Setting**

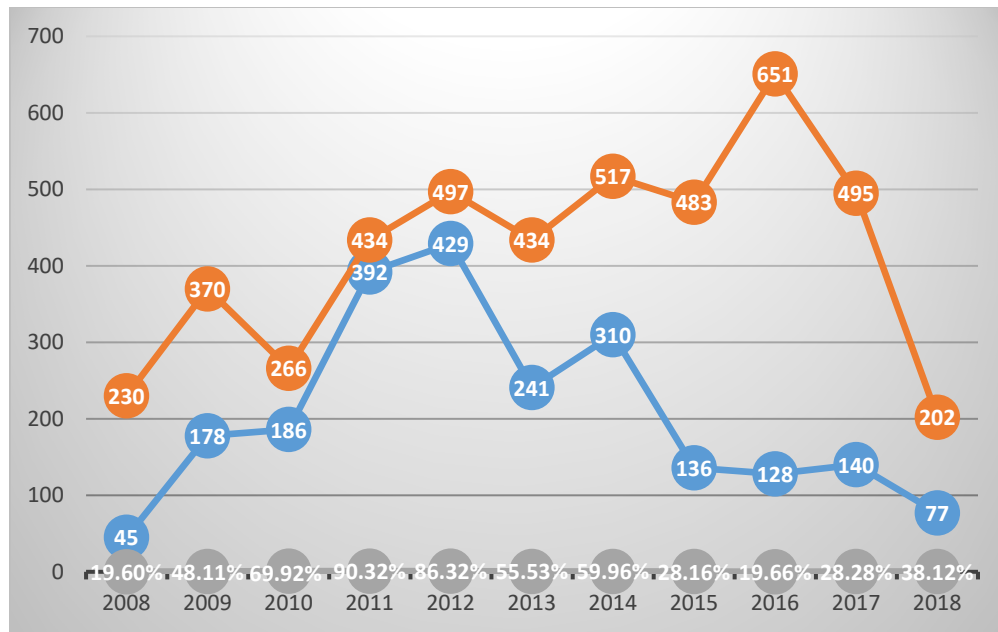
#### **3.4.1 Pittsburgh as a Resettlement Site**

Pennsylvania is one of the states with the highest number of refugees (Figure 5: Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.). It is also a popular destination for the Bhutanese and, for most years since resettlement, has been the state with the most Bhutanese refugees (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). With original settlers and secondary migrants combined, the population of resettled Bhutanese in the Pittsburgh area surpasses 5,000 residents (Murray, 2017).



**Figure 5. Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.**  
(Department of State, 2016)

My fieldwork took place in Pittsburgh, one of the state's five resettlement areas (in addition to Philadelphia, Harrisburg/Lancaster, Allentown/Scranton, and Erie) (Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 2020). In the peak years of resettlement (Figure 6: Bhutanese Versus Total Refugees in Pittsburgh Area), the Bhutanese comprised over three-quarters of international refugees resettled in Pittsburgh.



**Figure 6. Bhutanese (blue) vs Total (orange) Refugees in Pittsburgh Area**  
**(Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 2020)**

Bhutanese refugees, like others, arrive in Pittsburgh in one of two ways: assignment by the International Office of Migration (IOM) and its U.S. counterparts, or relocation after spending some months or years in a different location. For example, Arjun moved to Pittsburgh a year after living in their assigned resettlement location of Syracuse. His family decided, from relatives and acquaintances in Pittsburgh, that Pittsburgh would be a better option for them in terms of job opportunities and quality of life. Like Arjun, Niraj as well as Kiran and Pradeep are secondary migrants (Bloem & Loveridge, 2017).

My fieldwork took place at multiple sites, including participant homes, neighborhood institutions (public libraries, Bhutanese-owned organizations, and schools). The following sections provide descriptions of these sites.

### **3.4.2 Neighborhoods**

Bhutanese refugees live in several Pittsburgh area neighborhoods, mostly in the south of the city and nearby suburbs. I conducted most of my fieldwork in two suburban neighborhoods, Pine Haven and Walnut Hill. Most of the participants have lived or currently live in Pine Haven, with the exception of Manisha, who lived first in a city neighborhood and then moved to Walnut Hill, adjacent to Pine Haven. Both neighborhoods are internationally and linguistically diverse, with many Bhutanese residents. In Pine Haven are two apartment complexes where many refugees (as well as other immigrants and U.S.-born citizens) live. These residences were important sites for my interviews and field observations, as well as several neighborhood businesses, organizations, and schools, described in the following sections.

#### **3.4.2.1 Housing**

Most Bhutanese refugees, including participants in this study, in their early Pittsburgh days lived in one of two housing complexes in Pine Haven: Cedar Square and Birch Commons. Both provide low-income housing complexes in the south hills of Pittsburgh and contain studio through three-bedroom units as well as townhouses. Both are in the Pine Haven school district and in walking distance of school and city bus stops as well as discount shops, restaurants, and other businesses. Mostly elders, young mothers, and children are visible during the day; school-age children are at one of the public schools, while other adults are at work, most often at one of the industrial laundries or at a food-packing plant. On any given day, a stroll through either complex will include the sights of older Bhutanese women in tunics and skirts or saris, older Bhutanese men in topis (brimless hats sported by Nepali-speaking elders), and young mothers wearing jeans and T-shirts while they watch their children. In addition, other refugee children and adults from

Somalia, Congo, Syria, Burma, and Iraq live in the same area. Native-born U.S. citizens of all races also live in the communities, making these two areas among the most diverse in Pittsburgh.

While the housing at these sites is affordable, the living situation presents challenges. Residents are eager to find better, safer housing, as the facilities tend to be run-down, with thin walls that do not insulate against neighbors' noise, concrete steps that often need to be repaired, peeling paint and old appliances, and building staff who are slow to de-ice walkways in the winter. Before the Bhutanese began moving to Birch Commons, the neighborhood was known for high crime rates and gang activity. Niraj's aunt and uncle were among the first to move there several years ago; they were aware of the neighborhood's history, but the neighborhood where they initially resided also had safety issues plus fewer Bhutanese neighbors. Over time, as more immigrants and refugees moved in, safety issues became less of a concern. For the residents who moved there, the proximity to their jobs as well as Bhutanese neighborhoods and support structures offset their initial safety concerns.

Four of the participants lived in either Cedar Square or Birch Commons at some point. Manisha did not experience living in either housing complex. Because she had relatives who had settled in Pittsburgh prior to her family's arrival, she and her parents first stayed with an aunt and then found their own place to rent. Arjun, Kiran, and Pradeep lived at Cedar Square when they first arrived in Pittsburgh. Niraj's family first lived in another neighborhood with relatives and eventually moved to Birch Commons, residing in an apartment near other relatives. All five participants' families now own their own homes, typical of refugees and immigrants after five to seven years. However, Cedar Square and Birch Commons still factor into their experience (and, therefore, my fieldwork). BCAP hosts citizenship classes and other events at these complexes or in walking distance, thus enabling access to services for families with limited transportation. Kiran

and Pradeep have volunteered for BCAP and other non-profit programs that offer classes and children's summer camps at Cedar Square. Niraj assists with BCAP-sponsored citizenship classes taught at the library near Birch Commons, where COSL has also had meetings and events that I got to attend. (See 3.4.2.2. Businesses and Other Organizations for details on organizations in and near these housing complexes.) Finally, all five participants still have Bhutanese friends and relatives who live in the complex, making these sites still a meaningful part of their social and family lives.

#### **3.4.2.2 Businesses and Other Organizations**

In Pine Haven and Walnut Hill, daily social and economic life has changed with the presence of several Bhutanese-owned businesses and non-profit organizations. As of 2020, there are more than five groceries and restaurants, three convenience stores, a jewelry store, clothing store, and hair salon. In addition, there are at least two Bhutanese-owned elder care organizations. BCAP rents office space in Manisha's neighborhood, and Niraj and Kiran volunteer there, as Pradeep has in the past. COSL does not have a physical office space but meets in public spaces in these neighborhoods, including two public libraries as well as athletic facilities (for soccer practice and games). They also meet at one another's nearby homes. All of these spaces contribute to a vibrant Bhutanese presence in the area.

Other organizations in these neighborhoods are important to the Bhutanese community and have been significant for some of the participants in this study. Cedar Square houses not only Bhutanese but also refugees of other nationalities. In this complex, a non-denominational U.S. interfaith center rents space to coordinate family and youth programming for low-income immigrants. A local literacy organization also has used space there for adult ESL classes and related programming; Arjun's grandparents lived across the street from the literacy office and

walked over twice a week to study English with other refugees. A short bus ride away are two public libraries, both of which provide programs and materials for English language learners. The county community college has four campuses, one of which is a bus ride or quick drive away. Four of the participants in this study attended the community college for at least two semesters in order to save tuition money while they worked toward four-year degrees.

### **3.4.2.3 Schools**

Pittsburgh is in Allegheny County, which has 43 school districts (Allegheny Institute for Public Policy, 2018). Arjun, Niraj, and Kiran graduated from the Pine Haven district, one of the most internationally and linguistically diverse in the county, second only to the city school district. Manisha graduated from Walnut Hill after spending her first year at Metropolitan High School in the city district, and Pradeep graduated out of state before he and his family relocated to Pittsburgh. Similarly, Niraj went first to a city school and transferred to Pine Haven when his family changed neighborhoods. Manisha and the Pine Haven students all lived in diverse neighborhoods with other Bhutanese families. Depending on the bus route, students might ride a school bus only with other international students (and in some cases only with other Bhutanese).

Over the past several years, I have spent time in the Pine Haven High School as well as the first high school that Manisha attended. One year I helped teach an after-school career preparation program at Pine Haven High School, and in other years I helped Bhutanese students complete paperwork to transfer to both Pine Haven High School and Metropolitan High School. Nearly every year, I know someone who is graduating from one of these high schools and attend graduation ceremonies. These ceremonies reflect the increasing diversity of the city overall and the neighborhoods where most of the Bhutanese live. Some of the most commonly used Nepali-speaking Bhutanese surnames are seen in yearbooks and commencement programs (Acharya,

Chhetri, Gurung, Phuyal, Rai). At Metropolitan High School, one of the main hallways is lined with flags that represent the nationalities of the student body, including the flags of both Bhutan and Nepal.

It's a commonplace that schools are a microcosm of society; the mixed reception that immigrants and refugees face in the larger society is true of schools as well. On the one hand, Pine Haven and several other schools presently work to create structures that include refugee parents, including those who are English language learners themselves. In Pine Haven and other suburban districts as well as the city, phone or in-person interpreters are provided for parent-teacher meetings. Pine Haven also provides bus transportation to parent-teacher nights at the schools. On the other hand, participants spoke of challenges in selecting classes, placing in the correct grade levels or classes, accessing services, and engaging with non-Bhutanese peers. Participant reflections on their early days in the U.S. (see Chapter 4) illustrate a range of experiences with the school system (and responses to those experiences, both positive and negative).

### **3.5 Data Types**

Yin (2014) cites six types of data typically used in case study, each with its own advantages and disadvantages in collection and analysis: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. I define how each relates to my study in the sections below, and I follow these sections with a discussion on how I organized and interpreted the data I gathered.



### **3.5.1 Documents and Archival Records**

Most of my document analysis took place on-line as I reviewed BCAP and COSL websites and social media sites. (In order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity as well as to respect individual privacy, I did not request access to participants' personal social media sites.) This is a critical piece of research with youth in the present moment, as Jocson (2014) argues: "Youth media is a growing cultural and educational movement; studying what young people create as linked to their everyday experience has implications for humanizing research" (p. 105). To get the fullest sense of youth lived experience requires meeting them on-line as well as face to face.

Online documents were not difficult to retrieve. BCAP's website includes a great deal of background information as well as their mission and vision statements, which I could download for review and analysis. The organization is very active on Facebook, so I was able to capture images and text for later analysis

Physical archival records for this study were very limited. Occasionally a participant's family would show me such items, such as photographs from refugee camp. The few times participants shared artifacts with me occurred when I met with them in their homes, which not everyone wanted or was able to do. When we met in public spaces, archival records were not easily available. In addition, any archival records would be in the possession of parents or grandparents rather than the youth I interviewed. Material from websites and organization social media, then, were my primary sources for document analysis.

### 3.5.2 Interviews

I used a semi-structured interview protocol, with a list of guiding questions from which I could digress, depending on how the conversation with each participant flowed. I followed Seidman's (2006, pp. 17-19) three-part semi-structured interview protocol, described below, which involved scheduling at least two and usually three interviews with each participant. (See Appendix B for the interview questions.)

1. Focused Life History: Questions for the first interview challenged participants to look back on their lives by reconstructing "their early experiences in their families, in school, with friends, in their neighborhood, and at work" (p. 17). I asked participants about their experiences in refugee camps, including with camp schools, family responsibilities, difficulties as well as positive memories, and interactions with the refugee community as well as with communities outside of refugee camp. I also asked about their involvement with and/or awareness of non-governmental organizations' work with refugee youth, which has been described in Rosalind Evans' fieldwork in Nepali refugee camps (2010a). Finally, I enquired about their experiences in their early days of resettlement.
2. The Details of Experience: This second interview focused on participants' present lived experience, as opposed to the past. My focus here was to gain an understanding of participants' networks, including but not limited to the refugee community organizations BCAP and COSL. In this interview, I asked each participant to complete a network sociogram, described in the next section, adapted from the work of Hogan, Carrasco, and Wellman (2007). Some of the participants preferred not to complete the sociogram and chose instead just to converse about their friends, acquaintances,

mentors, and affiliations. Section 3.3.2.1 (Relationships and Networks Sociograms) includes an image of Niraj's sociogram (Figure 7) as an example.

3. Reflection on the Meaning: I asked questions to consider the effects of the experiences they described in prior interviews, and I asked them about their future plans regarding education, work, family, and location (e.g., plans to stay in Pittsburgh or to relocate). How participants see their future selves reveals much about the work of transcultural identity.

To collect the interview data, I used an audio recorder and took detailed notes. I transcribed interviews myself. Individual interviews with five participants (and three interviews per person) lasted just over an hour for most, with one or two exceeding 90 minutes. This number of interviews provided a substantial amount of material to transcribe and analyze; however, the second of the three-part interview structure was largely comprised of an activity (completing a network sociogram), which yielded less transcription.

### **3.5.2.1 Interview Process**

When I introduced the study to each of the participants, I explained that I would want to meet with them up to three times, if their schedules allowed, and that I could meet them at a location of their choosing. They chose different places, which provided me with a more expansive view of their daily lived experience. Arjun, Kiran, and Niraj chose to have all three meetings at their homes. Manisha asked to meet at the BCAP office, and Pradeep met with me twice at one of the local libraries and then once at his home.

In the first meeting, we reviewed process and IRB paperwork. I emphasized confidentiality and de-identification processes, such as changing each person's name, changing some identifying details (e.g., the name of a parent's workplace), and the like. We signed consent forms, including

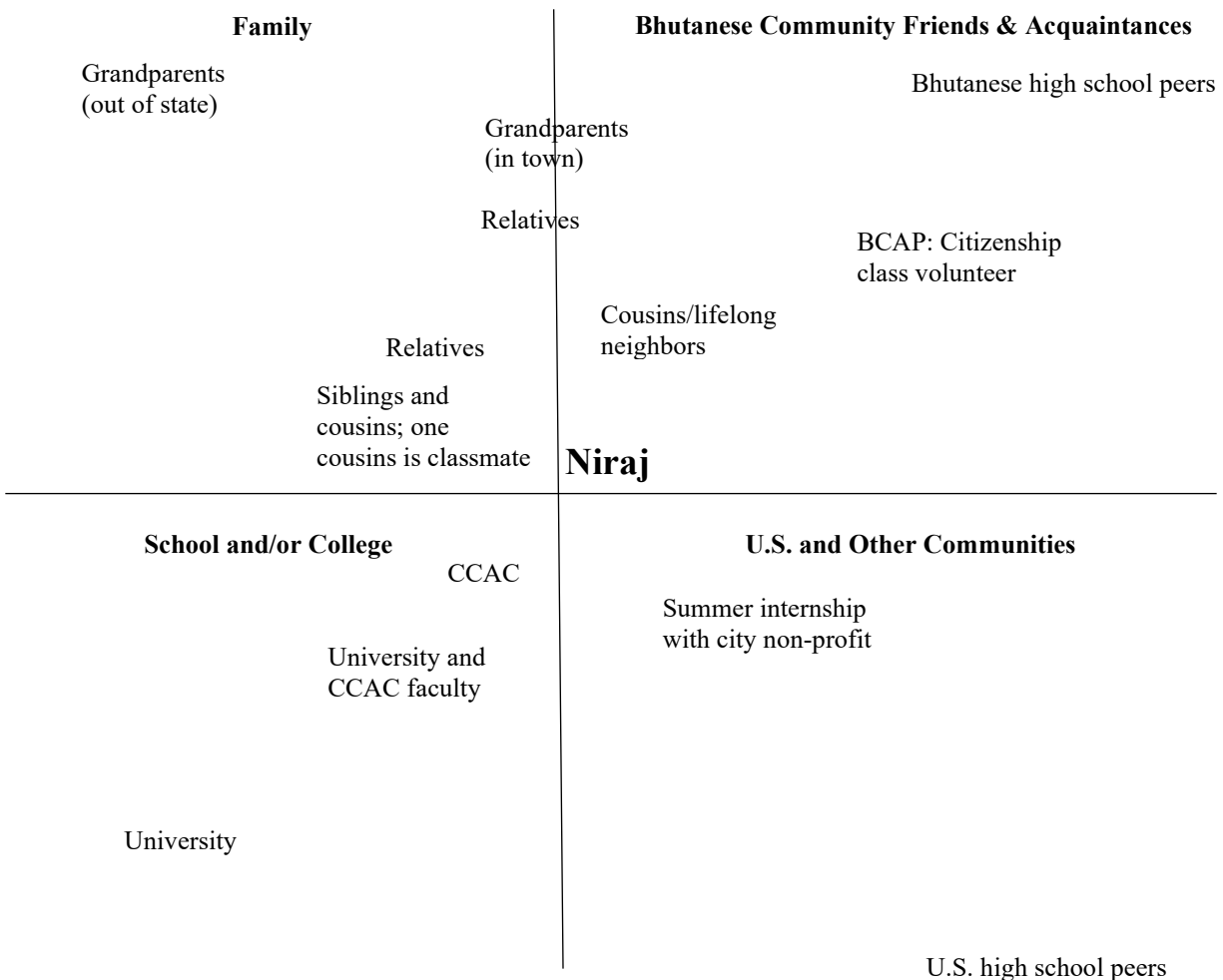
parental consent forms for those under the age of 18. Per IRB guidelines, we relied on email to communicate. Except for the activity described in the following section, the interviews were semi-structured and conversational. I arrived with a list of guiding questions, but our conversations took many turns while still providing me with ample data to address my research questions.

### **3.5.2.2 Relationships and Networks Sociograms**

One goal for this study was to learn about how Bhutanese refugee youth access pre-existing networks as well as form their own. In order to understand formal and informal networks with whom participants engage, I adapted a technique created by Hogan, Carrasco, and Wellman (2007). The authors created a guided activity to help participants identify relationships that serve as sources of support and guidance. This activity allows participants to identify “strong ties” and “loose ties” with minimal researcher interference. Participants created visual displays that were engaging, illustrated their “strong” and “weak” ties in multiple communities, and showed overlap in categories (e.g., a family contact who also participates with an ethnic community organization).

To gather this data, I asked participants to complete sociograms, visual representations of the organizations, individuals, and networks with which they engage. To begin, I tried to follow the Hogan, et al. (2007) protocol of giving each participant post-it notes or note cards with two colors, one color representing close contacts (people with whom the individual is very close and/or with whom the individual communicates regularly) and another color representing acquaintances with whom the participant does not feel a particular sense of closeness or kinship and/or with whom the participant interacts only occasionally. Participants were to write the name of the contact and also the person’s role (e.g., Mrs. Jenkins, ESL teacher) unless the relationship is self-evident (e.g., Mom). Participants were then to place the post-it notes or cards in cells drawn on large sheets of paper. Each cell, or block, was labeled with one of the following four categories:

Family, Bhutanese community, school, host community. A few participants found the color coding to be confusing; in the end, I asked those participants to simply draw a network map with the names of people and organizations they were close to. Some participants found it awkward to organize responses by degree of closeness and chose to talk through their responses rather than complete the written activity. Three participants completed the sociogram activity. Their network sociograms can be seen in Chapter 5. Niraj's is included here as an example in Figure 7 below.



**Figure 7. Sample Relationships and Networks Sociogram: Niraj**

### **3.5.3 Direct Observation and Participant-Observation**

Yin (2014) divides observation into two categories, direct observation and participant-observation. The distinction between the two lies in the role of the researcher. In direct (or naturalistic, according to Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2013) observation, the researcher unobtrusively observes interactions among the research participants, as I did as an audience member at a COSL panel presentation. Participant-observation, however, can offer unique insights as the researcher engages with participants and observes them more closely, as I did in attending family weddings. Yin (2014) cautions that the researcher's involvement could increase the risk of bias and data manipulation (p. 106). Conversely, it can be argued that the researcher is never invisible and affects the research situation under observation regardless (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2013). Both forms of observation were central to my work. As a direct observer, I observed not only the participants and the organizations with which they are affiliated, but also observed the impact on others. As a participant observer, I noted practices and relationships that participants might "take for granted" so much that they do not arise in interviews and other conversations (Hatch, 2002).

### **3.5.4 Artifacts**

What is kept and what is discarded reveal much about collective as well as individual identity. Artifacts are material items representing individual or community history. Examples could be emblematic of the home culture, such as regional dress, musical instruments, currency, religious iconography, and the like. In this case, artifacts can also be similar items from post-resettlement life, including high school diploma or recent photographs as well as the accoutrements of daily life (such as clothing and food).

Given the circumstances of refugee flight and resettlement, Bhutanese refugees have a surprising number of artifacts from their home countries, including property deeds (deemed inauthentic by the Bhutanese government) and IOM materials. As an example of the latter, many families still have plastic bags with the IOM logo, bags that were used to transport important paperwork and other documents on the flight to the U.S.

Artifact analysis was limited by some of the same constraints as archival records: Most artifacts were in the possession of parents and grandparents, who weren't interview subjects. Occasionally, artifacts would be on display in family homes I would visit. Some participants preferred to meet in public spaces, which limited my opportunity to observe home objects. Occasionally, a participant would share an artifact, such as the UNHCR blanket that Niraj still had from his travel to the U.S. (See Figure 8: Artifact: Niraj's UNHCR Blanket.)



**Figure 8. Artifact: Niraj's UNHCR Blanket**

Like Tim O'Brien's (1990) soldiers in Vietnam, the "things they carried were largely determined by necessity" (p. 2). They carried what was necessary, but even when the necessity had passed, the need to keep physical proof of our experience is important. Individuals and families in this community have some shared sense of necessity (e.g., IOM bags) but also their own unique understandings of what is necessary to keep. Most families keep documents about refugee camps, including their assigned homes and resettlement travel documents.

Artifact analysis is not limited to past experience. Four of the participants had me to their homes during my research project, which gave me opportunity to observe the material objects important to daily life. These include family photographs, which are plentiful and displayed on the walls, often printed as posters. Interspersed with family photographs are images of Hindu deities, most commonly Krishna, Shiva, Lakshmi, Ganesh, and Parvati. Dress varies by age, with younger family members more often wearing clothing of the dominant culture, particularly young men with jeans and T-shirts. Girls and women tend to wear a blend of host culture clothing but at community cultural events wear saris while the men generally wear western business casual, illustrating the gendered nature of cultural maintenance, at least in matters of dress. (See Chapter 5 for additional discussion of gender and cultural representation.)

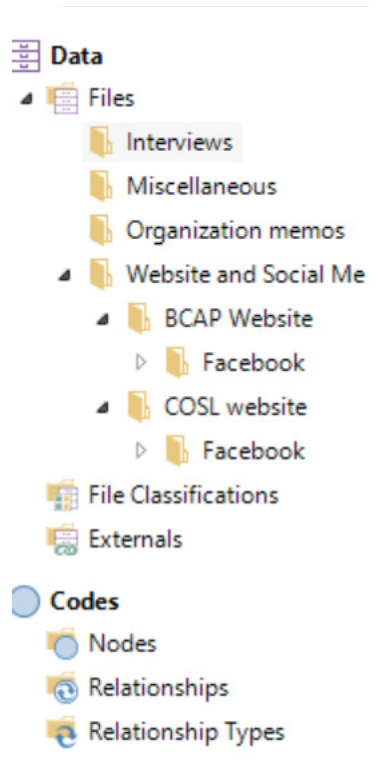
### **3.6 Organization and Analysis with NVivo 12**

Organizing, coding, and analyzing multiple sources of data is challenging, and software options make the process more manageable (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). I used NVivo qualitative data management software to organize, code, and present the data I gathered.



### 3.6.1 Organizing Data

Organizing all of my sources in NVivo helped me to move seamlessly among sources and to see overlapping themes. I began by creating folders for different forms of data, with a folder for interviews, observation memos and notes, BCAP website and social media posts, and COSL website and social media posts. See Figure 9 (NVivo Data Collection Folders) for an example.



**Figure 9. NVivo Data Collection Folders**

Case studies rely on multiple sources of data to explore the lived experience of participants (Yin, 2014), in this case, Generation 1.5 Bhutanese youth who reside in Pittsburgh. In order to manage and analyze multiple sources of data, it is important to create systematic processes for organizing as well as analyzing data and presenting findings. NVivo provides unique resources for each step of the process, beginning with organization. It has features that allow not only the coding and analysis of documents but also websites, social media, audio, and video files (Edhlund

& McDougall, 2016). Being able to access different forms of media in one place helped me to create a thorough and systematic coding process.

### **3.6.2 Coding Process**

While I gathered data and conducted and transcribed interviews, I began the coding process. Coding can be deductive, with predetermined themes, or inductive, allowing researchers to uncover themes based on their data review. My coding process was both deductive and inductive.

I began with deductive coding with codes based on my literature review on acculturation and social capital theory. I created codes for Berry's (1997) acculturation responses ("integrated," "separated," "assimilated," and "marginalized") and for Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco's (2001) transcultural identity model ("transcultural," "ethnic flight," and "adversarial responses"). Similarly, I assigned codes based on social capital theory (including codes such as "bonding" and "bridging" social capital, among others from the literature) and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework (with codes for each form of community cultural wealth, including "linguistic," "familial," "aspirational," "social," "navigational" and "resistant").

In addition, though, other themes emerged through my reading and review of the data. As I noted themes in interview transcripts, social media posts, and observation notes from field visits, I added codes. This inductive coding strategy yielded a number of codes, including gender (for participant remarks and my own observations about gender roles), friends, and family.

Dissertation 2018.nvp - NVivo 12 Pro

File Home Import Create Explore Share

Memo Framework Matrix Relationship Node Document External Case Case Classification File Classification Set Search Folder NVivo Transcription Transcription

Notes Codes Data Classifications Search Folder Folder

> Nodes Search Project

Name	Files	References	Created By
Acculturation	0	0	SD
Challenges	12	90	SD
Community Cultural Wealth	36	150	SD
Community event	12	21	SD
Family	11	61	SD
Friend	12	38	SD
Gender	15	24	SD
Government	6	24	SD
Great Quotes	19	83	SD
History	3	11	SD
Identity	8	31	SD
Media Forms	8	15	SD
Refugee Camp	6	72	SD
Resettlement	9	66	SD
Resources	13	46	SD
Social Capital	13	30	SD
Youth engagement	37	63	SD

Folders

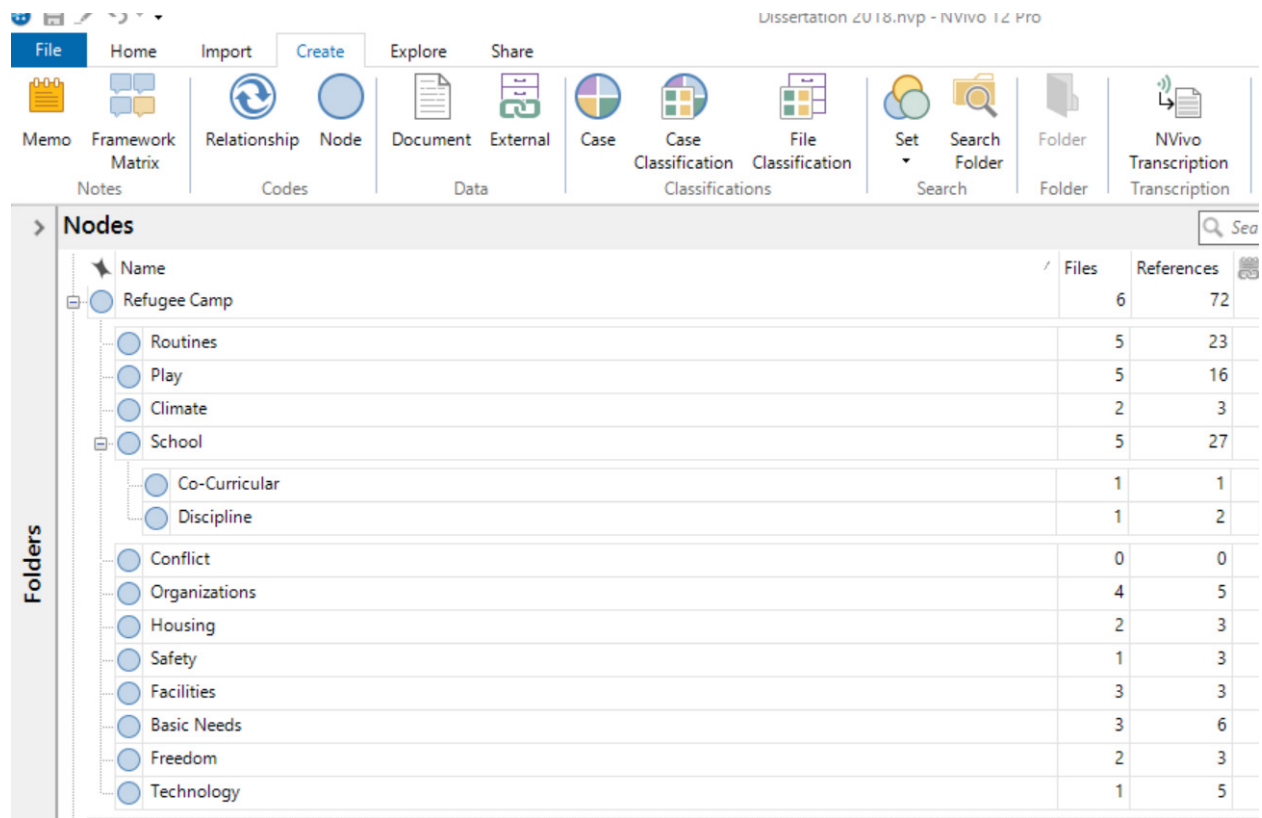
Figure 10. Coding in NVivo 12: Deductive Coding Highlighted

The screenshot shows the NVivo 12 Pro interface for a project named 'Dissertation 2018.nvp'. The 'Nodes' list on the left contains 18 nodes, with several highlighted in yellow to indicate inductive codes. The main table on the right provides a summary of these nodes, including the number of files, references, and the creator (SD).

Name	Files	References	Created By
Acculturation	0	0	SD
Challenges	12	90	SD
Community Cultural Wealth	36	150	SD
Community event	12	21	SD
Family	11	61	SD
Friend	12	38	SD
Gender	15	24	SD
Government	6	24	SD
Great Quotes	19	83	SD
History	3	11	SD
Identity	8	31	SD
Media Forms	8	15	SD
Refugee Camp	6	72	SD
Resettlement	9	66	SD
Resources	13	46	SD
Social Capital	13	30	SD
Youth engagement	37	63	SD

**Figure 11. Coding in NVivo 12: Inductive Codes Highlighted**

Some of these codes were quite general (e.g., “refugee camp”) and needed to be further divided with “child” nodes as subsections. Sometimes the child nodes themselves needed to be further broken down. In Figure 12 (Refugee Camp Coding Hierarchy), we can see the “parent” node of Refugee Camp with several “children” nodes, including “School.” The “school” node has its own children nodes (i.e., grandchildren) for co-curricular activities and school discipline practices.



**Figure 12. Refugee Camp Coding Hierarchy**

NVivo's coding hierarchy helps to make visible the many layers and nuances of data. There are many ways to organize data without software, of course. However, the features for coding and for grouping codes into "families" quickly and easily inform the analysis process.

### 3.6.3 Unearthing Themes and Patterns in Coded Data

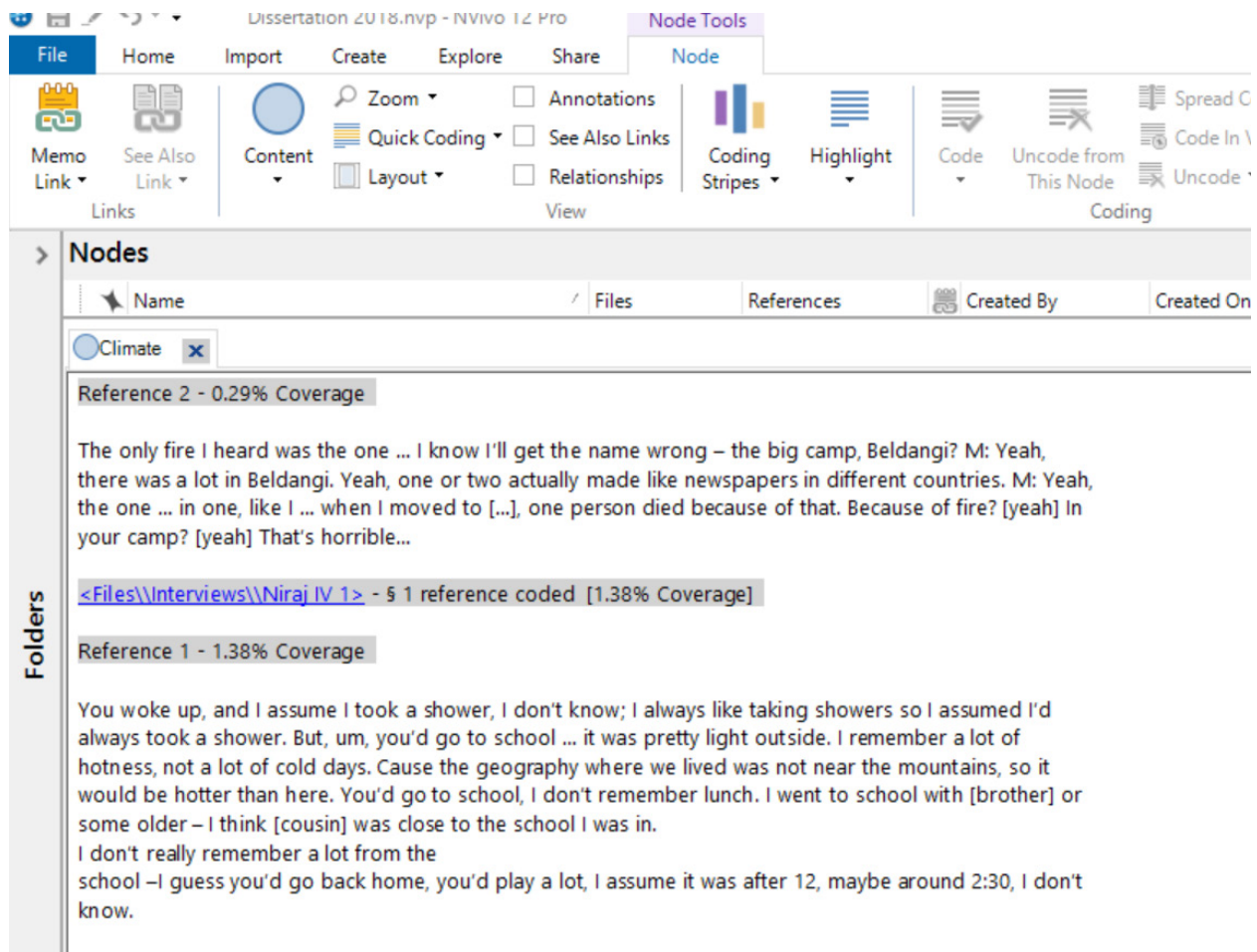
Coding with NVivo has affordances beyond the convenience of organizing and coding data; it allows for retrieving and analyzing data in multiple ways, by individual case (e.g., interview participant) or by themes (e.g., codes). The ability to query data in different ways enhanced the findings presented in Chapters 4 through 6. These query functions, and the multiple visual options

NVivo provides for representing data, also help to make transparent to the reader how I arrived at my findings.

### **3.6.3.1 Searching Codes**

Another benefit of coding with NVivo is the ease with which I could search the data not only by individual units, such as an interview participant or website, but also by themes informed by the literature (deductive coding) and those that emerged from a close reading of the data (inductive coding). After my coding process was underway, I could review the data and begin my analysis in multiple ways.

For example, I could review units of analysis, such as social media posts, to observe which codes, or themes, were marked most frequently. I could also search by code: For example, I used “climate” as a child node for the parent “refugee camp” node. When I click on the “climate” node, I can see that two participants made comments with this code. See Figure 13 below for two interview sections that were coded “Climate” under the broader code of “Refugee Camp.”



**Figure 13. "Climate" Node**

Another feature in NVivo assists researchers (and readers) in interpreting the weight of different themes. For example, two participants discussed climate issues in refugee camp. Their observations were quite brief, as seen in Figure 13. While each utterance on climate was more than one sentence, their comments comprised a very small part of the interview (1.38% coverage for the first and 0.29 percent for the second – in other words, less than 2 percent of each interview covered climate in refugee camp).

Quantifying narrative findings is a slippery business – my case study focuses on participants' lived experience and identity development, which are generally not quantifiable concepts. Noting how often participants referenced certain topics is useful in presenting their

experiences accurately – to a point. In referring back to Figure 13, the first reference is Niraj’s memory of going to school. He describes the heat relative to their location in Nepal and moves on to other topics. The second reference is from Manisha’s first interview and comprises an even briefer portion of our conversation (less than 0.5 percent). However, the brief conversation is more intense, with a bit more emotion (“one person died”). The miniscule quantifiable amount of “coverage” (0.29 percent) does not mean that this part of our conversation isn’t worthy of exploration. Quantifying some forms of qualitative data, however, can be helpful in identifying themes that might otherwise have been missed; I found this to be the case with word frequency counts (see 3.6.3.3 below). Numbers can also serve to triangulate findings, adding another form of interpretive work to lead to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Counting in qualitative research can be valuable but should be approached critically and cautiously (Hannah & Lautsch, 2011).

### **3.6.3.2 Coding Matrices**

In addition, I could create matrices to show where codes might intersect. This feature was particularly helpful when I analyzed the first interviews in which participants discussed their pasts, before resettlement and upon arrival. In considering the development of transcultural identity, I wanted to consider how the participants accessed or expressed a need for different forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). I created a matrix to illustrate how many times each participant made a statement that I had coded with one of Yosso’s six forms of capital that comprise community cultural wealth. See Figure 14 (Coding Matrix for Participants and Community Cultural Wealth).



	A: Aspirational ▼	B: Familial ▼	C: Linguistic ▼	D: Navigational ▼	E: Resistant ▼	F: Social ▼
1: Arjun Interview 1 ▼	6	17	10	29	2	18
2: Kiran 7.18 interview 1 ▼	10	12	1	24	1	12
3: Manisha 1 ▼	19	19	2	20	7	21
4: Niraj IV 1 ▼	2	12	1	7	6	15
5: Pradeep 1 ▼	10	25	4	15	4	19

**Figure 14. Coding Matrix for Participants and Community Cultural Wealth**

Hannah and Lautsch's (2011) caution about quantifying qualitative data applies to matrices as well. Creating this matrix as well as others was not an end point in my analysis but the beginning of a longer inquiry. I noted the importance of navigational capital for most of the participants and the comparatively lower number of utterances coded as "resistant." However, the number of utterances does not correlate with the intensity of some of participants' "resistant" statements, particularly for Manisha and Niraj. While it was interesting and somewhat informative to note the numbers of times particular themes emerged, my interpretive work did not privilege those numbers. They were one source of analysis, among many.

### 3.6.3.3 Word Frequency

With several documents, particularly interviews, I used NVivo to generate word counts, which could be visualized in list form or as word clouds. I used this feature for the first round of interviews, when participants spoke of their past experience in refugee camp and upon resettlement in the U.S. (Chapter 4). NVivo isn't the only product that provides this option, but it is a useful part of the software (as well as visually appealing, with the option to use different color palettes and the like). This feature was helpful in identifying emergent themes that I might have missed otherwise. For example, I noted that Kiran (Figure 15: Kiran Interview #1), in contrast with other participants, often mentioned physical spaces, whether speaking of cities (Kathmandu, Pittsburgh)

particular local spaces (school, airport), and physical movement (where he “lived” and when he “moved”).



Figure 15. Kiran Interview 1

Noting the patterns in each participant’s word choices provided another level of analysis that I might otherwise have missed. In Kiran’s case, spaces loomed large in our conversations, with his detailed descriptions of home life in Kathmandu and in refugee camp as well as the transition to a big city (Chicago) and yet another transition to a Pittsburgh suburb. All of the participants spoke of the spaces they inhabited in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, but not with the quantity and intensity that Kiran demonstrated.

Different forms of data visualization, including word counts (seen for each participant in Chapter 4) served two functions: first, to help me examine data from different angles, and second, to provide visualizations of data to help the reader understand the collective and individual experiences of participants. The combination of NVivo software and low-technology data visualization (in the form of network sociograms in 3.5.2.2. and throughout Chapter 5) served to represent my findings in creative, accurate, and accessible ways.

### **3.7 Ethics of Working with Refugee Youth**

The importance of education research with vulnerable populations, including minority youth, is well established in our field, with reasons including the use of narrative to amplify voice (Daiute & Fine, 2003; Ellis, et al., 2008), provide context for research findings (Kennedy & MacNeela, 2013), appeal to an audience (Fine, 2006; Fine, 2011), and influence policy development (Bertram, et al., 2000; Daiute & Fine, 2003; Fine, 2006). Before embarking on a qualitative research project with immigrant youth from a non-dominant population, it is important to consider the unique challenges involved at multiple stages of the process, from planning to publication (Schelbe, et al., 2014).

In planning this project and soliciting participation, I began with the network of relationships I had established over several years of engagement with the Bhutanese community, starting with my early volunteer work as a literacy instructor and expanding to include several friendships with families and mentoring relationships with children and adolescents, with whom I still have regular contact. I also met some new acquaintances, including Manisha and Kiran, through the course of planning my research. Because of my history with the local Bhutanese community, establishing trust and getting buy-in for my project was not too challenging.

Whether individual and community relationships are entrenched or new, the appearance or reality of exploitation is a concern addressed in organizational codes of ethics (American Anthropological Association, 2012; American Educational Research Association, 2011). As well as my responsibilities toward the individual participants are my larger responsibilities to local Bhutanese communities in general. The American Educational Research Association (2012) addresses the issues of community responsibility in the organization's ethical Principle E: Social Responsibility:

Education researchers are aware of their professional and scientific responsibility to the communities and societies in which they live and work. They apply and make public their knowledge in order to contribute to the public good. When undertaking research, they strive to advance scientific and scholarly knowledge and to serve the public good.

Qualitative research simply does not happen without relationships. In a project with strangers or new acquaintances, new relationships develop and previously established relationships evolve. As Gunzenhauser (2006) explains, “A supposition is that all knowing occurs in relation, because it is through contact with knowing others that knowledge claims emerge” (p. 622). His response is to think about the researcher and the participant not as one with knowledge and the other as the “unknown,” but rather as “two knowing subjects” who can engage in shared critique.

Gunzenhauser cites Noddings’ (1984) work on caring and “engrossment” in a relationship, and his statement draws from her work on the caring relationships, including the dyad of the “one-caring” and the one “cared-for.” This is not a relationship with one actor and one who is acted upon, as research may traditionally be viewed. Rather, “caring” and equal exchange requires reciprocity, “an ongoing process of exchange with the aim of establishing and maintaining equality between parties” (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008).

In my meetings with individuals and groups, I strove to meet Noddings’ qualities of care as well as professional ethical standards. Meeting with participants multiple times over interviews and at events helped to reinforce the message that I was vested in the community and in them as individuals. The semi-structured format of interviews gave participants agency and authority in driving the conversations toward those areas they most wanted to discuss.

I attempted to meet ethical standards in a transparent manner by sharing updates on my progress periodically, reminding them of voluntary participation consent and the option to withdraw from the study, and inviting them to attend my defense and review all or parts of the final manuscript. Only one interview participant and one community stakeholder (Khara, the BCAP executive director) accepted the invitation to the defense, and one interview participant asked to see the final manuscript. By communicating these processes from the start, during review of informed consent documents; during field research, by reminding them of informed consent and repeating steps taken for confidentiality (Schelbe, Chanmagum, Moses, Saltzburg, & Williams, 2014); and at the end (inviting to attend defense and to review final products), I hoped to communicate a consistent message of respect for individuals and their communities.

The ethical standards and scholarship I referenced above are not specific to refugee youth, but is important to apply in working with any non-dominant population. One area of special concern in working with youth is how best to exit the field, a research challenge that remains relatively unexamined. Katz (2014) speaks to “challenges of departure” upon completing her research with Latinx children of immigrants. She weighs the balance of being a community partner versus a clinical researcher who enters, gathers data, and leaves without sharing results of resources that might be interesting or useful to a group.

I may grapple a bit less with this than others, as I am still an active participant in the community. I attend events that BCAP and COSL host, and I continue to teach a citizenship class to community elders, as Niraj and Kiran sometimes do. As a result, there is no hard exit for me to navigate. Katz’s point is valid, though, regarding the relationships I have formed with the interview participants, some of whom I knew before and others I met through the course of the research project. They spent a great deal of time with me, shared so much about their lives, and

trusted me to render their experience truthfully and respectfully. In the end, I decided to let them decide if they wanted to continue to engage with me. I sent a few follow-up emails to let them know about the status of my project but also to ask how they were doing. After our interviews, most of them experienced some type of transition – graduating from high school or college, starting a new job, transferring to a new college, moving to a new place – and I asked how they were and let them know how they could reach me. Some continued to engage with me, and others chose to move on.

### 3.8 Conclusion

*Be a good listener in the special way a story requires: note the manner of presentation; the development of plot, character; the addition of new, dramatic sequences; the emphasis accorded to one figure or another in the recital; and the degree of enthusiasm, of coherence, the narrator gives to his or her account. (Coles, 1989)*

Whether through conversation, film, theater, or social media, youth members of the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh and Children of Shangri-Lost are telling the stories of their lives. My hope is that I render their stories accurately and respectfully. The choices I have made regarding study design and methodology are designed to do so.

The data I gathered and analyzed address my research question from multiple angles, as required for case studies (Yin, 2014). From a perspective of acculturation responses and transcultural identity, participants show how they “make sense” of the resettlement process and their responses to it. Written and multimedia documents from the group will provide emic perspectives, illustrating how Bhutanese youth both perceive and present themselves. Artifacts,

tangible objects that they keep and carry, also indicate the presence or absence of transcultural identity. Identity work happens in the context of relationships and communities. Participants, in interviews, described the relationships that have affected their growth and their involvement with home and host communities. In the next three sections, I will share their thoughts and expressions on their experiences.

#### 4.0 The Past: Life in Nepal and Moving to the U.S.

*Susan:* What are some positive memories you have of your time in Nepal, if any?

*Niraj:* Not if any, I have a lot.

*Kiran:* I remember reading a lot because I liked reading and I had a lot of free time and they had a library at the camp. The UNHCR – one of the organizations had a library and I remember reading and going to school. And if I was with friends, just going around in the jungle.

*Manisha:* We used to have poem competitions, and essay writing. There was the art and the theater one, but I didn't join them. I used to do my own art, and I never showed interest in the theater.

*Arjun:* I used to go to [my cousin's] house all the time, like once or twice a month; it wasn't that far. I used to go on a bike ride.

*Niraj:* Did anyone tell you about the events they would do? The event I was thinking of was they would have whoever was best ranked – events where the person with the highest grade would get an award: first gets a bowl, second gets a plate or something. I don't know; some kind of reward system. I remember that.

*Pradeep:* They would shout, "Hey, Pradeep, let's go!" Mom would be like, "Get home before it's dark." If there was nothing to do, you find a way to do something with your friends. You just go [after school] to his home, and you just stay there and you're like, "Hey, let's go there; let's do this; let's play soccer."

*Niraj:* [My cousin and I] would go watch movies and stuff. Some houses had television so they'd get movies and CDs, I guess, and they'd just play them and you'd pay one rupee or whatever, and you'd just go watch a movie for two hours, and we just did a lot of that.



*Kiran:* [When we lived in the refugee camp], in my free time, in the camps, I roamed around a lot from house to house, because there was nothing to do. And in the city [Kathmandu], even with my parents, we walked around, we roamed, I guess; they took me around places. They never let me just stay at home and do nothing, you know what I mean?

*Susan:* Who, if anyone, helped you when you moved to the U.S.?

*Arjun:* Yeah, the caseworker for us; she was helpful. She used to take us places; she used to take us to the office; she helped us make our green cards and stuff. And there were some other people from India, like from the temple. They used to come to our house and take us to the temple. They did that before, because we didn't have a car and stuff. They used to pick us up and take us to the temple and stuff. And they used to drop us off; they were helpful. [...] the only helpful teacher was my ESL teacher. She was very helpful; she helped us a lot.

*Manisha:* [On my first day of high school in the middle of the year] I didn't see anyone there that I knew; I was lost there. And while I was checking in, I saw one of my friends from Nepal. I knew her before, so she helped me out; she took me to the counselor office, and I followed her schedule that day. They changed my schedule after a few weeks. From that, I had no friends; I didn't have any friends in any classes, because I was the only Nepali in every class, except ESL.

*Niraj:* Kids in the classroom were helpful; they were nice. ESL – one teacher was good, but that was only one year. Joking around with my brother and cousins was helpful.

*Arjun:* I had a lot of Mexican friends.

All of the participants had different experiences in Nepal, and in each we see a more nuanced perspective than what is presented in mass media and much scholarship. They certainly faced their shares of injustice and difficulties, including with meeting basic needs. However,

children and adults were not lacking in agency and even joy. Family, play, learning, resilience, and resistance are among the themes that emerged in the first round of interviews. The participants revealed much about the intersections of systems that led to obstacles as well as resolutions to those obstacles.

The participants also spoke to their experiences in moving from Nepal refugee camps to their resettlement locations in the U.S. Manisha's family was assigned to Pittsburgh, while the other participants are secondary migrants whose families decided to move to Pittsburgh after living for a time in the cities where the IOM assigned them. Here, they speak of obstacles but also of resources that were helpful to them.

In the sections that follow, I introduce each of the study participants (by pseudonym) before delving into their discussions of refugee camp life and the early days of their resettlement. In addition to using pseudonyms, I obfuscated some details, such as prior cities of residence for secondary migrants, parents' jobs, and the like. Those modifications do not obscure the truth of their experiences.

In the first interviews about the participants' past lives, I hoped to find perspectives that would address my first research question (*What are the challenges and resources in the development of transcultural identity?*). Yosso's (2005) framework of community cultural wealth was most helpful in addressing this question. The participants' responses to interview questions and the conversations that ensued frequently referenced the six forms of capital that Yosso identifies as central to community cultural wealth (see section 2.3.1 in Chapter 2). Below, I briefly describe how the participants experienced each aspect of community cultural wealth.

**Aspirational:** Participants spoke of their individual hopes for their futures (e.g. college and careers) and also their families' aspirations. Aspirational capital was also reflected in

references to schooling and participants' experiences there. I coded future plans as well as educational participation as aspirational.

**Linguistic:** Participants spoke of language as a resource as well as a challenge and, in their early U.S. days, as a barrier. Two spoke of learning languages other than Nepali and English, highlighting the multilingual skills of the participants. Manisha's linguistic expression in the form of poetry and creative writing came up as an example of linguistic capital, in addition to language study and acquisition.

**Familial:** Unlike other forcibly displaced groups, participants did not experience traumatic separations from loved ones. Sometimes a parent, usually a father, would find work far from the camp and be gone for weeks or even months at a time, but their children took it for granted that they were safe and would return. The participants' familial capital was expansive – they shared housing with parents and siblings but frequently lived with or near extended family as well. Cousins as well as siblings were daily presences in most of their lives, as Niraj and Arjun mention. Finally, some families had more human capital than others in terms of educational and professional attainment. This factor was significant in participants' lived experience throughout displacement and resettlement.

**Social:** Social capital is consistently defined as access to individual and community relationships and resources (Coleman, 1988; Daly, 2010; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Participants spoke of individual friendships and mentorships as well as access to organizational networks that were helpful to them and to their families both in refugee camp and upon arrival in the U.S. They also spoke of moments when those relationships and resources were absent.

**Navigational:** Yosso defines navigational capital as the ability to move through different systems, not just geographic units like neighborhoods and cities but also systems like education and health care. I added to this category physical navigation, as several participants made statements about their freedom of movement (or lack thereof). Interestingly, the former was associated with refugee camp while the latter was associated with resettlement.

**Resistant:** Each participant, at least to a degree, made pointed critiques about institutions (e.g., nation-states), organizations (e.g., schools and school districts), or individuals (e.g., teachers). Two spoke of advocating for themselves in regard to school decisions about their course or grade placements.

Table 3 below shows how many times each participant made a statement that was coded with a form of community cultural wealth. For each participant, I highlighted the top three forms of capital described in the interviews.

**Table 3. Community Cultural Wealth Interview 1**

	Aspirational	Familial	Linguistic	Navigational	Social	Resistant
Arjun	6	17	10	29	18	2
Kiran	10	12	1	24	12	1
Manisha	19	19	2	20	21	7
Niraj	2	12	1	7	15	6
Pradeep	10	25	4	15	19	4
	47	85	18	95	85	20

The number of times participants referenced different forms of capital varies, with navigational capital the most frequently referenced and linguistic capital the least frequently referenced. However, each participant mentions each at least once – in other words, there is no form of community cultural wealth that participants lack. In looking back on their pasts, the participants coalesced around three forms of capital: navigational, social, and familial, albeit with different emphases. The community cultural wealth of individual participants and the displaced Bhutanese

community as a whole create the antecedent conditions for continuing, not creating, transcultural identity.

#### 4.1 Arjun: A Refugee Pioneer



Figure 16. Arjun: Interview 1

At the time of our interviews, Arjun, one of COSL's members, had been in the U.S. for nearly 10 years. His family had been among the first to arrive in the U.S. When they first arrived in Syracuse, they were one of only three families in the city. None of their neighbors were Nepalese, so they were very much on their own. Like others in this study (Pradeep, Kiran, and Niraj), Arjun's family are secondary migrants in Pittsburgh. After they lived in Syracuse for a time, they decided to move to Pittsburgh to be closer to Arjun's maternal grandparents and relatives. Their reasons for coming to Pittsburgh were similar to other Bhutanese in the community: family reunification, the promise of better jobs and housing, or, in Arjun's case, both.

We met at the house Arjun's family had purchased that year. Between five and 10 years into resettlement, many of the Bhutanese become homeowners, generally staying in or near the same neighborhood and school district. The living room is like most of those I have entered before. Pictures of Hindu deities and family members line the walls. A poster-sized print of his family hangs above the television. Yellow flowers line the walls in lieu of crown molding. Shoes are aligned at the entrance, including my own, in accordance with tradition. Leather sofas and chairs complete the living room. The house is uncharacteristically quiet, as Arjun's parents and brothers are away – visiting Nepal in preparation for the wedding of Arjun's older brother, who is marrying a Nepali woman he met online through mutual friends. The only element of the home that is out of sync with most other Bhutanese families is the presence of a very rambunctious puppy, named Rajesh, who responds to commands in Nepali but not in English. He is a delightful addition to our conversation.

Arjun is very concerned about being as accurate as possible; his statements are thoughtful and often brief, but never terse. Answers to questions, especially at first, are peppered with phrases like "I think," or "I'm pretty sure I remember." He moved to the U.S. at a younger age than Manisha, Pradeep, and Kiran, so retrieving memories is a bit more straining. I remind him that I conduct multiple interviews with multiple people in order to get as full and vibrant a picture as possible, so it's perfectly fine if he doesn't remember something. All of the participants know that I am doing this research for school – as they are diligent students, in Arjun's case in an engineering program, they worry about their responses negatively impacting my grade. I describe dissertations as a pass/fail endeavor in the hopes of putting them (if not me) at ease.

Arjun's arrival story is one of resilience and navigational challenges, both literal and figurative, as well as the importance of family ties throughout his journey.

#### 4.1.1 Navigational Challenges Offset by Familial and Social Capital

A theme in Arjun's first interview was the newness of everything in resettlement – including the newness of his family and community to the U.S. He explained that when they settled in Syracuse, his family was one of only three from Bhutan. After two years, they left for Pittsburgh. Other participants in this study spoke of requesting Pittsburgh for resettlement, but Arjun's family, being among the first, didn't have a frame of reference for places to settle. They told the International Office of Migration (IOM) that they did not have a preference for a particular city, and they were ultimately placed in Syracuse.

Familial cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) is exemplified in Arjun's travel from Nepal to Syracuse. Arjun's family, like most Bhutanese, was intact from departure in Nepal through arrival at their assigned resettlement location. Although his father sometimes worked away from camp in construction jobs, for weeks and even months at a time, the family unit was intact. He lived with his immediate family and within a bicycle ride of extended family in refugee camp. When his family left Nepal for the U.S., for the international parts of their flight they were with other Bhutanese refugees and an IOM employee who guided them until arrival at JFK International Airport in New York City. At that point, they were on their own – and lost:

We got lost in New York City. [...] And somehow we got to the [Syracuse] airport, and then we got lost again in Syracuse airport cause there was no one picking us up. I heard there was someone supposed to be ... and we were looking everywhere but like we didn't see anyone there. We had letters, saying we don't speak English on our bags, you know what I mean? There was a bag, it had, like, we don't know any English [...] They finally showed up after 30 minutes or so. I think she [a caseworker] was also looking for us, but she was struggling to find us, too.

This story is repeated in other refugee arrival stories. In her memoir, *The Other Side of the Sky* (2005), Afghan refugee Farah Ahmedi tells the story of her arrival to the U.S. and watching other refugees on her flight leave the airport, one by one, after each was met by a caseworker. Unbeknownst to her and her mother, their caseworker was stuck in traffic and arrived quite late, leaving mother and daughter to think they had been forgotten or abandoned. Arjun is not the first Bhutanese refugee in my acquaintance to share a story like this. He and his family, with only each other and extremely limited English knowledge, had to navigate their way in the most literal sense on their first day. Their IOM bags literally marked them as vulnerable (“We don’t speak English”), but nothing in their pre-departure orientation prepared them for such a scenario. When resettlement became a reality, refugee camp schools tried to prepare students. Arjun spoke of how teachers in refugee camp tried to help students accelerate their English learning:

They announce that people can go to the United States; they start telling us to speak more English in class, like when we wanted to go to bathroom or something, we had to ask “Can we go to the bathroom?” It was hard for us, having to learn different, different languages. Elementary school English had limited utility at JFK International. The only support was one another; the family being intact helped them to get through a very trying situation without navigational support.

Their arrival was not only stressful but isolating, as Arjun noted that theirs was the only family in the group assigned to Syracuse:

Yeah, that’s what I remember: there was no other families. I think it would have been easier if there was another family, but it was only my family, the four of us.

It would be only “the four of them” for some days to come. Once their caseworker met them and took them to their new home, an apartment without other Bhutanese neighbors, she



instructed them not to leave much for safety reasons, as Arjun explained when I asked him about the best and worst parts of arrival:

The good things were we had an apartment and we had food; the bad things were we didn't know anyone and we could not speak English and we could not go anywhere else. They told us not to go anywhere else cause we might get lost, so ... I guess some of them were good things. Some were good, some were bad.

I think we [new Bhutanese arrivals] only had three or four houses when we came here. We came in 2008, so it was a long time ago; there wasn't a lot of people. Yeah, we came in 2008, so there was like three or four families when we came.

We were one of the first – it was hard for us.

Of all the participants, Arjun spoke most about basic needs. When asked about the best parts of resettlement, he spoke of housing and food, the most basic necessities. None of the participants were as communicative about refugee camp housing and food insecurity, but those are realities in refugee camps. Bhutanese participants in Chao's (2019) research spoke of vivid memories of food trucks arriving at camp. Participants in this study, however, did not. Arjun did not speak of food shortages but of his gratitude for and curiosity regarding the food during his flight and upon arrival. The others spoke of their family garden plots in camp (Niraj) or family businesses that sold clothing and food (Manisha). Most described safety issues, such as fires that started small but spread quickly through bamboo huts and shelters. However, their more dominant memories were of resilience and entrepreneurial efforts that helped in meeting basic needs.

Arjun also speaks to the importance of bonding social capital, or relationships with other Bhutanese. This form of community cultural wealth came more easily when the family relocated

to Pittsburgh to be closer to their relatives and to participate in a larger Bhutanese community. For Arjun, this came to include involvement in Children of Shangri-Lost.

#### **4.1.2 Social and Familial Capital: Relationships That Sustained Them**

Putnam (2000) speaks of bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding is in-group, and supports cohesiveness and maintenance of cultural traditions and languages. Outside of one another and phone and video chats with extended family, their early days in Syracuse were marked by bridging social capital, starting with their caseworker. When I asked Arjun who helped his family in the early days of their arrival, he began by crediting his caseworker, who helped them for several months:

The caseworker for us; she was helpful. She used to take us places; she used to take us to the office; she helped us make our green card and stuff.

Eventually, they met others in the Hindu community:

And there were some other people, like from India, like from temple – they used to come to our house and take us to the temple. They did that before, cause we didn't have a car and stuff. They used to pick us up and take us to the temple and stuff. And they used to drop us off; they were helpful.

I then asked if anyone in his school was helpful in his adjustment:

No, not really. The only ... the helpful teacher was my ESL teacher. She was very helpful; she helped us like a lot. She knew we didn't know any English, so she tried to like focus on us. Like, more, so we would learn.

Finally, I recalled a picture of Arjun's mother with an American friend. I asked about her. Arjun recalled Samantha quite well, saying that they had met Samantha and her husband, who volunteered with the resettlement agency. Arjun's mother and Samantha maintained a strong friendship, even after Arjun's family moved to Pittsburgh for better job opportunities and closer contact with Arjun's maternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

While relationships with families and others helped to offset the challenges Arjun's family faced, their relative isolation in Syracuse amplified the challenges they faced, including with language.

#### **4.1.3 Linguistic Challenges**

Arjun spoke more than anyone else of language struggles, from refugee camp through resettlement. To prepare for resettlement, as noted in Chapter 1, refugee camp curricula included language instruction in Nepali (the students' heritage language), Dzongkha (the state language of Bhutan), and English. As Arjun explained, "I never learned anything from Bhutanese classes; it was really hard. Cause it wasn't even my language; we had to learn like three different languages; it was really hard."

Language instruction was uniquely challenging when he began school in Syracuse. He and his brother were the only Nepali speakers in his ESL class – nearly all of the others were Spanish speakers, including his ESL teacher.

[ESL class] was good, but I didn't learn a lot there, cause the teacher had to teach in two different languages [English and Spanish], so it was hard for us, too, because we had to listen in Spanish too and learn English at the same time. A lot of Spanish people didn't know any English, so she had to translate.

He spoke of his teacher as kind and helpful as well as willing to spend extra time with him, but he again was in a class with exposure to two languages that he did not fully comprehend.

When I asked him what the U.S. could do to be more helpful to newcomers, he replied:

They should provide someone who speaks Nepali so they can translate to the newcomers to help them speak more English. I was struggling when we came here. Even in ESL class, we didn't know anything; we just looked at the teacher. We didn't know what she was saying and stuff; that was really hard.

Other participants spoke of getting help from relatives and friends who arrived in the United States earlier. Arjun's family did not have that resource, as they were among the first. He also did not have Nepali peers at his school to help him as Manisha had. When the family moved to Pittsburgh, though, he did find those resources, as he describes in Chapter 5.

## 4.2 Niraj



Figure 17. Niraj: Interview 1

I met Niraj's family through mutual contacts, including his extended family and neighbors, when he and his family moved to Pittsburgh several years ago. Today, we both volunteer at BCAP and teach citizenship classes to community elders, some of whom are just beginning to learn reading and writing. Of all of the participants, Niraj is the most politically – and unapologetically – expressive about his thoughts on the systems he navigates, including education, health care, and politics, the latter being his major at a local university. While other participants sometimes hesitated to express negative opinions, Niraj did not – but he also posited solutions when he made pointed critiques of systems, including governments.

We met at Niraj's home, where he lives with his parents and siblings, and two doors down from other relatives. At each of our interviews, siblings or cousins would frequently drop in to watch TV, surf the internet, eat – or argue, like any other siblings. Niraj's family taught me that the word “cousin” is not really utilized in Nepali – they refer to one another as brothers and sisters. The same relatives also lived near Niraj's family in refugee camp and in their first resettlement town; all are secondary migrants to Pittsburgh. While Niraj and his siblings and cousins bicker regularly, perhaps constantly, Niraj reflects on these relationships with appreciation throughout the course of our interviews. In his interview, he speaks reflectively; terms like “think” and “remember” are among the most frequently used in his interview. He also alludes to important relationships, particularly cousins and teachers. (See Figure 17: Niraj Interview 1.)

#### **4.2.1 The Importance of Extended Family**

Like the other participants, Niraj lived with his immediate family but very close to extended family. He described where he lived in proximity to his grandparents and cousins in refugee camp:

The house was like ... there was a main house here. That's where [cousin's] family and every other relative that was not married and off with their own family lived there. And [paternal] grandparents and a couple of ... I guess [youngest uncle] was there and a couple of aunts were there. They were in the main house and next to it, we had our family's house. And next to our family's house was the garden.

Proximity to his extended family has been a near constant in Niraj's life. The cousins he refers to are his current neighbors. Prior to buying their current homes, they all rented apartments in different parts of the south hills but almost always near each other (and never more than a five- or ten-minute drive away). This level of familial capital is similar for all of the participants in the study. When I asked Niraj how the U.S. could be more welcoming of refugee youth, he spoke to this issue:

In terms of the government, they could stop splitting people [families] up because from my experience I think eventually people just come back together; there's no use in splitting people up. A lot of Nepali people gather in Pine Haven in Pittsburgh. I'm thinking specifically right now, I think the U.S. policy – when I moved here, they'd let you choose the city but you had to have immediate family there – that immediate sense of family, that's not universal. We still live by [my cousins], for example. Integration and assimilation are terrible words.

Familial capital also includes sharing material resources. When one family struggles to meet material needs, the others can help. In the case of Niraj's immediate family and cousins, several adults were able to work. Even though refugees technically were not permitted to work, with only a few exceptions, all of the participants' parents managed to find some form of paying work. Niraj's family was no exception. Like Arjun's father, Niraj's father traveled to work:

[My dad] taught in schools but also did tutoring for kids that could afford it and stuff; I think that's where his money came from. But he'd come back and then we'd be together for a week, and then he'd leave again. But my mom, basically, we'd get like food rations or whatever, and she would try to just take the food or whatever that we didn't use and trade it, I guess. I'm imaging a bartering system or whatever. And then we also had a garden right next to our part of the house.

Niraj's parents were able to find ways to offset the limitations on finding jobs; the same was true of Niraj's uncles who lived nearby. They also traveled to work in construction or teaching, which also helped to offset the challenges of living in refugee camp.

#### **4.2.2 Refugee Camp as a Site of Freedom**

In remembering his childhood in refugee camp, Niraj spoke of freedom of movement and spaces for play:

Yeah, I was a child, so you don't do anything, just chill and sleep and eat – which is what all children to do develop their brain or whatever, but that's, you know, it's childhood. You're just kind of have good memories because you never actually have to do anything that was bad. A lot of playing – not doing a whole lot, just playing around.

*Susan: What was playing? You said outdoors earlier.*

Yeah, just in the streets, or sometimes [my cousin] and I after it rained or whatever, we'd go because the trees would fall or whatever, and we'd go get little mangoes or whatever plant that fell down. We'd go walk places for fun.

Niraj's experience aligns with the other participants in this study. While he remembers refugee camp fondly, he also remembers his excitement at moving to the U.S.:

I was really happy. I don't know why; I was really happy; I just wanted to leave. I don't know why. I could make up some stuff about being a child and nationality, but that's probably not it. It's probably just because as a child, you want to go to a new place – and, it's new. And like, skyscrapers and planes – oh my god, a new place. That's probably it. I was excited. I was probably the most excited person in my family.

All of the participants had mixed emotions upon going to the United States, but Niraj was among the most positive. He, too, found the U.S. to be more limiting than refugee camp in terms of freedom of movement. Like Arjun, he was warned about walking alone in his neighborhood, and the threat of violence was real, with his parents having to walk on bus stop routes where muggings occurred regularly. During the day, he and his siblings and cousins could ride bikes to a nearby park. Upon hearing that some extended relatives had found better jobs and housing in Pittsburgh, Niraj's parents, uncles, and aunts decided they should relocate. All of them moved over the summer, and the children prepared to transfer schools together.

#### **4.2.3 Navigating Discriminatory Systems: A Critique of ESL and Social Capital**

While only seven of Niraj's statements were coded as "resistant," they overlapped with those that I coded as "social" (in terms of classroom relationships) or "linguistic" (for language acquisition). When Niraj spoke of social capital, he often spoke of systems that negatively influenced his resettlement experience and the challenges he faced in accessing social capital.

His most emphatic example was ESL instruction, which he was able to exit by the time he started middle school. Niraj's critique of ESL is particularly noteworthy because, with the family's frequent moves to and within Pittsburgh, he ultimately attended four different school districts and therefore experienced a variety of programs. He was critical of ESL, less because of its importance



in helping students to learn English but because of the impact on students personally and socially: “A lot of the interactions you have with Americans is through your ESL teacher when you first move here.” Niraj found these interactions to be largely negative:

I hated ESL; that was the worst – I despise ESL to this day; I hate ESL so much. It’s garbage! I don’t know how it got to that point; I know people sued to have it in the 1970s, but it’s so garbage and it got to that point. Every ESL teacher I ever had felt so patronizing.

ESL is a bigger mess than everything. I realize that education is a mess for low income kids, but I feel like it’s worse for refugee kids and people who don’t speak English as their first language. I don’t know how they find these teachers, but they discourage everything that makes people unique. I keep hearing things about ESL teachers being racist at Pine Haven.

He puts his struggle with ESL in national and historical context, situating ESL instruction within a larger education macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) that marginalizes many non-dominant populations, including but not limited to refugee youth. However, he also noted one teacher who was an exception:

The ESL teacher [in his first year] was the only one that I genuinely liked. She mixed a lot of real-life stuff into it instead of going on about grammar – which I still don’t understand – she would talk about things I was interested in, like the seasons, how science works. Plus, I remember her saying she was an immigrant or a daughter of immigrants – she was a person of color, so that probably helped. Every other ESL teacher I had was white.

Here, similar to Arjun, Niraj separates his positive feelings for an ESL teacher from his frustrations with ESL and with later teachers. Arjun spoke to struggling to learn English in a multilingual classroom without access to interpreters, but he spoke appreciatively of his teacher’s

empathy and attempts to help him and his brother, the only other Nepali speaker in a largely Spanish-speaking ESL class. Niraj, however, with an academic drive similar to other participants, did not give up on his ESL classes. Rather, he worked very hard to he could exit ESL as soon as possible. He was one of the first among his siblings and cousins to exit ESL support.

Niraj is among the most outspoken and willing to offer trenchant critiques compared to the other participants. However, his experiences are very similar to those of the other participants. He was academically engaged and looks back on his childhood as a time of free, not restricted, movement. Like Manisha (section 4.4), he was willing to question school policies or decisions that he viewed as unfair. Like all of the others, he learned that the presence of extended family as well as other Bhutanese community support was helpful to adjusting to a new country.

#### 4.3 Kiran: The Importance of Place



Figure 18. Kiran: Interview 1

I met Kiran through mutual acquaintances at BCAP, where he volunteered his services in numerous ways. Technologically savvy, Kiran provides technical assistance with computers and also with sound and video equipment at events. When an ESL volunteer cannot meet with a class, sometimes Kiran is called in as a last-minute replacement. As a university student with a part-time job, his time is more limited now, but he still helps out.

We meet in Kiran's home, which is in walking distance of Cedar Square, still home to numerous immigrants and refugees, including Bhutanese families. Kiran's family lived there after relocating from their first home in Chicago for many of the same reasons as the other secondary migrants in this study: a more affordable cost of living and better job opportunities. After Kiran shows me a better way to use the voice recorder, we begin our first interview.

Similar to Pradeep (Section 4.5), Kiran spent his earliest years and began school in Kathmandu, where his parents both worked as teachers. His identity is firmly rooted in place, as well as his love of computers – *Pittsburgh*, *Kathmandu*, and *computers* are three terms that come up frequently in our first conversation (Figure 18: Kiran: Interview 1). He arrived in the United States between the ages of 9 and 10, but his memories of life in Nepal are vivid and colorful. I asked him about life in refugee camp:

Well, let's start by ... I was *born* in the refugee camp, but we lived in Kathmandu, the city of Kathmandu for most – we would go back and forth between, like, the city and refugee camps, for like, holidays, or do you know, like the Nepali holidays? October-November months, or September, like we would go back with the big family [to refugee camp], and then Kathmandu for the rest of the year. So, even though I do have clear memories of refugee camp and what it was like, I haven't spent as much time, I guess....

Kiran's familial capital includes his parents' educational and career advancement. Both were teachers in Nepal and were able to obtain jobs in Kathmandu, even though their relatives lived in refugee camp. During holidays, they would join their families in refugee camp. When they applied for resettlement, they moved to refugee camp for their last several months in Nepal.

I noted in our interviews that Kiran often reflected on space. He spoke in the most detail about the places where he'd lived and the adjustments in transitioning from place to place – from his earliest school in Kathmandu to school in refugee camp, from refugee camp to Chicago, and from Chicago to Pittsburgh. He identified the most challenging of those transitions as his move from Chicago to Pittsburgh:

In Chicago, I got used to the train system very quickly, I got used to the buses, I walked, I think I walked to school; the whole area I got used to quickly. [...] Honestly, Pittsburgh was probably more of a harder shift than Chicago somehow. Somehow from Nepal to Chicago was, I guess, easier than Chicago to Pittsburgh. I guess the suburbs feels a bit different. I like the crowd. I don't know, something about Pittsburgh when I first started. As we discussed the challenges he faced in moving to Pittsburgh, I noted that one theme in his descriptions of life in Nepal, similar to Niraj, was freedom of movement:

- “We moved around in [Kathmandu], from house to house.”
- “Even in the city, we played mostly outside. We had computers towards the end.”
- “I had a lot of friends – I had a lot of freedom – just even like going to school, I'd just walk there by myself, come back home by myself, stay late.”
- “I think, in my free time, in the camps, I roamed around a lot from house to house, because there was nothing to do. I remember reading a lot because I liked reading and I had a lot of free time and they had a library at the camp.”

- “And in the city [Kathmandu], even with my parents, we walked around, we roamed, I guess, they took me around places; they never let me just stay at home and do nothing, you know what I mean?”

His experience in Chicago, after the early days, was actually somewhat similar. He got used to taking public transportation and visiting friends and relatives who lived in walking distance of his family’s apartment – “roaming,” as he had in Nepal. When he moved to Pittsburgh, that freedom was curtailed. He could walk around in his small neighborhood (Cedar Square, where many refugee families lived), but he could not easily walk to school and friends’ houses. In moving from an urban to a suburban neighborhood, his social circle became smaller and he had fewer friends to rely on. Within the year, that changed, and he adapted to a new school and made new friends in spite of his reduced navigational capital.

Kiran also spoke to the lack of diversity he experienced in his new Pittsburgh neighborhood. When I asked him what advice he would give to help the U.S. be more welcoming of immigrant youth, he replied:

Accept more diversity, be more open. You know, that’s probably another reason [I struggled], you know, Pittsburgh, early on, hadn’t had as much diversity, especially from the Bhutanese. Chicago, there’s a lot of cultures there. That’s probably another reason why I was quick to blend in in Chicago.

Kiran moved to Pittsburgh around his fifth-grade year, and he found that sense of “fit,” or blending in, soon afterward. Involvement with the Bhutanese community, particularly with BCAP (see Chapter 5), was helpful to him, as was his sense of “openness” to new experiences.

#### 4.4 Manisha: Social, Navigational, Familial



Figure 19. Manisha: Interview 1

I met Manisha at her internship site, BCAP's temporary office. She worked there for a summer to help them update materials, including the directory for their RoboCall service, which enables the organization to reach community members with urgent information and other announcements. The office was crowded that day – without a permanent office space at the time of our interview, BCAP was working from a local church's basement office. This small office housed two part-time administrators and Manisha, and, today, me. Outside of the office is a large common area used for church events. A few months after our first interview, I attended a Bhutanese children's birthday party there, as well as Teej, an annual Hindu women's celebration, so the congregation is clearly welcoming of diverse faith traditions. This welcoming attitude is

reinforced throughout the building, where I later notice flyers about welcoming all of our neighbors.

Manisha suggested meeting here because her home would have far too many distractions with family and neighbors in and out of their homes. This is quite typical of many of the Bhutanese homes I have visited. Since Manisha and I haven't met before, I am sure it's also more comfortable for her to be at the office with her supervisor, who, along with his wife, is known by many of the Bhutanese youth in the community.

We settled in to talk in the office, and occasionally her supervisor would join our conversation very briefly to clarify some point we were discussing, such as when Manisha struggled to remember the name of a non-governmental organization in refugee camp. He was very occupied with work, so we were generally unaware of his presence.

Manisha is mature, talkative yet reserved, and gives off an aura of adult awareness, responsibility, and quiet confidence. Occasionally her voice would trail off at the end of a sentence. Initially, she expressed hesitation to say anything negative, and I did not press. As she became more comfortable in the interview, she did offer some critiques of the systems she encountered as a U.S. high school student. At the same time, when she pointed out a problem, she also suggested potential solutions. She has the ability to articulate problems and propose solutions – and to take initiative to put those solutions into action with others.

#### **4.4.1 Social Networks and Organizations**

Like the other participants, Manisha's responses to questions often reference social relationships and networks. Of all of the participants, she was the most involved in refugee camp

leadership organizations, including the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum (Evans, 2010a). (See Section 2.1.2.)

Manisha described Youth Circle, part of the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum (BRCF). The organization is reminiscent of others begun by nonprofit organizations in the camps, with programming including theater, arts, leadership, creative writing, girls' and women's rights (Amnesty International, 2002; Evans, 2010a). Manisha spoke of elections and being among those participants selected to travel for leadership training:

Yeah, for that club, I went for training as a coordinator, and I went to many different, like, cities. Through that program, we share what we do and what they [youth from different camps and in schools outside of camp] do.

As Evans (2010a) notes, all Bhutanese children from the age of seven were automatically members of the BRCF. Of all of the participants, Manisha was the only one to participate and even to be aware of it. I asked all of the interviewees if they were involved in any co-curricular government or NGO-sponsored programming. They were not only uninvolved but largely unaware of such initiatives, although Niraj spoke of a sewing class his mother took. While Evans speaks of the BRCF as an almost ubiquitous presence in the camps, the participants here indicate otherwise. The program, however, was impactful for Manisha and provided her with travel and learning opportunities.

#### **4.4.2 Family Influence and Aspirations for Educational Success**

Manisha's enthusiastic involvement in camp co-curricular opportunities may have been informed in part by her strong aspirational and familial capital. As the reader will note from the word cloud at the start of this section (Figure 19: Manisha: Interview 1), school is a central focus



for Manisha. This young woman is very focused on academics; her most vivid memories in refugee camp and in resettlement revolve around school. Education for her is a mesosystem in which school, family (with both parents experienced teachers), government, and NGO programs intersect.

Manisha came to the U.S. at the age of 14 and was 17 at the time of our first interview. She had lived in refugee camp, she estimated, for about four years. Prior to that, she lived in a Nepal town far from refugee camp, a two-day bus ride away, where her parents worked as teachers. They moved to refugee camp to help take care of Manisha's paternal grandmother after Manisha's aunt resettled to the U.S., leaving the grandmother in the care of Manisha's immediate family.

Here it is important to note that Manisha's father is Bhutanese, but her mother was a Nepali citizen. There are many mixed families in the Bhutanese refugee diaspora. Nepali law reflects patrilineal traditions – if a Nepali woman marries a Bhutanese man, she joins his family and will not obtain Nepali citizenship for her family. If a Nepali man marries a Bhutanese woman, his wife will become a Nepali citizen by default and will no longer have refugee status. In the U.S. and in other resettlement countries, then, it will not be uncommon to meet a refugee family in which the wife/mother is not a displaced Bhutanese but still joins the family in resettlement due to her husband's refugee status. With parents from two countries, albeit with the same language, religion, and cultural traditions, as well as paternal relatives in Nepali-speaking parts of India, Manisha had several unique resources: aggregated familial capital (especially with educational attainment and income from small business) and social capital (cross-national relationships and networks).

She also had her own internal drive and motivation to succeed. When I asked Manisha to describe a typical day in refugee camp, she spoke in three categories: before school, during school, and after school.

I used to wake up at 6 or 7, and I study for an hour, and I go to bring water from the tap, and I used to take breakfast for my dad. Like he used to have a shop, I used to get that to him every day. And then I come back, get ready for school, eat lunch, go to school.

She went on to say that after school, she would do homework, play with friends, do some housework, study a bit more, and then go to bed.

All of the participants spoke about school as a constant in their refugee camp lives. They went every day and did not miss without a good reason. In some refugee situations, access to schooling is limited, and it is never ideal. Manisha, Pradeep, and Kiran all spoke of the difficulties of adjusting to refugee camp school after attending school in a Nepali town or city; Manisha said simply, “It was a huge change.” No one, though, spoke of lacking access to education, even if the conditions were quite different in terms of physical facilities, class size, and access to materials.

I asked Manisha if her commitment to academics was something her parents, as teachers, forced. Manisha laughed, answering, “I never felt like they forced me to study.” I asked her about favorite subjects, and she spoke of how her attitudes about math evolved:

Like I used to love math –before, I used to hate math, like I met one teacher in camp – maybe because of him, I started liking math. He used to teach so smartly, like I ... yeah .... I think it depends on the people. From that time, I loved math. It’s been easier.

With this example, we see the intersection of aspirational and social capital. She was determined to do well with a difficult subject, but she benefitted from a caring teacher.

Manisha described the camp school curriculum consistently with what other participants described. Students had general science classes that covered several subjects without separate courses for biology, physics, chemistry, and the like. She described a social studies class in a similar way; when I asked if it was mostly history, she said that it was general social studies.

Because she entered refugee camp in fourth grade, she began the study of Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, after her classmates had already been learning it for some time. This example reveals much about Manisha's commitment to academic excellence and to her academic aspirations. Several teenagers and adults have spoken to me over the years about learning Dzongkha, usually with terse language and grimacing expressions. Adults and children alike have described it as a very difficult language to learn. Manisha, however, said, "it was kind of fun" – even though she was clearly behind the other students in her acquisition.

The language curriculum reflected the community's tenuous positions as refugees. As noted in the introduction, the three possible outcomes for refugees are repatriation to the home country, integration into the country where they flee, or resettlement to a third country. The language curriculum was designed to prepare students for any of the three possibilities: Dzongkha study in case of returning to Bhutan, academic Nepali study so they could participate in Nepali schooling and universities in the event that they would stay there permanently, and English in the event of resettlement to an English-speaking country. When resettlement became a reality, teachers focused more on English in order to help the students.

#### **4.4.3 Navigating Countries and Systems**

"I went to India, like many places in India. My aunt lives there; most of my relatives are in India, my dad's side. I went to Bhutan too [whispering]; my older aunt lives there."

Manisha (as well as Pradeep, section 4.5) both spoke of frequent transnational travel while they were refugees. I asked Manisha how this was possible:

There is a problem; you cannot go there [to Bhutan] as a Nepali. I went there as an Indian.

There are Indians who speak Nepali, too, and I went there as an Indian, not as a Nepali.

Like most of my father's side, like relatives, lives there, too, in Bhutan, so it wasn't like that big a problem. I went to China, too. It's called Khasa; it's the border of China. We went there for shopping [for her father's clothing store in refugee camp].

Yosso (2005) defines navigational capital more broadly than geographic travel, but Manisha speaks to the great freedom of movement she experienced in crossing national borders. Being forced to hide one's identity in order to visit relatives, of course, is the antithesis of freedom. However, it also provided a way to overcome barriers to access, a skill that helped her when she came to the U.S. and enrolled in school.

#### **4.4.4 Education in the U.S.**

When Manisha's family were approved for resettlement and received travel dates, Manisha's approach to school did not change. She was in eighth grade and was determined to complete that year and final exams in order to get a certificate documenting that she passed her eighth -grade year and could then enter high school in the U.S. She took her final exams just days before leaving refugee camp.

Upon arrival in Pittsburgh, Manisha was assigned to eighth rather than ninth grade. She quietly insisted that that would not be acceptable. She had completed eighth grade and had the certificate to prove it. Her determination was so strong that she refused to attend the middle school in her district; rather, she waited out the process until she was allowed to enter ninth grade at the local high school:

When I came here, they put me in eighth grade. And I had the [eighth grade completion] certificate from Nepal, and I didn't want to go back a grade. So I told them in the [resettlement] office, so they were working on it. It took a month, two months. I just told

them I will not attend eighth grade; I want to start with ninth. So I gave them my certificate and everything.

Manisha's assertiveness and self-advocacy skills could have been influenced by many factors. Her parents were educators, which may have given her the confidence and ability to navigate an unfamiliar system (reflecting the familial and navigational aspects of Yosso's community cultural wealth). She had a history of academic excellence, including in language study, that helped her in communicating her expectations. As part of a displaced and transnational family and community, though, finding ways through and around systems was part of her daily life, such as visiting an aunt in Bhutan.

I asked her how she passed the time while she was waiting to enroll in high school:

I used to sit at home, watch TV; that's where I started doing art. Like I used to do a lot of art, those days, so ...

*Susan: What kind of art?*

Sketching, painting. That's where I started to get more into it.

She then spoke of camp school-based artistic displays and competitions:

Yeah, we used to have, like, for school, we used to have like poem competitions, or essay writing – do those count as extracurricular? There was the art and the theater one, but I didn't join them. I used to do my own, with the art, and I never showed interest in the theater.

Once she started high school, she took art electives each year, including one honors class. The seeds for her artistic expression and outlet may have been planted through the artistic programming of BRCF and other youth development programs in the camps.

While her art work was a private mode of expression, Manisha maintained the levels of curricular and co-curricular involvement she experienced in refugee camp. She rattled off a number of high school involvements:

Yearbook and newspaper, garden club. The teacher was nice, actually; they asked me to join, art club, pep club, it was like for decoration, for homecoming. Did I say student council? Interact club – it's like we go into the community and look for the service hours. We have a lunch every month with the Rotary Club. And we met with the superintendent to talk about the school problem or community problem. Track and field, I did one year.

I asked Manisha to elaborate on her meetings with the district superintendent. The superintendent scheduled monthly meetings to hear student concerns, and Manisha and some of her Bhutanese friends followed up on the opportunity. Manisha did not hesitate to make constructive suggestions to improve the immigrant student experience:

I told [the superintendent] that when I came here I didn't know anything about the school system, I didn't know anything about NHS, the higher classes, and yeah, I told her we should have some orientation for the newcomer so they get to know everything about what will be going on in the school.

This experience reflects resistant capital in the support of aspirational capital – Manisha is willing to challenge systems and make suggestions to improve her own and others' educational experience. This characteristic is also reflected in her critique of high school curricula as it relates to international students.

Upon first meeting me and agreeing to participate in this research, Manisha hesitated to say anything critical of any part of her experience. However, she spoke to several concerns she had about the experiences of international newcomers to U.S. high school, starting with the

curriculum. It is not unusual for non-native English speakers to be placed in classes that are perceived to have low language content, such as cooking and physical education. Manisha points out that this form of advice requires more forethought:

I had a cooking class. I didn't like it at all. After that, I never took the cooking classes. The thing ... I didn't know about, like, they cook different food than us, and I didn't know anything about that at all. Like, one time there was a test about the utensil thing, like even a pan – the type of pan you use to cook this – I didn't know anything at all. They told me to take one when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I dropped it. I took double math; I was OK with that. I didn't like gym classes either. They always play games I never heard before, like I never played before, and I had to get involved with them and play along with them, and I was the only Nepali.

Elective classes that fall outside the core curriculum are sometimes seen as an “easier” path for non-native speakers but can contribute to marginalization. Physical education, for example, can contribute to the marginalization of already marginalized groups (Lucas & Block, 2008). In her interactions with refugee youth in Lincoln, Nebraska, Pipher (2002) speaks memorably to a refugee's visible discomfort during a health class unit on sex education. In addition to unintentional insensitivity, situations like these and the cooking class Manisha describes also reinforce a western Eurocentric model of knowledge. Conversations about diverse and inclusive curricula in the humanities and social sciences are now ingrained in scholarship. Manisha reminds us that the entire curriculum would benefit from more scrutiny.

Manisha demonstrates several characteristics and experiences that show the shortcomings of a deficit model of refugee youth. Her ability to travel literally across borders and figuratively

through systems, with the support of strong family and other social networks, facilitates her achievement of her goals.

#### 4.5 Pradeep: There's Always a Way



Figure 20. Pradeep: Interview 1

Pradeep moved to Pittsburgh after graduating from high school in Houston, his first resettlement site. He is very involved in a number of organizations, including several that work with refugees and immigrants such as the local Bhutanese RCOs. He is also one of the most eager to discuss the Bhutanese diaspora and to explain the history of the diaspora in Bhutan, Nepal, and the U.S. Of all of the participants, he is the only one who was born in Bhutan and can remember



his life there as well as in Nepal, thus providing perspective on home, refugee, and resettlement countries.

Pradeep and I first met a few years before I embarked on this research. We both attended a Bhutanese wedding, and we met again through mutual friends at a Children of Shangri-Lost event when he acted in a one-act play written and directed by one of the members. The subject was the displacement and resettlement of the Lhotsampas of Bhutan; he played a Bhutanese soldier who harassed a Lhotsampa family. We have stayed in touch over the years, and he was eager to participate in this project and to help me find other participants as well.

Our first interviews were at one of the neighborhood libraries where COSL has some of their meetings. Our final meeting was at Pradeep's home, where he lives with his parents and siblings, one of whom was about to begin her university studies. While he was happy to talk about his family and his own experiences, he also is eager to discuss the Bhutanese experience in national and global perspective, often launching into historical overviews of political conflicts, including the socioeconomic causes and effects of those conflicts. I try to be careful not to ask participants to serve as community ambassadors, but it seems to be a role that Pradeep enjoys.

Pradeep's identity is very grounded in his family's history and in the larger history of the Lhotsampa population. When asked a personal question, he often situates his experience in Bhutanese history, politics, and culture.

#### **4.5.1 Familial Capital and Status in Bhutan**

Pradeep, unlike the other participants, was born and spent his early childhood years in Bhutan. His family was part of the Lhotsampa population that was harassed by the government,

but both of Pradeep's parents were civil servants, which afforded them some protection. Eventually, though, they had to leave:

We decided to come to Nepal after some time my mom was forced – she got a call from police station, because my uncles were . . . leaders in the community, doing some social projects and other stuff. So they targeted her and said “Your brother is a terrorist,” so you have to come to the police station every day and sign off.

*Susan: Oh, OK, so the police were monitoring her.*

Yeah, they were monitoring her – we got monitored and like telephone tracking and everything else.

Pradeep wanted to finish his sixth-grade year, and his father was hesitant to leave his (for the present) stable job. Because of his status as a Lhotsampa, he was unable to get promotions and raises, but his job was still secure. The family decided, then, that Pradeep's mother and sister would move to Kathmandu, and Pradeep would finish sixth grade and his father would keep working while they decided what to do long-term. They sold their home, which provided the family with financial resources to begin planning for the future. Pradeep and his father stayed in a room at a relative's house.

Familial capital is typically understood to encompass relationships and support, but in Pradeep and other participants' cases, families also provide literal financial capital, accessed by means of education and social and professional connections. The relative Pradeep stayed with was a dentist whose parents had also gone to Nepal. He was able to stay safely in Bhutan because dentists, doctors, and other health care workers were needed and were not facing the same levels of discrimination. Because Pradeep's family had some protection due to their jobs and status, they were able to live safely in Bhutan for a time. The family's connections and access to social and

financial capital helped them to plan their departure from Bhutan and to garner resources that would eventually prove helpful when they moved to the U.S.

#### **4.5.2 Moving to and Within Nepal**

Pradeep faced several challenges in leaving Bhutan for Nepal. It was not a new country for him. In fact, he and his family regularly visited Nepal while they lived in Bhutan:

It was like a family vacation, basically, so whenever my dad was off or my mom was off [work], we used to just travel. We used to have a van, or a small five-seat car and travel through, Bhutan border. We used to keep our van there at a relative's house, and used to take the public transportation to India border and then just head to Nepal.

I went to Kathmandu. Basically, I went down there [to refugee camp] to visit my relatives, so I spent one month there but it was in relatives' house; we didn't have our own house. Yeah, we used to visit relatives back and forth -- back in Bhutan, too -- my parents were in Bhutan, we used to come to refugee camp to visit them sometimes.

*Susan: Really? So you could go back and forth to refugee camp?*

Yeah, it was risky, but my dad used to work for the government; he was in an official position, so it was easier for him to ... like he knew everyone basically, so it was easier for him to stop at police or checkpoints, and [if they asked] "Who are you?" or "Where are you going?" he didn't even answer.

This relative ease of travel between Bhutan and Nepal did not prepare Pradeep for navigating a new school system – and a new language. While his family was Nepali-speaking, he could not read and write Nepali. He also could not reveal his identity as a Bhutanese refugee:

It's a known fact that you hide your identity just to have a secure job, just in a sense you don't get discriminated or you just don't feel like an outsider from the Nepalese population, even though you speak like same languages. They were like, "These refugee people, they might not be good." So, it automatically comes in the thought of different citizens, "Oh, refugee people are probably bad, they probably did something bad, so they got chased away." But they don't realize they speak the same languages; they might have the same blood. The discrimination is always there – the tag always remains.

In order to access schooling, to avoid being held back a grade or two, and to fit in, Pradeep did what Manisha's family did to enter Bhutan – he said he was Indian:

In my case I told them I was from India, and my dad used to work for the Indian government and that's why I didn't know Nepali. Because that was the only excuse I could make to get to eighth grade or like seventh grade. And when I started 7th grade ... they were not going to put me in seventh grade because I didn't understand Nepali, but I used to say, "OK, I can do it. Even if I get a 40 on the final exams, that's OK because I will pass the class."

Having stayed in Bhutan to complete his sixth-grade year, he did not want to be held back due to his lack of Nepali proficiency. With diligent study and his mother's tutoring, he passed his Nepali classes and stayed at grade level throughout his schooling in Nepal.

Staying indefinitely in Nepal was not an option for most refugees, so eventually they decided to pursue resettlement. They could not complete the process from Kathmandu, which was two days away from the refugee camp where their family lived.

The reason we moved to Damak Jhapa, we were living in Kathmandu, and the process was happening in Jhapa – so to travel from here to there took 12 to 14 hours by bus because that's the only option. What used to happen on that route was there used to be frequent

checking because Maoists used to attack the bus, sometimes they used to rob it, they used to do different stuff. So there was a checkpoint in every single [stop]. And sometimes there was a strike going on, meaning there were people coming on the road and they used to block that road. And strikes would happen for one month, two months. So I was missing school basically for one month sometimes, and sometimes it was really hard to find the transportation, and they would have to come from India border and they used to enter Kathmandu. So it would take us three days to get to Kathmandu instead of one. So my family thought, why don't we move down there so it makes the process easier. My family moved down there, and I had to finish school, so I stayed there and after I finished school I just moved down there.

Pradeep was the only one of the participants who spoke in depth about the Maoist conflict that began in the mid-1990s (Hutt, 2003). Even Manisha and Kiran, who were well traveled and lived outside of refugee camp, were either relatively sheltered from events or simply chose not to discuss it. For Pradeep, it was simply part of Nepal's macrosystem, a part of the landscape that had to be navigated and avoided in order to achieve his goals for an education and career. Meeting those goals meant education and resettlement.

#### **4.5.3 Social Capital**

So far, Pradeep's journey sounds rather serious and intense – hiding his identity, avoiding armed Maoist guerillas, going to school all day and learning a new language at night. However, he experienced the same joys and friendships that the other participants spoke about so enthusiastically.

They would shout, “Hey, Pradeep, let’s go!” Mom would be like, “Get home before it’s dark.” If there was nothing to do, you find a way to do something with your friends. You just go [after school] to his home, and you just stay there and you’re like, “Hey, let’s go there; let’s do this; let’s play soccer.” We’d have a schedule and say after 4pm, play soccer! There was like three, four kids. Or after school, like 6:00 or 7:00, we’d say, “Hey, let’s play soccer.” And there’d be 30 to 40 kids coming round, and we’d play on the ground. It was the whole community, basically from different ... people would come from 20 or 30 minutes away. We would ride bikes.

He speaks of his friendships from Bhutan and Nepal very much in the present tense, thanks in part to social media and other technology that allows them to stay in touch. Pradeep, having lived in three countries, has no qualms about international travel and is confident that he’ll maintain these friendships and see his friends in person again:

In Bhutan I spent 14 years, so I had many friends. And then I went to Kathmandu for two years and had many friends. And then Damak, I had many friends down there. I was getting used to moving every time [laughing]. I said, let’s see, I’ll meet you after five or six years, or two or three years; I’ll probably come back. I’ll probably have a tourist visa and just come down there and meet you guys.

Pradeep also spoke of teachers and mentors, particularly of one teacher who coached him after school. After-school coaching, or tutoring, is what Niraj’s father did to earn money. First, Pradeep explained the process:

Funny story, I used to take tuition classes – like coaching class – what happens in Nepal there is a class, you go to regular school and you teach that stuff, and after that, if you need additional help, you go to coaching – and teachers would charge you for outside classes.

So it was the same thing; it was like extra income for them; they used to say, “Hey, I’m teaching this, I’m coaching from 5:00 to 6:00, so you can come; I’ll do that at my house.”

Pradeep continued describing the teacher who coached him after school:

So I ended up going to the same professor for three or four years, and he never told us he was Bhutanese too [laughing]. And after some time I came here, and I realized he had come here, and I called him, and I said, hello, and I said the professor name, and I said sir. And he said, “I...don’t know who you are, but there is no one who calls me sir in the United States.” I was like, OK, but it’s a student who would call you sir. And he said, “I cannot not recognize you.” And I said my name, and he said, “Wow, you are also here?” And I said, how did you come here? And he said, “Well, I was also participating.” And I was like, you didn’t tell us; I spent four years with you at your home, and you never told us. And he said, “Yeah, it was really hard for us to disclose our identity.”

While this anecdote is amusing to Pradeep, it also speaks to several levels of community cultural wealth and what Evans (2010b) calls the “perils of a borderland people.” In Bhutan, even Lhotsampas in relatively safe positions such as Pradeep’s father and dentist relative had to proceed cautiously in terms of any statements they made or affiliations they maintained. In moving to Nepal for safety, the “refugee” label was problematic; Pradeep found it easier to navigate the system by saying he was from India in certain situations. More positively, this anecdote also demonstrates Pradeep’s social (and financial) capital, accrued because of his family’s earlier status and security – he was able to access and to afford after-school coaching to help him toward his academic goals.

## **4.6 Transcultural Identity in Refugee Camp**

The participants' memories show that the refugee experience is not a singular monolithic one – all of their families had to leave their home country, but they all had different experiences of Nepal and different levels of access to material and other resources. Some were able to travel extensively within and outside of Nepal's borders, while others spent almost all of their time in refugee camp. However, common themes emerge to show that transcultural identity development is not something developed reactively upon moving to a new place but something that participants have developed throughout their lives, from childhood on. This work takes place in mesosystems at the intersections of family, school, and other institutions.

### **4.6.1 Family**

Extended family are critical to participants' daily experience. Cousins are not just families but are also neighbors and classmates and playground co-conspirators. Aunts, uncles, and grandparents are also a constant in participants' daily lives, starting with refugee camp. Niraj has never lived far from his paternal aunts, uncles, and cousins, while Arjun's family moved to be closer to his extended maternal family, including the cousins whose huts he biked to in Nepal. Manisha, Pradeep, and Kiran also live in Pittsburgh near extended family.

One challenge with resettlement is that extended families didn't usually get to travel together, even if they eventually ended up at the same sites. The IOM and other organizations rely on a Western concept of family, which means a nuclear family comprised of family and children. While participants weren't separated from immediate family of parents and siblings for any length of time, separation, even temporary, from extended family made resettlement, especially early on,



more challenging. Arjun's relatives were among the first to resettle, and their transition to the U.S. would have been easier if other relatives were resettled at the same time.

#### **4.6.2 Education**

All of the participants attended school consistently and strove to do well. Conditions were certainly challenging, but the physical challenges were only noted by Manisha and Kiran, who had a comparative perspective after spending at least a few years in Nepal schools with Nepali citizens. In spite of the physical and other material challenges of refugee camp schools, participants arrived with taken-for-granted assumptions about school that served them well – e.g., attending every day and having different teachers for different subjects. The curriculum prepared them for some fundamental lessons about transcultural experience, such as a language curriculum that stressed functionality in three languages – academic Nepali (for their then-current living situation), Dzongkha (for the remote possibility of repatriation to Bhutan), and English (for the likelihood of resettlement). When resettlement became reality, English learning was reinforced more.

The participants were enrolled in ESL when they moved to the U.S., although some were able to exit quickly. Their feelings about ESL are complex and merit their own study. When Kiran, Manisha, and Niraj spoke of exiting ESL, they spoke of that milestone with great pride. In Niraj's case, the pride was coupled with relief and criticism of the curriculum.

The participants spoke of the challenges with some of their elective courses, as well as the benefits of some. Manisha, for example, spoke highly of the art electives that furthered her interest and use of painting and drawing. She spoke less fondly of cooking class, the only time she came close to letting frustration and even anger show during our interviews. It seemed very logical for a counselor to suggest cooking classes to refugee students, as hands-on classes might be less

dependent on academic language and more on performance. However, the taken-for-granted knowledge that U.S.-born students, teachers, and administrators have did not apply to the Bhutanese, as Manisha explained. Bhutanese refugee students generally had more cooking experience than their average U.S. peers, to be certain. That experience, though, was with solar stoves and ovens and not with U.S. or European systems of measurement. It never occurred to me, for example, how arbitrary a tablespoon versus a teaspoon would look to someone who didn't grow up with those systems. The same went for physical education classes – no one took the time to explain, for example, the rules of flag football, a game that was new to the Bhutanese students.

All of the participants valued academic effort and excellence. They sought challenging courses, including Advanced Placement, and two (Kiran and Manisha) were in the National Honor Society. All spoke of teachers and mentors who were helpful to them, and Manisha also spoke kindly of administrators with whom she interacted.

#### **4.6.3 Experiencing Place**

In the popular imagination, refugee camp is a rigidly bound space, difficult to get into or out of. There are regulations regarding work and rules for exiting and re-entering camp, largely for residents' safety. Except for Pradeep, participants rarely spoke of the sociopolitical context of Nepal in the 1990s, with its civil war and the presence of Maoist guerillas (Hutt, 2003). All of them spoke of refugee camp areas positively, while Arjun, Niraj, and Kiran spoke of discomfort and unease with some of the U.S. neighborhoods where they lived.

## 4.7 Conclusion

Asking participants to reflect on past experiences reveals that transcultural identity is not something that begins upon resettlement. For some of the participants, in spite of their families being forcibly displaced from their home country, borders were more porous than solid. Refugees weren't supposed to leave camp – but they could, with permission, and some participants had ways of navigating that system with more ease than others, as Manisha and Pradeep explained. They crossed borders, traveling to India, China, and even Bhutan. Participants did not create a transcultural identity upon arrival; they arrived as transcultural citizens of the world.

Participants spoke of three areas of their lives: home, school, and recreational spaces, mirroring Oldenberg's (1999, 2001) description of first, second, and third places, the first being home (temporary shelter, in refugee camp), the second work (or school, for children and teenagers), and the third recreational spaces for people to socialize with friends and to create community. When speaking of the first place, home, participants spoke of living conditions in camp and, for some, in different areas of Nepal. They rarely spoke of their families' former homes, as all but one of the participants were born in Nepal. They described their families and their daily home lives as well as the responsibilities several of them had for helping their families, including helping with housework, child care, or elder care. For the second place, school, participants described the physical space and their daily routines in the school space. The "third space" analogy is complicated for displaced communities, as there is limited infrastructure for creating such spaces (e.g., parks, playgrounds, cafes). However, children have a way of creating their own spaces, and the participants looked back fondly on going into the "jungle," or forest, with friends and kicking soccer balls in open spaces. In addition, NGOs provided third spaces in the form of arts and leadership development, in which Manisha participated.

In many ways, refugee camp created the antecedent conditions for establishing transcultural identity. Life and family history of being “borderland” people (Evans, 2010b) provided an ingrained sense of transcultural and international identity. The refugee camp school curriculum prepared students for the possibility of repatriation, integration into Nepal, or resettlement to another country by teaching students the languages of their home country, their refugee country, and English-speaking countries such as the U.S., the UK, Canada, and Australia, where many were ultimately resettled, with most going to the U.S. And time spent outside of home and school provided them not so much a sense of where they were restricted but, even more, an ability to take risks and venture to different spaces, whether it was in or near refugee camp, where Manisha would gather fruit with her friends, or in Kathmandu, where Kiran would wander with some degree of freedom. Refugee camp is not associated with freedom of movement in the common imagination, but several participants didn’t speak much about restrictions and boundaries until they described living in the U.S.

## **5.0 The Present: Life and Connections in the U.S.**

Every fall, the Bhutanese community celebrates Teej, an annual Hindu woman's festival. Traditionally, Teej is a three-day festival of feasting, fasting, ritual bathing, unmarried women's prayers for husbands, and married women's prayers for the health and long life of their husbands. Today the festival is one of the most important on Bhutanese refugee calendars, along with Dashain and Tihar (Diwali). Families and communities gather to celebrate a tradition in which women return to their birthplaces to reunite with their families, having left at marriage to live with or near their husbands' families. The mood is festive and celebratory.

It is a woman's festival of food, colorful dresses, accessories, singing and dancing. It is also one of the only occasions where women in our communities occupy and claim ownership of public spaces so openly and visibly. (Niroula, 2019)

BCAP hosts a community-wide celebration each year on or near the date of Teej, which usually falls in or near September. During my fieldwork, they hosted the celebration in a nearby Presbyterian church hall. Women, men, and children came out in force. The sound system blared Nepali traditional dance music nearly nonstop while an always crowded dance floor flowed with a sea of mostly red saris in constant, fluid motion. While the women and girls danced, pulling in their U.S. as well as Bhutanese female friends, the men socialized on the periphery of the room. The women who weren't dancing sat in the chairs facing the dance floor and the stage, where a Power Point presentation ran throughout the day, noting the sponsors of the event, such as a local Bhutanese realtor, a Bhutanese restaurant, BCAP, and some non-Bhutanese non-profit supporting organizations.

Toward the back of the hall, a buffet was set up on one side with folding tables and chairs for over 100 rotating guests. I ran into Manisha and several of her friends, all of them dressed for the occasion and on their way to the dance floor. At some point, the festivities stopped – the fire alarm went off, not for the first time that day, I learned, and we quickly evacuated the building. The local fire department came and cheerfully reset the alarm, leaving with plates of momo (Nepali dumplings), samosas, dal bhat, and kheer (rice pudding). The music and dancing began again.

Teej brings to the foreground the gendered subtext of cultural maintenance. In this celebration of and for women, the traditional foods were prepared over several days by women in the community. While most of the men were dressed in western business casual attire, save for some male elders wearing topis (caps), the Bhutanese women wore their best saris and jewelry for this occasion. I noted the same at other events, including annual Diwali celebrations and weddings. Not all, but many of the material manifestations of Nepali-Bhutanese culture are women's domain.

During the celebration, a student in his early teens pulled me aside and asked if he could interview me on video for a BCAP project. I agreed, and, in front of a video camera in a corner room, answered a series of questions about my experience with the Bhutanese community and my impressions of Teej. Wearing my salwar kameez and with a red tika dot in the middle of my forehead, I spoke of my appreciation for the multigenerational celebration of women in the community and my gratitude for being invited. I saw this video clip in an arts project over a year later, a culminating project for a grant-funded BCAP middle school youth arts group. In *This Is BCAP* (2019), the students documented their journey of learning videography in order to introduce themselves and BCAP to the larger community.

The Teej celebration exemplifies how BCAP and COSL access and create social capital, or organizational relationships and networks (Coleman, 1988; Daly, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-

Salazar, 1997). It also provides an example of how immigrant networks, sometimes negatively portrayed as sheltered and separated (Small, 2008) contribute to their own groups and to the larger communities in which they reside.

Putnam (2000) cites two general forms of networks, those that create in-network *bonds* and those that *bridge* different communities. His work and that of some others tends to privilege bridges over bonds. Small (2013) and others (Small, Jacobs, & Massenill, 2008; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995) point out that both types of networks are important as well as interdependent. While the dichotomy of bonds versus bridges is simplified, it still provides a useful way to frame the participants' present lived experience and the networks and organizations in which they participate. Bonds and bridges are overlapping, not separate, constructs. Teej is a Hindu celebration for the Bhutanese community (bonding), which creates bridges within the community (between generations) and with the host community (by inviting U.S. friends as guests and by coordinating with co-sponsors like the non-profit The Mission Continues, which helped with setting up the facility, and the Christian church that allowed the use of its space).

Niraj, Kiran, and Manisha are involved with BCAP, while Arjun and Pradeep have been active in COSL. These organizations present opportunities for their communities, including young people, to forge intracommunity bonds and cross-cultural bridges while presenting counternarratives about the refugee experience, important work for transcultural identity development and for resisting dominant narratives about refugees and other displaced groups.

In this chapter, I focus on the present lives of the participants in this study, which includes participation in an RCO, either BCAP or COSL. Organizations are central to their daily lives, including school, work, and RCOs. To answer my second research question, *What role do organizations, including RCOs, play in the process of transcultural identity work*, I asked the

participants to describe the organizations in which they participate, including those in and outside of the Bhutanese community. I found the concepts of social capital theory, as well as responses to those theories, to be informative in my analysis. I begin with a discussion of participant involvement in local RCOs and then look closely via sociograms (informal network maps) at three participants' networks in order to see how RCOs fit into their daily lived experience.

### 5.1 Local Bhutanese RCOs and Youth Development

The five participants in this study have all been involved in one of two local RCOs that offer youth programming. For some participants, involvement with an RCO is one of several activities in which they engage. For others, it is one of their primary activities outside of school and home responsibilities. (See Table 4: Participant Organizational Networks.)

**Table 4. Participant Organizational Networks**

	<i>Arjun</i>	<i>Kiran</i>	<i>Niraj</i>	<i>Manisha</i>	<i>Pradeep</i>
<i>RCO Activity</i>	COSL Sports	BCAP Service Academic	BCAP Service	BCAP Office work Events	COSL Sports Arts Mentoring
<i>School</i>		Band Volleyball Junior Achievement		Garden Club Multicultural Club GirlGov	
<i>Host community</i>		Summer job at faith-based organization Job at restaurant	Summer internship at non-profit		Volunteer at faith-based organization

Youth involvement in BCAP and COSL falls into one or more of the following categories:



- **Academic and Career Development:** Both organizations provide academic support facilitated by Bhutanese adults and community organizations as well as by Bhutanese youth themselves, such as programming led by Bhutanese college students to help high school students prepare for college. BCAP provides employment opportunities, including Manisha's summer internship. Both organizations also help youth with job and career preparation, for example by coaching on resume writing and interview etiquette.
- **Sports:** Most of the time, sports means soccer, although at school Kiran and Manisha participated in different sports (boys tennis and girls track and field, respectively). Both RCO organizations have youth soccer teams, and both make a point to include young women as well as young men. Both organizations have girls' and boys' teams, and boys and girls play together at practices. Diwas Timsina, founder and president of COSL, notes with pride the fact that their organization had the first Bhutanese female soccer team in the U.S.
- **Service:** BCAP and COSL encourage service from Bhutanese community members to the Bhutanese community. This encouragement, coupled with Pine Haven School District's community service requirement for graduation, provides opportunities for Bhutanese youth to help at events (or, just as often, to run their own events) and, in BCAP's case, to provide teaching, tutoring, and interpretation services for community elders as they prepare for their citizenship tests and interviews.
- **Arts:** Both BCAP and COSL also offer arts programming, defined broadly to include visual arts, creative writing, videography, and theater.

In all of these programs, the RCOs not only support Bhutanese youth but also create opportunities, like the Teej celebration, to facilitate internal community bonds as well as bridges between the Bhutanese and U.S. organizations and individuals.

### **5.1.1 Bonds and Bridges for Academic and Career Development**

BCAP's youth programming includes academic and career preparation for high school students. Kiran was a consistent participant in such programming during his high school years. RCO-led academic and career development programming takes several forms, including year-long after-school programs, round table discussions, and panel presentations, often organized by Bhutanese youth themselves.

BCAP and one of the local resettlement organizations co-sponsored an after-school program that Kiran attended. The two organizations obtained grant funding to provide after-school tutoring, college application assistance, and career exploration to neighborhood refugees (mostly Bhutanese but also ethnic Karen refugees from Burma as well as other countries). Kiran described his involvement with this program among his many co-curricular involvements, including volleyball, band, and his part-time job at a fast food restaurant. The program was designed specifically for refugee youth to help them succeed academically and to build career skills. Occasionally staff from Junior Achievement (JA) would attend to present lessons on entrepreneurship and financial literacy. A year or two before Kiran was enrolled in the program, I volunteered with JA to present a college preparation program. Kiran confirmed that the program structure I observed was typical: Five to 10 students attended, ate snacks the organization provided, and participated in a lesson. The school district provided a late bus, so transportation wasn't an obstacle for participation.

One example of RCO-sponsored youth-led programming was a panel created and facilitated by two young women, both of whom had been involved in BCAP and in COSL. After their first semester in college, they wanted to come back and talk to high school students in the community about lessons they had learned. They also wanted to foreground a message of civic involvement and responsibility as well as academic achievement and career planning. With “Connecting Youth to Community” (see Figure 21 below<sup>3</sup>), BCAP leaders helped them reserve a space at a local library and to find a local business to co-sponsor the event, which allowed the students to offer lunch to participants.



Figure 21. BCAP Youth Networking Event

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<sup>3</sup> In this and other images, identifying information is redacted.

The event was designed to help college-going and college-aspiring Bhutanese youth network with and learn from one another. In addition to building these bonds, or enhancing the bonds that already existed, the student facilitators wanted to facilitate bridges to civic engagement, including with encouraging voting and service. Kiran, at that time a first-year university student, was in attendance and, while he didn't participate in the panel, provided his own input based on his successful first semester at a local university. While the students spoke of individual behaviors that would contribute to academic success (e.g., time management, study skills, financial literacy), they also reinforced that academic and career success happens through participation in community, whether that community is local, national, or global. They spoke of giving back to the Bhutanese community as well as active engagement in the host society, particularly through civic engagement behaviors like voting.

Similarly, COSL was formed with the goal of providing youth development programs, including academic and professional development. In addition to having informal mentoring sessions on applying to college, navigating financial aid, and the like, they also offered other programs based on current youth interests. Coding, for example, was an interest for several high school students, so BCAP and COSL both offered coding bootcamps for interested youth. (See Figure 22 for COSL's coding bootcamp advertisement.)



**Figure 22. COSL Coding Bootcamp**

Both organizations’ programming provides Bhutanese youth with opportunities to learn and advance in school, college, and the workplace. These programs include Bhutanese youth and adults as well as outside organizations and individuals. They also provide both hard and soft skills development, with “hard” technical knowledge (coding, resume writing) and “soft” communication skills (speaking, writing) and self-management strategies (study skills, time management).

### **5.1.2 Bonding and Bridging Over Sports**

Sports are an important part of youth programming for BCAP and COSL. Arjun was the most enthusiastic about his involvement in COSL’s soccer team, and Pradeep also played and coached for COSL. Niraj didn’t play soccer with either organization, but he enjoyed playing soccer with friends and relatives as well as on his middle school team. Kiran and Manisha did not

participate in RCO-sponsored soccer teams, but they did have some involvement with high school sports. Kiran spoke about how much he enjoyed tennis throughout high school, and Manisha mentioned participating in track and field one year until an injury prevented her from continuing. While Kiran and Manisha got involved in other sports, soccer is a shared community experience and clearly an important one, from the number of posts on both organizations' websites and social media pages. COSL organized soccer teams in the organization's earliest days, and BCAP recently began sponsoring indoor and outdoor soccer play.

Soccer provides both bonds and bridges. Other Bhutanese organizations in the country have soccer teams, and COSL and BCAP participate in games and tournaments. They also play against other organizations. The enthusiasm for soccer contrasts with some participants' frustration with physical education classes, where they struggled to follow rules for games they had never heard of. BCAP and COSL provided opportunities for participants to shine in a familiar sport for those who didn't get that opportunity in school.

For both organizations, athletics is a way to reinforce core values about gender equity. Both organizations' commitment to gender equity is signaled in their social media and website posts about soccer practices and games. Both organizations post photos and videos that show women playing and practicing with each other and with their male peers. Men and women, boys and girls, play. COSL's website includes a video about soccer, with girls and boys kicking around with abandon, gathered in a circle to take photos of their shoes, and practicing together.

COSL's Facebook post announcing a new soccer season (Figure 23: COSL Soccer Flyer) illustrates the affordances of soccer, including but not limited to the benefits of competitive community sport. The text overlaying the photos indicates that "everyone's welcome," reinforced by the photos of boys and girls playing together. The welcoming and inclusive focus is also

reinforced by video that includes Karen refugees who fled from Burma's borders to Thailand refugee camps before settling in the U.S. Bonds and bridges are formed in meeting COSL's Facebook call to "play and stay active as well as meet and expand their networks and make new friends" (Figure 23, below). BCAP's team, the Dragons (Figure 24), also promotes inclusivity and gender equity, as girls' games and practices are equally promoted and supported.



Figure 23. COSL Soccer Flyer





Figure 24. BCAP Soccer Facebook Post

A review of both organizations' websites and social media fields reviews the dominance of soccer. A significant percentage of posts mention soccer, including a FIFA championship watch party hosted by BCAP as well as team formations, games, and tournaments announced on their pages. While the teams are Bhutanese, they also are open to players outside of the Bhutanese community. Athletics is a venue for promoting community bonds and for expanding networks through competition with neighborhood and regional teams in the Pittsburgh area.



### **5.1.3 Strengthening Bonds and Bridges Through Service**

BCAP and COSL encourage participants to give back to the community in many forms, whether through reaching in (by volunteering to help elders with citizenship preparation, as Niraj and Kiran do) or through reaching outward (with events to introduce the larger community to the Bhutanese diaspora). For all of the participants, service, including but not limited to service to the Bhutanese community, is important to their daily lives and central to their personal networks.

Some participants arrived in the U.S. with a predisposition toward service, partly influenced by their families. When Pradeep and his family arrived in Pittsburgh, it was the middle of the semester and Pradeep was not able to enroll in classes. His father suggested that he volunteer as well as work. Since they lived near Cedar Square where an interfaith organization had an office, he simply walked over, introduced himself, and began helping out at events, particularly those that involved serving immigrant and refugee communities. Manisha's aunt arrived in Pittsburgh before the rest of the family and got involved in BCAP. She encouraged Manisha to do the same, and Manisha has been an enthusiastic participant in events and frequently volunteers to help with cultural celebrations and outreach events.

Other participants began their involvement because of institutional directives. The school districts in which Arjun, Niraj, and Kiran were enrolled have graduation service requirements. In addition, Manisha and Kiran were both members of National Honor Society, which had annual service requirements for its members. BCAP provided opportunities for them to fulfill those requirements in the Bhutanese community, including through tutoring and helping at events.

For all of the participants who completed service for high school requirements, this extrinsic motivation led to an intrinsic desire to continue serving the community; several participants were engaged in service before and after fulfilling their school requirements. Kiran

said, “I like it – I like seeing how the older people learn” when he spoke of helping with English as a second language tutoring. Niraj also spoke with satisfaction about his involvement with teaching citizenship classes; he saw himself as helping to create new citizens who could then vote.

Service activities create bonds and bridges for the Bhutanese community. Again, one form of service for BCAP youth is helping elders prepare for their citizenship tests, which helps create bonds between generations. It is also helpful that younger volunteers can continue to use their Nepali language skills. Even though they speak Nepali at home, engaging with different adults on different topics only serves to help the students with maintaining their language. Manisha and Kiran also help with running events, including serving food and organizing technology.

Service opportunities also provide outreach to the larger community. COSL, for example, hosted a panel discussion, “Talk to Me” (Figure 25) to foster connections between Bhutanese youth and host society individuals and organizations.



**Figure 25. COSL "Talk to Me"**

In the first of two panels at the public library event, four Bhutanese students discussed their experiences in the U.S., including with schools and other systems. They spoke in particular about

enrolling in college, preparing for careers, and their general experience as refugees who resettled in Pittsburgh. They were followed by a panel of community advocates, including leaders from non-profit organizations and a nearby college. The event provided an opportunity for different groups to learn about each other – Bhutanese parents heard about what other Bhutanese children experienced in schools and in the community, and non-profit leaders learned about frustrations with accessing systems, such as college admissions and financial aid processes.

Service, then, provides bonds and bridges within and between communities. While some participants initially engaged in service in order to fulfill a requirement, the experience was not simply transactional for the participants. When I asked Manisha why, as a busy student, she was so committed to BCAP, she simply said of her service, “I love it.” Service opportunities, whether they involve helping the Bhutanese community or engaging with other communities, allow community youth to create relationships and networks that contribute to transcultural identity development.

#### **5.1.4 Arts as Bonds, Bridges, and Counternarrative**

Artistic expression is important to both organizations and, to varying degrees, to the participants in this study. Such expression is not only aesthetic but is often part of counternarratives that speak back to dominant rhetoric about refugees and immigrants.

Manisha spoke of artistic expression as an important part of her experience upon resettlement. While she was waiting to get enrolled in school, drawing was one of the activities that filled her time. For other participants, artistic expression was public rather than private, and served to amplify individual and community voice and experience. This was the case for Niraj, who learned to produce podcast documentaries during his summer internship with a local

nonprofit. He and the rest of his internship team presented their podcasts at a public forum; in his, he discussed his conflicting feelings about being labeled a refugee and spoke of how he grew not only to accept but to embrace that label.

Through traditional forms and new technologies, the arts serve as both community bonds and bridges. Both BCAP and COSL, for example, sponsor youth dance performances. Sometimes these performances take place at Bhutanese community events such as the Teej festival described at the beginning of this chapter. The dancers are more often than not girls and young women from the community who have been taught by family members and others in the community (Figure 26: BCAP Dance Group). Their performances provide opportunities to share Nepali-Bhutanese music, dance, and dress within the community, particularly by extending and reinforcing shared cultural expression with younger community members, including those who do not remember or did not experience life in Bhutan and Nepal.



Figure 26. BCAP Dance Group

Dance performances also occur at the invitation of host community organizations, such as neighborhood and city festivals (Figure 27: COSL Dance Group at Pittsburgh World Cup). Dance exhibitions in this case serve to bond community members in cultural expression but also to connect Bhutanese and other Pittsburgh communities.



**Figure 27. COSL Dance Group at Pittsburgh World Cup**

Dance, in fact, was the impetus for BCAP to register as a non-profit organization. When Khara Timsina was approached about scheduling a Bhutanese dance performance at a neighborhood fall festival, he approached a local library about reserving rehearsal space. He could only do so under the aegis of a formal organization, providing an incentive for the organization to create a board of Bhutanese community members, allies, and advocates and then formally register as a non-profit organization.

Another form of arts engagement is the BCAP Youth Arts Team, comprised of middle school students and funded by a three-year grant from a local arts council. This group, with an artist mentor from the council, chose videography as their art form and a documentary, *This Is BCAP*, as their culminating project (Figure 28: *This Is BCAP* Film Launch Party).



Figure 28. *This Is BCAP* Film Launch Party

To develop their videography skills and create the documentary, the participants interviewed community members and U.S. friends and advocatess. For the grant period the students functioned as qualitative researchers, curating emic and etic perspectives to create a picture of a vibrant community (Bethea & Dawkins, 2019). I sat for video-recorded interviews at two events, one at the Teej celebration that opened this chapter and another event to celebrate the community elders and BCAP volunteers. I was struck by the students' deliberate efforts to garner diverse perspectives, not only including Bhutanese and "other" also male and female, young and old, community member and friends. They also asked rather probing questions, beyond standard

questions such as “Who are you?” and “How did you learn about BCAP?” At the Teej celebration, the youth artists asked me about my knowledge of Teej, how I heard of it, and what I thought of the celebration. They would not accept “pat” answers, such as “I think it’s lovely” but would probe on why I thought it was significant.

The students contributed to BCAP’s mission to foreground “culturally-informed services and activities” (BCAP, “Our Mission,” 2019) by creating a product that melds the community’s past displacement and present life and participation in the city. Captured in the subtitle “Their work. Their city” (Figure 28 above) is the assertion that BCAP, and by extension the Bhutanese, are an entrenched and valuable part of the city in which they have resettled.

BCAP and COSL participants accomplish much through the arts. The arts provide opportunities for strengthening community bonds and bridges, whether through traditional dance performances or the production of audio and visual media. Bhutanese youth learn new skills and expand their networks by working with Bhutanese adults and host society individuals and organizations. Finally, the arts provide a form of resistance to dominant narratives about displaced populations.

## **5.2 Participant Organizational Networks**

To explore participants’ life in the U.S. from resettlement to the present day, I asked each to begin the second interview by completing a network sociogram that I modified from the work of Hogan, Carrasco, and Wellman (2007). In Hogan et al.’s model, participants created hand-drawn sociograms indicating not only the individuals and organizations with whom they interact, but also the degree of closeness. The closer the relationship, the closer the name of the person or

organization to the participant's name. Kiran, Manisha, and Niraj completed the activity, and their sociograms are below (Figures 29-31). These provide a visual representation not only of the relationships they have with individuals and organizations, but also the degree of closeness to each.

While their sociograms are very revealing, participants sometimes found it challenging and even awkward to figure out the distance between themselves and some individuals. In those cases, I would ask them simply to name organizations and individuals in their networks with the following categories, also used to organize the sociogram quadrant: Family, Bhutanese Community Friends and Acquaintances, School/College Community, and U.S./Other Community. This modification was helpful to Arjun. In Pradeep's case, we used a timeline in which he was able to visualize his relationships with individuals and organizations chronologically rather than in degrees of importance. With these modifications, Arjun and Pradeep were still able to reflect on the influence of different relationships on their experiences in the U.S.

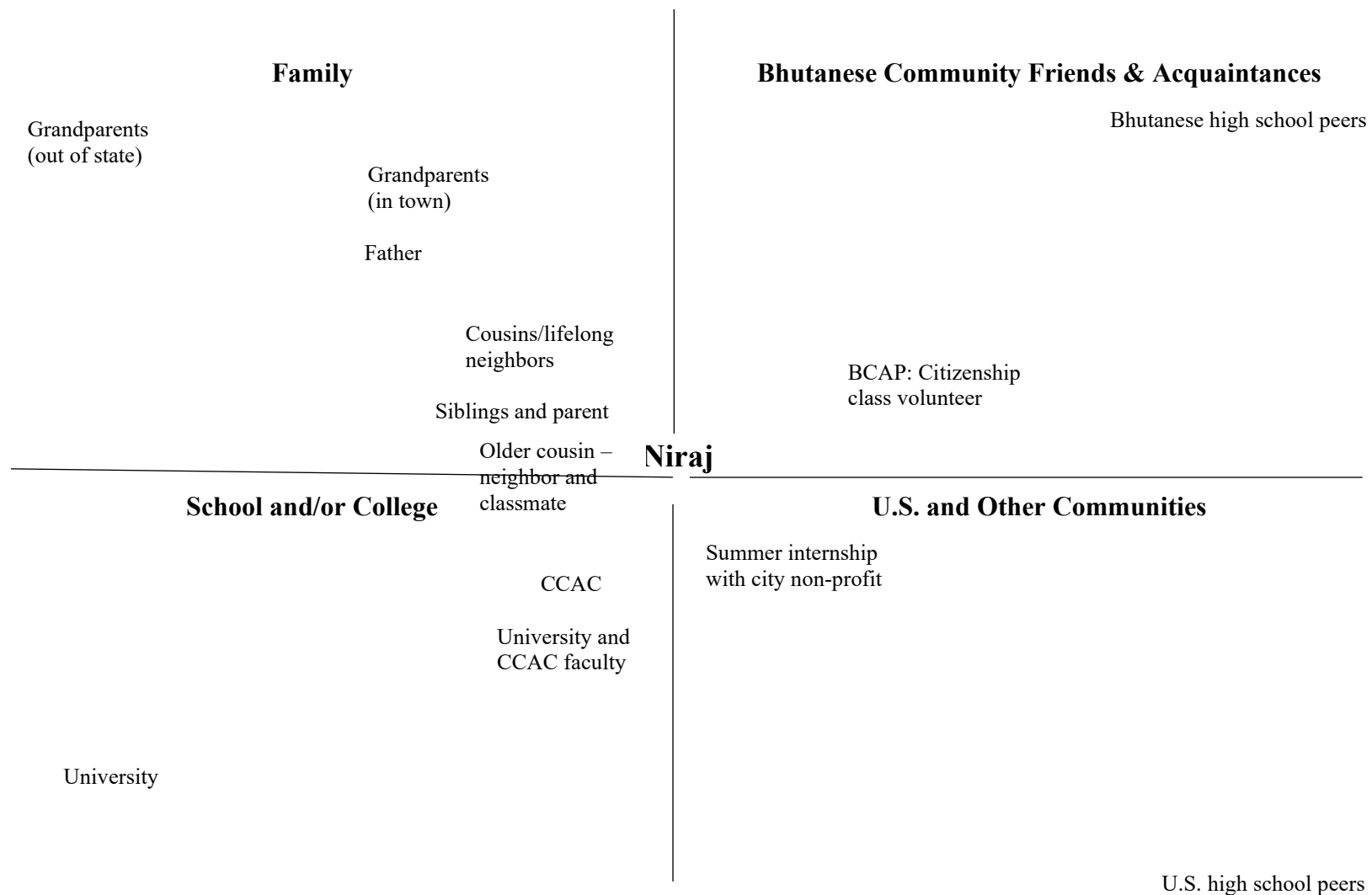
The figures below present the participant network sociograms Niraj, Manisha, and Kiran completed. Each participant was given the following instructions:

- There are four quadrants on this chart: Family, Bhutanese Community Friends and Acquaintances, School/College Community, and U.S./Other Community.
- Write your name in the center.
- In each quadrant, write the names of people with whom you interact and how you know that person (e.g., Kumar from refugee camp).
- If someone fits multiple categories (e.g., a cousin [Family] with whom you have classes at community college [School and/or College Community], place that name at the intersection of the quadrants.

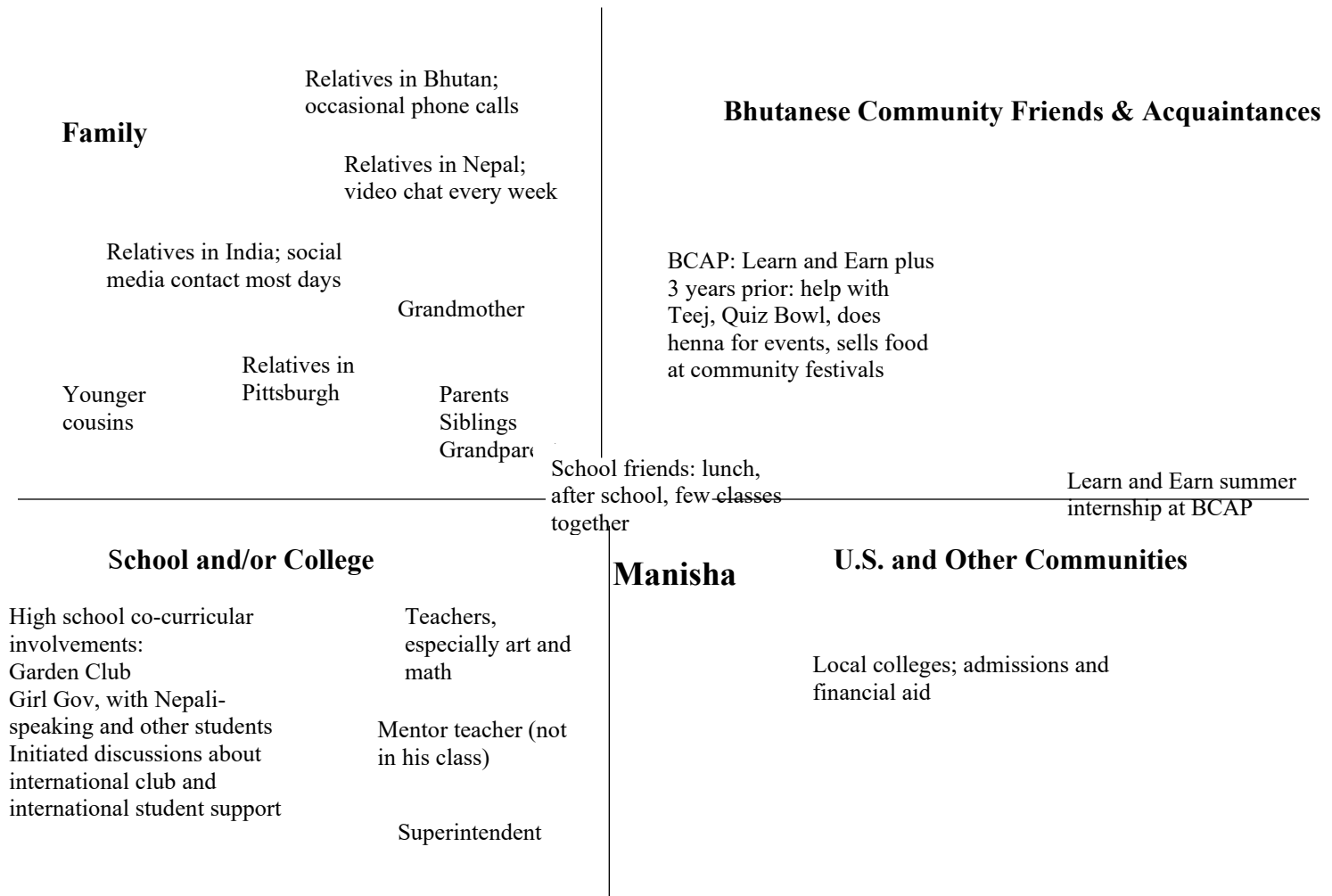


- The closer you are to someone or some group, the closer that name should appear to your own name. Names and organizations of acquaintances will be placed further from your own name, while the most significant and crucial relationships will appear closer to your name.

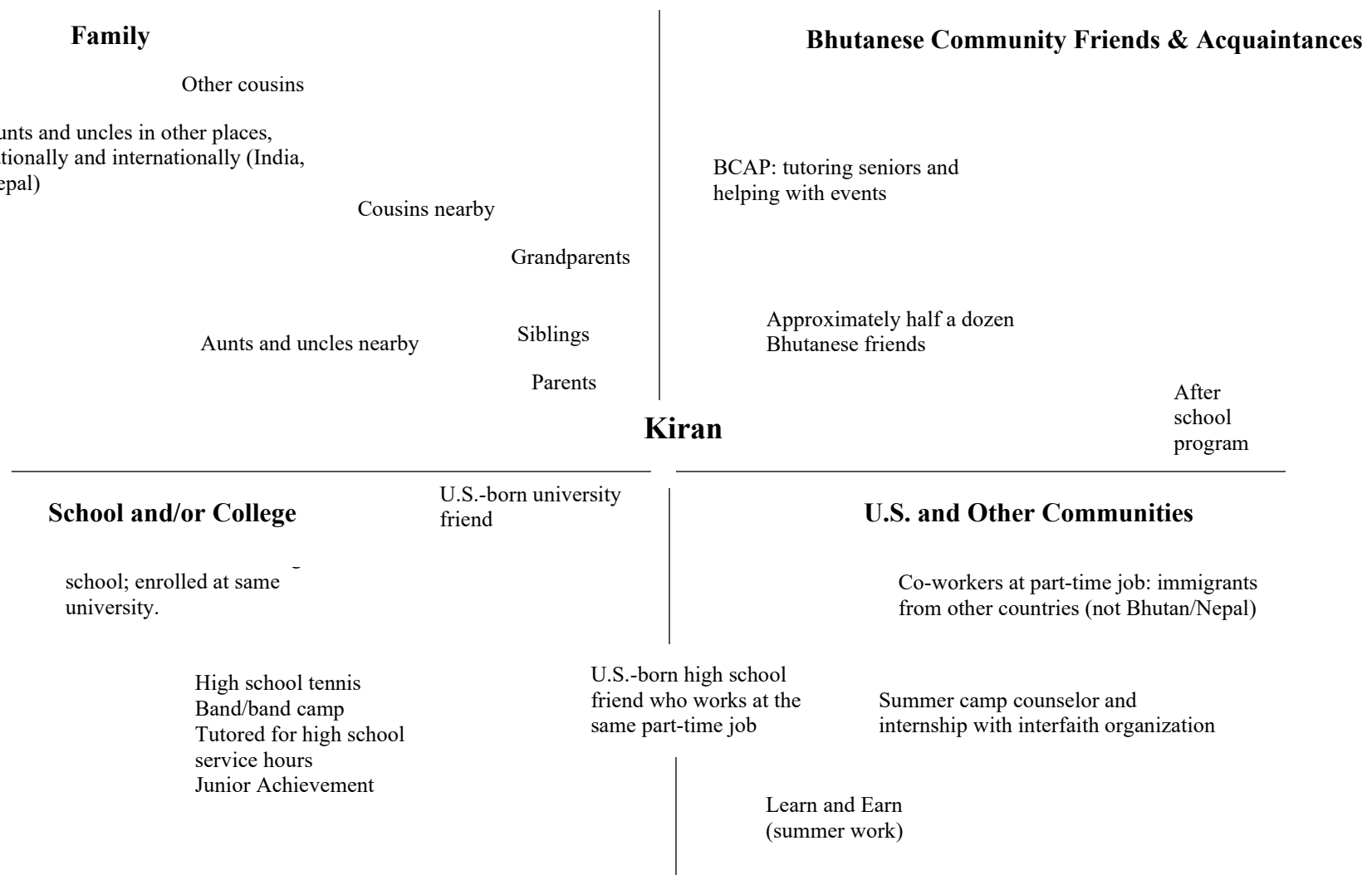
For each participant, organizations play important roles in their lived experience. For-profit businesses and organizations play somewhat minor roles, with Kiran and Pradeep mentioning their workplaces as important to their daily lives. The relationships that are most meaningful to their daily lives, in addition to family connections, often are connected to BCAP or COSL, other community organizations, and, of course, schools and higher education institutions.



**Figure 29. Niraj's Relationships and Networks Sociogram**



**Figure 30. Manisha's Relationships and Networks Sociogram**



**Figure 31. Kiran's Relationships and Networks Sociogram**

### 5.2.1 RCOs

The participants all cited their involvement in a local RCO as important in their daily lives, albeit for different reasons. For Arjun, COSL provided him with social and athletic opportunities; playing soccer with friends was the outlet he enjoyed most. Niraj initially came to BCAP to fulfill a high school service requirement but stayed because he found teaching citizenship classes to be intrinsically fulfilling; he enjoyed helping to create future (voting) citizens. Manisha appreciated the opportunity to serve and to socialize through BCAP and to further cultivate the leadership skills she had begun to develop in Nepal. Kiran benefitted from the academic and career programming that BCAP provided in an after-school program, while Pradeep, similar to Manisha, drew satisfaction from volunteering to help the community. Pradeep participated in both BCAP and COSL, first by helping BCAP in the office and participating in COSL's artistic, leadership development, and soccer programs.

RCO involvement for all five participants resulted from or contributed to different forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) – it is both cause and effect. Kiran and Pradeep became involved partly as a result of family influence, or familial capital in Yosso's community cultural wealth framework. Involvement with and service to the Bhutanese community is emphasized in Kiran's home, and Pradeep got involved in community service because of his father's encouragement. Familial capital led to their involvement in RCOs. RCO participation also led to enhanced social networks for the participants, providing them opportunities to socialize and to make new friends, as in Arjun's case. After-school programming provided by BCAP facilitated navigational capital, as part of the curriculum involved helping high school students to learn about college applications and job seeking skills. Finally, teaching citizenship classes

enhanced Niraj's resistant capital, as he came to view his service with BCAP as part of his effort to counter policy and rhetoric that label refugees and immigrants in deficit terms.

RCOs are not the only organization central to refugee youth and young adult development. However, they do contribute to transcultural identity development because those organizations facilitate engagement not only in Bhutanese spaces but also at the intersections between those space and host society organizations, described in the following sections.

### **5.2.2 Other Community Organizations**

The study participants engaged with other organizations outside of the local RCOs, including non-profit community organizations that serve the communities in which they live. Two participants, Kiran and Pradeep, also worked for businesses outside of the local Bhutanese diaspora, and one, Niraj, obtained summer internships unconnected to the Bhutanese community.

The participants engaged with community organizations that were not RCOs but were refugee-serving – in other words, organizations that defined all or part of their mission as helping refugees and/or immigrants in general. Pradeep's first interactions in Pittsburgh outside of his family came when he walked to a nonprofit office at Cedar Square to seek out volunteer opportunities. The Community Interfaith Organization<sup>4</sup> works with all populations in the Pine Haven area and is dedicated to addressing poverty and helping those in need to access resources. Part of their mission specifically references immigrants and refugees who live in this part of Pittsburgh. Pradeep, and later Kiran, volunteered with the organization's youth summer camp,

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym.

which included but was not specifically created for Bhutanese children. Pradeep also helped with staffing the food pantry and occasionally providing translation assistance.

For Kiran and Pradeep, non-RCO organizations were the first community involvements they experienced in Pittsburgh. In contrast, BCAP was the first organization with which Niraj and Manisha engaged, Niraj for service opportunities and Manisha for service and also for social opportunities. BCAP sometimes led youth to other opportunities, such as a summer internship program sponsored by the City Youth Organization<sup>5</sup>. This program provides selected students with paid internships that allow them to gain job experience and skills as well as contribute labor to organizations that need assistance. Kiran and Manisha each completed a summer internship with a local nonprofit organization, the Community Interfaith Organization in Kiran's case and the BCAP office in Manisha's case.

Manisha's internship placement problematizes the construct of intra-community "bonds" versus "bridges" that help refugee youth connect to individuals and organizations outside of the Bhutanese community. Refugee youth and adults do not "retreat" into "ethnic enclaves" nor do they reject the home community. Individuals and organizations function at the intersections, as seen through city internships that place students with the BCAP office and with an interfaith organization that serves all populations but also foregrounds work with refugees and immigrants as part of their mission (Figure 32: Venn Diagram of RCO and Host Society Organizations).

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym



**Figure 32. Venn Diagram of RCO and Host Society Organizations**

BCAP's relationships with other organizations help community youth to make connections to those and other organizations outside of the local Bhutanese diaspora. For example, BCAP sponsors an annual Quiz Bowl competition for Bhutanese elders who are studying for the citizenship exam. This program brings together not only the Bhutanese community but other constituencies, including community and government organizations. Guests over the years have included the county executive, the U.S. representative, and staff from the mayor's office.

Not all of the participants' organizational involvement have any connection to the Bhutanese community. These outside organizations often take the form of employment, such as Pradeep's first job in the technology sector and Kiran's part-time job at a fast food restaurant, where he had friends and colleagues from the U.S and from countries other than Nepal. Similarly,



Niraj obtained summer internships in two consecutive years, one for a non-profit organization and one in Washington, DC, where he worked for a government organization

### **5.2.3 Secondary and Tertiary Institutions**

All of the participants were hard-working and successful students who aspired to go to college after high school. To that end, they worked diligently to earn strong grades; Manisha and Kiran were in the National Honor Society, and all of them planned to go to college after high school. Whether their involvement in co-curricular programming was minimal (like Arjun and Niraj) or extensive (like Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep), all five were committed to academic excellence and worked hard to prepare for college study.

Participants had vastly different levels of involvement at school, with three participants, Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep, being deeply involved in curricular and co-curricular programming. Arjun and Niraj were diligent students with good academic records in high school and college, but they demonstrated less connection to the life of their schools in general. Arjun cited transportation as a barrier to participation in clubs and activities, so COSL provided an important social and athletic outlet for him.

Niraj's experiences with school and college were revealing. Like many other families in the community, his moved multiple times after resettlement. After his family relocated to Pittsburgh, they moved three times within the city, each time to a different school district. Of the three participants who completed sociograms, Niraj placed high school and university peers at the far edges of his sociogram. He spoke with frustration of his high school experience:

That was like *I'm so done*, like these people are so racist, I didn't want to be associated with them, and then I just gave... Because I didn't have any Nepali people in like any of

my classes [right], so it's not like I could talk to them. I was like separated from them. The only time I knew them was like the last semester of senior seminar class.

I asked him to elaborate on the racist behaviors he observed:

Like, you'd come outside, from the person that you had a class with and then they would just be like making fun of Nepali people talking, and it's like if you're in that class and you're talking to me in that class, all I'm going to do is do my work and get out because I don't want to have any association with you if you're doing that stuff to people outside...I don't want to talk to you.

Niraj continued by discussing his experiences in the classroom as well as outside of it. Here, he was less specific, noting a patronizing tone in class discussions about the "other":

Every time we would have like AP class discussions and whatever [yeah], people would just casually say things that are not like ... not the greatest things to say. every time we would have like AP class discussions and whatever [yeah], people would just casually say things that are not like ... not the greatest things to say.

*Susan: People were more openly saying offensive things.*

YEAH! Like when we would do discussions about other civilizations or whatever, you know, that patronizing tone. I think it would be like three or four people, that were on my side and the rest of the class would be SO ignorant.

Niraj's experience with high school echoes, to some degree, Kiran's experience with elementary school when he moved to Pittsburgh. Kiran spoke of struggling with the transition from Chicago to Pittsburgh and moving from a city neighborhood to a suburban one (see section 4.3: Kiran: The Importance of Place): "Somehow from Nepal to Chicago was, I guess, easier than Chicago to Pittsburgh. I guess the suburbs feels a bit different. I like the crowd."

Niraj, too, spoke of the shift from city to suburb, only in his case, the change occurred in the same metropolitan area. Where Kiran was describing his experience in adapting to the neighborhood, Niraj focused on the difference between city and suburban schools, noting a “culture shift” in moving to a suburban district:

Yeah, so I didn’t, like – yeah, like all the jokes are like different. I can’t even tell when suburban people make jokes; they’re not even funny, honestly. They are *not* good jokes, terrible [muttered].

*Susan: So ... was [city school] a better environment?*

Yeah. [quietly]

Both Kiran and Niraj expressed less difficulty with the transition from one country to another than with the transition from city to suburb, finding the latter more restrictive and less welcoming. Their suburban neighborhoods appear more welcoming in several respects. First, the suburb where they both graduated from high school, Pine Haven, is more internationally diverse than other area suburbs. Niraj’s family moved there partly due to the higher crime rate in their city neighborhood. The Pine Haven School District is reputable and offers co-curricular programs and academic opportunities, including several specific to immigrant and refugee populations (such as an after-school program Kiran attended). However, Niraj felt that his city neighborhood and school were more inclusive. I asked him to elaborate on the differences between the city school where he began high school and the suburban school where he graduated:

People weren’t openly racist at [city school]. I mean, how *can* you be when you live next to people from Nepal, and there’s black people above your apartment, and you’re all poor together. It’s hard to be racist against people who you interact with every single day. But the suburbs are so segregated – all the Nepali people would be on one bus in Birch

Commons, and that one bus would just go to Birch Commons and be like 99 percent Nepali people.

Niraj and Kiran describe a restrictive and often unwelcoming context of reception (Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011). In Berry's (1997) acculturation model, Niraj's response would be labeled as *separated* from the new culture, a response characterized as unhealthy. However, Niraj did not choose a separated response so much as respond to an unwelcoming environment. While he felt separated from his peers, silenced by racist text and subtext in class and hallways, and apart from other Bhutanese students who were in different classes and with whom he did not previously attend school, he threw himself into academics, selecting honors and advanced placement classes when available. He cultivated better relationships with his teachers than with his peers. While Niraj found class discussions frustrating and even offensive, it was not because he expected those classes to be an echo chamber to reinforce his own opinions. One of his strongest mentoring relationships was with an honors teacher who had very different political opinions and would, in a respectful and friendly manner, spar with Niraj and challenge him on political issues. Separated from U.S. peers, and perhaps wary of trying to form school friendships after being uprooted from school multiple times, he experienced stronger connections to the world of ideas and to teachers and other adult mentors.

While Kiran expressed the same sense of restriction in the suburbs, he went through the transition before adolescence, and without the number of school changes that Niraj navigated. After his first few shy months in middle school, he adapted and made friends. In contrast to Niraj, he placed peer relationships, Bhutanese and other, closer to the center of his sociogram. He excelled academically and socially, and was involved in co-curricular activities like tennis as well as with National Honor Society and after-school activities.

One of Kiran's after-school activities intersected with a community organization, in this case one of the local resettlement agencies. This organization sponsored an after-school academic and career preparation program for refugee and other immigrant students. They hired one of the BCAP adult volunteers, a woman who had prior teaching experience in Bhutan and Nepal, to facilitate workshops and bring in speakers on topics such as applying to college, writing resumes, and interviewing for jobs, among other academic and professional skills. School, like the RCOs and other non-profit organizations, was also then a space where U.S. and refugee community members engaged for youth development.

Like Kiran, Manisha and Pradeep were also involved in co-curricular programs. In high school, Manisha participated in a number of academic (National Honor Society), civic (Girl.Gov), and recreational (Garden Club) programs (Figure 30: Manisha's Relationships and Networks Sociogram). Pradeep finished high school before his family moved to Pittsburgh. Like Arjun, he began his college career at the local community college with plans to transfer to a four-year college.

Notably, when a school did not provide a club or activity they wanted, two of the participants took matters into their own hands. Manisha in her high school and Pradeep at the community college both took steps to create multicultural student organizations. Manisha spoke with her district superintendent about creating a support organization for new immigrant students:

Yeah, I told her like in our school, like if the new people come, they get so lost with everything. Like our school is so small, and people know everyone, and I told her like when I came here I didn't know anything about the school system [whisper], I didn't know anything about NHS, the higher classes, and yeah, I told her we should have some

orientation for the newcomers so they get to know everything about what will be going on in the school.

Pradeep had a similar experience at the community college. He noted a lack of multicultural and multinational programming, and he proposed an international club. While Pradeep has since transferred from the community college, graduated, and entered the workforce, the club is still active.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

All five participants in this study are involved in at least one of the local Bhutanese RCOs. What influences their involvement in these and other organizations? Personality plays a role; some are more introverted, and some are more outgoing. Logistics, particularly transportation, also impacts participation in many programs and organizations. In Arjun's early days in Syracuse, he did not have access to a BCAP or COSL equivalent, because his family was among the first to arrive in the U.S.

The context of reception also comes into play as the participants navigated their options for RCO, community, and school involvement. While none of the participants discussed episodes of outright bullying, Niraj spoke at length about forms of microaggression that, while not personally directed at him, excluded and even demeaned his and others' lived experience (Keels, Durkee, & Hope, 2017). Arjun and Kiran were not as expressive as Niraj, but both struggled with moving to places where they initially felt isolated. Other participants cited more positive reception experiences, which enabled their involvement. When Pradeep's family moved to Cedar Square, he met the Community Interfaith Organization, which provided engagement opportunities and the

start of a vibrant network of friends and mentors. Manisha's family, on arrival, were met by an aunt who introduced them to BCAP, which provided Manisha with social and service opportunities as well as friendships that bridged Bhutanese and school communities.

Just as the context of reception influenced participant involvement, the context of origin may be equally important. Refugee camp (and for Kiran and Pradeep, life in Kathmandu) created antecedent conditions for these experiences. Kiran was encouraged to explore city and camp, and he attended a school that provided access to computer technology. Manisha was involved in youth development organizations like those Evans describe in her work (2010a). Pradeep had traditional social (and financial) capital that gave him advantages in navigating borders. Arjun and Niraj were encouraged to advance their educations.

Participants' reflections on their present-day lives and associations helped to address my second research question: What role do organizations, including refugee community organizations (RCOs), play in the process [of establishing transcultural identity]? Their reflections on past and present experience point to the fact that transcultural identity development is influenced by networks and relationships but is not initiated at resettlement. The schooling and enrichment opportunities they encountered in refugee camp were significant – different from what students in their U.S. school districts experience, but not “less than.” Among the world's “borderlands people” (Evans, 2010b), participants had already established fluid transcultural identities through diverse encounters with cultures, nations, and languages. How their identity work influenced their views of the future is the subject of the following chapter.

## **6.0 Future Plans and Aspirations: Transcultural Identity**

In each participant's last interview, I asked them to imagine their future selves. These were the shortest interviews. Participant responses to questions about their future were brief and general. When I asked about the potential for marriage and family, most responded with, "Of course!" They were shy about discussing dating, although Pradeep mentioned a trip he and several friends were planning with their girlfriends. Manisha shrugged off discussions about relationships, explaining that while a lot of her friends had boyfriends, or were interested in having boyfriends, she really was not interested: "I don't know why [laughter]." She derives great satisfaction from friendships, schoolwork, and service. Niraj deflected the question by discussing world affairs and the wisdom or folly of bringing new life into the world, and then joked about adopting 20-plus children and living in a mansion. When participants spoke of future personal and family lives, they spoke in very general but largely positive terms. Getting married and having children was a taken-for-granted assumption that they did not feel the need to elaborate on, and therefore did not articulate.

Also taken for granted was the pursuit of a career. All five participants were either enrolled in university study or making plans to be. They all had specific plans for their careers; no one was undecided. One was pursuing engineering, one business, one technology, one health sciences, and one public policy. None of them spoke of college study without a plan for a major and for supporting themselves. The latter was important to them; applications for financial aid factored into their approaches to higher education.

Striking about their imagined future lives was the contrast between home and career: Visions of their future home lives were characterized by community bonds and cultural



maintenance. Those who spoke of marriage and family would find their life mates from Nepali-speaking communities, not necessarily in Pittsburgh. They hoped to stay near their parents and siblings but understood that jobs might take them away. Their academic and career plans were influenced by families who wanted them to be able to support themselves. However, they thought broadly about a number of career paths and did not limit their options based on gender, caste, or cultural considerations. While most of the participants assumed that they would have families, they wanted to complete their education and establish their careers first.

## **6.1 Marriage and Family**

During my fieldwork, Arjun invited me to his brother's wedding. I arrived at the family home, a modest ranch house in the Pine Haven suburb where many Bhutanese refugees live. A number of cars were parked along the street, and I saw that the wedding gathering had spilled outside. Neighbors did not notice or stare; one worked quietly in his yard. I walked past several cars in the driveway, and saw that the garage door was open. A handful of men were standing or sitting while grilling chicken and goat.

I crossed the yard and entered through the front door, ushered by Arjun's preschool cousins. In the living room, where several middle-aged and elderly Bhutanese sat, Arjun's grandmother greeted me effusively; we are old friends. Other relatives included Arjun's other grandparents and assorted aunts, uncles, and cousins from different parts of the U.S. and Canada. Everyone chatted loudly and happily, with a large screen TV airing Nepali and Hindi movies, shows, news broadcasts, and music. Internet is one of the first amenities the Bhutanese and other resettled groups access, understandably, in order to communicate relatives and friends in other

places. Such communication provided a direct line to home culture and relatives for Arjun's family when they lived in Syracuse with few Bhutanese acquaintances.

The doorway separating the living room from the hallway and bedrooms was framed by red and white floral garlands. Flowers lined the tops of the walls, beneath which hung family photographs, including a formal portrait of Arjun's nuclear family: mother, father, Arjun, and his brother. Others were snapshots of immediate and extended family, mostly taken after arriving in the U.S. The décor is similar in all of the family homes – flowers, posters of Hindu deities, and family photos taken (mostly) in the U.S., with occasional images of refugee camp.

Bhutanese weddings take over the entire house, and this one was no exception. The dining room had been cleared out as a reception area for the bride and the groom, who sat in the center as guests lined up to wish them well after the marriage ceremony. The bride was from Nepal. Arjun's brother met her online, and courtship followed, with Arjun's brother traveling to Nepal to meet and escort her to the U.S. I had not met her before and didn't get to converse with the couple, except when the children guided me through the ritual of placing tika on the couple's foreheads in order to bring about a long and prosperous life, sprinkling dried flower petals over their heads, and presenting them with a small gift.

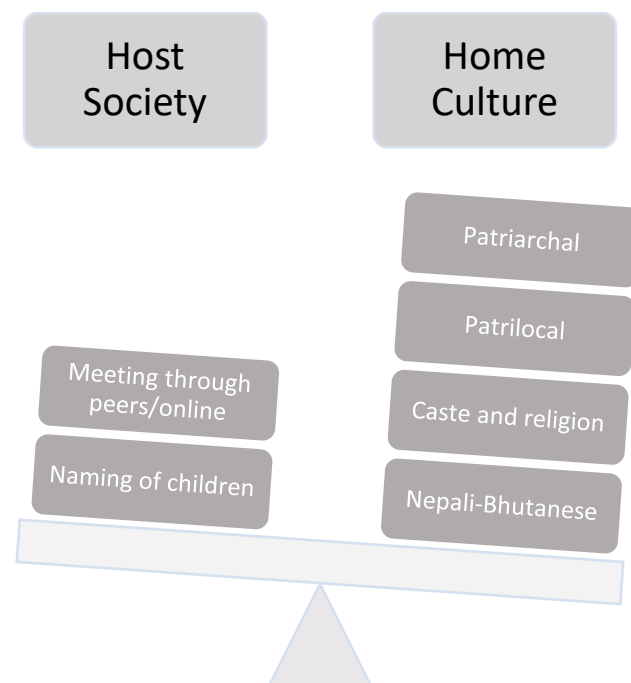
The younger children led me downstairs, where we saw folding tables and chairs decorated with white covers and red ribbons. Nepali-Bhutanese food was provided and prepared family and friends. The adults ate enthusiastically, the children with mere tolerance, until one of their uncles brought in several fast food meals with toys. Two male middle and high school students sat near me. "Your name is Susan?" one asked. "Yes," I replied. "Mine, too," he said, "Sussan" or "Sujan" being a male Nepali name. I said, "It's nice to meet you." He returned to his meal and his cell phone. Some things are universal.

Arjun's aunt directed me to a sofa at the side of the room, where I happily played with some of the younger children. I was soon directed to a nearby table, where the children and I began to eat. Arjun wandered through with his camera. Like so many weddings, this was half wedding, half reunion. The bride's family was unable to make the journey from Nepal. The groom's extended family, however, did come from various U.S. and Canadian cities. There were cousins, aunts, and uncles who live in Pittsburgh, either because it was their initial resettlement site or because they chose it for secondary migration, moving to Pittsburgh from other places in order to be closer to family. Others had departed for other states to be closer to in-laws' extended families. But they gathered to celebrate the wedding.

I have been to a number of Bhutanese weddings over the years, and I have been struck by one thing: No matter how younger generations identify as far as any of the acculturation models, when it comes to marriage, they maintain a separatist approach. I have yet to meet a Bhutanese person of marriageable age who chooses to marry outside of the community. Always, weddings are heteronormative and patrilocal as well as Hindu, with the female bride, almost always a bit younger than the groom and of the same caste, moving to join her husband's family. The couples are young, at least under 30 and usually under 25. I have not observed any interracial, interethnic, or international couples. Nepali-speaking Bhutanese appear to marry either other Nepali-speaking Bhutanese or Nepali nationals. I have also never heard parents or grandparents argue the necessity of doing so. It is not a point of discussion or contention; marriage and family within cultural boundaries is assumed.

Some relationship elements are unique to this generation. Couples are more likely to meet through peers or online rather than through family connections. Arjun's brother met his Nepali wife online, for example; Niraj's older cousin also met his wife the same way. I have observed

newlyweds to have children fairly quickly (and to assume that there would *be* children – I again have not met any couples who were deliberately childless for long). Occasionally, I have noticed variations in the naming of children. Most maintain home culture traditions by giving their children Nepali names, while others give their children English names. Home lives are firmly rooted in shared cultural bonds. Most significantly, marriage partners are older than their parents and grandparents were. Many of the participants' parents and all of their grandparents married in their teens.



**Figure 33. Marriage and Family: Host and Home Culture Influence**

When it comes to marriage and family, participants revealed the multidimensional nature of transcultural identity and the importance of maintaining home culture bonds – as Gibson (1997) put it, accommodation without assimilation. Approaches to marriage and family show participants to be the furthest from Berry's integration concept.

## 6.2 Career Goals

During my fieldwork, I attended a youth-led and youth-focused event, Connecting Youth to Community (Figure 21: BCAP Youth Networking Event in Chapter 5). This event was held at the public library with support from BCAP and a local grocery store. Two young women in the community, both of whom were in their first year of college, had the idea for an event that would serve two goals: help high school students know what to expect from college life and encourage civic involvement, including community service and voting. They organized the event, comprised of two panel discussions with audience question-and-answer time followed by lunch and mingling in the library commons room.

Kiran attended the event as an audience member but also as a BCAP volunteer, there to assist with setting up the event and providing general assistance. Quiet in large groups, he nevertheless contributed some observations about the importance of time management as the event organizers and other students discussed study strategies, time management, and stress management in navigating university life, especially for those who leave Pittsburgh and familiar home environments to attend school. This session was followed by another panel discussion about the value of community service and civic engagement, including voting in local as well as national elections.

A few parents were in the audience, and one eventually asked some questions of her own. Smiling, she asked the speakers how they selected their majors and steps they were taking toward financial security. The panelists spoke respectfully but directly about the importance of being happy with one's field of study in spite of parental pressures about finances. The mother gently challenged them: "But will you be happy if you cannot earn a living?"

When asked to imagine their futures, participants responded first by talking about education and careers. Many scholars speak of the “immigrant bargain” implicit in the mother’s question above – families make present-day sacrifices in order to ensure future generations’ success (Cherng & Liu, 2017; Katz, 2019; Louie, 2012; Smith, 2006; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The participants in this study did not speak directly of parental pressures regarding academic and career choices. However, there was an undercurrent of concern about finances. Most of them applied and were accepted to four-year colleges out of high school. From high school through college, participants asked very detailed questions about financial aid and mapped their long-term financial obligations carefully. Of course, college debt is part of the national conversation, but the participants in this study were more concerned about the long-term ramifications of debt than most of their U.S. peers. Without enough grant and scholarship funding to afford tuition without taking loans, Arjun, Manisha, and Pradeep opted to start at the area community college. After a successful first semester at a nearby university, Niraj transferred for a few semesters to the community college in order to save money.

In contrast to their imagined futures regarding marriage and family, all of the participants’ career plans take them outside of the Bhutanese diaspora. While many families are entrepreneurs, none of the participants appear to want to open businesses that cater to the community. Pradeep majored in business but works in IT and ultimately would like to go into academic research and teach future business leaders. Kiran majors in computer science, Arjun in engineering, and Niraj in political science. Niraj’s career goals are closest to engagement with the community, as immigration law is one of the fields he is considering. He wants to work in the government or nonprofit sector in part to make a difference for others who are marginalized and displaced.

Manisha had just graduated from high school at the time of our interviews and was planning a medical career of some sort and a biology major to prepare her for multiple options.

In listening to the participants ponder their futures, I am reminded again of Oldenberg's (1999, 2001) concepts of first, second, and third places. The analogy is imperfect, as Oldenberg grounded his theory in physical spaces, with third spaces being social sites such as pubs, cafes, and the like. In the participants' futures, their first places, home, are grounded in the maintenance of cultural bonds and traditions. Their present and future second spaces of work and school connect to the host society. While home is grounded in family and cultural bonds, work and school are grounded in host culture institutions. Youth do not sacrifice their Nepali-speaking Bhutanese identities but consider all of their academic and career options. In discussing the importance of civic engagement and voting, the organizers of the Connecting to Community event blurred the boundaries between home and host society institutions. Local civic engagement would help the Bhutanese community and also forge connections outside of it.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

My first research question centers on the challenges and opportunities participants experience in developing transcultural identities. In imagining their future selves, participants spoke in largely positive terms. The contrast between imagining future home lives grounded in Bhutanese traditions and future careers based in dominant U.S. institutions did not pose a challenge. A Bhutanese-centered home life and a successful academic and professional career coincide as Bhutanese youth blend elements of home and host societies (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). For the participants in this study, the ability to move fluidly across, between, and among cultures

and languages is supported by forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), including familial and navigational capital.

Familial capital is a source of support for participants' future plans. While marriage and family are taken for granted in most participants' imagined futures, they are also encouraged not to marry as young as their parents and grandparents did. While there might be some tension between what parents and students consider worthwhile academic and career pursuits, they all have family support for pursuing their studies. For some in this group, familial capital includes parents' prior work as teachers or tutors (Niraj's father, Kiran's parents, and Manisha's parents), which helps the students to develop positive academic behaviors and to prepare for advanced studies. Familial capital, in Pradeep's case, took the form of his parents' status in Bhutan, where his parents had professional positions that enabled them to provide the family with the most literal form of capital – money to move to Nepal and then to the U.S.

Navigational capital helped participants to find their way through challenging systems, which may provide confidence as the participants ponder uncertain futures. Most of the participants had tales of being lost literally (in airports) or figuratively (working through complicated systems involving health insurance, school enrollment, and other processes), but spoke of those moments with a spirit of resilience rather than frustration or anger. Whether it was Manisha speaking matter-of-factly about refusing to be put back a grade or Arjun casually relaying his family being lost at the airport, participants spoke of working their way through new places and new systems with relative independence. They all spoke with quiet confidence about their futures. While they occasionally used phrases like they “hope” they get good jobs or scholarships, they didn't make these statements with a tone of stress or despair. As Pradeep said, “There is always a way.”



The events I attended during fieldwork informed my second research question regarding the roles that organizations can play in youth transcultural identity work. Connecting to Community was one such program. When the student facilitators encouraged students to vote and be civically engaged, they spoke of their neighborhoods and communities, Bhutanese, to be sure, but also Pittsburgh, the state of Pennsylvania, and the country as a whole. Khara, one of the founders of BCAP, spoke to students at a COSL event (Chapter 5, Figure 25: COSL Talk to Me), telling them that while it's well and good to become scientists, engineers, and business executives, a life of public service would also be worthwhile. He concluded his comments by expressing his hope that a future international ambassador might be in the youth audience.

Participant and audience discussion at RCO events illustrate the simplified dichotomies in social capital theory, such as Coleman's (1988) closed versus open networks or Putnam's (2000) bonds versus bridges. Acculturation theory models (aka the "Berry boxes") (Ward, 2008) are similarly bifurcated. In interviews, participants assumed future movement between first (home, centered in home community traditions and expectations) and second (school and workplace, grounded in the host culture) places (Oldenberg, 1999). The third places, rooted in community, were best visualized in RCO events like Connecting to Community, where participants were encouraged to engage in their communities, places where Bhutanese and other non-dominant populations intersect with dominant host society organizations and institutions. COSL's Talk to Me event had similar goals and structure, meeting audience members at the intersections of host and home communities. Since these events, BCAP has implemented youth support groups to provide (third) places for community youth to talk about current concerns as well as to make plans for their futures. Where participants in this study imagined futures with fluid movement between

home and host institutions, RCOs provided space and opportunities to engage where home and host institutions overlap.

## 7.0 Concluding Thoughts

When asked what advice he would give to newcomer youth, Niraj replied:

Stay true to yourself. It's so cliché, but it's . . . I feel like from the moment you come here you're asked to strip down everything you had. I feel like a lot of people abandon that part of themselves to climb the social ladder. I remember, I stopped eating food that was like home because I got bullied for smelling different. So now I'm trying to go back to doing the stuff . . . it makes me happy to see [my cousins] talk about Bollywood stars. When you're a kid, what makes you get bullied is what makes you an interesting adult. So sad they have to force themselves to not be that.

Staying true to oneself, as Niraj says, means staying true to all parts of one's identity. His statement encapsulates transcultural identity – maintaining what you had and not “stripping it down.” He, along with Arjun, Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep, seeks ways to engage with new experiences without rejecting what came before, which is the essence of transcultural identity.

In this study, I sought to address the following questions: *What challenges and opportunities do Bhutanese refugee youth encounter in the development of transcultural identities? What role do organizations, especially refugee community organizations, play in the process?* I will approach each of those in turn below, and conclude with recommendations for future practice and research.

## **7.1 Challenges and Opportunities**

### **7.1.1 Refugee Camp**

There are obvious challenges in refugee camp life, including limited access to basic needs such as food. For parents and other adults, job opportunities are extremely limited. There are very few paying jobs in camp, which necessitated fathers sometimes leaving camp to work for days or weeks at a time, including Niraj's father, who taught and tutored, and Arjun's father, who worked as a laborer. School conditions, as described in Chapter 4, also pose challenges with crowding, limited materials, and teacher turnover. In addition, the curriculum structure created challenges for some participants. A curriculum developed for three possible futures – repatriation to Bhutan, integration into Nepal, or resettlement to another country – required a split focus that some participants, particularly Arjun, found challenging. Students had instruction in three languages as a result of this structure, a challenge that Manisha enjoyed but that Arjun found frustrating.

Arjun, Niraj, Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep shared more positive than negative memories of refugee camp. Perhaps most striking is their shared nostalgia for the freedom of movement they experienced in Nepal. All of them spoke of roaming and playing freely in refugee camp, generally in the company of friends and relatives with whom they could play and explore. Unlike other displaced populations, they were in refugee camps with their immediate families intact and with extended family nearby. Cousins were (and are) on an equal footing with siblings; relationships with cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents remain an important part of daily life. The participants' descriptions of refugee camp life and the transition to the U.S. counter the dominant narratives, in which refugee camps are prison-like and the U.S. provides open and safe spaces.

### 7.1.2 Resettlement

Resettlement did not mean greater physical freedom for the participants; it usually, in fact, meant far more restricted movement. Arjun recalled his caseworkers encouraging his family not to leave their apartment when they first arrived, fearing they would get lost and encounter an unsafe situation. Niraj also spoke of being resettled in a neighborhood, and later living in other neighborhoods, that were unsafe and lacking in green space and areas for play. While Kiran enjoyed his first resettlement site in Chicago, where he could walk down the block to mingle with peers, he found moving to the Pine Haven suburb to be restrictive, with fewer places to explore and less public transportation to access. The notion of refugee camp being a freer, more open space does not correlate with narratives of displacement (not to mention the narrative of the U.S. as a welcoming refuge).

Regarding school, participants also spoke in general of navigational challenges, such as literally being lost on the first day (Manisha) but also in moving through a new system and trying to figure out the “unwritten” as well as written rules and regulations, or routines (Este & Ngo, 2011). Areas of critique generally involved curriculum. While Niraj was the only interview participant to be outspoken in his criticism of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, the others made clear that ESL enrollment was at least somewhat stigmatizing and that exiting ESL was a moment of great pride. Some made a distinction between ESL *classes*, which they found to be unhelpful or frustrating, and some of (but not all) their ESL *teachers*, whom they found to be caring and supportive (Arjun and Niraj).

Another curricular challenge involved placement in elective classes. Manisha spoke most emphatically on this point, noting that physical education and cooking classes were stressful for her because she didn’t know “the rules” for these classes. Team and individual games and

activities were different for her and the others; unlike her high school peers, she had not grown up with dodgeball, kickball, basketball, and flag football. With cooking class, processes, instruments, and ingredients were different in Nepal. Her confusion, for example, with measuring cups may have been interpreted as a lack of knowledge – however, her cooking skills (and those of Arjun, Niraj, Kiran, and Pradeep) most likely outstripped those of her U.S.-born peers.

Finally, another challenge involved resettlement assignments for extended family. Arjun's immediate family was the first among his relatives to be resettled. They were on their own in Syracuse for several months; when Arjun's cousins and grandparents followed, they were assigned to Pittsburgh. Niraj's family also did not get to resettle with the cousins with whom he had grown up, leaving him without an emotional support system that was just as important to him as his parents and siblings. One country and culture's understanding of immediate family does not apply universally. Being resettled near the same time and in the same place as extended family would have made the early days and months of resettlement less stressful for Arjun's family.

While the challenges they faced in resettlement were significant, they did have opportunities and resources in the form of relationships, or, in Yosso's (2005) framework, familial and social capital. When extended families were initially separated, they strategized to reunite. Arjun's family compared their living and job situations, and decided that Pittsburgh would be a better place for them to live, partly to reunite with extended family. Niraj, Kiran, and Pradeep had similar experiences as secondary migrants. Attending school and learning new neighborhoods with the cousins they had gone to school with in refugee camp provided critical forms of support. While most of their peer friendships were with other Bhutanese, many of them found, to use Portes and Rumbaut's (2014) phrase, "*really* significant others" who provided support and guidance, sometimes with a neighbor, family friend, teacher, or other mentor.

## **7.2 The Role of RCOs**

My second inquiry question focused on the role of refugee community organizations (RCOs) in Bhutanese refugee youth development of transcultural identity. Here, it is important to provide context on the treatment of refugee youth in resettlement. The transition from refugee camp to countries of resettlement focuses on adults. When families are eligible for resettlement, the International Office of Migration (IOM) provides cultural orientation training sessions for adults. Upon arrival, families are greeted by caseworkers who help resettled families in the first few months of arrival. The focus, again, is on adults. Caseworkers assist children with initial medical appointments and with school enrollment but then focus their attention on parents. Throughout the resettlement process, parents and other adults are the focus of transition, with the assumption being that they, in turn, will help their children to acclimate. In reality, refugee youth often find themselves in the roles of cultural brokers as well as translators for their families, given their greater facility with English and daily access to host institutions through attendance at school (Parke & Chuang, 2011; Pipher, 2002; Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011).

In Nepal refugee camps, however, youth wellness and leadership development programs flourished, including through the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum and other NGO-sponsored programs (Evans 2010a). These programs included education and engagement with the visual and performing arts, gender equity, and leadership development. RCOs such as BCAP and COSL fill this gap with the programs described in Chapter 5, which offered spaces for youth to connect with one another and with other groups over school and career planning, sports, service, and the arts. The participants' experiences with the transition to resettlement and their identity development were supported by BCAP, COSL, and other organizations. It is important to note that RCOs were not the only forms of organizational support for participants. Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep were

actively involved in school co-curricular opportunities. Niraj's internships with non-profit and government sectors were critical in his development. However, BCAP and COSL provided important support and programs that helped facilitate transcultural identity: opportunities to maintain home cultural identity, to engage with U.S. societal institutions, and to embrace all of the cultural interactions that facilitate transcultural identity work.

### **7.3 Implications for Practice**

#### **7.3.1 International and Local Refugee Organizations**

Not all of the participants experienced the kind of programming Evans (2010a) describes in her fieldwork in Nepal refugee camps. Artistic and related educational programming outside of school was very important for those who did experience it. Women's empowerment programming also had a positive effect on their children, as Niraj spoke appreciatively of the sewing classes his mother got to take. Manisha's experience indicates that the out-of-school leadership and artistic programming she experienced was invaluable to her development.

While all children over the age of seven were automatically members of the Bhutanese Refugee Children's Forum, Manisha was the only participant. More concerning was the fact that some participants (Kiran, Arjun, and Niraj) had not even heard of the BRCF or the opportunities it afforded. Exploring why some refugee youth participate and others do not, and expanding youth participation, is an avenue of inquiry worth exploring, particularly given the ubiquity of protracted displacement worldwide.



The resettlement system for the past couple of decades, even before the current political moment, has created challenges for resettlement agencies. They now provide intensive support for only 90 days, with funding support for five additional months. This creates a triage situation in which agencies' interaction with children and youth only involves arranging medical exams, vaccinations, and school enrollment. Added support for refugee youth is an ideal goal but one that may not be realistic due to systemic limitations. An avenue of practice to explore could be more systematic engagement between organizations – resettlement organizations and RCOs – so that youth could get the support they need in navigating new schools and other U.S. institutions. Manisha and Pradeep did interact with BCAP in their early days in Pittsburgh, but they were not directed to that resource by their resettlement case workers; rather, they made contact through relatives (Manisha) or other organizations (Pradeep). If resettlement organizations facilitate these connections, Bhutanese youth can have earlier access to support.

BCAP and COSL provide models that other organizations can look to in supporting refugee youth (as well as other groups in the refugee population). For one, they provide safe (third) places: "Marginalized groups also need access to private and semiprivate places in which people can come together across generations for support, renewal, and the development of collective agency in the face of oppressive circumstances" (Kemp, 2011, p. 140). BCAP and COSL, and other RCOs, provide these places for children, youth, and adults. In public programming and private groups, BCAP and COSL engage with youth through different types of programming (academics, careers, service, athletics, and arts). Both organizations also are models for foregrounding equity. BCAP includes youth as well as elder and female representation on their board, and COSL is made up entirely of teenagers and young adults. They know firsthand the needs of young refugees in schools and other systems.

### 7.3.2 U.S. Schools

One institution that all U.S. immigrant youth navigate is the educational system, a system with inconsistent support and resources across school districts. Many immigrants, including resettled refugees, live in low-income and underperforming school districts (Fine & Burns, 2003; Suarez-Orozco, 2001). International newcomers in wealthier districts experience the mixed reception and imposition of dominant culture norms and assumptions seen in other institutions (Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Watters, 2008). Scholars across many disciplines have begun to address this problem, leading to increased research and publication centered on youth experience (Schelbe, et al., 2014) including experiences with educational systems (Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

In the past few decades, present-day federal policy notwithstanding, there has been an overall increase in foreign-born residents in the U.S., which also means an increase in children of immigrants in U.S. school systems (Suarez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, 2015). From 2010 to 2016, the numbers of English language learners increased by approximately 1 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This increase includes the population of this study, Nepali-speaking refugees, as the NCES (2019) notes that the numbers of ELL students who spoke Nepali quadrupled, from approximately 3,000 to over 13,000 from academic year 2008-2009 to the fall of 2016.

Suggestions for practice should be divided into curricular and co-curricular arenas. Certain assumptions about appropriate course placement could be revisited. When assigning elective courses to non-native speakers, counselors understandably seek out courses that appear to be less language-reliant, such as cooking and physical education. These courses, however, rely on ingrained cultural context that is just as challenging as a new language. Manisha had the confidence to question the assignment and to ask for a second math class instead. Many students

do not have the reservoirs of resistant capital (Yosso, 2005) that helped Manisha to challenge her grade and course assignments.

Co-curricular organizations can be helpful, and student leadership in such initiatives can enhance those efforts. Manisha's suggestion to her school district's superintendent to create an organization, led by refugee and other immigrant students, to help international newcomers is one that could be piloted in local school districts. Peer mentoring programs have proven records of success (Birman & Morland, 2014; Yeh, Ching, Okubo, & Luthar, 2007,) and such programs would provide low-cost levels of support.

#### **7.4 Implications for Future Research**

Fine and Burns (2003) address the importance of research on youth experience with social institutions, including educational institutions:

Through a close look at institutional policies, networks, practices, and identities, we can begin to see how the material conditions of class come to enter the skin and consciousness of groups and individuals. The confounds of social class of student, and quality of institution, are all too apparent. (p. 847)

While Fine and Burns focus on class, their statement intersects with characteristics of race, ethnicity, and national origin. Qualitative research, including but not limited to ethnography, interviews, observations, and content analysis, provides vehicles for scholars, practitioners, and other stakeholders to better understand how institutions "enter the skin and consciousness" of nondominant and/or vulnerable populations.

Parke and Chuang (2011) cite the importance of descriptive studies, particularly for populations, like Bhutanese youth, that have not been studied very much but comprise a significant percentage of the refugee population in the U.S. and other countries. Qualitative studies that amplify research participant voice and experience would do much to counter the deficit perspectives and oversimplified depictions of immigrant youth (e.g., “Asians” as one monolithic group) (Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011).

Such studies should focus on both context of origin and context of reception (Suarez-Orozco, Carhill, & Chuang, 2011). Accessing refugee camps in order to conduct fieldwork is, of course, challenging. Fieldwork modeled on Evans’ (2010a) work with organizations and individuals in Nepal’s refugee camps would provide insight into the conditions that support and/or challenge youth resettlement experience. In particular, observing how youth spend unstructured time in refugee camp would be useful in helping educators, caseworkers, and other stakeholders to know more about their interests, skills, and daily habits, all information that could help practitioners to contribute to more welcoming and supportive environments.

A potential area for research in the context of reception relates to student experiences with school systems, starting with the curriculum. The participants in this study revealed very negative feelings about ESL placement and classes, finding the former to be stigmatizing and the latter to be largely unhelpful. Qualitative studies with students currently and previously enrolled in ESL classes would shed light on these perceptions. More studies about student perceptions of ESL, particularly for adolescents and young adults, would shed light on how to make ESL classes a positive space.

## 7.5 Caveats and Concerns

One concern for this project is the potential for, or a perception of, researcher bias. I have gotten to know many members of the Bhutanese community, including some participants, through my own community involvements as a volunteer literacy tutor and citizenship instructor. There is a concern that my positive relationships within this community would affect my interpretation of the data. My choice of case study, with its inherent reliance on multiple methods, helps to counter this limitation. With multiple data points to explore, and with multiple participants, the data should help to counteract misguided interpretations due to my own bias.

Related to the concern of relationship bias is the potential for, or at least the appearance of, coercion. Were participants willing to be part of this study, or did they feel uncomfortable saying no to this project because of their relationships with me? I was mindful to remind participants of the voluntary nature of their participation and the option to withdraw from the study at any point. A couple of original participants chose not to continue and told me so directly.

Another concern inherent in research with vulnerable populations is the issue of reciprocity. Would participants have any expectations of me as a result of their participation? Seidman (2006) argues that we reciprocate through respectful listening to stories and responsible reporting of those stories. I was able to maintain professional boundaries while still being a resource if participants came to me with particular problems or issues, particularly relating to higher education, the field in which I work. My responses in these cases were the same as before this study: I answered questions and provided assistance where appropriate (e.g., explaining a question on a FAFSA form) and made referrals (e.g., explaining how to call the financial aid office and how to word a question).

Finally, I still grapple with the issue of exiting the field (see section 3.5). I am still involved with BCAP, but I am still concerned about the perception that I gathered data for my dissertation and then left, a concern that others have spoken to (Figueroa, 2014; Katz, 2014). As my study concludes, I am in touch with some of the participants and have left it up to them to decide how much we communicate, much as I do when I teach undergraduates. In this case, given the number of contacts I have in the community and my involvement with Bhutanese organizations, I anticipate remaining a known entity for participants now that my fieldwork has ended.

## **7.6 Concluding Thoughts**

Suarez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, and Marks (2015) argue that adolescent immigrants have the most challenges because they are navigating a new country and culture while also navigating the difficulties of adolescence, including identity formation. They also have strengths, including deep family and community networks that provide support.

Participants spoke of ways in which host societies could be more helpful in helping newcomers navigate new systems, whether it is most literally in navigating international airports or in articulating needs with school systems. They also revealed, in different ways, the importance of host society organizations recognizing their strengths as well as their need areas.

Finally, participant responses reveal their capacity for resilience and creative problem solving. Policies are needed that do not “rescue” but “involve and empower” children and youth (Panter-Brick, 2000, p. 12). RCOs are not the only resources that “involve and empower” children and youth; all of the participants spoke to other individuals and organizations that did the same.

RCOs like BCAP and COSL, however, given their engagement with both home and host communities, are uniquely positioned to contribute to youth development in a holistic way.

I asked the participants to give their advice to other newcomers. They spoke of being open and taking appropriate risks.

Manisha: “Be more forward, and believe in yourself. You can do anything if you want to.”

Kiran: “Take everything in, and, try stuff out. Don’t be like, oh, this is not what I’m used to and shut it out and don’t do it. Be more adventurous.”

Niraj: “Stay true to yourself.”

Organizations, including RCOs, as well as participant relationships and networks, play important roles in helping youth to “do anything,” “be more adventurous,” and “stay true” to themselves. Arjun, Niraj, Kiran, Manisha, and Pradeep provide insight into the experiences, from childhood to the present, that helped them to take their own advice. In doing so, they counter the established narratives of refugee youth as troubled or troublesome.

## Appendix A IRB Documentation

### Appendix A.1 Consent to Act as a Participant in a Research Study

Study Title: Children of Shangri-Lost: A Case Study in Transcultural Identity  
Principal Investigator: Susan Dawkins, Doctoral Student  
University of Pittsburgh  
Home Address: [REDACTED]  
Cell Phone: [REDACTED]  
Email: [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

#### Introduction to the Study

Thank you for considering participating in this research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of twenty Bhutanese refugee youth (ages 14 through 25) and your/your child's experiences with resettlement in the United States.

To complete this study, I would like to invite participation in the following research activities:

*Focus Group:* A focus group would involve several participants (a maximum of ten per focus group session) to talk about your/your child's early experiences with resettlement. This meeting will last for about 90 minutes and will be audio recorded. The investigator will transcribe the recordings and, in the written transcripts, will assign pseudonyms to you/your child.

*Interviews:* The investigator will ask six to twenty youth to be interviewed in three sessions, each lasting from 45 to 50 minutes. In these interviews, you/your child will be asked about past experience, present experience, and future plans. These interviews will be conducted one-on-one rather than in groups. They will be audio recorded and transcribed; you/your child will be identified with pseudonyms.

*On-line Materials:* Your/your child's on-line materials including the website and social media pages of Children of Shangri-Lost, possibly in conjunction with similar material from other organizations will be reviewed. If you/your child opt to share information from their social media accounts, the investigator may include it in the study with your/your child's permission.

*Attendance at Events:* The investigator will plan to attend events like those Children of Shangri-Lost has hosted in the past, such as soccer games and practices and public events.

*Document and Archive Analysis:* Sometimes through the interview process, you/your child may share documents or archival material (such as old photographs, report cards, and similar materials). The investigator may include descriptions of such documents in the study.



**Study Risks and Benefits**

*Risks* for participation in this study are minimal. Although every reasonable effort will be taken, confidentiality during Internet communication activities cannot be guaranteed, and it is possible that additional information beyond that collected for research purposes may be captured and used by others not associated with this study. You/your child could experience stress as a result of topics that may arise in the interview or focus group. In addition, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality in group settings. Steps will be taken to prevent and/or minimize these potential risks. If discussing past events proves stressful for you/your child, the Principal Investigator will make appropriate referrals to support organizations, guidance counselors, counselors, mentors, etc. The Principal Investigator will also reiterate processes for withdrawal from the study. There are no foreseeable *benefits* to participation in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

Every effort will be made to protect your/your child's privacy and to maintain confidentiality. For written transcription of audio recordings, you/your child participants will have pseudonyms. In order to assist with privacy, some details about your/your child's lives will be obfuscated (for example, if a participant mentions her father's place of employment, the Principal Investigator will substitute the name of another workplace in order to further conceal your/your child's identity).

Data will be stored securely by a) using a secure server for written documents (Box) and b) a locked office at the University of Pittsburgh for data, documents, and artifacts that cannot be stored on-line.

Per University of Pittsburgh policy all research records must be maintained for at least 7 years following final reporting or publication of a project. For projects involving children, records must be maintained for 5 years past age of majority (age 23 per PA State law) after study participation ends.

**Withdrawal from Study Participation**

You/your child can, at any time withdraw from this research study. This means that you/your child will also be withdrawn from further participation in this research study. Any identifiable research obtained as part of this study prior to the date that of withdrawing consent will continue to be used and disclosed by the investigators for the purposes described above.

To formally withdraw from this research study, you should provide a written and dated notice of this decision to the principal investigator (Susan Dawkins) of this research study at the address listed on the first page of this form. The decision to withdraw from this study will have no effect on your/your child's current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh.

**Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. There is no penalty for declining to participate, and there is no benefit to agreeing to participate. Whether or not you/ provides consent for your/your child's participation in this research study will have no effect on your/your child's current or future relationship with the University of Pittsburgh. You/your child will not receive any payment for participation in this research study.

## Consent to Participate

- The above information has been explained to me, and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions, voice concerns or complaints about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions, concerns or complaints will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given.
- I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator. I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations that occurred during my participation. By signing this form I agree to participate in this research study. A copy of this consent form will be given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

## PARENTAL PERMISSION

The above information has been explained to me and all of my current questions have been answered. I understand that I am encouraged to ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of this study, and that such future questions will be answered by a qualified individual or by the investigator(s) listed on the first page of this consent document at the telephone number(s) given. I understand that I may always request that my questions, concerns or complaints be addressed by a listed investigator.

I understand that I may contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate of the IRB Office, University of Pittsburgh (1-866-212-2668) to discuss problems, concerns, and questions; obtain information; offer input; or discuss situations in the event that the research team is unavailable.

A copy of this consent form will be given to me/my child.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Child-Subject

I understand that, as a minor (age less than 18 years), the above-named child is not permitted to participate in this research study without my consent. Therefore, by signing this form, I give my consent for his/her participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's or Guardian's Name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship to Participant (Child)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **CHILD ASSENT**

This research has been explained to me, and I agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Child-Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **CERTIFICATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above-named individual(s), and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of study participation. Any questions the individual(s) have about this study have been answered, and we will always be available to address future questions as they arise. I further certify that no research component of this protocol was begun until after this consent form was signed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Role in Research Study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix A.2 IRB Approval

### University of Pittsburgh *Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
(412) 383-1480  
(412) 383-1508 (fax)  
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

#### **Memorandum**

To: Susan Dawkins

From: IRB Office

Date: 8/24/2017

IRB#: [PRO17040424](#)

Subject: Children of Shangri-Lost: A Case Study of Transcultural Identity Among Bhutanese Refugee Youth

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The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the above referenced study by the expedited review procedure authorized under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Your research study was approved under:

45 CFR 46.110.(6)

45 CFR 46.110.(7)

This study has been approved under 45 CFR 46.404 for the inclusion of children. The IRB has determined that the written permission of one parent is sufficient.

The risk level designation is Minimal Risk.

Approval Date: 8/24/2017

Expiration Date: 8/23/2018

For studies being conducted in UPMC facilities, no clinical activities can be undertaken by investigators until they have received approval from the UPMC Fiscal Review Office.

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others [see 45 CFR 46.103(b)(5) and 21 CFR 56.108(b)]. Refer to the IRB Policy and Procedure Manual regarding the reporting requirements for unanticipated problems which include, but are not limited to, adverse events. If you have any questions about this process, please contact the Adverse Events Coordinator at 412-383-1480.

The protocol and consent forms, along with a brief progress report must be resubmitted at least one month prior to the renewal date noted above as required by FWA00006790 (University of Pittsburgh), FWA00006735 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center), FWA00000600 (Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh), FWA00003567 (Magee-Womens Health Corporation), FWA00003338 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Cancer Institute).

**Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.**

### Appendix A.3 IRB Renewal Letters

## University of Pittsburgh *Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
(412) 383-1480  
(412) 383-1508 (fax)  
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

### Memorandum

To: [Susan Dawkins](#)

From: [IRB Office](#)

Date: 7/3/2018

IRB#: [REN18060269](#) / PRO17040424

Subject: Children of Shangri-Lost: A Case Study of Transcultural Identity Among Bhutanese Refugee Youth

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Your renewal for the above referenced research study has received expedited review and approval from the Institutional Review Board under:

45 CFR 46.110.(6)

45 CFR 46.110.(7)

Please note the following information:

Approval Date: 7/3/2018

Expiration Date: 7/2/2019

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others [see 45 CFR 46.103(b)(5) and 21 CFR 56.108(b)]. Refer to the IRB Policy and Procedure Manual regarding the reporting requirements for unanticipated problems which include, but are not limited to, adverse events. If you have any questions about this process, please contact the Adverse Events Coordinator at 412-383-1480.

The protocol and consent forms, along with a brief progress report must be resubmitted at least **one month** prior to the renewal date noted above as required by FWA00006790 (University of Pittsburgh), FWA00006735 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center), FWA00000600 (Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh), FWA00003567 (Magee-Womens Health Corporation), FWA00003338 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Cancer Institute).

**Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.**

**University of Pittsburgh**  
*Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
(412) 383-1480  
(412) 383-1508 (fax)  
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu>

**Memorandum**

To: [Susan Dawkins](#)

From: [IRB Office](#)

Date: 8/6/2019

IRB#: [REN19070014](#) / PRO17040424

Subject: Children of Shangri-Lost: A Case Study of Transcultural Identity Among Bhutanese Refugee Youth

Your renewal for the above referenced research study has received expedited review and approval from the Institutional Review Board under:

45 CFR 46.110.(6)

45 CFR 46.110.(7)

Approval Date: 8/6/2019

Please note that because your study is minimal risk and the study's status is on-going, there is no longer a requirement for continuing review. It is still your responsibility to submit modifications, reportable events, and a termination report when the study is complete.

**Please be advised that your research study may be audited periodically by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.**

## **Appendix B Interview Protocol**

The interviews were structured according to Seidman's (2006) three-part protocol, described in Chapter 3: Methodology. I explained to participants that I would like to meet with them three times (reminding them that, per IRB protocol, they can withdraw from the study at any point). The first interview would be about the past, the second about the present, and the third about future plans. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis and interpretation. Questions and topics are listed below:

### **Focused Life History**

- Tell me about a typical day in refugee camp, including school and home. What responsibilities did you have in both places?
- Can you share some good memories of refugee camp? How did you feel about leaving Nepal? Were you happy? Sad? Scared? Angry? A combination of feelings?
- Did you have any interactions with humanitarian or other organizations? What were those like?
- What were some of the challenges you encountered in moving to the U.S.? Can you elaborate on what happened, how you dealt with it, and who, if anyone, was helpful to you?
- What were some positive events in moving to the U.S.? Can you elaborate on what happened, how you dealt with it, and who, if anyone, was helpful to you?
- Looking back, and thinking of areas of challenge when you moved to the U.S., do you have advice for other young people who leave refugee camp for the United States?



- Looking back, do you have any recommendations for how the U.S. could help young refugees?

**The Details of Experience:** In this second interview, I asked participants to reflect on their present-day experience by considering their relationships. Each participant completed a relationship and network sociogram. (See Chapter 3 for a description of the activity.) This activity provided a visual representation of each participant's relationships and networks. I analyze patterns in participant relationships in multiple domains, including family, school, the Bhutanese community, and external communities.

**Reflection on the Meaning:** I asked participants to reflect on what we discussed so far and how the resettlement process and the relationships they have built affect them in terms of general identity and future planning. I planned to ask the following questions, with follow-up questions generated by participant responses.

- Why did you decide to participate in the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh or Children of Shangri-Lost? What have you gained from your involvement?
- What other organizations are you involved in, including or outside of Bhutanese organizations? What have you gained from these involvements?
- Who, if anyone, influenced your decision to get involved in this and/or other organizations we've talked about so far?
- What has been the most important aspect of your community involvement? Are there organizations that you would like to participate in but cannot? Please explain.
- When asked where you are from, do you identify as
  - Bhutanese?

- Nepali
  - American
  - A combination of the above
  - A different answer depending on where you are or with whom you are speaking
- Where do you plan to be in five years? Ten years? Consider this question in terms of education, work, family, and location.

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