Spring 5-10-2018

A Narrative Inquiry of Afghan Refugee High School Young Women: Experiences and Transnational Literacy Practices from Home Country to Resettlement

Sarah Turnbull

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF AFGHAN REFUGEE HIGH SCHOOL YOUNG WOMEN: EXPERIENCES AND TRANSNATIONAL LITERACY PRACTICES FROM HOME COUNTRY TO RESETTLEMENT, by SARAH M. TURNBULL, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF AFGHAN REFUGEE HIGH SCHOOL YOUNG WOMEN: EXPERIENCES AND TRANSNATIONAL LITERACY PRACTICES FROM HOME COUNTRY TO RESETTLEMENT

by

SARAH M. TURNBULL

Under the Direction of Dr. Peggy Albers

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study analyzed the narratives of Afghan refugee high school young women and their educational experiences and transnational literacy practices. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) informed the methodology of the study. This study was situated within critical literacy (Vasquez, 2014) and Massey's (2005) notion of space and place. Three questions guided this study: (1) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their past schooling experiences? (2) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their transition experiences to the United States? (3) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces? Participants included three Afghan high school refugee young women, who have resettled in the United States. Data sources included interviews with participants, artifactual-elicitation, and field notes. Data collection for this study took place during a three-month time period. Narrative inquiry analytic tools (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and Vasquez's (2014) critical literacy guiding questions were used to analyze data. This study extends the research focused on Afghan refugees' backgrounds, educational experiences, and literacy practices.

INDEX WORDS: refugees, critical literacy, narrative inquiry, transnationalism, literacy practices

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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Teaching and Learning

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Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2018

DEDICATION

This disseration is dedicated to my maternal grandmother, Shookofeh Ayagh. Born and raised in Iran, she never had the opportunity to attend school. However, she always instilled in me the importance of school and hardwork. I am eternally grateful for all the sacrifices she made for her family, so I could be where I am today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I must thank God because without Him none of this would be possible. He guided my steps and has blessed me immensely.

I must thank my outstanding committee: Dr. Peggy Albers, Dr. Sue Kasun, Dr. Laura May, and Dr. Amy Seely Flint. Thank you for your unending support and dedication to my success. Your constructive feedback and encouragement guided me through this long journey. I am deeply grateful for the patience, time, and wealth of knowledge you shared with me. A special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Albers, your guidance was outstanding. You knew exactly what I needed and when. The detailed feedback you provided helped me fine tune and immensely improve my writing and research. You always gave your time freely and were there when I had any questions or needed to talk.

I could not have done any of this without the love and support of my family. I am especially thankful for my husband, Doug, for his unending encouragement, love, and editing. You gave up precious time that we could spend together so I could pursue this goal. At times when I was struggling and ready to give up, you pushed me to keep going. I am deeply grateful for my mom and dad for all the sacrifices they made for me and for instilling in me the importance of school. My mom, Maryam, cooked countless dinners so I could work on my dissertation. Her devotion and passion to helping others, espcially refugees, is the reason I chose this topic for my dissertation. My dad, Joseph, helped me cultivate a love for reading. He has always been so encouraging and motivated me to pursue my dreams. I am also thankful for my sister, Hannah. She was my “good luck charm” and my writing partner. We spent hours writing together and bouncing ideas off one another. She was always there when I needed a good laugh.

Finally, I must thank my participants: Salma, Roya, and Amina and their families. Your stories have inspired me. You opened up your homes and hearts to me and for that I am so grateful. Thank you for spending your time and sharing your stories with me.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

"Refugees are welcome here! Refugees make America great!" These were some of the chants that I heard as I made my way to the epicenter of a rally against the U.S. President Donald Trump administration's immigration and refugee ban in January, 2017. Several thousand people standing outside one of the terminals at an urban airport were holding signs and marching back and forth. Eventually, featured speakers gathered at the front and began to shout into the megaphone their hopes that the ban would be lifted. The immigration and refugee ban is an executive order the President Donald Trump White House put into effect in January 2017. The order states, "the entry of nationals of Syria as refugees is detrimental to the interests of the United States and thus suspend any such entry" (Executive Order No. 13769, 2017) and includes citizens from seven other countries: Iran, Yemen, Somalia, North Korea, Venezuela, Libya, and Chad. In the original ban, there were seven Muslim-majority countries. In addition, the executive order lowers the number of refugees to be admitted in the United States in 2017 from 110,000 to 50,000. However, a U.S. district judge in the state of Washington temporarily froze the executive order because a lawsuit was brought forth by the state (Dwyer, 2017). Then President Trump eased the ban restrictions for green card holders. However, these changes were again halted by a federal judge. In March 2017, President Trump unveiled a new ban, which changed the list of countries so they were not all Muslim-majority countries. Eventually, this was also blocked by a federal court. Overall, there have been three iterations of the immigration and refugee ban (Liptak, 2018). Currently, the ban is frozen and President Trump is taking the issue to the Supreme Court. The executive order is entitled "Protecting the Nation

from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States" and one of the main groups targeted are refugees (Executive Order No. 13769, 2017).

However, the President Trump administration is not the only entity that views refugees as a threat. According to a Pew Research Center Survey in February 2017, 46% of those surveyed said they thought that Syrian and Iraqi refugees posed a major threat to the United States (Smith, 2017). This survey highlights the divide on the U.S.' views towards refugees. Many in the United States feel that refugees pose a threat to our nation, as evidenced with the immigration and refugee ban rally I attended.

As I was standing at the rally, I started to think about the refugee family I helped to sponsor. The resettlement agency I volunteer with matched me up with this family. Silas (pseudonym) and his family came to the United States four years ago from Afghanistan. He had been an interpreter with the U.S. Army for several years and the United States granted him and his family entry. When he and his family arrived to the United States, he was so excited and hopeful. In our talks together over time, Silas explained how grateful he and his family were to be resettled in the United States and what a wonderful country it was because he felt safe and had more freedom than he ever had before. Now, several years later Silas works in a refugee resettlement agency helping other refugees. He told me he was saddened by the immigration and refugee ban, but said he knew this was not the true sentiment of the majority of the American people. I hoped he was right and that this majority sentiment would prevail. The circumstances for the rally were disheartening, but witnessing such a large group of people coming together to fight for others' rights made me hopeful.

The engraving on the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" (Lazarus, 1889), so eloquently describes the foundations upon

which the United States was built. These foundations include a country that is comprised of immigrants from different ethnicities who leave their home country behind to earn a piece of the "American Dream." One of the major notions of the "American Dream" is that America waits with its arms open-wide for immigrants and refugees. However, this is not always a reality, as witnessed with the immigration and refugee ban. One of the recent NBC news headlines declared: "The U.S. is Way Behind on its Goal of Accepting 10,000 Syrian Refugees" (Sakuma, 2016). In reality, only ten percent of this goal has been achieved because of a lack of preparedness of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in receiving refugee applications and because several states were fighting the courts for the right to ban refugee resettlement (Sakuma, 2016). Refugee applications surged in 2016, as the Syrian civil war intensified and many fled their war-torn homeland.

In terms of the Afghan refugee crisis, there are currently 2.5 million Afghan refugees, but the United States has only accepted 20,000 in the last twenty years (Gordon, 2017). According to Peterson (2016), Afghans are the "forgotten refugees." In 2013, the UNHCR suspended refugee applications from Afghanistan, citing a backlog. Eventually, these applications were processed, but from 2013 to 2015 only 3.6% of Afghan refugees in Turkey were approved for resettlement. There was such an outcry from the Afghan refugees in Turkey that they staged 52-day protest in Turkey's capital Ankara. Afghans in Turkey and other parts of Europe feel forgotten and discriminated against because they have been put aside, while there is preferential treatment in resettling Iraqi and Syrian refugees (Peterson, 2016). Meanwhile, many European countries are deporting Afghans in startling numbers. From 2015 to 2016 the number of Afghans being deported tripled to over 9,000. There are even policies in place where refugees are paid to "voluntarily" return to Afghanistan or they will be detained (Qazi, 2017). Overall, "Afghanistan

is deeply unsafe, and has become more so in recent years. Yet European countries are returning people to Afghanistan in increasingly large numbers, even as the violence in the country escalates" (Mackenzie, 2017 citing Amnesty International Report). In 2016, Pakistan deported almost 600,000 of 2.5 million documented and unregistered Afghans. Pakistan is forcing the mass exodus of Afghans because of several security incidents and strained relations between the Pakistan and Afghan governments. *Human Rights Watch* declared, "The exodus amounts to the world's largest unlawful mass forced return of refugees in recent times" (Sadat, 2017, para. 1). Overall there is an alarming Afghan refugee crisis, but the United States has been mostly silent and had a very minor role.

Since 2015, many U.S. state politicians are using Middle Eastern refugees as a political target, especially after the Paris terror attacks on November 13, 2015. In Paris, a suicide bomber detonated a bomb near a soccer stadium and that same night other related terrorists conducted mass shootings at a café and club, killing 130 individuals. A Syrian passport was found at the scene of one of the shootings and many in opposition to Middle Eastern refugees resettling in their countries used this as evidence that Syrian refugees were responsible for the attack (Nossiter, Breeden, & Bennhold, 2015). However, investigators revealed that the passport was fake and these terrorists were not Syrian refugees. Humanitarian advocates, such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Goodwill ambassadors and many in the U.S. Congress like Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, have been advocating for refugees. Senator Schumer has stated that the United States should play a greater role in the refugee crisis (Seipel, 2017). Congressional representatives are advocating the United States should do more to resettle refugees.

The term “refugee” has recently become more visible in the news. Refugees are individuals who flee their home country due to persecution because of race, religion, ethnicity, or other reasons, and fear further persecution (Dow, 2011). The number of refugees coming to the United States has varied based on global events and U.S. priorities. The 1980 Refugee Act raised overall quotas for refugee admittance to the United States to 50,000 per year. Refugee admissions dropped to fewer than 27,000 in 2002 following the September 11th attacks in 2001. However, since 2002 the quotas have increased and 85,000 refugees were admitted in 2015. In 2016, the highest number of refugees who came to the United States were from the Democratic Republic of Congo with 16,370 and Syria was second with 12,587. The top three U.S. states that resettled refugees are California, Texas, and New York with a total of 20,738 in 2016 (Krogstad & Radford, 2017).

Refugees who are resettled in the United States go through a stringent vetting process. Once they are accepted for resettlement by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, they are referred to a resettlement agency that is a nongovernmental organization (NGO). The U.S. Department of State (DOS) Reception and Placement Program provides resettlement agencies support for refugees in the first 30 days by providing funding for food, housing, clothing, employment guidance, and language and cultural training (Capps & Newland 2015). The resettlement agency supports refugees by helping them attain jobs, getting children enrolled in school, and teaching them how to do everyday tasks, such as shopping at the grocery store or going to the bank. However, once the first few months have passed, most resettlement agencies require refugees to become self-sufficient and they no longer provide refugees financial support. This short time span to become self-sufficient does not allow refugees time to recover from trauma or the challenging journey that they have had to endure to resettle in the United States.

Before the journey to the United States, refugees may have idealized notions of resettlement and this may come to an abrupt end and cause depression, once they are faced with the realities of resettlement. For example, many refugees feel a sense of loneliness and isolation from the mainstream culture and community to which they arrive (Fike & Androff, 2016).

Negative beliefs and connotations of refugees in U.S. society may be factors that contribute to refugees' negative feelings when resettling. Janks (2010) used a UNHCR poster to teach critical literacy to both students and teachers. The poster titled, "Spot the Refugee," has many Lego figures all dressed and looking different (http://capsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/UNHCR-Spot-the-Difference.pdf p. 3). The command on the poster prompts readers to find refugees by looking for someone that stands out and is different. Then, below the Lego figures is text that says the refugee could be any one of these Lego figures. These prompts create a "general decontextualized picture of refugees" (Janks, 2010, p. 107), and are using a notion of "sameness" (p. 106) to describe refugees. Overall, the text creates a "social divide" and positions refugees as the "other" (Janks, 2005, p. 36). Unfortunately, the notion of refugees as "other" is taken up by many and the admittance of refugees to the United States has become a highly contested topic.

Research Phenomenon

Recently, there have been many partisan debates in U.S. politics about refugee admittance to the United States. For example, 31 U.S. state governors said they are opposed to admitting Syrian refugees into their states, even though the federal government determines the guidelines (Fantz & Brumfield, 2015). In addition, President Trump tweeted, "Our legal system is broken! '77% of refugees allowed into US since travel reprieve hail from seven suspect countries.' (WT) SO DANGEROUS!" (Davis, 2017). President Trump cited a report from *The*

Washington Times about a federal judge whose ruling paused the immigrant and refugee ban. President Trump believed as a result there was an influx of immigrants and refugees being admitted from the seven banned countries. However, President Trump's tweet and *The Washington Times* article are misleading because there was only a rise of 100 refugees weekly from these countries and all had been stringently vetted. The debates between those anti- and pro-refugee and immigration ban have shown that many people, including leading politicians, are not aware of the vetting process involved for refugees to be admitted to the United States. In order to be resettled in the United States, a refugee must register with UNHCR and be approved to go through the vetting process (see Figure 1). Then, they go through biographic checks, biometric checks, security checks, medical checks, and an interview with the Department of Homeland Security. Once they pass all of these checks and are approved, then a U.S. NGO determines where they will be resettled. (https://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/).

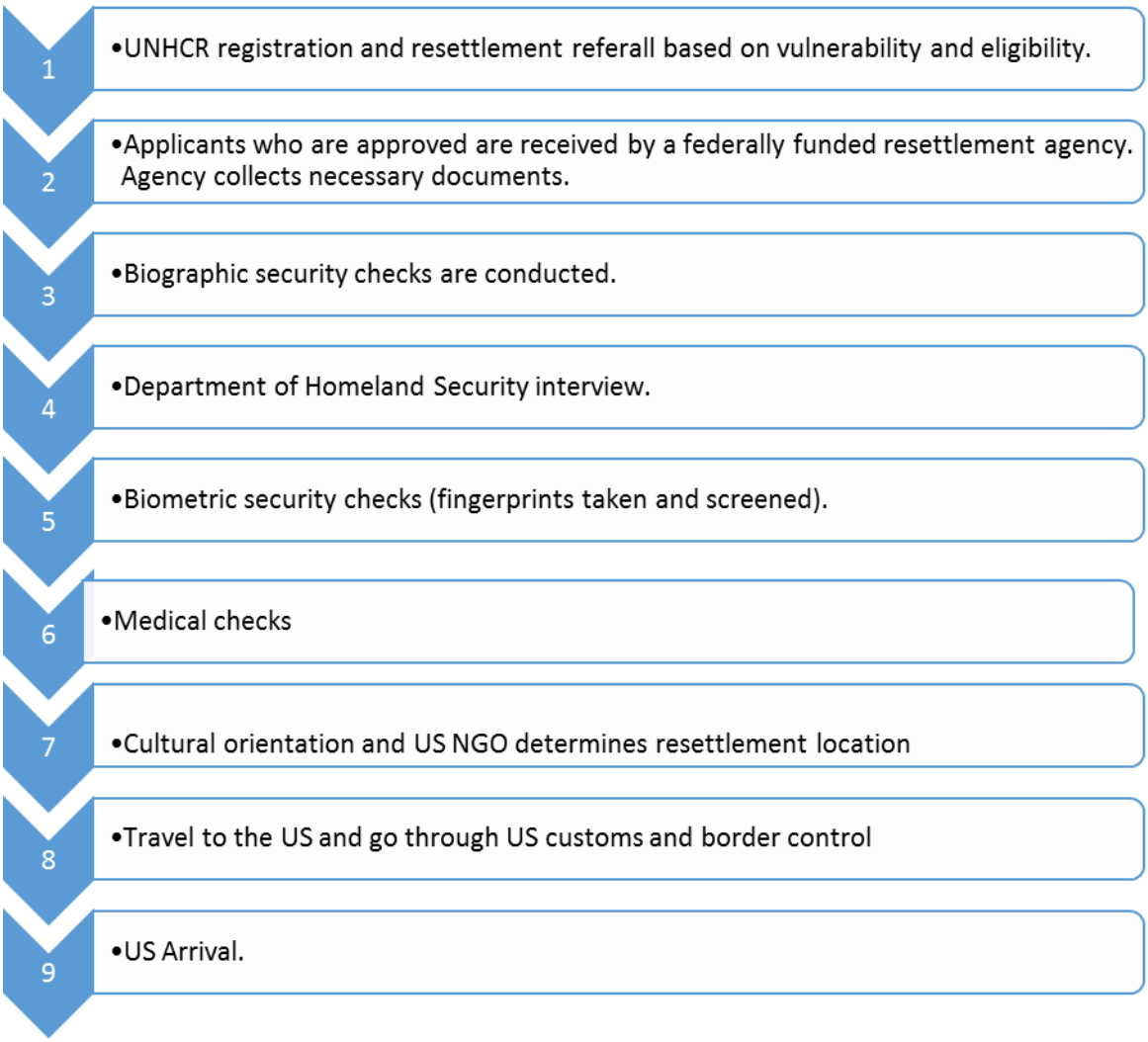

Figure 1 Refugee Vetting Process *Adapted from US Department of State website https://www.state.gov/*

As U.S. politicians are struggling to agree on the U.S. roles with refugee admittance, there is a major refugee crisis where thousands are losing their lives. Of the 21 million refugees worldwide, nearly 12 million live in just 10 of 193 of the world's countries (Shetty, 2016). Countries that host high numbers of refugees are overwhelmed and struggle to meet refugees' needs because many of these countries are already poverty-stricken and have limited resources. There has been major inequality of countries responding to the refugee crisis and "many of the

world's wealthiest nations host the fewest and do the least" (Shetty, 2016, para. 7). Countries worldwide are not sharing the humanitarian responsibility, because "the prevailing narrative in many countries is xenophobic, anti-migration, and driven by fear and concerns about security" (Shetty, 2016, para. 13).

In the fall of 2015, images of a young Syrian boy's body washing ashore in Turkey went internationally viral. His name was Aylan Kurdi and he and his family fled Syria to find sanctuary in Europe. He was one of over 7,000 people who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea trying to make their way to safety in the last two years. Many refugees that flee the Middle East, from countries such as Afghanistan and Syria, try to enter Europe by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. A number of refugees take these risky journeys and flee their homes because they are left with no other options. They flee their home countries because of war, violence, poverty, and lack of human rights. In a recent *National Public Radio* article, Bilal Askaryar (2017) described the terror reigning in Afghanistan before his family left in 1990:

> Finally, we left. I can't properly explain the connection my family has to that land. "Home" isn't the right word. What's the word for a land that has your blood in its soil and whose soil is the flesh that makes up your body? Whatever that word is, that is what we were forced to leave. (para. 24)

Askaryar (2017) fled Afghanistan because there was a Civil War and the Taliban was taking over. If a person has never been forced to leave their home country then understanding this anguish and hopelessness is difficult. Refugees are forced to leave their home countries, which is part of their being, identity, and makes up their "flesh" and "blood," as described by Askaryar (2017).

In order to help the refugee crisis, people need a better understanding of the plight of refugees. This is the biggest refugee crisis since World War II, with Syria having the highest

number of refugees at four million (Tufekci, 2015). Half of the population of refugees are children. Meanwhile, the crisis has placed tremendous pressure on non-profit refugee organizations. For example, the World Food Program decreased its monthly food allocation to refugee families in Lebanon from $27 to $13.50 a month (Tufekci, 2015). In addition, health care services in Iraq have been drastically reduced, which means many are not receiving vaccinations against diseases. *The New York Times* estimates that one in three Afghan children are not in school and this number is growing because of increased violence, displacement, and poverty ("Afghan Children Deprived of School, Tell of Their Deepest Fears," 2017). In addition, many refugee resettlement agencies have lost funding because of the President Trump administration's reduction in the number of refugees resettled in the United States. For example, World Relief, one of the main refugee resettlement agencies in the United States, had to lay off a fifth of staff members and close five offices nationwide (Gjelten, 2017). The number of refugees, the lack of healthcare and education, and the dangerous journey of refugees are all major issues in the refugee crisis. So why is more not being done to help refugees in this growing crisis?

A number of stories of refugees position their plight. A 106-year-old Afghan woman, Bibihal Uzbeki, was recently rejected asylum in Sweden. Her grandson and son carried her through the Balkan Mountains on their perilous journey to Europe. Shortly after her request for asylum was denied, she suffered a debilitating stroke that left her severely disabled and barely able to speak. The Swedish Migration Agency explained their decision, citing that age is not taken into consideration when determining asylum and that the area of Afghanistan the family is from is not unsafe enough ("Sweden Grants Temporary Asylum to 106-year-old Afghan Woman," 2017). However, the family is stating that they fear for their lives if they are forced to return to Afghanistan because of the dangers of ISIS and the Taliban. Eventually, a Swedish

court overturned the decision made by The Swedish Migration Agency and Bibihal Uzbeki was granted asylum for thirteen months. In other words, she will be sent back to Afghanistan after this short time. Some of the most vulnerable victims in the refugee crisis, such as Uzbeki, are not being protected and treated humanely. An elderly refugee who is facing debilitating health issues should not be facing deportation to a country where safety is questionable. Unfortunately, these scenes are increasingly more common and highlight the devastating plight of Afghan refugees.

Recently during at a town hall meeting in Germany, a thirteen-year old Palestinian asked Chancellor Angela Merkel why she faced deportation and why she could not go to school and study like everyone else. Merkel replied, “Politics is sometimes hard” (Tufekci, 2015). The girl then burst into tears and Merkel hugged her after she realized the impact of her words on the young girl. The refugee crisis and the threat of deportation cannot be summed up into the curt quote, “Politics is sometimes hard.” People’s lives are at risk and the reduction of their lives to politics only creates more chaos in the crisis. Fifty-three percent of refugees come from only three countries. The second largest group of refugees are from Afghanistan, the focus of my research (UNHCR Statistics Database) (see Figure 2).

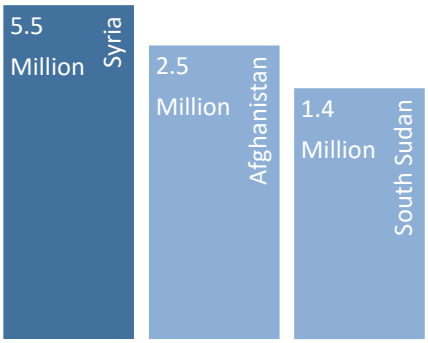

Figure 2

Top 3 Countries Where Refugees Come From Adapted from UNHCR Statistics Database

Contextualizing the Lives of Refugees

Refugee Definition

Although, the Immigration and Nationality Act has clearly defined the term "refugee," there is copious debate over the term. According to the United Nations (1951) Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, a refugee is a person

> who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2011)

Nyers (2006) argues that there are many issues with this definition of a refugee. For example, a "well-founded fear of being persecuted" is conflicting because what counts as persecution is often contested. The criteria for "persecution have been widely criticized for its limitations and parochialism" (Nyers, 2006, p. 47). For example, persecution is often seen in the public-sphere,

which is typically male-dominated. This means that females endure "private persecution" because they are often not involved in the male-dominated public activism. In other words, females are largely excluded from this limiting definition of persecution.

In addition, the Convention's definition of a refugee places an "emotional experience (fear) as the core essence of refugeeness" (Nyers, 2006, p. 51). The use of fear as a criterion to be accepted as a refugee is problematic in many ways. First the emotion of fear is hard to clearly define and often creates a sense of detachment from self. Also, each person has a unique disposition so his/her reaction to situations may be different and may not resemble the Convention's definition of fear. Individuals are supposed to objectively assess a person's "well-founded fear." However, to identify one as a refugee is a daunting task and involves subjectivities and bias. Also, a catch-22 is that refugees may be in so much fear to share their story that they may not be able to fully capture and share their fear. This well-founded fear can be hard to explain because of its "silencing effect," while the absence of fear also does not necessarily mean an individual should not be deemed a refugee (Nyers, 2006, p. 60).

The field of human rights is much broader than the narrow definition of refugee that exempts many individuals. All individuals should be afforded basic human rights and if some are not, then they should be considered for refugee status. For example, many individuals do not flee because of persecution, but rather try to escape horrific human conditions. Overall,

> human rights is a broad field compared to the narrow definition of refugee…placing refugees under the protection of international human rights may make it difficult for states to avoid their responsibilities under international law to assist people in distress by avoiding the terminology of refugee. (Miranda, 1990)

Therefore, the use of human rights rather than a definition of refugee may prompt countries, such as the United States, to step-up their role and take more responsibility in helping individuals not afforded basic human rights. If the definitions of refugee are broadened then refugees will be more easily identified and able to continue through the process of resettlement, which will reduce their time in the unstable refugee camps.

Brief History of Afghan Refugees

The plight of Afghan refugees is quite complex and stems from events in the late 1970s. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan as part of the Cold War. The Soviet Union had a long history of supporting and providing aid to Afghanistan. In 1978, a Soviet-supported communist government took over Afghanistan. Many Afghan citizens opposed the new government because it went against their Muslim beliefs. The communist government wanted to get rid of mosques and began stricter regulations on religious gatherings and practices. Therefore, a Muslim rebellion group, the Mujahedeen, formed and a war started between them and the Soviets. In addition, the United States began providing financial assistance to Afghanistan and to Mujahedeen groups, as a way to counter the spread of communism. As a result of the fighting, many Afghans fled the violence and poverty which ensued. Over five million Afghans fled to Pakistan and Iran. This war continued until 1989, when the Soviets signed a peace treaty (Feifer, 2009). When the Cold War ended, many returned to Afghanistan, but this return was halted once the civil war started, because people did not want to return to a war. In the civil war, the two opposing sides were the communist government that the Soviets had established and the Mujahedeen.

The civil war led to the Taliban, an Islamic extremist terror group, control over most of Afghanistan and then eventually the Western invasion of Afghanistan after the September 11th,

2001 attacks, which is also known as 9-11. Al-Qaeda, an Islamic extremist terrorist group, carried out 9-11 because they viewed the United States as an obstacle to create worldwide order under Islamic extremism (Barfield, 2012). After the deadly attacks, the United States invaded Afghanistan because Al-Qaeda was based in Afghanistan operating training camps, and lived there with the support of the Taliban. Overall, all of these wars forced six million Afghans to flee to other countries, such as Iran and Pakistan (Haidari, 2016).

The most recent headlines from Afghanistan describe how the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a terrorist organization, and former Taliban groups are joining forces in attacks against Afghans. In August 2017, ex-Taliban and ISIS launched an attack on a northern village in Afghanistan, where 50 people were killed. The victims were brutally murdered and the village was left in ruins (Mashal, Abed, & Rahim, 2017). In January 2018, the Taliban drove an ambulance packed with explosives into a crowded street in Kabul, killing 95 people and injuring 158 others. Roughly, ten civilians were killed every day on average the first nine months of 2017 (Mashal, & Sukhanyar, 2018). Sadly, these terror attacks are all too common in Afghanistan and worrying many that more and more ISIS fighters are moving into Afghanistan.

However, the Taliban and ISIS are not working together in Afghanistan, but rather they are fighting one another. ISIS claims that the Taliban is not ruled by Islamic law. The Taliban's mission is to establish an Afghan state that is ruled by Islamic law. On the other hand, ISIS' mission is to establish a global caliphate or a world-wide rule by Islamic leaders. The Taliban mission is limited to Islamic rule on a nationalistic level and ISIS is aiming to rule world-wide. However, both radical groups are using the same methods of brutal murder, suicide bombings, and overall terror wherever they go. Meanwhile, innocent victims are suffering and dying amidst the fighting between these two groups. In addition, when ex-Taliban members are teaming up

with ISIS groups they are causing even deadlier attacks and damage. Now citizens of Afghanistan are facing deadly attacks by a growing number of terrorist groups.

Therefore, Afghans continue to face harsh conditions in Afghanistan, such as violence and death of loved ones, lack of healthcare and education, and extreme poverty. Afghanistan has become such a challenged country because it has been in the midst of war since 1979. However, the journey for refugees, once they leave Afghanistan, is just as harsh. Najeeba Wazefadost (2012), an Afghan refugee, recounts how she risked her life by boat to get to Australia. In Afghanistan, Ms. Wazefadost's family was in imminent danger because they are part of the Hazara, an ethnic minority, whom the Taliban was targeting in genocidal massacres. They could not wait for rescue, so the family fled to Pakistan by foot and, at times, they paid smugglers to transport them by truck when they had to hide from the Taliban. Once in Pakistan, they flew to Indonesia using false passports. Then from Indonesia, they set sail on a flimsy fishing boat to get to Australia. They risked their lives because their boat could have capsized and they could have drowned. Ms. Wazefadost said that they would rather drown because they "preferred taking that risk over brutal killing at the hands of the Taliban" (Wazefadost, 2012, para. 7). Once on the fishing boat, they were intercepted by the Australian Navy and placed in an Australian detention center, until they were granted Temporary Visas to stay. They had the visas for three years before they were granted permission to stay in Australia. Ms. Wazefadost is now an ambassador for Amnesty International, which means she is an advocate for refugees and makes their plight known. She uses her story to plead with the Australian government to increase humanitarian intake of refugees and improve resettlement so refugees are not forced to take a dangerous boat journey.

Many refugees, including Afghans, are trying to reach Europe through Greece, one of the main points of entry. In 2015 alone, over one million refugees made the journey to Europe, while tens of thousands were turned away and sent back to the Middle East. In 2016, over 5,000 refugees en route to Europe either lost their life or went missing (unhcr.org). For example, in just one of the many boats that capsized, over 74 bodies washed ashore in Libya (Melvin, 2017). The passengers on the boat were trying to make their way from Libya to Italy by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Mitra (2013), an Afghan refugee, recounts leaving Afghanistan after his father was killed. He said his five brothers and sisters moved with his mother to his grandfather's house in Afghanistan. His cousin arranged for him to travel to Iran and he stayed in a house with fifteen other refugees. Then he met with a group of smugglers who took him to Turkey. Once there, they had to cross the Evros River to get to Greece. They were in inflatable boats and several people died because the boats capsized. In Greece, there were hundreds of other Afghans trying to make their way to other parts of Europe. Eventually, when he tried to make it to Italy, authorities detained him. Mitra's journey is like those of so many other 2.5 million Afghans who fled and continue to flee. These devastating statistics, reveal the magnitude of the tragedy and the need for stable countries such as the United States to do more to help. In addition, the United States' financial assistance during the Cold War is one of the major reasons the Mujahedeen spread so vastly and had so much control over Afghanistan. Also, even though the United States war in Afghanistan has helped stabilize Afghanistan's government and clear out many of the extremist groups, it has also caused much instability because of the added threat of violence that comes with war. Therefore, these reasons showcase the United States role in Afghanistan's refugee crisis and the need for the United States to step up the efforts to help out more.

Too often the narratives of refugees that pervade the media involve despair and tragedy. There are not enough narratives of the success and accomplishments of refugees, especially Afghan refugees. One such story in August 2017 was featured in *The New York Times* about a 10-year-old Afghan refugee, Farhad Nouri, living with his family in a refugee center in Serbia. He is nicknamed "Little Picasso" and the article describes his extraordinary artistic ability. He has been drawing incredible portraits of individuals, such as the artist Dali and President Donald Trump. His family is in limbo, waiting to be granted asylum and move to Western Europe and his story sheds light "on forgotten asylum seekers and suggests the untold potential lost among migrants stranded along the Balkan route to Western Europe" (Brunwasser, 2017, para. 3). The family has no control on their future and where or when they will be able to move. Meanwhile, Nouri has been holding exhibits of his artwork and not only raising money for his family, but also for a young boy recovering from brain surgery. Nouri remained hopeful despite all the uncertainty his family was facing and his incredible artwork showcases the incredible talent of refugees.

Refugee Camps

Defined, refugee camps are temporary housing provided by governments or NGOs for displaced persons. Refugee camps may vary, but overall Murphy (as cited in Sossou, 2009) argued they share the characteristics of being "segregated from the host population, the need to share facilities, a lack of privacy, plus overcrowding and a limited, restricted area within which the compass of daily life is to be conducted" (p. 470). Some of the earliest refugee camps were established in Europe in the 1940s, due to World War II and the growing number of displaced people.

The UN Charter established the UNHCR in 1951 which aimed to create durable solutions for refugee populations. Some of these solutions included integrating refugees into host communities or resettlement in another country. As the WWII camps began to empty and close down, as inhabitants either moved back to their home country or somewhere else, Europe began to outsource camps or set them up in countries outside of Europe. By the 1990s, refugee camps started to become more widely dispersed worldwide, mainly because of the Cold War. Refugee camps are places that are meant to be the exception and only temporary. However, the length of time refugees spend in them can range anywhere from a year to several decades (Dunn, 2015). Even though the UNHCR has set explicit parameters for refugee camps, such as living area requirements and camp settlement size, these are not always followed. Often, refugee camps are filled to the brim and lack basic human necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare and lack basic human rights, such as freedom of movement and the right to work (Shuster, 2016). In addition, many host country governments are placing more restrictions on refugees seeking to leave the camps for employment or education. In a sense, they are imprisoned because they are confined to the camps. One only has to Google "refugee camps" to see the challenges those who are displaced in these places face daily, and for some, years. The conditions in many refugee camps are harsh. In many of the camps, refugees live in tents or shacks and sleep in bunk beds or on the floor. For example, in the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, which is only thirteen kilometers from the Syrian border, there are close to 80,000 refugees in only three square miles. The large population in such a small area is causing major issues for the infrastructure. Families feel like they are stuck in limbo because they thought it was a temporary solution, but the Syrian civil war has now lasted over six years and they cannot return home. Over 13% of the children in this camp do not attend school, in order to work and earn money for the family (Ott, 2015).

Once refugees make the journey from their home country to the country of first asylum, then they may live in refugee camps in the country of first asylum. Many wealthier countries, such as Western European countries, try to keep refugees out, forcing refugees to find shelter in developing countries, such as Pakistan and Kenya. Dunn (2015) argued that there is "total failure of the refugee camp as a humanitarian and political technology" (p. 10). In other words, the camps are only meant to be a place of temporary shelter until refugees are approved to resettle in another host country. Unfortunately, "the purgatory of camp life" (Dunn, 2015, p. 11) may last many years or even generations. The average length of time in a refugee camp has increased from 9 years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003 ("Protracted Refugee Situations", 2011). However, refugees face no choice and must wait in these camps until their applications are approved to immigrate to a host country, such as the United States.

First Country of Asylum

The right to be granted asylum is not international law. However, Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the right to seek asylum. Although many refugees may seek asylum, they are not guaranteed being granted asylum. If a refugee flees to another country without prior approval for asylum they may find some safety, because the 1952 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees prohibits a country to return a refugee to their home country, if their life or freedom is in danger (Kjaerum, 1992). However, not all countries abide by this and often times return refugees. Essentially, the first country a refugee flees to from their home country is where they are granted asylum, pending their resettlement to another country. Often, refugees live in refugee camps in the first country of asylum while they wait to be resettled in a third country, such as the United States.

Special Immigrant Visas

The participants in this study did not live in refugee camps nor did they move to a country of first asylum before being resettled in the United States. They are one of the exceptions to the regular process and places a refugee goes to because they were able to apply for Special Immigrant Visas (SIV). An SIV is only available to those who were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan or Iraq. Eligible applicants are required to have been employed a minimum of two years and have experienced serious threats as a consequence of employment. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) authorized 15,500 visas (the applicants' spouse and children are not included in this numerical limit) from December 2014 until this number has been fulfilled (U.S. Department of State). If an applicant is eligible then they can apply for a SIV, which takes anywhere from six months to a year or more to be approved. Then after the application is approved, the applicant, along with their family, goes through an extensive interview. If they pass this step, then they move onto medical screenings and being placed with a resettlement agency. The resettlement agency then will help them resettle in the United States (https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/siv-iraqi-afghan-translators-interpreters.html). Therefore, unlike refugees without an SIV they do not move to refugee camps or a country of first asylum. Instead, they can move directly from Afghanistan or Iraq to the United States.

United States' Role in the Refugee Crisis

The role of the United States in the refugee crisis has been relatively small, especially since it has only met a small portion of former President Barak Obama's goal of receiving Syrian refugees. The admission of refugees to the United States is authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended by the Refugee Act of 1980. The purpose of the 1980 Act

was to amend approaches to refugee admissions that were established during World War I. The act had two purposes: (1) to provide a uniform procedure for refugee admissions, and (2) to authorize federal assistance to resettle refugees. According to the INA, the President, along with members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, determine the number of refugees admitted based on regions of the world. Additional refugees may be added to this number, based on emergency situations.

For the fiscal year of 2017, U.S. President Obama set the ceiling of the number of refugees admitted to the United States at 110,000. In January 2017, U.S. President Trump cut the refugee admittance cap to 50,000, which would lead to tens of thousands of refugees to remain in refugee camps (Foley & Frej, 2017). In order to be admitted to the United States, a person must meet the INA definition of a refugee, as previously stated, and not be permanently settled in another country. Usually a NGO or a U.S. embassy processes refugees. They determine whether a refugee qualifies for the U.S. refugee program. Refugees who are admitted into the U.S. program then must go through "vetting," a process that refugees undergo with an intensive interview and provide evidence that they are eligible for refugee status. The purpose of the interview is to gather background information, question them about their situation in their home country, and learn why they fled. Evidence that they must present includes identifying documents, such as birth certificates and school records. Next are the biometric checks that include taking fingerprints as part of the security screening process. At the end of the vetting process and while a refugee waits final approval to be resettled in the United States, they go through medical screening and cultural orientation programs. The United States does not have refugee camps because it is a resettlement country and not a first country of asylum. The entire

vetting process depends on an applicant's location and circumstances, but it usually takes between 18-24 months (U.S. Refugee Admissions Program).

Once admitted, refugees are resettled in various communities in the United States, but are free to relocate anywhere else in the country. A resettlement agency provides refugee families an apartment that is furnished with essential items, such as beds and sofas. They are also provided initial and longer-term resettlement assistance. There are numerous resettlement agencies in the United States that provide pick-up on arrival to the United States, basic resources (i.e., housing, food, and clothing), and referral for employment, education, and health services (Refugee Admission and Assimilation Process, 2016). However, refugee admittance to the United States seems to be in at risk as the President Trump administration continues attempts to enact the immigration and refugee ban.

Refugees' Conditions and Trauma

Each refugee group has gone through its own struggles and hardships because the reasons that refugee groups flee differ. For example, refugees in Afghanistan flee because of the decades-long war. However, refugees from Somalia flee because of both war and famine. The refugees from these two countries have their own unique struggles and plights. In addition, within each group, individuals have their own experiences and unique backgrounds. For example, some Afghan refugees may spend a decade or more in a refugee camp, while others may get resettled to the United States or in another country in under a year. Even though both of these refugees are from Afghanistan their experiences would be different. Afghan refugees are the second largest refugee group in the world and over 75% have been in exile for over three decades (Tyler, 2014). As their displacement time increases, their humanitarian conditions are worsening, such as longer disruption in schooling and proper healthcare.

Another difference amongst individual refugees is the trauma they have endured. Burstow (2003) defines, “Trauma is not a disorder but a reaction to a kind of wound. It is a reaction to profound injurious events and situations in the real world and, indeed, to a world in which people are routinely wounded” (p. 1302). For example, many refugees have lived under war conditions, witnessed or been victims of violence, been separated from parents or other family members, lived in refugee camps, and suffered other physical and emotional hardships. Thus, they have had “reactions” to these catastrophic events. Studies have shown that post-traumatic stress disorder is the most prevalent health issue of children exposed to war and violence, followed by depression (Baddoura & Merhi, 2015; Ghumman, McCord, & Chang, 2016). Once resettled, healthcare and school systems should investigate if a refugee has been victim to trauma, so a plan of action can be made to support the refugee’s social, mental, and physical wellbeing.

There have been very few studies on the mental health of Afghan refugees who are living in Western nations (Slewa-Younan, Yaser, Guajardo, Mannan, Smith, & Mond, 2017). Research has shown that the most effective ways to help traumatized individuals is to identify and strengthen the coping mechanisms that are currently being used within the population (Dossa, 2010). In other words, utilizing culturally sensitive strategies work best. Refugee students cite a sense of belonging as one of the most important factors in helping them cope with their hardships (Edge, S. Newbold, K.B., & McKeary, M., 2014). Much of the focus on refugee children’s well-being is only on the traumatic experiences from their home country. However, post settlement experiences are extremely critical in refugee children’s well-being (Montgomery, 2008). Post settlement challenges and hardships may exacerbate premigration trauma. Therefore, in order to

support refugees a comprehensive analysis is needed of both premigration and post settlement trauma and challenges.

Life as Resettled Refugees

Once resettled, Afghan refugees continue to face struggles and their interactions between them and "their host country leave lasting effects on both the displaced population as well as the host population" (Tober, 2007, p. 264). Oftentimes, the effects on the displaced population are that they must integrate into the dominant culture and its literacy practices. Also, as mentioned previously, refugees may feel a sense of depression and loneliness after resettlement because the reality may not match their idealized notions of resettlement. In other words, they may face many struggles, such as how to find employment and financial issues, and these may not have been considered with thoughts of resettlement.

One of things that helps refugees in resettlement is maintaining a connection to their heritage and culture (Omerbasic, 2015). Artifacts often help create a bridge between the places of the past and present. For example, Pahl (2004) found that artifacts help refugees convey narratives that include family histories and cultural identities. The artifacts that refugees have include drawings, religious texts, clothing, letters, and any other material object that has importance in their lives. A part of my study utilized refugees' artifacts and understanding the role these play in their resettlement and construction of narratives.

Refugees and Role of Religion

In Afghanistan, "Islam has a deep role in the sociopolitical life" (Nojumi, 2002, p. 4). In other words, Islam pervades every aspect of life in Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan have gone through many wars and much instability. However, their faith has remained one of the only constants in their lives. Furthermore, Islam "has been an important element of social and cultural

identity for the people of Afghanistan" (Nojumi, 2002, p. 5). Islam is deeply rooted part of Afghan culture and with how Afghans identify themselves. For Afghan refugee children, maintaining religious beliefs helped promote resilience (Kanji & Cameron, 2010). In addition, religious faith can help refugees adjust to their new culture post-settlement (Pieloch, McCullough, & Marks, 2016). In my study, I examined the role of Islam in the participants' lives, especially in resettlement.

Newly resettled refugee students must take on the daunting task of learning how to navigate a new country and its educational system. Religion can further compound these difficulties. For example, many Muslim students are often stereotyped as dangerous or as terrorists (Bartlett, Mendenhall, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017). In a post-9/11 society many Muslim students are positioned to feel as outsiders (Kasun, 2013). Wilson and Mavelli (2016) argue, "It is hard to think of a time in recent history when both 'religion' and 'refugees' have been such prominent and controversial categories in public politics and discourses around the world" (p. 1). One reason for this phenomenon is because there has been such a strong and unjustified link in the media between Muslim refugees and terrorism. The entanglement of the concepts of refugee, religion, and terror have led to "the production of narrow policy responses, exclusionary politics, and a growing trend towards 'securitizing' forced migration, rather than treating the global refugee crisis primarily as a question of humanitarianism, or solidarity with fellow human beings" (Wilson & Mavelli, 2016, p.1). This study aimed to help in the disentanglement of Muslim refugees and notions of terrorism by shedding light on the positive role of Islam in their lives.

In addition, Islam plays an important role in Muslim refugees' literacy practices. Sarroub (2002) found that religious texts were used to help participants navigate multiple worlds, such as

home and school. In other words, religious texts and practices can be used in ways that result in transnational literacy practices, where borders and spaces are extended and crossed. In my study, religion played a role in some of their transnational literacy practices and practicing their religion helped them stay connected to their home country.

Overview of the Study

With the above serving as a backdrop, this study used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to investigate the stories of high school Afghan refugee high school young women in terms of their experiences and transnational literacy practices. Briefly, narrative inquiry is a methodology that gathers and analyzes narratives and presents the findings in narrative form. Narratives have great power in portraying and reflecting on life and are "creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 250). This study investigated the stories of Afghan refugee young women about their experiences in their home country and their transition to the United States as told through their own voices. As the young women told their stories, I aimed to understand participants' schooling experiences and transition to the United States by rewriting their narratives of the past and contextualized in the present situation of refugees.

Often, many refugee stories are told through the news media. Further, these stories often spotlight the struggles and hardships of refugees, and rarely highlight their successes and hopes. This study focused on the agency and voice of refugees and how they disrupted such dominant discourses about the "problems" with refugees. By analyzing and telling the stories of these young women, I aimed to write a counternarrative to the negative images that often surround the word "refugee."

I used a critical literacy lens (Vasquez, 2014) to examine the stories of Afghan refugee young women in hopes of understanding the Discourses (Gee, 1999) and relations of power that underpin these stories. I collected the following data sources: semi-structured interviews (Atkinson, 2002), artifactual-elicitation (Riessman, 2008), and field notes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Analyzing individual refugee stories through a critical lens helped to "illuminate the reaffirmation of self, in order to contest over-generalized and de-individualizing images" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 254). This means that their stories allowed them a chance to share their individual experience rather than being situated within generalized narratives about refugees. Specifically, I used tenets of critical literacy (Vasquez, 2014) and Massey's (2005) notion of space and place to study the relationship between their stories of home, their stories of transition, and how transnationalism and resettlement inform how they navigate their space in the United States.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examined the narratives of Afghan refugee young women and their transitions experiences both in and out of school, with specific focus on their literacy. With a focus on narratives, this study was primarily an interview study (Merriam, 2009). By examining the narratives of Afghan refugee students, I hoped to understand their experiences and literacy practices in their home country and then here in the United States.

In addition to their narratives, I studied how their literacy practices are enacted in transnational spaces. That is, how their literacy practices cross and extend to the places they inhabit. Refugee students bring a wealth of knowledge to the classroom, yet often their literacy practices are not valued. When refugee students' literacy practices are not valued, they become unengaged and disconnected from the classroom (Perry, 2014). Rather than focus on refugees as

oppressed and as victims, I focused on their stories of resilience and integrity. That is, I wanted to highlight their agency, ambitions, and aspirations despite the challenges they have faced. The purpose, then, of this study was to examine the following questions: (1) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their past schooling experiences? (2) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their transition experiences to the United States? and (3) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces? (e.g., objects, photos, critical moments).

Significance of the Study

The number of refugees immigrating to the United States increases yearly. The refugee ceiling for admittance in the U.S in the Fiscal Year 2016 was 85,000 ("Proposed Refugee Admissions," 2015). In 2017, the ceiling was raised to 110,000. However, the current administration reduced this number to 50,000 (Exec. Order No. 13769, 2017). With refugees' populations as one of the fastest growing groups in the US, the number of refugee children enrolling in U.S. schools has also increased (Sugarman, 2015). Teachers are unprepared on how to meet the needs of these students (Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2016).

Much of the current research on refugees focuses on their mental health and struggles. For example, Ehntholt and Yule's (2006) study on refugee children and adolescents describes how they are subject to many traumatic events and losses and as a result have many mental health difficulties. Little research has been conducted around refugees and school, not connected to the educational setting, so this connection needs strengthening (McBrien, 2005). However, the research that has been done focuses largely in early childhood contexts (Prior & Niesz, 2013). Further, existing literature (Prior & Niesz, 2013; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009) focuses on post arrival of refugees and does not place much attention on their

education and experiences in their countries of origin or first asylum (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Missing in the literature on refugees is attention on the upper grades (Faltis & Valdes, 2010), and research—in general—on refugees needs strengthening (McBrien, 2005).

Each refugee community is unique and more research is needed on specific refugee groups. Perry (2007) argued that each refugee community has its own literacy practices and "studying one refugee community in depth may provide insights about issues of culture, community and identity in relation to literacies" (p. 60). Therefore, a study that focuses only on Afghan refugees, and specifically adolescent girls, will contribute to understanding their literacy practices as part of a larger community's culture, practices, and identity. This study is significant because it is based on the less focused areas of refugees and education and the stories of Afghan refugee young women. In addition, this study is on the topic of refugees and high school education, which is largely missing from the research. In addition, this study is significant because there are currently no studies specifically focusing on Afghan SIV refugee students and their experiences. Also, this study provides implications for teaching and research that addresses refugees and education. Overall, "media rhetoric and statements and proposed policies by country leaders have led citizens to fear refugees and even deem them terrorists" (McBrien, 2017, p. 107). Therefore, this study is significant because it aims to counter the negative rhetoric and statements on refugees and portray a more accurate picture of their lives and experiences. Specifically, this study focuses on the "forgotten refugees," Afghans. They are the second largest refugee group in the world, but this is not mirrored in the research (Peterson, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study is located within critical literacy (Vasquez, 2014) and place and space (Massey, 2005). Critical literacy is a both a theory and approach to literacy that allows readers

"to examine how definitions of race, class, ability, and gender are culturally and socially constructed" (Flint, Holbrook, May, Albers, & Dooley, 2013, p. 399). Critical literacy involves having a critical perspective or way to view the world, where texts are actively analyzed for underlying messages concerning power and sociopolitical issues. As such, critical literacy is a framework that guides thinking and beliefs. I used Vasquez's (2014) critical literacy and Massey's (2005) concept of space and place to frame this study. To situate narratives within critical literacy, I defined the stories that the Afghan young women told and their artifacts as "texts." Texts are the concrete material object produced in discourse (Hodge & Kress, 1988). In other words, texts are the material form of discourses. The participants' Discourses are abstract and are not tangible until they are realized in texts (Janks, 2010). The material form of the discourses in this study were the transcribed narratives as well as the participants' artifacts.

Critical Literacy Theory

For Vasquez (2014), the world is a socially constructed text that can be read. By this she means that the world should be analyzed and critiqued in order to uncover power and social structures that exist. Vasquez describes critical literacy as a way of being or a way to participate in the world. In other words, this way of being involves interrogating the relationship between language and power in the world. Although Vasquez discussed critical literacy in terms of reading and writing, I present several tenets that served well in regards to narrative inquiry and the stories that are told by Afghan young women: (1) critical literacy involves having a critical perspective, (2) texts are never neutral, and (3) students' cultural knowledge and multimodal literacy practices should be valued.

First, critical literacy involves having a critical perspective. One's readings of a text are situated within discursive practices and cultural models that are part of the sociopolitical systems

in which we live. Critical literacy is not a topic that is addressed, rather it is a perspective or lens used to see the world. In addition, this perspective "should not be an add-on but a frame through which to participate in the world" (Vasquez, 2012, p. 3). Critical literacy is not a text, but a way in which to view texts. Furthermore, the term 'critical' is "used to signal analysis that seeks to uncover the social interests at work, to ascertain what is at stake in textual and social practices. Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged?" (Janks, 2010, p. 12-13). In other words, critical literacy is a perspective that focuses on power, specifically who has power and who is marginalized. A critical lens allows a focus on the social practices that take place and to analyze who is benefiting, specifically in this study with regards to Afghan refugees. This mindset is a way of thinking and making sense of the world and understanding the connections between "power, knowledge, language, and ideology" (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 16). Critical literacy practices and perspectives, Vasquez stated, can then contribute to change.

A critical perspective includes the notion that the world is a socially constructed text that can be read (Frank, 2008). What Vasquez means by this is that all texts are created by someone for some purpose and these texts can be revised by others. This concept is located in Freire and Macedo's (1987) notion of *reading the word* and *reading the world*. *Reading the word* is decoding a text and *reading the world* is drawing upon experiences to critique social structures. In order to *read the word* a reader must first *read the world* to grasp the full meaning. I drew upon Afghan refugees' experiences and transition to life in the United States in order to understand and critique the larger social structures in place, such as in their home country and U.S. schools. The purpose of the study was to better understand how Afghan refugee high school young women are situated within social structures. For example, I wanted to understand if they are at a disadvantage in U.S. schools and struggling to fit in with other students. In addition,

reading the world should always precede *reading the word* (Freire & Macedo, 1987). *Reading the world* develops critical consciousness, which is necessary to examine social injustices facing refugees and, specially, how these participants read their world.

Second, texts are never neutral; that is, texts work to create particular subject positions and we need to interrogate these positions presented through texts. Further, we read from particular positions, so our readings of a text are never neutral. Therefore, we need to interrogate the position from which we read. In critical literacy, Vasquez (2014) argued texts are never neutral and work to create particular subject positions. She argued that humans read the world from a particular point of view, and act accordingly. For example, the Afghan young women read their worlds as Afghans who lived in their home country, but are positioned by the United States as "refugees" in need. Thus, their reading of the spaces in which they now inhabit will be informed by these positions, readings that are not neutral but embedded with cultural, political, social, familial (etc.) knowledges. For this study, I looked for instances of how Afghan young women position themselves as Afghans resettled in the United States, and who situate themselves as "Americans" in schools that may see them as "refugees." Reading their texts in this way enabled me to interrogate the very objects, events, and experiences that comprise their lives.

Furthermore, critical literacy involves understanding the sociopolitical systems in which we live (Janks 2010). This assumption involves analyzing why social issues are the way they are in the world. In addition, focusing on the relationship between language and power. The way we use language to share refugees' narratives and the issues they face helps determine who is given a more powerful role in society. When refugees are telling their own stories rather than dominant discourses, they are able to transform discourses surrounding refugees and notions of power. The

changing discourses leads to another critical literacy component: Critical literacy practices can contribute to change (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Vasquez 2014). For example, Freire (1998) writes:

> A more critical understanding of the situation of oppression does not yet liberate the oppressed. But the revelation is a step in the right direction. Now the person who has this new understanding can engage in a political struggle for the transformation of the concrete conditions in which the oppression prevails. (pp. 30-31)

When we better understand the situation of refugees and their stories we are moving in the right direction, towards social equality. We are more able to engage in actions that lead to their Discourses being valued.

In addition, text design and production can provide opportunities for critique and transformation (Janks, 2010; Larson & Marsh, 2005; Vasquez, 2005). In this study, "text design and production" entailed narrative construction and reconstruction. The refugees' narratives provided an opportunity for us to critique dominant discourse about refugees and lead to transformation. A critical literacy lens involves using language in powerful ways, such as the construction of narratives, as a means to enhance lives and question injustice and privilege (Comber, 2001).

Third, students' cultural knowledge and multimodal literacy practices should be used. As Comber (2001) and Vasquez (1998) argued, students' cultural knowledge and multi-modal literacy practices should be utilized and valued. What they mean by this is that the cultures and literacies that students bring to the classroom should be welcomed. The stories that Afghan young women tell are embedded with their cultural knowledge and literacy practices, which lead to an understanding of their transnational practices and knowledge. For example, Thomson's

(2002) described that children come to school with "virtual school bags" that are filled with different interests, beliefs, experiences, narratives, and knowledge. However, only some children are allowed to take out these resources from their virtual school bags. In order to understand what a student contains in his or her virtual school bag, then teachers should first learn more about their students' backgrounds and histories. This study aimed to uncover what three Afghan high school refugee young women's backgrounds and histories revealed about their "virtual school bags" as well as the artifacts through which they told other narratives grounded in culture, beliefs, and practices.

Additionally, Janks (2010) argues that critical literacy necessarily involves diversity or "different ways of reading and writing the world in a range of modalities" (p. 24). In other words, there are different perspectives and ways of representing meaning in the world. These differences often are organized in a hierarchy and is not inclusive of all cultural resources. Educators should be aware of the "dangers of affording some cultural practices and interests more status than others" (Nixon & Comber, 2006, p. 135). In my study, I highlighted the participants' literacy practices and their affordances. For example, I examined the specific literacy practices that these young women take up and where and when they are able to use these literacy practices. I used Barton and Hamilton's (2000) definition of literacy practices as "the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense, literacy practices are what people do with literacy" (p.8). In this study, I examined what the participants did with literacy. Furthermore, I analyzed their cultural ways of using written language, specifically how they were used transnationally. In other words, I analyzed how the participants' literacy practices crossed and extended passed borders.

Vasquez also argued that what we claim to be true or real is always mediated through discourse. For Gee (1999), narratives are how people make sense of their worlds, and help us understand the interaction of discourse (language in use) and Discourse (a socially enacted identity) (Lopez-Bonilla, 2011). Gee (1996) differentiates between Discourse (capital D) and discourse (d). The former is "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" (Gee, 1996, p. 131). Discourse in this sense is ways of talking, ideas, and "identity kits," which suggest how to talk, act, dress, and take up a certain role (Gee 1990, p. 142). Discourse with a small 'd' is the linguistic aspect or connected stretches of language. As Afghan young women related their stories, I looked for the D/discourses that underpin their experiences. I also noted that their narratives—as personal experiences—are, as Lopez-Bonilla (2011) argued, "provide powerful insights into the figured worlds that render experience meaningful" (p. 48). That is, the narratives of the Afghan young women were mediated through their use of language and their own cultural, social, educational, familial (etc.) practices.

Massey's Space and Place

A strong complement to critical literacy, I also located the study within Massey's (2005) concepts of place and space. For Massey spaces are socially constructed and are, therefore, more or less inviting to different participants. That is spaces may seem more inviting to participants who have access to dominant discourses of the space and not as inviting to those who do not have access to these discourses. Space does not have inherent or universal characteristics, but rather is comprised of a "throwntogetherness" of interactions between human and non-human elements of place (Massey, 2005, p. 140-14). For example, how Afghan young women

understood themselves can be described through their interaction in their homes, schools, and the post-settlement. Their narratives had a "throwntogetherness"—the space in which they mediate their interactions with others (family, counselors, immigration officials, teachers, etc.), as well as the non-human (housing conditions, modes of travel, food, etc.). In so doing, they made sense of who they are as young women, Afghans, refugees, sisters, aunts, etc.

Massey (2005) outlines three main characteristics of space: Interactions, plurality, and dynamic. First, space is a result of interactions from the global level all the way down to intimate level. Second, space entails multiplicity or plurality. Since space is based on interactions, this then lends itself to plurality. Third, space is dynamic or always changing. The interactions themselves are dynamic, thus causing space to be "always in the process of being made" (Massey, 2005, p. 9).

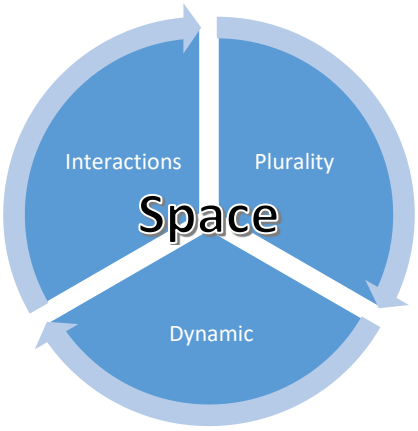

Figure 3

Space Adapted from Massey's (2005) For Space

In context of this study, then, Massey's concept of space offered insights into the human and nonhuman interactions (personal, social, intimate, political, etc.) that Afghan young women experienced in their home country and their current experience in the United States. The number of experiences and events that they told in their narratives positioned them to relate, and perhaps

interrogate, why and how the plurality of these experiences and events matter to them. Further, through their stories, the young women showed the ever-changing understanding of who they are, who they are becoming, and who they hope they might be. Massey discussed the concept of place in relation to space:

> If space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of those intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of them. (Massey, 2005, p. 130)

Place, then, for Massey is a collection of those "stories-so-far" of their experiences and their interactions as they relate to the larger social structures (e.g., immigration, travel, "refugee" construct, admittance ceilings, etc.). How they see themselves in the larger systems places them—positions them—as particular subjects in particular places.

The stories are located within "power-geometries," which focus on the following questions: Who controls the power? Who is at the receiving end of it? Who is the imprisoned? (Massey, 2005). Refugees have done much physical moving of place, but in terms of power, they are not in control of why, where, or how they move to new places. In addition, participants are influenced by time-space compression or the amount of "movement and communication across space" (Massey, 1991, p. 24). In other words, an examination is needed on what is influencing participant's degree of mobility. There can be many barriers to mobility, such as language, culture, and socio-economic status. Some groups of people have more mobility than others and some have more control over their mobility than others.

Situated within Vasquez's (2014) critical literacy and Massey's (2005) notion of space and place, both allowed for a critical perspective and focus on social interactions (in texts and

place). Vasquez' (2014) critical literacy involves interrogating the positions of texts and the positions readers of a text take. In addition, this perspective requires examining the sociopolitical systems in place. Vasquez's critical literacy allowed me to analyze the three Afghan high school refugee young women's subjectivities and how they read the world. The narratives allowed me to see how they read the world in their home country and in the United States and how these ways of reading the world differ. I examined their experiences in order to understand the social structures that exist. Since the refugee population is one of the fastest growing groups in the United States and Afghan refugees is the second highest group of refugees in the world, there needs to be analysis on how refugees are situated in the U.S. educational system and society. Are they benefitting or disadvantaged? One of the ways to examine how they are situated is to focus on their literacy practices and if these are valued in places, such as the classroom. Massey's space and place enabled me to examine how participants are situated within a place by focusing on their interactions and how the places are dynamic. For example, I examined how the places they have lived interact with one another and help shape the young women's experiences. In addition, this lens allowed me to examine the interactions that occur in each place. In conclusion, these theories focus on the social interactions and importance of place in the Afghan young women's narratives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

"You know those of us who leave our homes in the morning and expect to find them there when we go back-- it's hard for us to understand what the experience of a refugee might be like" ("Naomi Shihab Nye: A Bill Moyers Interview," n.d.). The world is in the midst of a refugee crisis. However, the world still cannot comprehend what it means for a population of people who are forced to leave their homeland and flee to another country only to be called refugees. In addition, the research on refugees, while it has expanded some, has not progressed enough to understand the extent of the refugee crisis.

Not only is the world not fully comprehending the refugee crisis, but there is also confusion on the difference between refugees and immigrants. Refugees are forced to flee from their country of origin for various reasons. Conversely, immigrants choose to leave and are often under much less tense circumstances. Even though there are vast differences between immigrants and refugees, the research on immigrants has often been adapted and used with refugees, which is unsuitable (McBrien, 2005). Refugee children who transition to schools in the United States, require specialized instruction and attention that is vastly different from what teachers normally provide for immigrants and English language learners (Faltis & Valdes, 2010).

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to further the review the literature on refugees from over a decade ago (McBrien, 2005). The literature review is on refugees and education, while expanding to include their histories and experiences. In order to fully grasp the plight of refugee children, further research is needed on their educational experiences, literacies, transnationalism, and transition experiences and histories. In addition, specific review is needed on refugees, rather than the utilization of immigrant research.

I conducted a thorough review on previous research on refugees overall. I first began a search of the existing literature by using the general terms “refugees,” in combination with “literacy,” “education,” “refugee camps,” and “students” on the databases of ERIC, PsycINFO, and Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA). I also began building up a list of articles, however I was not having much success.

The turning point in my search was when I met with a doctoral student who was finishing up her dissertation on refugees and education. Her topic was very similar and she suggested key researchers that I should review, such as McBrien (2005), Sarroub (2002), Perry (2014), and Warriner (2004). Starting with these key researchers and some of their foundational studies on refugees helped me to begin building a stronger literature review. The references in these studies then lead me to additional articles and next steps to study research on refugees. Overall, the scope of my search focused on refugees, their literacies, educational experiences and transition, and identities.

The literature review is organized into four main areas: (1) refugees’ educational experiences, (2) refugees’ backgrounds and stories, (3) refugees’ multiple literacies and practices, and (4) refugees and transnationalism. The first area, refugees’ educational experiences, includes the following:(1) the educational experiences in first-asylum countries (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Uptin, Wright, Harwood, 2016), (2) educational needs and barriers of refugee students (McBrien, 2005; Sarr & Mosselson, 2010), (3) the transition to U.S. schools (Roxas & Roy, 2012), (4) the adaptation to early childhood U.S. classrooms (Prior & Niesz, 2013), (5) the reading and academic achievement of refugees (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009), and (6) the overall experiences of refugees in U.S. schools (Oikonomidoy, 2010). The second area, refugees’ backgrounds and stories, includes the following: (1) the use of narrative

construction to cope (Ramsden & Ridge, 2013), (2) the use of reading and writing to understand refugees' experiences (Stewart, 2015), (3) the silences in narratives (Ghorashi, 2007), and (4) the complex and dynamic nature of the refugee experience (Kumsa, 2006). The third area, refugees' multiple literacies and practices, includes the following: (1) multiple literacies (Warriner, 2004), (2) brokering of literacy (Perry, 2014), (3) community cultural capital (May, Bingham, Turnbull, & Tesler (2015), (4) digital literacy practices (Gilhooly & Lee, 2014), (5) using digital tools to share stories (Omerbasic, 2015), and (6) the literacy practices of newly resettled refugees (Kaur, 2016). The fourth area, refugees and transnationalism includes the following: (1) in-betweenness (Sarroub, 2002), (2) literacy practices in transnational context (Lam & Warriner, 2012), and (3) transnational youth and ways of knowing (Kasun, 2016).

Refugee Educational Experiences

Only a decade ago, Pinson and Arnot (2007) described the lack of refugee education research as a "wasteland." This lack of research creates a space where the educational experiences and lives of refugee youth are "invisible" (p. 400). Even though the world is facing a refugee crisis, there is still very much a "wasteland" and lack of much needed research and insight on refugees and education. These educational experiences should no longer be "invisible," but rather more studies are needed to bring light to them.

The Migration Policy Institute (Dryden-Peterson, 2015) conducted a study in order to answer: "What educational experiences do resettled children have prior to their arrival in the United States?" (p. 3). This study collected data from three sources: UNHCR data from 14 countries on quality of education, key informant interviews, and field-based case studies. The study offered limited information on the data sources and how they were collected. The UNHCR data was listed as quantitative, but no further details were given. Researchers found issues in first asylum countries' schooling, such as students may have limited or disrupted schooling, they may

encounter language barriers in school, the students are exposed to other languages (they do not have academic mastery of any of the languages), the educational quality is low, and they may face discrimination. The findings revealed the importance for teachers to learn each individual refugee student's history and to learn how to create strategies and support for these students. The study sheds light on the importance of the connection between educational experiences in first asylum countries and education in the United States. Refugee students have had limited, disrupted, or no schooling before resettling in the United States.

Concerning students' educational experiences prior to resettlement, Uptin, Wright, and Harwood's (2016) research examined how three different refugee students (2 Burmese and 1 Togolese) constructed new identities as a means to access school in their countries of first asylum. The theoretical framework that was used is Yuval-Davis (2010) notion of creating identities as narratives. A thematic content analysis was used to lead to the findings: a desire to connect with their peers, a desire to be seen as a person having value and much to contribute, a desire to make the most of educational opportunities, a longing to be reunited with family, a need for autonomy, and displaying hope for the future. However, the study did not clearly state the data sources. The participants' schools before resettlement had limited resources and were merely a place to occupy children. For example, there were no textbooks, paper, or pens. In addition, the participants described discrimination against them in school by both teachers and students. The implication of the study was that the discourses of refugees as victims should not prevail because this "diminishes the complexity and diversity of each individual experience (Uptin et al., 2016, p. 613).

"The experience that refugee students have in schools is very much determined by the way that refugees are thought about, and represented in the public culture and how these

representations are taken up or contested in schools" (Hattam & Every, 2010, p.409). These words so eloquently describe the transition experiences of refugee students to schools in the US. Overwhelming deficit beliefs and negative or indifferent attitudes about refugees have negatively affected their transition experiences. The following studies delve into the experiences, obstacles, and needs of refugee students as they transition to schools in the US.

Over a decade ago, McBrien (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of articles and book chapters on the educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States. The review used Portes and Zhou's (1993) theory of segmented assimilation, which focuses on different resettlement situations and the acceptance of refugee populations. This theory argues that there are different types of adaptation and these are dependent on the situation of the earlier generation that immigrates, the pace at which parents and children immigrate, the cultural and financial barriers, and the family and community resources to manage these barriers. The purpose of the meta-analysis was to answer the following questions: "(1) What do refugee students need to succeed in U.S. schools? (2) What are the obstacles to their success? and (3) What can be done to help refugee students overcome their obstacles?" (p. 332). The researcher restricted the scope of the review to only refugee students resettled in the United States in the past 25 years. One of the emerging themes was refugees' need for psychosocial well-being, especially through adjusting to the culture of the new country while maintaining a connection to their home country culture. Also, teachers were unaware that they had refugees in their classrooms and the types of experiences they have had prior to arrival in the United States. In addition, school settings where refugee students are not required to rapidly acquire language and culture are best environments. McBrien suggested that one of the best ways to help refugee

students was to better understand their experiences and stories and accept their cultural differences.

Approximately five years after McBrien's (2005) meta-analysis, Sarr and Mosselson (2010) conducted a similar meta-analysis that reviewed the issues in teaching refugees in U.S. schools. An ecological theoretical positioning was taken, which focuses on the individual experiences of refugees. This approach helped to "refrain from essentializing their identities" (p. 553). Refugee experiences are heterogeneous and unique. The researchers did not give the specific methodology and scope of the meta-analysis. Two themes emerged in this study. First, once students moved from "refugee-ness" and the invisibility that comes with this label, they were able to access more school support and not feel as isolated. Often "refugee-ness" comes with many false assumptions because the refugee experience is so diverse. Second, there are many practices in school that "peripheralize refugee students as 'other' and 'refuge-ness' as a condition to overcome" (p. 566). Overall, teachers need to know individual refugee students, implement critical pedagogies, and strengthen the home-school connection.

In one of the few studies on recently arrived refugees, Roxas and Roy (2012) examined how students and their families made the transition to U.S. schools. Intersectionality was the theoretical framework, which examines the various factors in life and how they intersect, specifically in this study the factors around success and failure in schooling. The researchers conducted a case study with Abdullah, a Somali Bantu male high school student. Data collection included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and field notes. Abdullah began the study with an optimistic perspective, but this was not consistent with his teachers' perspectives. As the study progressed, Abdullah began to get failing grades and was suspended twice. Rather than blaming the institutional obstacles, Abdullah "internalized the 'boot strap' metaphor,

attributing his failures to himself rather than the intersection of factors including lack of support in school" (Roxas & Roy, 2012 p. 480). The study revealed that there should be a whole-school approach when serving refugee students, whereby the families, educators, support staff, and administration all communicate and work together to best serve these students. These researchers suggested that more collaboration will help break down the dichotomy of success or failure. In this study, a framework of failure was established— "failure for not only Abdullah but his teachers and caregivers" (p. 483). The study would have been much more powerful had the researcher included excerpts of Abdullah's interviews.

There is little research on refugees in early childhood education from students' perspectives. The goal of Prior and Niesz's (2013) study was to understand the views on U.S. schooling of two Karen refugee families. Framed as a narrative inquiry, Prior and Niesz examined the Karen refugees' stories of change and transition over a school year. The guiding research question was "What do the stories of Karen refugee children and their families reveal about the children's adaptation to an American early childhood classroom?" (p. 5). They argued that the children's stories provided insight into their cross-cultural experiences and their meaning-making. Data collection included interviews with three children (ages 4-6) and their respective families in order to understand their history and backgrounds. Findings included how much the children's beliefs changed over time, the importance of bridging home to school, and the importance of building friendships with students from the US. The children looked for similarities in the classroom with things at home (e.g., toys) and they also sought to find similarities with other students, in order to make connections. Overall, the children adapted quickly and this successful adaptation was in part because not only did the families adapt, but the schools did also.

An influx of Sudanese refugees compelled Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009) to examine the reading achievement and academic challenges facing three families with a total of twelve children. The theoretical framework enlisted was sociocultural theory. The researchers collected data by conducting structured interviews with the parents, children and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers over a six-month period. The interviews were a series of 15 questions that were audio-taped and accompanied by field notes. The researchers analyzed the data using content analysis and came across several findings: (1) perceived difficulties faced by children in becoming capable readers and writers of English, (2) academic challenges faced by Sudanese students, (3) techniques teachers might use to make learning easier, (4) and challenges faced by teachers. The study revealed if there was a not a strong and positive relationship between parents and teachers, the students suffered, bringing light to the Sudanese proverb "when two elephants fight the grass suffers." Researchers found that parents had high aspirations for their children and wanted them to be successful in school and these were not always in line with the teachers' aspirations and beliefs in the students. Overall, the implications were that teachers should focus on the children's strengths and value their cultures.

Refugees' experiences have often been examined by two major frameworks: macro-level (social integration and the community) and micro-level (language learning experience). Oikonomidoy (2010) took a third approach and integrated the macro and micro level frameworks. The purpose of this study was to focus on refugee students' experiences, specifically with curriculum and teachers. The research question asked, "If one-dimensional assimilation of immigrant groups is no longer possible (or desirable) in a multicultural nation, how have educational interventions accommodated the pluralistic integration of immigrant students?" (p. 75). The use of "immigrant" in the research question is misleading because there

are vast differences between refugees and immigrants and the focus of this study is refugees. Critical discourse analysis was used to analyze the data from seven female Somali high school students in a focus group. The results of the analysis led to three findings: (1) students' relationships to the instructional material, (2) their views of the characteristics of their favorite teachers, (3) and their projections of what they would do if they were teachers. In regards to relationship with the instructional material, the students felt that they could not see the relevance and connection to their own lives. Also, the students had many negative views of teachers in the United States because the teachers exuded disappointment and disapproval. The students' favorite teachers were those that were more personable and created more positive environments, where the students felt a sense of belonging. When the students envisioned themselves as teachers, they said they would not try to offend other students and would be accepting of all. Overall, the answer to the research question showed that the educational system is still far from interventions that accommodate refugee students because teachers do not know their histories and stories.

There is a growing interest in examining the resettlement process and educational support programs in resettlement countries. However, there is still limited research on refugees' educational experiences prior to resettlement. My study aimed to shed light on the educational experiences of Afghan refugee young women in their home country. The educational experiences of their home country have implications for post-resettlement education. In addition, McBrien (2005) described that one of the major limits in refugee research is the relatively small number of studies done on specific refugee groups. Therefore, this study adds to the research by focusing on Afghan refugee young women's educational experiences in the United States, a topic that has little coverage. This study aimed to share refugee stories using the participants' own

words and narratives. In addition, the study extended the current research by focusing on stories of refugee students' agency and heterogeneity of experiences.

Refugees' Backgrounds and Stories

Teachers need "to understand former refugee students in the light of their individual complex histories, not in a way to can re-traumatize the students but by hearing their stories of hope and resilience" (Uptin, Wright, Harwood, 2016, p. 599). Refugees do not all have the same story and do not belong to a homogenous group, but rather there is diversity in ethnicity, locality, and intergenerationally. In addition, within these groups there are differences as well because each refugee has his or her own unique lived experience. Often times, refugees' stories are given a simplified story of a victim that are meant to cover all their experiences. Over time, "this dominant social discourse oversimplifies the histories of refugee youth, limiting understanding of what they do and don't know and they can and can't do" (Uptin et al., 2016, p. 600). In addition, the refugee narratives in resettlement are often times vastly different from the narratives they tell in refugee camps because they are still living in an uncertain situation where the outcome is unknown (Eastmond, 2007).

Sharing narratives provides many affordances and support for refugees. For example, Ramsden and Ridge (2013) conducted a study where Somali refugees used narratives of their homeland to re-affirm their identities and help them build a new life in their resettled country. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how Somali refugees construct narratives of the past as a means to cope in the present. The narratives also included their transition and adaptions to their newly settled country, Australia. Data sources included group interviews with twenty-eight Somali parents at a local school and then individual interviews were conducted with fifteen of those parents and fifteen key informants in the school (i.e., counselors, bilingual

teachers). Researchers first transcribed the group interviews and found themes and then they further explored these themes in the individual interviews. Among the findings, narratives about refugees' homeland included strong family and community connections and did not focus on the negative experiences. In addition, narratives about resettled life included struggles of not belonging and feeling disconnected from Somalia. Participants noted the differences between a previous collectivist society, where people work and live collaboratively, in the homeland and now an individualistic society in Australia, where people are more independent and not as collaborative. The findings revealed that participants experienced civil conflict, living in refugee camps, and hardships of creating a new life in a new country. All of these experiences helped them to adapt to their new country and the narratives were a support in this process because they promoted meaning-making of these experiences. Implications that the researchers suggested were for refugees to draw on past experiences because doing so provides an avenue to deal with the present and maintain hope for the future.

The language arts classroom provides a space where students and teachers can discuss and take action on issues of social justice. In addition, teachers can understand "diverse students' life experiences" and use those experiences for "literacy gains" (Stewart, 2015, p. 149). For example, Stewart (2015) used reading and writing about refugee experience as a way to get to know her refugee students and create effective instructional strategies. The purpose of the study was to reimagine the language arts classroom where the teacher is learning from students, specifically refugee students, as a way to enhance teaching strategies. The design of the study included the teacher as a researcher at a summer literacy program for refugee high school girls. Stewart used mentor texts, similar to the students' experiences, as a way to invite students to share their experiences. Freire's (1998) ideas of transformation and understanding the human

experience framed the study. The data included students' narratives and the researcher's personal reflections. Many of the narratives began with students describing their homes before they had to leave and then they described the various reasons they were uprooted. The researcher found how different her perspective was from the students and through listening to their narratives, she was able to take up different perspectives. Even though the students had been through horrific events, they still maintained "hope and peace" (Stewart, 2015, p. 157). Thus, the findings suggested that refugee students sharing their stories is a powerful practice that allows them to share who they are as individuals and take agency.

The experiences shared in refugees' narratives was eye-opening, but just as important is what is not said in a narrative. The silences in narratives, argued Ghorashi (2007), allowed a researcher to understand a different layer within the narrative. Her study focused on Iranian women refugees, in both the Netherlands and the United States, and their narratives of the past, present, and future. Her research method was participant observation. In addition, life stories were employed as the methodology because identity is a dynamic process that can only be captured by looking at both the past and the present. The interviews were dialogic, interactive, and open-ended. The participants from the Netherlands described feeling like 'the Other' in the Netherlands because of the negative outlook on migration in that society. However, they still felt that they were successful there and talked full of passion. The researcher found when the participants were asked about their futures, they were silent or only cried. These silences displayed their uncertainty about the future. On the other hand, the participants in the United States felt that they were both American and Iranian and were not affected by any discrimination. They described being successful and having a sense of belonging. They felt very hopeful about

the future. The comparison between the Netherland narratives and U.S. narratives showed how context can affect experiences and the importance of social participation after resettlement.

The refugee experience is dynamic and complex for each individual. These experiences are most effectively problematized, according to Kumsa (2006), when essentializing and constructivist discourses and dichotomies are put aside. This study used Kumsa's own theoretical framework of dispersal-affinity or the lens that explores the interplay of identity and cohesion (what holds the nation together). The research question was, "How do young Oromo refugee negotiate the shifts in identity and cohesion?" (Kumsa, 2006, p. 235). The purpose of the study was to explore Ormo refugees (from Ethiopia) who have resettled in Canada and their "understandings of 'the refugee' and the wider processes of refugeeization and refugee be-longing" (p. 230). The researcher used the hyphenated *be-longing* to showcase the desire and inherent nature involved in 'belonging.' The participants included eighteen, high school Ormo refugees and the data included their narratives and reflections (audio and video taped) of 'be-longing' and what 'refugee' means to them. Kusma gathered data through one-on-one and three small group sessions over the period of seven weeks. The data were analyzed using critically reflexive hermeneutics and narrative analysis. The findings revealed that be-longing is both fixed and dynamic and is constructed through self-reflection and through social relationships. They felt that they had a loss of their nation and are an 'Other' because they are a displaced person with no place to call home. Researchers found that participants had an aversion to being called a "refugee" because they wanted to have a sense of be-longing and a nation. The narratives revealed the importance of deconstructing dichotomies of home and exile, and connecting "be-longing to freedom from oppression" (p. 248), where exile becomes home. Refugees' narratives display the dynamic and complex nature of refugee experiences and their path to be-longing.

Refugees' narratives provided an opportunity to break down the oppressive walls of homogenous 'refugeeness' and view the diversity and uniqueness of each experience. Even when refugees are from the same region or country, each person has his or her own unique story. Refugees' narratives and backgrounds provide educators and others with a better understanding of these students' needs and creates a space where new perspectives can be taken-up and examined. These stories also reveal the unique affordances and literacies that refugees bring with them. This study provided the stories of Afghan refugees in order to portray the Afghan refugee experience and to contrast the oversimplified refugee narrative. Therefore, this study sheds light on how even refugees from the same home country have very unique experiences and stories.

Refugee Literacy Practices

> The jealous light on your brow casts you as old
> Your breaths are desolate voice
> When tired farmers know
> the moment that the frost will strike the poppies
> Your legs carry the smell of landmines
> Your mouth the smell of hunger
> Your shoulders of wander wander
> wandering. (Alavi as cited in Olszewska, 2007, p. 221)

This poem from a young Afghan poet has a theme of exile and a literacy known as 'sha'er mega' (the poet says) (p. 26). In Afghan culture, the literacy of reciting poetry stems back hundreds of years and offers a medium for expressing experience and emotions and sharing political views. As a literacy practice, "poetry composition and recitation has been and continues to be the most highly prized and widely practiced art form among Afghans of all walk of life, both literate and illiterate" (Olszewska, 2007, p. 205-206). The reason poetry has served as such a uniting literacy practice is because oral literature is a successful medium of communication in a

society where few can read. The literacies of refugees, such as Afghan poetry recitation, are often marginalized and left out of the school curriculum.

Refugees have journeyed from place to place and as result become transnational because of the multiple cultures, literacies, and languages they experience. Refugees' literacy practices are often not valued (Perry, 2014). Warriner (2004) explored the literacies of two refugee women as they negotiated various challenges in their transition to the United States and the connections between their in-school and out-of-school literacies. This was a two-year ethnographic study that focused on an adult English as a second language (ESL) program. This study is framed in Street's (1998) definition of literacy as an ideological practice that is influenced by social, historical, political, and economic factors. The methods of this study included collecting participant observations, documents, and interviews. The study included extensive background of each participant, including descriptions of their identities and literacies and how they used these to achieve their goals. The researcher found that participants used their resources to construct identities beyond local context and challenge stereotypes about refugees. The two forms of literacy that they relied heavily on were understanding how things work in the United States and how to position themselves in relation to their goals and the second literacy is how to have self-efficacy when school resources did not help. Findings illustrated that participants used available literacies, in order to reach their goals, and teachers and ESL programs need to do more to include these literacies.

Perry's (2014) 18-month case study of three families with young children examined how print functioned as language brokering with emergent young refugee children. Perry noted that teachers often had limited views of children's language brokering which was often invisible to them. Data sources included observations, interviews, and artifacts. The brokering occurred

around English texts and occurred when teachers and parents were not present at the same time. The three types of brokering occurred: meaning of words, culturally specific information, and genres or using texts to accomplish specific goals. Perry concluded that literacy brokering at home and at school were very different. Language brokering at home was encouraged and valued; parents viewed their children as translators. However, in school, children brokered language "under the radar" (p. 320) because it conflicted with the school's emphasis on independent work. The results of the study illustrate the valuable insight into the overlooked act of young children's literacy brokering. The findings suggested that teachers need to understand how some of the texts sent home, such as field trip forms, are genres that parents may not be familiar with and need more clarification. Overall, children's literacy brokering is an example of how they utilize multiple literacies to accomplish their goals.

May, Bingham, Turnbull, and Tesler (2015) used a community cultural wealth perspective (Yosso 2005) to examine pre-K refugee parents' perspectives on education and how they support their children's education and school success. This study considered cultural capital as knowledge lived within groups of people, rather than individuals or the nuclear family. The six distinct forms of knowledge that comprised their framework included: aspirational capital (goal-oriented resiliency), linguistic capital (communicative repertoire), familial capital (commitment to community), social capital (networks of support), navigational capital (function within institutional structures), and resistant capital (ability to challenge inequality). This study included eighteen participants and the data included semi-structure interviews, which was analyzed with open-coding. The findings that emerged were that parents had aspirational capital or staying positive despite their circumstances by drawing on their familial, linguistic, social, and navigational capital in order to navigate the educational systems. Even though there was much

diversity within the group of parents they had much in common, such as navigating the school system and supporting their children's success within it. The most variability that existed was with participants' opinions of the U.S. educational system. These differences were not based on the country they came from, but rather the longer the parents were in the United States the more critical they became of the educational system.

One way to support refugee students' literacies and identities is through the use of digital tools. Gilhooly and Lee (2014) documented the digital literacy practices of three Karen refugee brothers and how they it is used to transition to the United States. The research question was "How do digital literacies facilitate the resettlement process of immigrant refugee adolescents?" (p. 390). The theory, though not explicitly named, utilized was that literacy is not a set of skills, but rather practices that are socially situated, such as in digital space. The data included 120 visits over two years and included videos of digital practices and informal interviews. Another data source was the digital artifacts the participants created, such as videos and photographs. Researchers used open-coding and the four main codes were as follows: (1) maintain and build co-ethnic friendships, (2) connect to the broader Karen diaspora, (3) promote and maintain ethnic solidarity, (4) and create and distribute digital creations. The digital tools allowed the brothers to take on role of a designer and a form of expression that may be unavailable in academic setting where they felt isolated and neglected. In other words, the study revealed the importance of incorporating digital literacy with refugees in order to help them resettle and use their funds of knowledge.

Those who are in exile, such as refugees, are displaced from their home, so their new locations become populated with their stories and "hybridized with the ones in new context, producing new stories, histories, places and homes" (Omerbasic, 2015, p. 473). Digital tools are

often used to share these stories. Omerbasic's (2015) study focused on literacy as a translocal practice or a space that extends beyond experiences and geographic locations. The research questions were: "How did the girls draw on their knowledges and experiences to produce translocal spaces through digital multimodal literacy practices?" and "What connections were created, gained or rebuilt through their digital production of translocality?" (p. 473). The location was at an after-school program for secondary school students and included nine teenage refugee girls from the Thailand/Burma border. The data included participant observation, in-depth multimodal interviewing, and document collection. The data was analyzed through theme analysis through the lens of multimodality and sociocultural perspectives on literacy. The researcher found that digital spaces offered validations for the refugee girls' ways of knowing (literacies) and a place for their stories to converge. The participants were able to use hybrid language, where they mixed English and their home languages and interacted with peers who shared their languages and experiences. The digital tools provided opportunities for refugees to negotiate their in-betweenness or "translocality in which the localities of the imagined Karen state, the lived experiences in refugee camps, and the experiences in the US as a resettled refugee are connected" (p. 478). Overall, the findings highlight that educators should provide more opportunities for refugee students to utilize digital tools, especially those that they use out-of-school.

Syria has been one of the largest home countries in the present refugee crisis. As a result, Kaur (2016) examined the everyday literacy practices of a Syrian refugee resettled in New Zealand. The purpose of the study was to look at how a refugee's literacy practices changed and the strategies used when challenges arose from literacies of a new language and culture. The theoretical framework used was New Literacy Studies and how "people's literacy practices and

literacy events are shaped by individual, social, and cultural meanings" (Kaur, 2016, p. 30). This ethnographic study's data sources included participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and photographs. Kaur found that a person's literacy practices can determine their access to resources. Also, the use of online literacy practices allowed the family to stay connected with others and interact in a variety of ways. The changing literacy practices, as a result of resettlement, created copious stress, an issue which needs further analysis. Therefore, the implication for this study was that refugees and their literacy practices should be valued. Also, refugees are extremely resourceful in navigating new literacies. Too often, refugees are viewed through a deficit lens, rather than having focus on their strengths and agency.

As mentioned previously, refugee students have many literacy practices. Poetry recitation is a form of literacy that may not be fully valued in U.S. schools, especially when most of the poems children study are from U.S. poets. Afghans' poetry is a literacy that should be invited in the classroom as a means for better understanding these students and creating a connection to their out-of-school literacy. For my own research, I examined the literacies my participants brought with them. I wanted to understand what these literacy practices look like, the role of these literacy practices, and how these literacy practices connect their cultures. Literacy practices are closely entangled in a web of power and marginalization. Research has shown that literacy practices of power dominate the literacy practices of the marginalized (Perry, 2008; Sarroub, 2007). I examined refugees' literacies and where they exist in this "web of power."

Transnationalism and Refugees

In addition to examining refugees' literacy practices, a lens of transnationalism should be used, a form of hybridity, in order to better understand refugees. Transnationalism is a "process by which migrants through their daily life activities create social fields that cross national

boundaries" (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton, 1994, p. 7). This process is a way in which refugees connect their home country, asylum country, and host country. Dabach & Fones (2016) expand the "funds of knowledge concept" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) to include "transnational funds of knowledge" or the skills, knowledge, and resources refugees have from their various communities. People continue ties to their countries of origin while resettling into new countries and may "participate regularly in cultural, economic, or political activities within social networks that span national borders" (Lam & Warriner, 2012, p. 192).

Refugees not only have multiple literacies, but they also utilize various texts to negotiate home and school worlds. Sarroub (2002) analyzed how Yemeni high school girls used religious and secular text and how their home and school spaces overlapped. She focused on these participants because the Muslim population, especially Yemeni, was growing and so were the tensions between the Arab and non-Arab students in this particular community. The theoretical framework used was in-betweenness, which in this study focused on how the texts the participants used are forms of discourse that arise from "different contexts, and bridge, subvert, and recreate Yemeni and American social and cultural norms" (p. 133). In addition, she used Scribner's (1984) definition of literacy as three metaphors: literacy as adaptation, as power, and as a state of grace. Each literacy practice was analyzed though the lens of this metaphor. The researcher concluded that participants used multiple literacies in order to perform identities in their contexts. Most of their literacy practices were influenced by their religion and culture, however they claimed that their culture was independent of their religion. Sarroub (2002) argued that this is not true because the religion and culture were connected in elaborate ways. In addition to texts that connected the culture was the use of music and clothing. The texts, music,

and clothing were all dependent on context, both temporal and situational. Further analysis is needed on these two contexts and how refugee students utilize in-betweenness.

People continue ties to their countries of origin while resettling into new countries and may "participate regularly in cultural, economic, or political activities within social networks that span national borders" (Lam & Warriner, 2012, p. 192). Lam and Warriner (2012) conducted a meta-analysis on research studies that were about language and literacy practices and learning, in regards to transnational contexts. Overall, the researchers found that "linguistic and textual practices provide ways for young people to navigate and integrate multiple spheres of their lives across cultural and geographical borders" (Lam & Warriner, 2012, p. 203). The process of transnationalism contributes to refugees' funds of knowledge and occurs through in-betweenness, where there is a hybridity of languages, cultures, and literacies. These findings reveal that in order, to help refugee students we need to draw from their transnational funds of knowledge and understand the literacies they use in-between their cultures.

Transnational students and families "cross real and metaphoric borders" spanning countries to interact and making meaning (Kasun, 2016, p. 129). The focus of Kasun's (2016) three-year critical ethnography was transnational Mexican-origin youth. The purpose of the study was to shed light on this misunderstood transnational population and their ways of knowing. The theoretical frame used was both border theory and Chicana feminism. The study took place in Washington D.C. and two rural communities in Mexico. The participants included four working-class Mexican families who lived in D.C. and returned to Mexico every two years. The data sources included participant observations and interviews and were analyzed and coded for emergent themes. The findings included families' ways of knowing or conocimiento and has three categories: Nepantlera knowing (in-between knowing), chained knowing (to the border and

community), and Sobrevivencia knowing (survival knowledge). These forms of knowing were not linear and were interdependent upon one another. Implications that the researchers suggested included, educators, researchers, and policy makers should be aware and value the transnational ways of knowing, so they can construct curriculum to meet these students' needs.

My study extended the research on transnationalism and refugees by focusing on the transnational literacy practices of Afghan refugee young women. I examined how the participants' literacy practices crossed to transnational spaces. In addition, I examined how they make meaning and integrate and cross "metaphoric borders" (Kasun, 2016, p. 129).

Summary

Refugees are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States and have very unique backgrounds and histories. As a result, refugee students need differentiated instruction to meet their needs and literacies. There has been some progress since McBrien's (2005) literature review because the focus on refugees is expanding. For example, there are now more studies on refugee students' first asylum country education (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In addition, there is more research that involves narratives or the stories from refugees themselves (Oikonomidoy, 2010; Prior & Niesz, 2013). My review of the literature found that there needs to be more focus on refugees' previous educational experiences because they impact the educational trajectories in the U.S. schools. Young children adapt quite quickly to early childhood classrooms, especially when there is adaptation from both families and schools (Prior & Niesz, 2013). In fact, students' reading and academic achievement greatly improves when teachers adapt the classrooms to meet these students' needs and cultures (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). There needs to be more studies on refugee students' histories and specific interventions that support these students.

The review revealed the research on refugee children's multiple literacies and identities. Many refugees take up literacies in ways that help them achieve their goals and better transition

in the United States. (Warriner, 2004). They are able use these literacies and utilize texts based on the temporal and situational contexts. In other words, they utilize in-betweenness or negotiate between cultures through the use of texts and literacies (Sarroub, 2002). Also, young children are able to broker literacy even if they are in emergent print literacy in order to help their parents understand different text genres (Perry, 2014). In summary, refugee children are very resilient and have a multitude of literacies that they can use to their advantage. Each refugee community has their own literacies that they bring with them, so there should be more research on individual refugee groups and their literacies. This research offers teachers a look into literacies they should value and use in the classroom.

In conclusion, I found that some progress has been made, but more research is needed on refugee students' education and literacies. There is still too much focus on the stories of trauma and despair and there should be more research on the refugees' funds of knowledge and resiliency (Sarr & Mosselson, 2010). Throughout the literature, refugees are sharing stories of hope for a better future and remaining positive, despite their circumstances. Refugees' stories are needed to drown out the negative stereotypes and shed light on the hope and ambitions.

Need for the Study

Overall, my review of the extant literature identified few studies in which refugee students' stories were told with their own voices. In addition, most of the studies that were refugee narratives were not from students, but rather their parents or other adults (Ghorashi, 2007; Kumsa, 2006; Ramsden & Ridge, 2013). Therefore, more studies are needed that include refugee students and narratives told through their voices.

In addition, I could not find any studies that detailed refugee students' pre-migratory experiences, transitions, and then resettlement experiences in regards to schooling. Most of the

studies focused on post-settlement educational experiences (Perry, 2014; Prior & Niesz, 2013; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Warriner, 2004; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Refugee students' pre-migratory experiences are important to understand because they deeply influence transitions and post-settlement experiences (Blanchet-Cohen, Denov, Fraser, & Bilotta, 2017). More research is warranted that bridges the gap between pre-migratory educational experiences and post-settlement educational experiences. Research is needed that addresses the role pre-migratory experiences play in classrooms in post-settlement.

Furthermore, few studies focused on transnational literacy practices and the role these play in refugees' lives (Lam & Warriner, 2012; Sarroub, 2002). Therefore, research is needed on refugee students' literacy practices and how some cross and extend past borders to create transnational literacy practices. The absence of such research reveals a gap in the current literature and the need for my study, which sought to understand Afghan refugee young women's pre-migratory experiences, transitions, and lives post-settlement in regards to schooling and transnational literacy practices. Therefore, this study has the potential to positively inform research and practical instruction on Afghan refugee students and their lives.

In the following chapter, I present the methodology that I used for this study. I begin with an overview of qualitative research and rationale for using narrative inquiry. Then I situate narrative inquiry within critical literacy. Next, I list the assumptions I hold and my role as a researcher. I then move on to explain the research design, including the participant selection, recruitment procedures, participants, study procedures, context and setting, data collection and data analysis. I conclude with the authenticity and trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Study Overview

The current refugee crisis is the most drastic in human history. Refugee students come to U.S. classrooms with diverse cultures, languages, and literacy practices. However, these backgrounds are often neglected and not valued. In addition, there is scant research on Afghan refugees. With Afghans as the second largest global refugee population, much more research must be gathered to understand their stories of home and resettlement to better educate this group of refugee students. This qualitative study utilized narrative inquiry to analyze the stories of three Afghan high school refugee young women. Their stories gave insight into their transitional experiences and their literacy practices both in their home country and the United States. The study occurred over twelve weeks and included the following data sources: interviews, artifactual-elicitation and field notes. A critical literacy lens (Vasquez, 2014) and space and place (Massey, 2005) was used to analyze the data. The following research questions lead this study:

- How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their past schooling experiences?
- How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their transition experiences from their home country to the United States?
- How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces?

In the following sections, I discuss my rationale for using narrative inquiry, narrative inquiry situated within critical literacy, my assumptions as a researcher, my positioning as a researcher, my role and entry as a researcher, the research design, the data collection methods and analysis, and the authenticity of the study.

Rationale for Using Narrative Inquiry

Narratives are one of the most effective ways to represent and interpret experiences in our life. "We understand the world narratively," argued Clandinin and Connelly (2000), so we "study the world narratively" (p. 17). For this study, I utilized narrative inquiry, which is defined as:

> …a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

As a researcher, I entered "in the midst" because the participants' narratives were still unfolding. Also, these narratives were reconstructions of their experiences on the individual level and on the social level or interaction with others. Overall, the focal point of narrative inquiry is the participants' retelling their experiences.

Narrative inquiry emerged in the social sciences with the decline of exclusively quantitative research and more researchers' emerging use of qualitative methods. Since the late 1960s, narrative ways of thinking and methodologies have made their way into every discipline and do not fit into just one research field (Kohler, Riessman, & Speedy, 2006). The narrative turn or shift to narratives was evident when Thomas Mitchell (1981) published the book *On Narrative* and stated that narratives were no longer just for those in the literary fields, but were a source for all branches of research. Polkinghorne (1988) described the importance of qualitative researchers' use of stories, because they are a useful method of portraying human experience. Two of the first researchers to use narrative inquiry in educational research were Connelly and

Clandinin (1988) who studied the stories of teachers and learners. This study included teachers' narratives as they actively made curriculum alongside with students. In addition, the researchers examined how teachers came to know and situate their knowledge in context of teacher education. For narrative inquirers in education, they aim to "bring the lived experiences of teachers and students to the forefront as a way to shape the views on education" (Kim, 2016, p. 19). In other words, narrative inquirers focus on the experiences of students and teachers as means to change the dominant stories that exist and represent the actual lived experiences in schools (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Kim 2016).

Narrative inquiry utilizes narratives as both a data source and as a way to make sense of the data (Montero & Washington, 2011). In other words, narrative inquiry uses "narrative as both phenomena under study and method of study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). The narratives are gathered from the participants and then retold by the researchers through narratives, where experience is the focal point. In narrative inquiry, the narratives are the medium for which a person can interpret his or her experiences of the world and make them meaningful (Kim, 2016). I used narrative inquiry in this study, especially drawing from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) and Kim's (2016) work. These researchers suggest that a narrative inhabits a three-dimensional space: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These spaces afford a more in-depth and complex investigation of human stories.

First, narrative inquiry allows researchers to examine experiences as *temporal*. Temporality is the notion that experiences are not only examined in present time and place, but also in the larger sphere of life. For example, researchers can examine "people's lives embedded within a larger narrative," such as institutional narratives, historical narratives, and more (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19). Temporality involves the description of experience in

relation to the past and present and a projection into the future, if it is possible (Kim, 2016). According to these researchers, individual narratives should be examined in relation to the larger social narratives that exist. For example, in the mainstream media, refugee narratives are often about hopelessness and despair dominate. Recently, *The New Yorker* published an article titled, "In Sweden, Hundreds of Refugee Children Gave Up on Life," which describes how these children were becoming immobile and in an almost coma-like state because of their situation (Brink, 2017). The narrative described how these children give up on life in the sense that they just lay in bed and do not move, eat, or respond at all. Unfortunately, these types of narratives are all too common and do not highlight refugees' agency and ambitions enough. In addition, these narratives should be compared against individual refugee narratives to understand the intricacies and uniqueness that each individual brings to their own refugee story. There is an overarching narrative about refugees and this must be disaggregated into smaller narratives to find the nuance in each story. In other words, stories that typecast refugees as hopeless are problematic, as not all refugee narratives represent despair and hopelessness (Stewart, 2015). Examination of individual narratives of refugees—especially those that focus on agency and hopefulness-- may bring forward a different truth that speaks against the pejorative dominant narratives. Also, "narrative inquiry acknowledges that an event or a person is in temporal transition" (Kim, 2016, p. 90). In other words, a person has experiences from the past that shape the present and will continue to shape experiences into the future. Therefore, narratives describe a person in connection to a past, a present, and a possible future. The participants in my study constructed narratives that described their past lives in their home country and the transition experiences to their present lives in the United States and their aspirations and hopes for the future. The participants'

narratives described how their past experiences, such as in schools in Afghanistan, influenced their experiences in the present and into the future.

Second, narrative inquiry is concerned with *sociality* or the personal and social aspects of the participant. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) position much of their work based on Dewey's (1938) notion that human experience is the focal point for narrative inquiry and "all human experience is ultimately social" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). The personal aspects of the participants include feelings, beliefs, hopes, and desires. The social component of narrative inquiry focuses on the interactions and connections between people. Sociality ensures that there is not just an emphasis on the personal or the social, but rather a balance between the two aspects. For example, Prior and Niesz's (2013) narrative inquiry on refugee children examined the personal aspects or emotions and beliefs through the analysis of the children's artwork. In addition, the researchers focused on the social aspect of the children's lives by examining their relationships with their parents and other children. Therefore, this study included sociality in a balanced manner, because there was insight into the children's personal and social experiences. In my study, interviews with participants focused on the personal aspects in their narratives as well as their social conditions. Questions concentrated on the personal aspects by including the participants' feelings, hopes, and beliefs. Questions also elicited their social aspects in which they described their interactions with family members and others.

Third, narrative inquiry acknowledges aspects of *place* and the impact on the participant. Massey (2005) connects place to sociality by stating that places are socially constructed. Certain places are more or less inviting to certain participants because it depends on who controls the power and who is at the receiving end of the power. For example, refugees often have less control over place, because they are forced to leave their home country (place) and seek asylum

elsewhere. In addition, they often do not have control over the place they will be resettled. Refugees are forcibly displaced from their homes, argues Freund (2015), and attempt to make new homes in different locations. Freund's (2015) study moved away from the dichotomy of home being in the original country and then a new home in the resettled country. Instead, this study examined how refugees made homes along the way, which showed how the refugees had transnational lives. They were incorporating important aspects from other places, such as experiences, traditions, and memories, in order to recreate a home in a new place.

In my study, I examined places such as the home country, journeys to the United States, and homes and schools in the United States through the lenses of both Connelly and Clandinin (2000) and Massey (2005). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define place as "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place" (p. 480). In regards to Massey's (2005) space and place, different places impact people differently, because of variations in cultures, attitudes, beliefs, and more. For example, the participants in my study were impacted differently in their home country and then here in the United States. Furthermore, I utilized narrative inquiry because narratives are a way to interpret and relay human experiences, which are the essence of life. Narrative inquiry employs temporality, sociality, and place, which further demonstrate how participants' lives are positioned.

Qualitative methods best suit a narrative inquiry approach to studying the stories of refugees. Narrative inquiry is necessarily located in critical methodological approaches (e.g., critical literacy), as it situates research squarely in the lives of those being studied—in this case, refugee high school young women. In referencing the connection between critical theory and narrative inquiry, Kim (2016) argues, "theory devoid of lived experience would be like an empty

tin can just making noise" (p. 41). Narrative inquiry is not "an empty tin can," but rather it is based on the participants' lives. In addition, narrative inquiry positions participants, so that they are active in the collection and interpretation of the data. The process in narrative inquiry is collaborative, where the researcher and participants are constructing the narratives together (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry draws from subjective epistemologies and aim to "locate the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011 p. 1). This means that narrative inquiry strives to examine participants and how they are situated, by focusing on their beliefs, social interactions, and experiences. Qualitative research includes "interpretive, material practices that make the world visible" (p. 1). Qualitative researchers study people and things in their natural settings, in an attempt to make sense of meanings. Much of the research on refugees uses quantitative methods, such as many of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' studies, which focus primarily on trauma, anxiety, and exile related stressors. The main type of data collection is through surveys. However, there are limitations with sole reliance on quantitative methods for refugee studies. These methods do not allow for deep understandings of cultural and political contexts (Miller & Rasco, 2004). Furthermore, narrative methods emphasize both the temporal and sequential attributes of experiences, as well as the ability to reflect on these experiences (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). This study aimed to examine refugees in a local context and compare them to societal systems, such as positioning refugees as hopeless and in despair. In other words, I critically studied the lives and experiences of these refugee young women and examined how they are situated within the larger societal system.

Narrative Inquiry within Critical Literacy

This narrative inquiry was informed by critical literacy, which is a theory and approach to literacy that allows readers "to examine how definitions of race, class, ability, and gender are culturally and socially constructed" (Flint, Holbrook, May, Albers, & Dooley, 2013, p. 399). A critical literacy approach is to critically read and to examine the world and relationships between language and power (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). With this approach, literacy is not a set of reading and writing skills, but rather literacy is a consciousness of the power relations that exist. The goal of critical literacy is to use texts in a way to analyze social systems and to transform these power relations (Luke, 2012). Not only should there be consciousness of social injustices, but there also needs to be action to transform these inequities. In this study, the texts were the participants' narratives and artifacts and they informed an understanding of the social systems and power relations that exist within their personal narratives.

In their review of the literature, Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) identified four dimensions of critical literacy: "(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues and (4) taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 382). First, disrupting the common place involves using a new lens to analyze everyday experiences. In other words, new perspectives should be taken on in order to analyze and understand experiences. Also, rather than accepting everyday experiences as a given, these should be critiqued. In this study, I strived to disrupt the common place or the dominant narratives that exist about refugees, by bringing to light the everyday experiences of Afghan refugee young women, not viewed from a deficit lens, but a lens of agency and hope. Second, interrogating multiple viewpoints is the ability to "stand in the shoes of other" (Lewison et al., 2002) and to understand experiences from our point of view and the points of view of others.

This aspect is similar to Janks' (2010) critical literacy domain of *diversity*. Multiple viewpoints and diversity are understanding texts from the viewpoint of ourselves and others, which is a resource for "changing consciousness" (Janks, 2010, p. 24). This study incorporated multiple viewpoints, because I included the narratives of three different refugees mediated by my own viewpoint. Examining issues and experiences from multiple viewpoints, allows a deeper understanding of the topic.

Third, these researchers suggest that a focus on sociopolitical issues means that readers take into consideration the relationship between language and power (Lewison et al., 2002). This dimension involves the reader "to step outside of the personal to interrogate how sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions" (Lewison, et al., 2002, p. 383). In this study, I focused on the sociopolitical systems and power relations that the participants were facing. For example, I narrated Afghan young women's literacy practices and how they were situated within dominant school literacies, such as writing a five-paragraph essay or using academic language. Schools are sociopolitical systems that wield power and often do not value the participants' literacies (Stewart, 2015). Lewison et al.'s (2002) third aspect of critical literacy, language and power relationships, should be examined in the realm of schools. Fourth, after multiple viewpoints have been considered and power relationships have been analyzed, then the reader must take action and promote social justice (Lewison et al., 2002). Janks (2010) argues that social action can change existing discourses and the power relationships. I hope that the participants' narratives brought to light some of the experiences of Afghan refugee young women and promote social action in their favor, such as advocating for refugee students.

Assumptions of the Researcher

My experiences as a volunteer with Afghan refugees, a classroom teacher, and a doctoral student inform my assumption as a researcher. In addition, I am able to proficiently speak Dari, one of the major languages spoken by Afghans. My mother is from Iran, so growing up in my home we spoke both English and Farsi (the primary language spoken in Iran). Dari is a dialect of Farsi and very similar. Therefore, I am able to speak with Afghans who speak Dari because of my language proficiencies. In addition, most of my volunteer work with refugees has been with Afghans. Although I have worked with and advocated for refugees, I still do not have an insider's view because I am not a refugee myself. However, I strived to "understand the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118) or the emic point of view. In order to understand the point of view of others, I first unveiled my own point of view or subjectivities. My subjectivities revealed the lens and beliefs I took up in my research. Therefore, I will outline three main assumptions I hold as a researcher, specifically regarding refugees.

First, I believe that individuals and refugee groups have unique experiences and transitions. Although many refugees may go through similar experiences, each refugee brings a unique story and background to the classroom. Even within a group, there are vast differences between refugees. For example, even though I focused on Afghan refugees, each participant's story is unique. There needs to be a focus on the individual experiences of refugees, which helps from "essentializing their identities" (Sarr & Mosselson, 2010, p. 553) or making general conclusions about refugees' experiences.

Next, I believe that the stories of refugees are significant to their learning in classrooms. The refugees' stories of their lives, experiences, struggles, hopes, and so much more reveal their needs and strengths as learners in a classroom. In a language arts classroom, Stewart (2015)

utilized reading and writing about refugee experiences, as a means to learn more about the life experiences of her refugee students. The purpose of learning about her students' backgrounds was to help her create more effective instructional strategies. When teachers understand their students' histories, then they can create effective instructional strategies, and also better understand how to meet their emotional needs (Stewart, 2015). Kumsa (2006) argued that refugees' stories reveal the complex nature of their experiences and their journey to belong in their resettled country. In addition, refugees' narratives can be viewed as "funds of knowledge, cultural resources to be used and developed in educational setting" (Pahl, 2004, p. 339). Gathering the Afghan refugees' stories helped me understand their complex experiences and how they are significant in the classroom.

Third, I believe refugees have literacy practices that are diverse and should be valued. This assumption is in line with the belief that they have diverse histories, because a unique history lends itself to diverse literacy practices. Warriner (2004) states that refugees have transitioned to several places and as a result have multiple literacies. However, these literacies are often not valued in the United States, especially in the context of the educational system. For example, Perry (2014) found that refugee children were engaged in language brokering literacy practices in the classroom. However, these literacy practices were not encouraged or valued. When refugee students' literacies are not valued, they become unengaged and unmotivated in the classroom (Perry, 2014). Teachers need to put forth effort to understand their students' literacies and how these can be valued and incorporated in the classroom.

Overall, my volunteer work and relationships with refugees afforded me an opportunity to better understand their perspectives. In addition, my experience as a classroom teacher and doctoral student afforded me the understanding of how important it is to learn about

marginalized groups backgrounds and individual lives and experiences. These experiences allowed me to establish entry into the field, which I discuss in the next section.

Role of the Researcher and Establishing Entry

In narrative inquiry, the role of the researcher is "in the midst" of a "set of nested stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). The researcher has his or her own stories and these interact with the stories of the participants. When researchers write, they use the term "I"; however, "I" can be the voice of the researcher, participant, woman, observer, and any other number of identities. Furthermore, "plurivocal" writing is having a multitude of "I's" that the researcher must address (Barineh, 1989). The role of the researcher is to understand the dominant "I" in the narrative and the perspective that is shared (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The process and role of the researcher, during inquiry, involves sharing narrative construction and reconstruction with the participant (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In narrative inquiry, the researcher is the "medium for storying the research journey and the understandings that emerge along the way" (Gordon, McKibbin, Vasudevan, & Vinz, 2007, p. 327). The researcher must both share and interpret the story by using descriptions and questions.

My mother is an Iranian and immigrated to the United States to attend high school. When I was growing up, she was a social worker at a non-profit that resettled refugees. She worked with Iranian and Afghan refugees and always involved our whole family in helping out these families. I would often help the children with homework or play with them, while my mother assisted their parents. I really enjoyed spending time with the refugee families and learning all about their experiences. As a result, the summer after I graduated from high school, I interned at the refugee resettlement agency where my mother worked. I spent the summer translating for Afghan and Iranian refugees. I also took them to doctors' appointments, answered their

questions, described American life and culture, and listened to their stories. After my internship, I continued to volunteer with Afghan and Iranian refugees.

I have a strong desire to be an advocate and supporter of this community. As I write this section, I have reached out to elected officials and attended protests and rallies against the refugee and immigration ban that U.S. President Trump's administration enacted. My role in conducting this narrative inquiry was to embed myself "in the midst" of high-school Afghan refugee young women's stories of transition, literacy practices, educational experiences, and resilience. I have my own narrative and perspective of which I needed to be aware, as I collaborated with my participants in the construction and reconstruction of their narratives. For example, as an individual from an Iranian background, I have often linked Iranian and Afghan cultures and experiences together because these countries are so close in proximity and languages spoken there. I felt that because I knew so much about Iranian culture and way of life that this has given me insight into Afghan way of life. However, these two countries are vastly different. Afghanistan has been involved in war for several decades. Therefore, the Afghan people have gone through much different experiences. Since I have so much knowledge about Iran this does not necessarily translate to knowing about Afghanistan or Afghan people. In addition, most of my volunteer work with Afghan refugees has been with refugees who spent time in a refugee camp and were not recipients of an SIV. Therefore, refugees in refugee camps may have had vastly different narratives than those who were given SIVs and moved directly to the United States, such as my participants. Overall, I needed to be aware of my prior experiences and narratives and the role they played in the construction of my participants' narratives.

I currently volunteer with a non-profit refugee resettlement organization, so I did not have any issues with establishing access to the participants or study sites. I already had access to

the refugee community through multiple relationships with families I have helped sponsor and resettle. Therefore, I did not anticipate any issues with gaining participant volunteers.

Research Design

The purpose of this 12-week narrative inquiry was not to verify a hypothesis about reality, but rather to portray an experience. This study portrayed the experiences of three Afghan high school refugee young women. The goal was to "help explain the big picture in such a way that the reader is always connected to the whole without getting lost in the minutiae" (Montero & Washington, 2011, p. 344). In this study, I collected a series of narratives through interviews with participants. Because these are the stories of Afghan young women, these narratives were co-constructed between the researcher and participant (Riessman, 2008); I constructed a larger narrative of their narratives. This co-construction occurred through open-ended interviews, which were then transcribed and analyzed. In addition to interviews, I collected artifactual-elicitation data, and wrote field notes over the course of the study. In the following sections, I outline the participant selection and participants, study procedures and time frame, context and setting, data collection, and data analysis.

Participant Selection

For this study, I utilized purposeful participant selection, which allowed me to select those that best help me understand the research questions. Purposeful participant selection involves selecting participants who are knowledgeable or experienced with a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). For this study, I recruited participants who had come to the United States as refugees, and specifically, the Afghan refugee experience. In addition, I used homogenous sampling which afforded me the opportunity to look at a particular subgroup in a focused and in-depth manner (Patton, 2002). Homogenous sampling, "focuses, reduces, simplifies, and facilitates group interviewing" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The sample I chose is

considered homogenous because all the participants are Afghan, they are young women, they are in high school, and they are refugees who have resettled in the United States. Further, high school is a suitable age as participants may be able to articulate and recall details that younger children may not.

Recruitment Procedures

To recruit participants, I followed these procedures. I used a snowball technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Snowballing involves finding participants based on acquaintances the researcher knows and then those acquaintances recommend other possible participants. As I volunteer in a refugee center, I contacted the director of a local refugee high-school and a volunteer coordinator for a refugee resettlement agency. I talked with both of these administrators and explained my study. Both of these individuals recommended possible participants. Once I had a list of possible participants, I went and met them in person to describe the study to these potential participants. Once I had three participants, I ensured that they fit the inclusion criteria. At the same time, I talked with their parents to secure permission to work with their child. I then asked participants to sign the minor assent form and asked parents to sign a parent permission form (see Appendix B & C).

Participants

Following Huber and Whelan's (1999) narrative research, I recruited three Afghan high-school young women for this study. As these two scholars argued, a small number allowed me to gather in-depth narratives about their lives in their home country and in the United States as well as their educational experiences and literacy practices. Using three participants is apt in that I was able to spend a substantial amount of time with each participant in order to construct a narrative and understand their temporality, sociality, and place as it impacts/ed their lives. Also, three participants was apt even if there is attrition. Huber and Whelan have argued that even one

or two participants will provide insights into experiences with in-depth data collection. Inclusion criteria included female participants who (a) were born in Afghanistan or their family is from there, (b) attended school in their home country or host country and now attend school in the United States, (c) are high school age, (d) are local to the researcher's geographic area. I decided on participants of high school age because they are may be better able to recall events and life experiences before transitioning to the United States. In Afghan culture, it is only appropriate for people of the same sex to speak with one another. Therefore, I chose to work with females. In addition, there is not as much research focused on only refugee females. I chose to work with participants in the local area, in order to conduct face-to-face and group interviews with participants. There are no other exclusionary criteria for participant selection. In the following sections, I describe the three participants who volunteered for this study, providing pertinent background about their families, homes in Afghanistan and the United States, and other background information on their lives. I assigned each participant, their schools, and family members pseudonyms to keep their anonymity. I have outlined major details of each participant in Table 1.

Table 1 *Summary of Participants*

NAME	Age and Grade	Afghanistan Home	Afghanistan School	Transition	Extracurricular Activities
Salma	17 years old 10th grade Moved to US 4 years ago	Lived in suburbs outside of Kabul with parents, younger brother and sister, and both grandmothers	Moved from school to school between both public and private schools	Very rough transition, until 9th grade biology teacher reached out and developed a relationship	4-H Club and developed a project on gardening (which she did in Afghanistan) and will get a scholarship from project
Roya	17 years old 9th grade Moved to the US 3 years ago	Lived in rural area outside of Kabul with mom, grandmother, and sister	Moved from Iran to Afghanistan and started 1st grade late Changed schools numerous times	Very rough transition and teachers were very unsupportive so moved to World Refugee School	Drama club, presenting at local colleges and events on refugees, Soccer team, and numerous other school clubs
Amina	17 years old 9th grade Moved to US 1 year ago	Lived in upper-class area in city of Kabul with 7 younger siblings and parents	Stayed in the same school her whole time in Afghanistan, went to English classes	Rough transition, but after only a semester has progressed tremendously	Aspiring Girls Leaders club where she had a mentor and went to many events

Salma

The first time I met Salma was in an after-school tutoring session at her high school. She was wearing a hijab and very soft spoken. She had resettled in the United States a little over three years ago and spoke fluent English. She asked me to come to her home to meet her parents and tell them about the study. Later that day I went to her apartment to meet her parents. She lives in a two bedroom apartment located right outside of a major Southeastern city. As I drove

through the apartment complex, I saw children and families walking and playing outside. There were families from every nationality living in her apartment complex. Salma said she only knew of one other Afghan family in the complex and mostly stayed inside to study.

Salma, a seventeen-year-old Afghan refugee, was born in Afghanistan and lived there until she was fourteen years old. She is the oldest of four: Mohammad (13), Seema (6), and Nilo (3 months). When I first met Salma, her mother was pregnant with Nilo and she delivered the baby two weeks after our second interview. Her mother stayed at home with the baby and her father worked at local community center. He primarily worked at the front desk and spoke fluent English. He learned English in Afghanistan and translated and drove for the U.S. army. He was able to apply for an SIV for his family and within a year of applying they were accepted and moved to the United States.

In Afghanistan, Salma's family lived with her aunt, both of her grandmothers, and her immediate family in a small home in the suburbs of Kabul. Their home was originally a large room, but her father converted that room into three small rooms. Salma shared her bedroom with her brother. Salma was very close to her family and had a very strong bond with both of her parents. They were very involved in her school work and daily life. Salma was a very studious tenth grade student. When I first met her, she was timid and did not speak much. However, after I had been over a couple of times she opened up more and was much more talkative.

Roya

A former doctoral student at my university is now the head of school at World Refugee School (WRS), an all-girl preparatory school for refugees with interrupted education and limited English proficiency. I reached out to her to ask if she knew of any possible participants. She immediately thought of Roya and put me in touch with her mentor. I spoke with him about the

study and he told me he would get in touch with Roya and her mother to see if they were interested. Once he told me they were interested, I went to Roya's home to meet her. Roya lives in a two bedroom apartment in the suburbs of a major Southeastern city in the United States. She lives with her mother and younger sister.

Roya's mother grew up in Iran to Afghan refugee parents and was forced into an arranged marriage at fourteen years old to an Afghan refugee, Ali. Soon after they were married, he became addicted to drugs. When she was in her early twenties she had both of her daughters and when Roya was around five years old her father was deported back to Afghanistan. Roya did not have many memories of Iran. She moved to Afghanistan at six years old because her mother could not financially afford to raise two children on her own, so she moved to be closer to her family.

Roya described moving countless times in Afghanistan. For most of her time there, she lived with her mother, grandmother, and sister. She did not live with her father and did not have any contact with him either. Her mother eventually divorced Ali and Roya did not have any relationship with him afterwards. Her mother worked for the U.S. army as a driver. As a result, she was able to apply for an SIV and Roya moved to the United States when she was about thirteen years old. At the time of our interviews she was in ninth grade and involved in numerous extracurricular activities, such as drama club and the international club. Roya is an extremely outgoing and energetic seventeen-year-old. She spoke fluent English and was extremely detailed in her answers in our interviews. She often used very descriptive and figurative language. Overall, Roya was very opinionated and enjoyed sharing about her life.

Amina

I met Amina, a seventeen-year-old Afghan refugee, through a non-profit refugee resettlement organization where I volunteered. She was involved in a young women's mentorship program at the organization and the leader there introduced me to her. Amina lived in an apartment complex that is very close to Salma's. Amina lived with both of her parents and six other siblings in a three bedroom apartment. She had a twin brother, older sister, and four younger siblings. The youngest was born a couple of weeks after our second interview. Her father worked in a carpet factory in the United States and her mother stayed at home and took care of the children. Her father spoke fluent English and was a driver for the U.S. army in Afghanistan. He brought the family to the United States with an SIV.

Out of all three participants, Amina had the most stable life in Afghanistan. She lived in the same apartment her whole time in Afghanistan. The apartment was located in the center of Kabul in an upper-class neighborhood. At the time of our interviews she had only been living in the United States for little under a year. In addition, she was not fluent in English, but was able to answer all the questions. Once in a while, she had to look up the meaning of a word in her phone or I would say the word in Dari.

During our first interview, she was very apprehensive and uneasy about answering. She kept asking me if she was saying the right things and I assured her that she was doing a great job. By the second and third interviews, she was much more comfortable and more at ease with answering the questions. Amina was very excited about her new life in the United States and the opportunities she had in school. She was a ninth grade student and in ESL classes at school. Even after the end of the study, I continued to go to her home for tutoring sessions and to help

out her family with anything they needed. She would often message me on social media to ask me the meanings of words and help with her homework.

Study Procedures and Time Frame

Data collection commenced in August of 2017, during which I collected data over twelve weeks and concluded data collection in October 2017 (see Table 2 below, adapted from Fournillier, 2012; Handwerker, 2002). The reason the interview collection occurred over twelve weeks is so I had sufficient time between each interview to transcribe data and construct subsequent research questions based on participants relay in the interviews. During that time, I collected the following data sources: interviews, artifacts, and field notes. Data analysis occurred alongside data collection. Data collection and analysis was a recursive process. After I conducted each interview, I immediately transcribed them. Polkinghorne (1995) describes how most qualitative procedures involve a recursive movement between the data and emerging classifications that help organize the data. These emerging findings from the first and second interviews helped guide the questions I asked in subsequent interviews (gathering data).

Table 2 *Timeframe for the Study*

Task	**2017**												**2018**				
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M
Prospectus, C 1-3	X	X	X	X	X												
IRB Request					X												
Defend Prospectus						X											
Recruit Participants								X									
Data Collection								X	X	X							
Member Checks										X							
Data Management								X	X	X	X	X					
Data Transcription								X	X	X							
Data Analysis								X	X	X	X						
Preliminary Report												X					
Revisions													X	X			
Dissertation Defense															X		
Revisions															X	X	
Graduate																	X

Context and Setting for the Study

The setting for this study was in the participants' homes. I met with each participant separately for their interviews. Two of the participants, Amina and Salma, lived in Brookview, a small town right outside of a major Southeastern city in the United States. Roya lived in Brookview for her first three years after moving to the United States. Brookview, about one square mile in space, roughly welcomes over 1500 refugees a year from every corner of the globe. Over the past 25 years, about 40,000 refugees have moved there. The resettled refugees in this diverse town represent over 150 different ethnic groups. As one drives down the streets in Brookview, the sidewalks are filled with people from every nationality walking to their homes, schools, and jobs. The small town is nicknamed the "Ellis Island of the South." There are stores for countless nationalities, mosques, and a community center in this tiny town. Most of the refugee resettlement agencies in this Southeastern state arrange apartment housing for their refugee clients in Brookview because it is in walking distance to the agency, other refugees, medical facilities, schools, and stores. In addition, Brookview has a very low cost of living, which is an ideal characteristic for resettlement locations, so that refugees can more easily become self-sufficient. Even though Roya moved from Brookview, she still only lived about ten minutes away.

Data Management

In order to manage the data collected, I had all audio recordings, transcripts, scanned artifacts, photographs, and documents in a secure folder designated only for my dissertation on my password protected computer. Within this folder, I appropriately labeled sub folders for each type of data and for each participant: transcripts, artifact-elicitation, and field notes. In addition, I printed copies of the transcripts and documents and kept them in a binder that will be labeled and locked in a file drawer. Furthermore, I ensured participant anonymity by using a pseudonym in

written and presented work and using a code to label files and documents, such as S2017_P1_Jul (Summer 2017_Participant 1_July Interview). I named each audio file and corresponding transcript by using a template that corresponds to each participant's assigned identification number (this ensures confidentiality and anonymity). For example, S2017_P1_May, corresponds to Summer 2017 Participant one's interview in May. I included the scanned photograph in the computer file.

Data Collection

I collected data from August 2017 to October 2017 and included the following (a) semi-structured participant interviews, (b) artifacts, and (c) researcher observation or field notes. I was not confined to these data sources and used "imagination and creativity to find as much meaningful data as possible" to accomplish the research purposes for my narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016, p. 180). What this means is that I was not limited to these data sources listed because as the study progressed I was open to other data sources providing more insight. For example, I included my conversations with the participants' family members and mentors. In the following section, I outline my rationale for collecting this data and detail the steps that I followed. In addition, prior to any data collection I obtained minor assent and parent permission (see Appendix B & C) from each participant and placed it in a secure password-protected computer folder. I then placed a hard copy in a binder that I stored in a locked file in my office.

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted three digitally recorded semi-structured interviews with each participant: August, September, and October. Atkinson (2002) recommends at least "two or three interviews with the person, each an hour to an hour and a half in duration" (p.132). Semi-structured interviews refer to an interview guide or a set of questions that are open-ended. After the

participant has responded to a question, the interviewer follows-up with probing questions to get more details and descriptions (Roulston, 2014). Interviews were conducted in English, but occasionally I spoke Dari if participants did not fully understand the interview questions.

Interviews are one of the most common data collection methods in narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). I used semi-structured interviews, a process which allowed me to develop general questions in advance that help focus the interview. However, I was not limited to these questions and this format allowed for flexibility, because I was able to ask subsequent questions depending on the interviewee's response. The questions that I had as my guide were open-ended (see Appendix A) and after each of these questions was answered, I followed up with questions that sought more description and details on significant events (Roulston, 2014). As such, the interviews with each participant differed because I asked follow-up questions based on their unique responses to initial questions. This flexibility afforded me the opportunity to understand participants' perspectives and experiences that are connected to the research question and purpose.

Since I used a critical literacy and space/place lenses, I worked collaboratively with participants, "placing control in the hands of the people who are living the research topic, rather than the researchers" (Edwards & Hollands, 2013, p. 20). These semi-structured interviews were collaborative endeavors where the participants "answer on their own terms" (Edwards & Hollands, 2013, p. 29) and I was an active listener. I did my best of only asking questions and then allowing participants to take control of the conversation and doing the majority of the speaking. I merely facilitated the conversation and provided space for them to share their narratives.

Mishler (1986) states, “No significant aspect of life has been beyond the pale inquisitive interviewers” (p. 233). This statement signifies the importance of strong interviewing skills that invite stories that answer our research questions and align with research purposes. Thus, an interview is judged by the “strength and value of the knowledge produced” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 17). I aimed to guide my participants and invite narratives that shed light on my research questions by following these steps:

1. Created a set of open-ended guide questions for the interview.
2. Arranged a time/date via phone correspondence to conduct a semi-structured interview that is convenient for the participant.
3. Called or messaged the participant the day before the interview to remind them.
4. Conducted a semi-structured interview at the participant’s home and used a hand-held audio recorder to capture the interview.
5. Transcribed the interviews the same day or very close to the interview. Named each audio file and corresponding transcript by using a template that corresponds to each participant’s assigned identification number (this ensures confidentiality and anonymity). For example, S2017_P1_May, will correspond to Summer 2017 Participant one’s interview in May.
6. Reviewed the answers to the interview and determined guide questions for subsequent interview. Repeated steps 1-5 for subsequent interviews.

Kim (2016) describes the interview process in terms of “phases.” The purpose of the phases is to start off with a strong background of the participant and then follow-up with questions to probe further into topics they addressed, which means that at least two to three interviews will be needed in order to cover both phases.

Interview 1: The first interview began with small talk and helped develop rapport (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The first interview included the "narration phase" where the participant was asked "to give a full narration of events and experiences from their own life, encouraging their narrative thinking processes" (Kim, 2016, p. 167). During this phase, my main role was an "active listener" and observer (Spence, 1982).

During the first interview, I asked some questions from the interview guide that elicited general background information on the participants' lives, schooling, families and homes. This background information helped me to get a general sense of their lives and experiences. For example, some of the questions I asked were, "Describe your life in Afghanistan. Describe your schooling in Afghanistan. Describe your transition to the United States."

Interview #2 and #3: The next phase occurred in the first interview, but mostly occurred in the second and third interview. This phase is the "conversation phase," which is "in-depth questioning or interchange when the interviewer wants some clarifications on the issues presented in the first narration" (Kim, 2016, p. 169). I reviewed experiences and events brought up in the first interview and used that to guide my open-ended questions for the second and third interview. During this phase, I asked questions that invited the participant to elaborate on specific experiences in more detail, and we collaboratively understood the stories. In other words, I asked clarification questions to better understand the experiences. The broad questions prompted participants to provide an overview on these topics, then I was able to tailor follow-up questions that allowed for more in-depth conversations about unique experiences and perspectives of each participant. For example, in my first interview with Roya when I asked, "Describe your life in Afghanistan." I found that she did not move there until she was six years old. Therefore, I asked her, "Describe your life in Iran and the transition to Afghanistan." I did

not ask the other participants this question because it did not relate to them. The first interview with each participant, helped me to tailor the subsequent interview to include questions about significant events or topics for each participant. Since I individualized each interview to each participant, I was able to capture the individual and unique narratives of each participant.

Researchers are collaborators and co-constructors of the narratives. Rather than just record the data, I interacted with the participant and created "solidarity" with them as I "both try to understand important aspects of the interviewee's life, which in turn will systematically create knowledge that illuminates human experience" (Kim, 2016, p. 169). In this study, I illuminated the human experience of Afghan refugees resettled in the United States.

Artifactual-elicitation

For this study, I drew from photo-elicitation technique to extend this method to artifacts (Ketelle, 2010). Photo-elicitation is an interview method that involves the participant making comments on photos other forms of visual representation (Ketelle, 2010). For Riessman (2008), "a photograph stabilizes a moment in time, preserving a fragment of narrative experience that otherwise would be lost" (p. 179). Harper (2002) also and eloquently captures their importance: "Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone; an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk" (p. 23). I extended the significance of photos to include artifacts, a method I call artifactual-elicitation. I asked the participants to share artifacts and I elicited narratives and talk based on that object. In artifact-elicitation, artifacts—like school assignments--are stabilized in time and space, and I elicited narratives that captured the significance of their artifacts for them, especially as they relate to my research questions.

Photos are one artifact used to mark special memories in a person's life. However, other objects (e.g., books, clothing, icons, etc.) can also be used to mark memories and construct

stories. Artifacts can act as a catalyst for triggering memories from long ago. For example, Pahl (2004) found that the use of artifacts found in the home evoked participant narratives. In Pahl's (2004) two-year ethnographic study, she visited three families' homes and recorded their stories on important artifacts in the homes, such as flags from their home countries, children's drawings and toys. The artifacts "spanned the distances travelled by the members of those households and triggered the telling and retelling of narratives" (Pahl, 2004, p. 357). The artifacts helped evoke narratives. These narratives were related to family histories and cultural identities. Furthermore, Pahl (2004) stated that "artifacts within homes carry powerful family narratives" (p. 339). These artifacts act as conduits for narratives.

After the first interview with each participant, I invited them to bring an artifact to the next interviews. I said, "Next time I come bring something that is significant to you. It can be anything that is important in your life…a photograph, a song, something from Afghanistan, or anything else that you can think of that is important to you." Only two of the three participants brought artifacts, Salma and Roya. Salma brought a photograph of her and her brother at their cousin's wedding when she visited Afghanistan after being in the United States for a year. Roya brought a yearbook from her school, several poems and posts she wrote on social media, and a play she wrote in her drama club.

This study afforded participants the opportunity to use artifacts to help them remember forgotten moments and bring them back into view. Artifacts created a space for me to bring up topics or experiences that I otherwise may not have had a chance to do with interviewing alone. For example, in my interviews with Roya we had not spoken about her poetry writing. However, when she showed me the poems she wrote on social media, this created an opportunity to explore this important literacy practice in her life and the role it played. Further, the use of artifacts

helped participants remember their past experiences in their home country, transitioning to the United States, and families. For example, Salma's photo from her trip to Afghanistan opened the conversation up about how much she realized she missed Afghanistan when she went back and what she missed the most. She began to reminisce about other memorable events in Afghanistan with her family. Artifacts can be used to understand the world of others because they are socially constructed (Harper, 1994). They capture the cultural context underlying the image. Artifacts for this study were any object in the home that was significant to participants' lives, experiences, literacies, and/or transition.

When artifacts are examined "in the context of narrative inquiry, [they] constitute something that might be called an archaeology of memory and meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). In other words, the researcher can use artifacts to excavate memories and meaning in a participant's life. Artifactual-elicitation supports narrative inquiry because images "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (Harper, 2002, p.13). In other words, "working with images can thicken interpretation" (Riessman, 2008, p. 179). Furthermore, not only can images help with interpretation and understanding experiences, but other artifacts do as well.

Artifactual-elicitation is a method that provides a space for reflexivity, because it creates a discursive space for participants and researchers to revise and reframe topics in the context of changes that have occurred in their lives (Twine, 2006). For example, the artifacts helped the participants recall important experiences and events. Roya and Salma's artifacts helped them recall memories of their past and bring up topics that were not discussed in the interviews. Rose (2001) identifies three main aspects of analyzing visual information: 1) capturing the story of

how the images were produced, 2) the image itself, and 3) how the image might be read by different audiences (Rose, 2001). Capturing the story of how and when the artifact was made enabled me to understand the participant's social identity and her culture. With Roya's photo, we began to talk about Afghan weddings and the rituals involved because it was from her cousin's wedding. The image itself focuses on the story the image evokes and the design of the image. Roya's photo helped us focus on her story about how she never danced before this wedding, but she promised her cousin she would dance and it ended up being one of her most memorable moments from her visit to Afghanistan. How the image might be read focuses on the audience (participants and researcher) perception, such as "response of the initial viewers, subsequent responses, and stories viewers may bring to an image" (Riessman, 2008, p. 144). During each interview, I asked participants to share significant artifacts. Based upon their stories, I used questions to clarify points, asked them to expand upon their initial response, and confirmed how these artifacts may illuminate aspects of their literacy practices, their transnational experiences, and their schooling experiences.

I used Rose's (2001) three aspects to guide the actual artifactual-elicitation procedures:

1. During the first interview, I invited participants to bring artifacts that contribute to their narratives for the next interview.
2. I had participants talk about the artifacts by using guiding questions that focus on Rose's (2001) three aspects. I recorded their comments using a hand-held audio recorder. I took pictures of the artifacts.
3. I encouraged participants to bring more artifacts to the next interviews or take photos before the next interview that can be used.

4. I transcribed the artifactual-elicitation the same day or very close to the interview. I repeated steps 1-4 for subsequent interviews.

Researcher Field Notes and Observation

Field notes are interpretive records of researchers' experiences in the research context and include feelings, beliefs, reactions, stories, doubts, and so on. In addition, field notes are one of the primary tools of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Field notes "are the text out of which we can tell stories of our story of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 104). At the same time that I gathered my participants' stories, I also recorded my "story of experience" in the research field. Field notes are a means to record observations and the relationship with the participants influence field notes. For example, field notes look vastly different if researchers see themselves as a "character in the event" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 106), rather than an outsider recording the event. In this study, I wanted to be a "character in the event" and have a relationship with my participant, rather than being an outsider. For example, in Pahl's (2004) study using artifacts to create narratives, she included field notes: "We looked at a picture of a number of ducks, different sizes, in blue biro on the page" (p. 354). She used the word "we" to show how she was collaborating with the participant and a "character in the event" rather than an outsider just observing. I used this same method and included myself in the event.

The method I used for field notes included "turning inward, watching outward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p, 86) or dual field notes, which includes the outward events and the inner response to those events. The purpose of this method is to keep the researcher reflective of the experience and to interpret the events. The inward notes show how the researcher is "experiencing the experience" (p.87). For example, when I went to Salma's home for dinner, I recorded the events or outward experience. Then, I wrote about how I experienced the event. I

described, “I really felt the sense of team work with the family. Each person had a role and I felt their strong bong as they worked together. I also felt how appreciative they were of my help.” Through using dual field notes, I was able to “actively record” events by including my interpretation and thoughts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5).

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis was an iterative process during which I went back and forth between both. I gathered data and begin to analyze this data and then started the process over again. A question that I kept in the forefront for this process was: How do I transform the “messy” data to meaningful stories?” (Kim, 2016, p. 185). This question helped me keep in mind that I was taking the data and weaving it into meaningful stories that portrayed the experiences of the participants. In narrative inquiry, the process of data analysis is a “meaning-finding act through which we attempt to elicit implications for a better understanding of human existence” (Kim, 2016, p. 190). In this study, I analyzed the participants’ stories, in order to better understand their experiences as refugees from Afghanistan who have resettled in the United States.

Guided by Clandinin & Connelly’s (2000) temporality, sociality, and space, I also considered how storying Afghan young women’s lives necessarily invoked critical literacy (Vasquez, 2014) and space/place (Massey, 2005), especially since stories are located in time, space, cultural assumptions, and so on, governed by larger social systems. I specifically used three analytic tools, as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (1990), *broadening, burrowing*, and *storying* and r*estorying*. The first tool, *broadening,* is the act of generalizing or broadening the context of a story to include information about the participant’s character or the social and cultural details of the time. For example, when a participant introduces a particular cultural

tradition or historical event, I included more background on this tradition. In Salma's second interview, she described, "the school [in Afghanistan] started getting crazy and then when the new president came, everything started going crazy, so my dad wanted for us to have a better education and better life, so he decided to come." I wanted the reader to understand the political context she was referring to with the presidential election, so in this part of her narrative I included the necessary background on Afghan politics. The purpose of incorporating additional background is so that the story is contextualized further or broadened and then appropriate interpretations can be made. Also, the more information included about the participant's general character or values, the more context is given to the experiences.

The second data analysis tool, *burrowing*, involves focusing on specific details in the data. In the process of burrowing, the researcher must analyze the data from the participant's point of view by looking at his or her "feelings, understandings or dilemmas" (Kim, 2016, p. 207). This process involves focusing on why certain feelings arose from specific events. For example, when the participants were discussing schooling in their home country or in the United States, I used *burrowing* by focusing on the feelings they had and what sparked these feelings. In Roya's interviews, she repeatedly brought up the incident of her teacher telling her she would "end up in a chicken factory." I could sense the strong emotions in her tone and expressions. She described how she "hated" her teacher and the school after this event. I used the tool of burrowing, by analyzing why she felt this way. I realized that she had gone through so many hardships and struggles to come to the United States and now that she was there and full of hope this teacher was not supporting her, but rather putting her down. The teacher's words were completely diminishing and sparked anger in Roya. Because I knew all that she had been through, I was able to further burrow and understand her point of view and feelings.

The final data analysis tool is *storying* and *restorying* which occurs after the data has been generalized and focused in on. The researcher connects the experiences from the past across time and place and examines how the participants told and retold certain experiences. Using this data analysis tool, I examined and compared how the participants told and retold transitioning to the United States and how their past experiences influenced this transition. Each interview with each participant focused on different aspects and important events in the participants' life. Therefore, their stories were not told in a chronological or completely organized manner. I had to take their stories and restory them so the narratives were told in a more organized manner, not necessarily chronologically but more so by topic. Through this examination, I linked together a participant's experiences and told a complete story.

I used these three analytic tools, as I gathered the data. I met with the participant and gathered interviews, artifacts, and field notes. After each meeting, I analyzed the data by *broadening*, *burrowing*, and then *storying* and *restorying* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). I took the transcribed interviews and read through them again and again. Whenever, I came across an event or experience that needed broadening, I would notate this on the transcript and then start on further research to provide more context. For example, I broadened Salma's description of the Afghan presidential election or her description of Afghan wedding customs. I included this research in the narratives. For burrowing, I would also notate this on the transcripts and I created a chart with excerpts of the transcript, my interpretation, and then the description of burrowing. In the chart, I also included aspects of narrative inquiry, such as temporality, sociality, and reality, and Massey's place. I then pieced the stories from each meeting together so that I have a complete picture. An excerpt of the chart is listed below:

Table 3 *Excerpt of Data Analysis Chart*

Text Excerpt	Interpretation	
I did not want to see his face. I still remember him, when we were in Iran. I do not have a good memory from him, so I was like, 'I'm not going to meet him at all.' I did not see him that day, I hid. They couldn't find me. I was hiding in the bathroom. I was so mad because they wanted me to go and meet him, but I didn't want to. Until he went out of the house, I was in the bathroom.	One of her last memories of her father. This memory just like the rest is negative. She signifies the desire to flee from him and avoid him at all costs by including descriptions of hiding in the bathroom.	Sociality—Avoiding a relationship or any contact with her father. She was mad at her family for not siding with her and looking for her. Temporality—this event of her father looking for her in Afghanistan, triggers her time with him in Iran and how negative it was. Burrowing—I need to focus on her feelings of anger. She was so mad she did not even want to have him in her presence.

To restory someone's life involves listening to multiple perspectives (participants) and consider how these stories inform my own interpretation or perspective (Vasquez, 2007). For each participant, I read through the interviews several times and identified major events or experiences in their life. For example, some of these included "home in Afghanistan," "school in Afghanistan," "family," "transition to the United States," "school in the United States," and so on. I then created a color coded system for each major event or topic and used this to highlight the narrative. I used light blue for "home in Afghanistan" and then went through each interview and highlighted all the parts that corresponded to this topic. Thus, once the interviews were color-coded, I was much more easily able to restory or piece together all of these individual stories to create an organized story of the participant's life. As seen in Table 4, I created a chart and organized all similarly color coded items for each participant together, so that I could then restory them together in that part of the narrative.

Table 4 *Excerpt of Color Coding Chart*

Code	Color Code and Participant	Excerpts
Life in Afghanistan	Light Blue--Amina	I lived in a high-rise building on the sixth floor in Kabul. We had three rooms and there were eight of us living there, my parents and five brother and sisters. Life in Afghanistan is very dangerous. There are always explosions by the Taliban. We don't feel secure. It was so dangerous to live there. My dad worked for the military for twelve years. He was translating and driving for the military.
Transition to the United States	Light Green--Roya	I didn't get to say the last goodbye to her. It was sad because we were always together, laughing and having fun. I was happy because I was imagining what America would be like. I would dream, I was in heaven. I did not know anything about America or see a picture of America, but I would imagine what it would be like. All of you will end up in the chicken factory

I have outlined below the iterative process of data analysis:

- Read the transcripts to get an overview.
- Read the transcript again and notated throughout areas that needed broadening or burrowing. Included these excerpts in the chart.
- Researched necessary background for broadening to include in narrative.
- Repeated steps 1-3 until all transcripts had been thoroughly broadening and burrowed.
- Based on readings of transcript, developed headings for topics or events to organize narrative. Then created a color-coded system.
- Read through transcripts and applied color-coding according to the topic or event.
- Pieced together same colored sections to re-story the narrative.
- Took each participant's completed story and cross-analyzed with one another to find common themes to make generalizations in relation to the research questions.
- Compared the interpretations against the data to ensure that the data supported the findings.

Further, looking at data with these three tools, burrowing, broadening, and storying and restorying allowed me to analyze social practices in regards to social relationships. I broadened what participants said, and through burrowing, contextualized it within the larger social systems at play. This analytic approach enabled me to dive into issues, such as status, solidarity, distribution of social goods, and power, and understand the space in which interactions happen in participants lives (Massey, 2005). These tools also enabled me to get at what Comber (2001) describes as the connection between language use and power. Language positions individuals in terms of power (Janks, 2010). If individuals have access to dominant languages and literacy, then they will in turn have more access to power. This orientation will prompt me to examine

relationships of language and power and "Who benefits? and Who is disadvantaged?" (Janks, 2010, p. 13).

The narratives that participants told and the storying and restorying that I did in this study more deeply informed readers about aspects that affect the lives of Afghan refugees. When examining their experiences and interpreting the texts, I examined who is marginalized and privileged. For example, when examining their experiences in schools in the United States, I was interested in understanding if their literacies are valued and if their voices are heard. Also, stories about refugees bombard us in the media, but I wanted to examine if these are the realities of refugees or if the actual reality is being ignored. Finally, when interpreting these texts, I needed to be mindful of the positions from which I am reading them. My experiences and beliefs influenced the way that I interpret texts.

Authenticity and Trustworthiness

Every research study needs to ensure quality and one of the main signifiers of the quality is the level of trustworthiness. Traditionally, narrative research includes the perspective and lens of the researcher and researched. However, "by not seriously addressing the issue of trustworthiness of its analysis and findings, it does not seem to be fully addressing the perspectives of its utility and audience" (Loh, 2013, p. 11). In other words, if a study does not address trustworthiness, then it can be impossible to determine the usefulness of the study. Trustworthiness is directly related to the authenticity of a study and the term "trustworthiness" was used by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as an alternative to the positivistic terms of validity, reliability, and generalizability. They set up trustworthiness criteria and techniques for establishing them.

First, I met with the participants after the interviews to confirm, extend, and clarify any meanings that I have interpreted throughout the study. Some may call this member checking

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which involves taking findings and interpretations to the participants in order for them to provide more context and alternative interpretations. However, I met with the participants more so that they could respond to the interpretations that I have made. Throughout the study, I would often ask the participants questions about my interpretations or the transcripts to ensure that I was on the right track. For example, as I was reading through the transcripts and making interpretations, I would often reach out to participants through messaging or in person to ask them to clarify or confirm my interpretations. After an interview with Amina, as I was reading over the transcript, I noticed she talked about English classes in Afghanistan, but I realized that I did not have any other information on this in the other interviews and I needed more background. Therefore, I reached out to her on messenger and asked her to extend and clarify on the English classes. Her added information then helped me make more accurate interpretations on subsequent transcripts. The participants are the ones actually involved in the experience first-hand, so they have "detailed information about the context in which the experiences occurred, their personal reasons for the occurrence, and their responses to it" (Loh, 2013, p. 6). This provided an opportunity for the participants to provide their views on the findings and help establish trustworthiness. In addition, I used peer reviews with my peers and committee members to help validate my findings.

Next, to ensure authenticity, I used reflexivity in this study. Reflexivity involves reflecting on the objective observation of the research study and then on the observation itself. This includes not only reporting the steps taken in the research process, but also the researcher's role in the study. As I was interviewing participants, I constantly reflected on my role and biases. I made sure that I was a facilitator and that I was letting the participants lead the interviews. In addition, I realized that I wanted to focus on refugees' agency and not take a deficit approach.

However, I wanted to make sure this mind-set did not make me overlook any struggles or negative thoughts or experiences the participants had. I was constantly asking myself, “What is my role in the data collection process? Whose voice is dominant in these narratives? Does my interpretation and observation reflect the participants’ lives?” During and after interviews, I would write down my observations of the process and then reflect on these in order to answer these questions. The process is based on “critical reflection on the research process including what sorts of facts might influence the research planning and findings, and what kind of role the researcher himself or herself plays in the research process” (Kim, 2016, p. 105). Reflexivity requires the researcher to pay attention to any ethical issues that may arise and respecting the dignity and integrity of the participants. This process involves the researcher being completely transparent and interrogating all the actions and steps taken in the study.

Finally, I ensured authenticity through prolonged engagement in the study and persistent observation throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The prolonged period of time included twelve weeks of data collection and over a year of time for the whole prospectus and dissertation process. Throughout this time, I recorded my observations and interpretations of the data.

Write up of the Study

Since narrative inquiry can be challenging, researchers need to include subjectivities and understand the presentation or write up of the inquiry or the. With subjectivity, the researcher should be mindful of their role and jotting down their position. The subjectivity is also referred to as the “voice” and this can become quite a balancing act because the researcher is involved in representing the participant’s voice, being mindful of the audience, and including his/her own voice without abusing subjectivity. Throughout the process of piecing together the narratives, I often stopped and reflected and made sure I was restorying the narrative as accurately as

possible, without my voice or position taking over. My role was to piece together all the stories the participants told me and create a complete story, while representing the participants' voice. The second challenge is the presentation of a narrative inquiry, because it does not have a traditional "findings" section. Instead, the findings are throughout the interpreted narratives. Narrative inquiry positions me as a restoryteller or someone who tells another's story. Through the use of data analytic tools, I was able to broaden and burrow to ensure the lives of the participants are as accurately portrayed as possible. Overall, I ensured that when writing up the study I was staying true to the participants' voice and including the findings throughout the narratives.

Summary

For this study, I used a narrative inquiry grounded in critical literacy. Participants for the study will included three high school Afghan refugee young women. The time frame for the data collection was twelve weeks and included: interviews, photo-elicitation, artifacts, and field notes. Data analysis followed Vasquez's (2014) critical literacy. The findings were authenticated through the use of participants responding, reflexivity, and prolonged engagement and observation of the study. In addition, I included my subjectivities and stayed true to the participant's voice when writing up the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

"I am from Afghanistan and I have Afghan blood in me. Sometimes when I start forgetting about my country, I think back to my memories and what I've been through. Those things keep me alive. Those memories help me" (Roya, last interview, October 28, 2017).

Overview

During my English tutoring session with Amina and her two other siblings, we both spoke about our week. They told me their struggles in school and I shared about teaching in my classroom. Just yesterday, I had a wonderful Afghan meal with Salma's family. They taught my husband and I how to make traditional food. The week before, I went over to Roya's home for a dinner her mother was having for about twenty people. I was able to meet her previous teachers, her friends, and neighbors. Amina, Roya, and Salma were participants in my study and they shared their amazing narratives with me. The work we did together was a relational narrative inquiry, where the storyteller (participant) and the storylistener (researcher) formed a relationship that promotes growth and learning for both parties (Kim, 2016). We were creating stories together. My participants' stories and my story merged together to create "collaborative stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 12).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the narratives of Afghan refugee young women and their transitions both in and out of school. Specifically, I wanted to understand their experiences and literacy practices in their home country and the United States. The three participants in this study, Salma, Roya, and Amina, were Afghan refugees who had resettled in the United States. They were all current high school students. Each volunteer agreed to participated in three open-ended interviews from August 2017 to October 2017 (for a total of

nine), during which I gathered the data for this inquiry. In this chapter, I present findings for this study related to each of the following three research questions: (1) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their past schooling experiences? (2) How do Afghan refugee young women describe their transition experiences to the United States? (3) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces? Based on the data gathered from participant interview transcripts and field notes, the following themes emerged from this study:

1. Support systems were a vital part of life in the home country, transitions, and resettlement in the US.
2. Self-Expression and connection to home country assist in transitioning, building confidence, and academic success.
3. Future goals and aspirations reveal a positive outlook.
4. Place is influential on literacy practices and outlook.

I organized the chapter by starting with each participants' narratives. Within each narrative, there were different subsections based on the topic of the participant's life. For example, all the participants had subsections on schools in Afghanistan, schools in the United States, transition to the United States, and future aspirations. Overall, each narrative provides a glimpse into each participant's life in Afghanistan, transition to the United States, and then ends with their future aspirations. After the narratives, the chapter moves to the four themes that emerged from the cross-analysis of the narratives. Even though I separated the findings into four different themes these themes often overlapped with one another.

I have done my best to ensure that I am representing the participants. These are their stories, words, ideas, and lives that I based my analysis and where the themes emerged. As

previously mentioned, these are collaborative stories between my participants and myself. Within their narratives, I will share some of my experiences.

Salma's Story

"I had a dream about this, that I'm a doctor and I went to Afghanistan and I helped a bunch of people" (Salma, Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017).

The first time I met Salma was at a very busy after-school tutoring session at her high school. The noisy room was teeming with students of all nationalities and ages. I introduced myself to Salma and briefly explained my dissertation topic. Salma, a seventeen-year-old young woman who was the first born of four in her family, was born in Kabul and moved to the United States three years ago. She asked me to come to her home later that day to meet her parents and talk to them. Later, when I arrived at her home, I immediately felt the close connection Salma had to both of her parents.

Family and Home

Her parents, both in their mid-thirties, were very welcoming and eager to talk about their lives. I also met her younger siblings, Mohammad (13) and Seema (6). She had a very tight-knit family and relayed this numerous times throughout our interviews together. She told me, "My family always supports me. They're always trying for us to have the best grades. They're never like how some parents don't care" (Last interview, October, 14, 2017). Maybe one of the reasons for the closeness of her family was because of their close living quarters in Afghanistan.

In her home in Kabul, she lived with her aunt, both of her grandmothers, her parents, and her younger brother and sister. Their home consisted of one large room. However, Salma's father split that room up into three very small rooms. Salma shared her bedroom with her brother and it was only big enough for their beds, where they could only "stand there and get into [their] bed,

that's all." In the United States, she lives in a two bedroom apartment, with a living room, dining room, kitchen, and two bathrooms. She lives with her parents, younger brother, and two sisters.

Furthermore, when I asked Salma what a typical day in Afghanistan was like, her response entailed a day filled with family time. She said,

> I would wake up at 11, but my dad would get to work at 5, and then my family would eat breakfast, and then me and my brother would go to school with our friends. When we came back from school, then my brother would play in the yard, not really me. When my dad came home, we would eat dinner and then watch some shows together, and then we went back to sleep. (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017)

Before I asked any questions in our second interview, Salma said she would like to start this interview with something that was important to her, her home country Afghanistan. She described how Afghanistan was so significant to her because her family is there and she said, "I had a lot of fun there, all my family's there, and every weekend we used to go somewhere" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). She was so happy to have her immediate family in the US, but I could sense the longing she had for her extended family.

During our three interviews together, Salma's mother, Laya, sat next to us and listened. Every once in a while, she would chime in when Salma forgot something and needed help remembering. Even though Laya spoke little English, she was able to understand the gist of our interviews and what we were talking about. I told Laya that I was so impressed with her English skills. Laya said that when she was young she took English classes and even completed the highest level possible, but now she has forgotten so much. She is very caring and I could tell how much she invested in her children's education and well-being. For example, Laya tried her best to help with Seema's homework and cooked dinner for the family each night. Even though my

interviews were with Salma, I got to know her mother and whole family through the data collection process because they were so close and helpful.

During one of our conversations, Laya explained how lately it was so hard to get to her doctor's appointments on time because it was always when her husband was at work and she needed him to drive her. When I asked why she had so many doctor's appointments, she laughed and pointed at her stomach and said she was eight months pregnant. We both laughed that I did not realize she was pregnant and so far along. As a result, my third interview with Salma was postponed because Laya went into labor early (she had the baby a week after our second interview). Salma stayed with her mother in the hospital overnight and was in the delivery room when her baby sister was born. When Salma's mother came home, she began to feel ill and they rushed her back to the hospital. They found that she had high blood pressure and the doctors kept her and the baby a few days. Salma again stayed with her mother in the hospital and missed several days of school. Salma relied on her mother for so much, but the more time I spent with them I realized that her mother relied on Salma as well. For example, Salma stayed with her mother in the hospital, she would help her mother take care of the baby, and every time I came she was in the kitchen helping her mother prepare food. In addition, Salma would help her siblings with their homework or help watch after them. They had a close bond and Salma did so much to help out her parents and siblings. Salma said her parents support her so much and she wants "to work for them, they do everything. [She] needs to make them proud" (Last interview, October 14, 2017).

After our last interview, Salma invited me over to her house for lunch. She told me to come early to learn how to make mantu. They decided to make mantu because in our first interview I told Salma how it was my favorite Afghan dish and I wanted to learn how to make it

one day. Mantu is simply Afghan meat dumplings. I brought my husband and when we arrived, Salma and her parents had set up a table cloth on the floor and were preparing the mantu. The process of making mantu involves making dough and then putting the dough in a pasta machine that flattens the dough, which is then cut into squares. Then, the square dough pieces are filled with a meat and onion mixture, which were then closed up in an intricate pattern. Salma's mother was making the dough, Salma was using the pasta machine, and her father was filling and closing up the dumplings. They had a very efficient assembly-line for their mantu-making. Meanwhile, my husband and I took turns holding the newborn baby and drinking Afghan tea. During this process, Salma's father was explaining how to make mantu and proceeded to tell us about his job and current events in Afghanistan. Then, once the meal was ready we all sat on the floor in the traditional Afghan way and ate together. The family making mantu was only one instance of how the family worked together. For example, one of the times I came to visit the newborn baby was crying continuously, so each person in the family took turns to soothe the baby. When it was Salma's brother's turn to soothe the baby, he was successful and everyone stated how he was great at calming the baby when she cried. It was not just one person's responsibility to calm and soothe the baby, but they all took responsibility and worked together. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know Salma's family and witnessing the closeness and connection they all had with one another. This time spent in her home enabled me to better grasp of Salma's sense of place and space in Afghanistan from her schooling to her father's work for the U.S. government.

Schools in Afghanistan

Time seemed to stand still as Salma waited for her teacher to show up in her school in Kabul. It was the start of a new school year and Salma was wary that this school year would be

any different from previous years. Salma spent the first fifteen years of her life in Afghanistan, until her family moved to the United States. In one of our first interviews together, Salma described the danger, instability and disorganization in schools in Kabul.

When she walked to school, Salma recollected that she had to walk a treacherous path to get to school. Salma expressed this fear, "It is fighting there, and then when we used to go to school, and it was kind of scary, like 'what's going to happen?" She further explained,

> The way we used to walk we had to pass by a famous person who worked for the public and there was lots of security, but if you choose to go the long way, it takes forever to get there. So it's kind of scary. (First interview, August 26, 2017)

Sadly, this fear would not subside once she arrived at school because there were several instances of tragic and terrifying events. Specifically, one time when Salma was in seventh grade she remembered, "This girl cut her wrists because her parents were forcing her to do something. I remember in the back of the school, there was blood everywhere" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017).

Salma also talked about teachers she encountered in school, and how unstable this made her schooling. This caused her and her brother to move from school to school.

> The teachers weren't in the school. We had to do nothing in there and sat there all day long. And that's why, in third grade, my teacher wasn't there the whole year, a different teacher came, and then my grades started dropping off, so I didn't like it there. So we moved to the private school because of my brother, and then after that school dropped, I didn't like any other private school there. We moved to another one. (First interview, August 26, 2017)

Salma changed schools many times in Afghanistan. She moved back and forth between private and public schools. For example, when Salma was in fourth grade she was at a private school and explained,

> The school got kind of crazy, and then my brother started school and my aunt was the principal of one of the private schools, so he [brother] started school there, so my dad wanted us to be in the same school, so I moved with him. (First interview, August 26, 2017)

As a result, Salma really enjoyed the school where her aunt was principal and was doing well in her classes. However, the school, "had no budget and no money, so it started to fall apart" (First interview, August 26, 2017). Salma's father moved both children back to public school.

When Salma recalled different subjects in schools in Afghanistan, she particularly discussed math and her math teachers. As she retold this story, she remembered that the bench on which she sat was meant only for two students, but there was a lack of space, so four students had to be crammed onto the bench. Math for her was a challenge for different reasons. Her brows furrowed in confusion as she began to talk about how she would just stare at the math problems. She had the answers, but did not understand the steps to take to get from the problem to the answer; her teacher was less than helpful to her and her classmates. Salma said,

> In seventh grade, I had this math teacher who never taught us anything. She would basically sit down and there was a student in first position. The teacher would tell her 'get up and teach our class.' When she was teaching, she would just say 'x equals ten,' and we were like 'where did you get that from?' She was like, 'that's the answer.' (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017)

Salma recalled that she looked over to her classmates who were sitting on her bench to see if they understood the math, but they only offered blank stares. When students asked this teacher to explain something in class, the teacher responded, “I don’t get paid a lot of money, so I don’t put pressure on myself” (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). In other words, the teacher felt that she was not being compensated enough to provide detailed lessons, but rather only needed to give the answers to the textbook questions. Salma remembered that she was increasingly upset that the teacher could not offer any further assistance. This confusion and frustration about learning, Salma described, was a daily struggle in school in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Salma’s seventh grade math teacher was one of many teachers that Salma had that did not provide adequate classroom instruction. All teachers, not only the math teacher, would only go over the answers in class, but would not offer any further explanation.

Unfortunately, according to Salma, she encountered resistant teachers in Afghanistan because they felt they were underpaid as well as classrooms that did not meet the needs of students. Other than the cramped desk-bench conditions, Salma recollected that the classrooms did not have air conditioning or heat, so “if it’s hot you have deal with it, or if it’s cold you have to deal with it” (First interview, August 26, 2017). In addition, Salma talked about how students were responsible to secure their own textbooks. They would often get textbooks that were falling apart from other students. Drawing upon her memory, Salma stated that the students would stay in the tiny, barren classrooms the whole school day, while the different subject area teachers rotated throughout the school. Students often took fourteen different classes across two weeks. They would take seven classes a day and then the next day they would take the other seven classes.

Unfortunately, Salma did not have very fond memories of schools in Afghanistan. Not only did she face instability in schools, she encountered danger and disinterest on the part of her teachers, many of who did not seem to care whether she learned or not. A major source of comfort and peace to the chaos Salma faced in school was her family. Her father's job in Afghanistan was an entrée into her future move to the US.

Salma's Father and SIV

When in Kabul, Salma was talking with her classmate and began to tense up when her classmate asked where Salma's father worked. She quickly responded that he was a taxi driver and changed the subject. As the conversation moved on to other things, such as homework, Salma breathed a sigh of relief. Yes, it was true Salma's father drove people around, but he was no taxi driver. He had been a driver for the U.S. government in Afghanistan for twelve years. The government assigned him to drive military personnel to certain locations. However, Salma explained,

> Not everybody knew about it, because if someone knows that your dad works for the U.S., it's kind of dangerous for you, so my dad always used to tell us, 'tell them that I'm a taxi driver, don't ever tell anybody'. (Last interview, October 14, 2017)

Salma's family was worried that if the Taliban or anyone who was anti-U.S. found out that Salma's father worked for the U.S. government, then they may harm him and his family.

Even though Salma's father was fearful of others finding out about his job, there were many benefits. For example, because of his interactions with people from the United States, he was able to speak fluent English and the job paid him much more than any other job he would be able to get in Afghanistan. Salma stated, "My father working for the U.S. was really good because some people don't even have food to eat or money, so I think it was good" (Last

interview, October 14, 2017). Therefore, he was able to provide much for his family and ultimately he was able to apply for a Special Interest Visa (SIV) for his family to move the United States.

As mentioned in chapter one, an SIV is only available to those who were employed by or on behalf of the U.S. government in Afghanistan or Iraq. Eligible applicants must have been employed a minimum of two years and have experienced serious threats as a consequence of employment. For example, if members of the Taliban or others who are anti-U.S. find out that someone is working for the U.S. government then they may cause harm to that individual and/or their family. Since eligible SIV applicants face serious threats, these applications are processed much more quickly than routes other refugees take. Salma's family was accepted to immigrate to the United States within a year of applying.

Arrival in United States and School

Once life in Afghanistan for Salma's family began to become too unstable, they were lucky and were accepted to immigrate to the United States. Salma described how "the school [in Afghanistan] started getting crazy and then when the new president came, everything started going crazy, so my dad wanted for us to have a better education and better life, so he decided to come" (Mid-point, September 16, 2017). I asked Salma what she meant that the school was "getting crazy.' She answered,

> The teachers were never at school and we had nothing to do in there, but sit there all day long. In third grade, my teacher wasn't there the whole year and a different teacher came, then my grades started dropping off. (Mid-point, September 16, 2017)

The presidential election Salma referred to was in 2014 between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah. Initial results from the election showed that Ghani received the majority of

the vote. However, Abdullah and his supporters brought forth allegations of electoral fraud and protested the results. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry flew to Afghanistan to help broker a deal that involved an extensive vote audit, which was supervised by the United Nations and funded by the U.S. government. Finally, Ghani was announced the winner and he agreed to a power sharing deal with Abdullah (J.K., 2014). Ghani was inaugurated in September, 2014 and it was the first peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan since 1901. Ghani inherited a very unsteady Afghanistan because he took office during the withdrawal of the majority of foreign troops. Afghanistan's economy began to decline and the unemployment rate reached forty percent. The Afghan army was left with the role of fighting the Taliban, a seemingly impossible task (Packer, 2016). A sense of hopelessness returned to Afghanistan and many began to leave, such as Salma's family.

Salma was very excited and hopeful about moving to the United States, but she was also apprehensive. She described how she felt: "I was kind of freaking out, coming to a different country, leaving everything behind" (First interview, August 26, 2017). When her family first arrived in the United States, their case manager from the non-profit refugee resettlement agency picked them up from the airport and took them to their apartment. The apartment was sparsely furnished, but seemed massive compared to her home in Afghanistan. Salma talked about her case manager,

> He showed us everything and every time we had an appointment in the beginning he would take us. Or if we needed to buy something for the house, like grocery shopping, he'd take my mom and dad. (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017)

Salma thought that she would have some time to acclimate to the United States. However, when she talked about school, she said that when she first arrived to the United States,

"I didn't think I would go to school very soon because we didn't speak English or anything. I thought we would have a class to learn English, then go to school" (First interview, August 26, 2017). However, she did go to school almost immediately. Her school required that she take an English test to gauge which grade in which she was placed. Based on the results of this test, Salma attended eighth grade at her local middle school and was in "three English as a Second Language (ESL) classes: Social Studies, Language Arts, and Reading." However, her brother did not know as much English and had to attend the International School. This school had an intensive English program for newcomers, or international children who immigrate to the United States, in grades three through twelve. Newcomers usually attend one semester and then transition into to their local school. Even though Salma did not have to attend the International School, she still struggled with English and often "did not understand anything the teachers were saying" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). She described the first year in school in the United States as hard with lots of miscommunication in class:

> She [English teacher] didn't know I really don't speak good English, so she didn't really help me out. She thought I would know everything, so kind of crazy. I never did her homework because I didn't understand anything. And then my science teacher, I didn't really like him because he would take off for every little mistake I would make. If I even missed one word, he would take ten points off. He would basically tell me 'Do this. Do that' and I am thinking I don't understand anything. (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017)

However, in ninth grade, only one year after moving to the United States, Salma took the ESL test and was able to successfully exit the program. She felt that her ESL teachers and high school content area teachers really supported her and worked hard to help her in class.

Looking back, Salma detailed how some of her favorite times in high school were eating lunch with Ms. Taylor, her ninth grade Biology teacher. Ms. Taylor was one of Salma's favorite teachers in school and she would often invite Salma to come eat lunch with her. Ms. Taylor would ask questions about "where are you from, how long have you been here, what kind of food do you eat, and things like that" (First interview, August 26, 2017). Salma explained, "At the beginning of the year I didn't like her because she was so hard" (First interview, August 26, 2017). Salma thought Ms. Taylor expected too much. However, as the year went on she realized she was learning so much and passing all the class assignments with A's. She detailed the year:

> The other teachers' classes were only passing the [state standardized] test by twenty or thirty percent, but eighty-four percent of her [Ms. Taylor's] class passed. She was a hard teacher, but so helpful. (First interview, August 26, 2017)

Salma credited the high percentage of students passing with Ms. Taylor's impeccable teaching abilities. She deeply cared about the students and would provide multiple opportunities to practice concepts and ask questions. Salma described that Ms. Taylor told the class "I want you all to pass the test" (Last interview, October 14, 2017). Ms. Taylor would provide the students with practice tests and help them with test taking strategies. Salma recalled that she would often stay up late into the night studying; she ultimately received an A. At the end of the school year, Ms. Taylor threw a party for the class. Salma referred to Ms. Taylor multiple times through our interviews and described her current teachers as helpful and pushing her to do her best. Salma spoke about schools in the United States with enthusiasm and how she was so motivated to learn and do her best. Salma, when talking about her high school in the United States, said, "All my teachers were great teachers and they help you a lot" (Last interview, October 14, 2017).

Overall, Salma's description of the differences in school and life in the United States and Afghanistan seemed vast. Even though Salma described the United States in a much more positive light, she still missed Afghanistan, especially her family there. Salma stated several times, "Afghanistan is very important to me because all my family is there. I have missed a lot of occasions with my family there" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). However, after only being in the United States for a year and a half Salma along with her mother and siblings were able to return to Afghanistan for a visit. Her father could not take off work, so he stayed behind. She detailed the trip:

> My mom, brother, and my sister. My dad wasn't there. We never traveled by ourselves, so it was kind of hard. And then I had lots of fun seeing my cousins again, and then during the wedding we had lots of fun, so it was kind of memorable to me. (Last interview, October 14, 2017)

The main purpose of the visit was for them to attend Salma's cousin's wedding.

During our last interview, I asked Salma to bring an artifact that had significance in her life. She brought a picture of herself and her brother at her cousin's wedding. In the picture, she had long flowing hair and was wearing a beautiful white dress with red trim. I told her that her dress was beautiful. She said, "We had a special dance, so all girl cousins, we were all wearing this. And the boys wore suit[s]" (Last interview, October 14, 2017). Salma described,

> It was memorable to me because it was my first time dancing. I really wanted to be in wedding party, so my cousin was like 'you have to dance in my wedding.' So we practiced so much. It was lots of fun. (Last interview, October 14, 2017)

The joy in Salma's voice made me realize how happy she was to reunite with all her family in Afghanistan and how the wedding was one of the greatest times in her life. In this interview,

Salma stated that she wanted to go back to Afghanistan again, but only for a visit and only after she finished high school.

Future

In the last interview, Salma said she identified as a refugee. She said it meant a "person from a different country who had a different life there with difficulties, but came to the US to have a better life" (October 14, 2017). Salma went through many difficulties in Afghanistan, especially with school, and her transition to the United States was hard at first, but she is doing a phenomenal job in all of her classes and adjusting to life. The support of her family and her determination are what keep her going and are why she has such a positive outlook for the future.

The first time I met Salma, she talked about how she wanted to take the American College Testing (ACT), a standardized test used for college admissions. She had already been thinking about colleges and had toured a local college. Salma was a very dedicated student and consciously made decisions in school based on her hopes for the future. When I asked her about future plans, Salma said, "I had a dream about this, that I'm a doctor and I went to Afghanistan and I helped a bunch of people" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). In this interview, Salma indicated that she wanted to study biomedical engineering because she loved all her science classes in school. Last time I visited Salma, I brought her an ACT study book and we looked over it together. I helped her sign up for the online quizzes and tutorials. She seemed very excited and eager to begin studying for the test and talked about how she was looking into scholarships for college.

Roya's Story

"I felt this amazing breeze that came through me and I felt so comfortable" (First interview, September 23, 2017).

Roya was only six years old when she made the daunting move from Iran to Afghanistan with her mom and four year old sister. Roya's mom, Parisa, was born to Afghan parents in Iran. They moved to Iran in hopes of a better life. Parisa's parents arranged a marriage for her with an Afghan man, Ali, living in Iran. Parisa and Ali married when she was only fourteen years old and soon after he began to get involved in drugs. Roya recalled,

> My mom, she felt alone because my dad wouldn't help. And then she was sad that she can't find a job and she was missing her family too. We moved from Iran, but it was hard. We had to sell all of our stuff to get money to go to Afghanistan. It was hard for three women without a man. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

Early Life and Move to Afghanistan

When I asked Roya, about her life in Afghanistan, she said, "I'm trying to remember when I was 6, and that was a long time ago" (First interview, September 23, 2017). Roya had very few memories of Iran, but when I went to her home for the first time I spent most of it talking to her mom. Parisa, tearfully described her life in Iran and her marriage to Ali. She said even though she and her daughters were not born in Afghanistan, they were not considered Iranian and life was extremely hard for them in Iran. Her husband was spending all of his money on drugs, so she had to find a job, a task extremely hard for Afghan refugees in Iran. She finally found a job working as a migrant farmer. Parisa described how labor intensive the work was and that she had no one to watch her two daughters. The Iranian government found out that Ali was undocumented; Roya described what happened,

> He was sent to Afghanistan and we did not have any money. My mom was alone and could not handle two kids by herself. She called my grandma and asked, 'What should I do?' My grandma said, 'Come to Afghanistan. We will help you at least.' (First interview, September 23, 2017)

Then, Roya recollected her move from Iran to Afghanistan,

> All I remember moving from Iran to Afghanistan is that it was hard because we did not have money, so we had to take a bus. And my mom could only afford two seats, even though there were three of us. She and my sister were on the seat and I slept on the floor of the bus. I was rolling back and forth. And then my sister left all the food in the bus, so we were very hungry. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

Roya was looking forward to being reunited with her grandparents in Afghanistan, especially her grandfather. He moved back to Afghanistan two years prior, but he passed away only a couple months later. No one in the family told Roya because they knew how heartbroken she would be. Instead, they told her he was living in another city or that he was away. Roya said, "We had a lot of fun memories with him. We were like best friends" (First interview, September 23, 2017). He moved to Afghanistan because he "wanted to be buried in his own land, Afghanistan" (First interview, September 23, 2017).

Roya finally found out the truth of her grandfather's passing when she was nine years old. By this time she had grown used to his absence, but said, "His death was still hard for me" (First interview, September 23, 2017).

Roya's family, while traveling from Iran, stopped in Herat, which is an Afghan city close to the border of Iran. They stayed in Herat with Roya's aunt for three months. She outlined the difficulties there,

> Herati people their accent is like Iranian, but there are differences. So whenever I would go to the market the owner there would make fun of me or he wouldn't understand what I was saying. So he would say, 'Go back and bring someone older than you. I don't know what you're saying.' And it was a hard time there, too. Until we moved to Kabul, it was such a big challenge. I had to learn Afghani [Dari]. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

In Iran, Roya and her family spoke Farsi. However, in Afghanistan, the majority of people speak Dari, which is a dialect of Farsi and has differences in accent and some vocabulary. Roya faced many hardships and challenges by the time she was six years old. Her absent father was addicted to drugs and deported to Afghanistan, her grandparents moved back to Afghanistan and her grandfather passed away, and Roya had to leave the only home she ever knew, Iran, for a foreign place where she struggled with the language.

Family and Home

Once in Afghanistan, Roya moved several times. After a few months in Herat they moved to Kabul. Roya explained,

> We moved to Kabul to my grandma, she was living in an apartment in the city. And she had a small apartment and it was her, my uncle and auntie, and three of us. So the owner of the house came to her and said 'I can't take this. You guys have to move. There are too many of you.' And then we moved a little bit outside of the city. The owner there said the same thing. And then we had to move from there to a village. And we were living there until my mom made a little bit of money working and she said, 'I'm going to buy land and build a house.' It took over a year, and the owner of where we were living kept coming and saying, 'When is your house going to be ready?' And we were tired of them

> coming and asking this. And that day when our house, it was only one room, was built it was better. We moved into our own house. (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017)

They moved to a village outside the city of Kabul because in the city, "there were bombs all the time and a lot of killings" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). The village was safer, but it came with its own struggles.

> It was hard to get from the village to the city to buy stuff. There was no bus. You would have to walk almost three miles to get to the bus stop, and then take the bus to the city. It was a long, long way. There wasn't twenty-four hour electricity. You would have power from 6 PM to 9 PM. It was hard. We didn't have a phone. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

Roya was living in the new home with her mom, grandmother, and younger sister. She did not have a relationship with her father and did not even know where he was. However, one day he did show up to the house because Parisa was divorcing him. Roya did not want to see him.

> I did not want to see his face. I still remember him, when we were in Iran. I do not have a good memory from him, so I was like, 'I'm not going to meet him at all.' I did not see him that day, I hid. They couldn't find me. I was hiding in the bathroom. I was so mad because they wanted me to go and meet him, but I didn't want to. Until he went out of the house, I was in the bathroom. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

She further angrily described her feelings about him, "I did not like him at all as my dad because he didn't even stay in my life or in our life. I feel like my mom was dad and my mom" (First interview, September 23, 2017). Parisa faced so many struggles as a single-mom, but she did an amazing job raising her two daughters. Every time I came for an interview, Parisa was at work so

she could provide for her family. When I spoke with Parisa, she relayed the pride she had for her daughters and how she wanted to ensure they were able to achieve all their hopes and dreams.

School in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Roya was constantly moving schools and had a late start to first grade. She never attended school in Iran and once she moved to Afghanistan she did not start school because she needed time to learn Dari. However, once it was time for her to start school she did not want to go and recalled, "I didn't want to go to school. I would run away from school. I completed first grade three times. I was scared, so I would just run away from school" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). Roya would often miss school and did not enjoy it, but she eventually finished first grade by the time she was ten. Roya did not like school because she moved several times, so she had to start over meeting friends and learning the content and she was scared of the strict teachers. Unfortunately, school became a frightening place for her:

> School was hard because I went to so many schools. I can't even count them all. I studied first grade in different schools. And we had to move from apartment to apartment, until we got our own house. So I was in different schools and had to learn many skills and I learned many difficulties. Because in some schools they hit you. Some schools would punish you for different things, like not doing your homework or failing in class. They would hit your hands with a ruler. It was hard for me to learn because I was scared of the teachers. I wouldn't understand anything. Instead of understanding something, they would just hit you. (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017)

Not only did was Roya scared of her teachers, but there was also violence in school. For example, she recollected a frightening memory of a fatal shooting,

> One time I was in school, this is when we lived in the city. I don't know what happened, but people were mad and brought guns and violent things to school and then I heard gunshots. Three very young students were shot and died. When I got scared, I passed out. I had to sit in the classroom for hours for those bad people to go. And then someone came to pick me up. It was hard when I saw the blood outside. It was so scary. (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017)

Roya described that violence in school was not a common occurrence, but it happened enough to leave her fearful. Often, the Taliban would stage their fatal attacks in busy places in the city. Unfortunately, in this instance it was at Roya's school.

However, once Roya and her family moved from the city to the village she was then scared of her trek to school, which she detailed,

> The school was two and a half miles from the house in the mountains. I had to walk and come back each day. It was scary to walk through the mountains. And I had to pass a cemetery. All by myself, when it was still dark in the morning. I would start praying to get through there. I remember one day I was walking and I saw something sitting. It was wearing black clothes and had long hair. And they were just brushing their hair. When I saw that I just started running because if I scream nobody would hear me. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

Roya said from that day on she would wait until she could walk with a friend to school. She had negative memories of not only the journey to school, but also the school itself. She described how the school had a strict dress code. Girls were not allowed to wear makeup or jewelry and had to wear hijabs. She recollected the morning routine at school,

> Every morning they would check your nails. If you have something they would start beating your head. If you have a necklace or earring they would just take it. They don't care if it's gold or silver. And if you have makeup they would wipe it off. For the boys if they had long hair they would cut it off. And for the girls they would check under their hijab to see if your hair is brushed or cleaned. Every day, before I would get to school I would check myself. One day I realized I forgot to take off my gold earrings at home. I took them off outside of school and found a hiding place in the ground. Then after school, I was praying, they would still be there. I found them and I made sure after that day to not wear them. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

Roya's memories of this school are filled with negativity and she said she asked herself, "What is the whole point of this? Going from here all the way to there and not learning anything" (First interview, September 23, 2017). Parisa agreed and moved Roya to a private school. However, the private school was only slightly better because they were not as strict. Overall, Roya did not have fond memories of school in Afghanistan. She changed schools numerous times because of their instability in housing. The schools had strict dress codes and the classroom instruction mainly consisted of punishments for not having the right answers or not having homework completed.

Transition to United States and School

After a few years in Kabul, Parisa was able to secure a job with the U.S. government. Parisa's job involved transporting military personnel to various places. Eventually, Parisa was able to apply for a SIV and within a year she and her daughters were approved to come to the United States. For Roya, the move was very abrupt because her mom did not give her any warning. Roya described, "My mom told me pack up, and I was like 'Pack for what?' She told

me we were moving. I asked her, 'Why didn't you tell me sooner? So I could say goodbye to everyone" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). Unfortunately, Roya had a best friend, whom she could not see before she left. She sadly remembered,

> I didn't get to say the last goodbye to her. It was sad because we were always together, laughing and having fun. Then I had to suddenly leave. And I never remembered her. I can't remember her name. We spent four years together and I forgot everything. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

It seemed that Roya blocked out emotional memories and maybe forgetting her best friend's name was a way to cope with suddenly leaving her behind. Although Roya had to suddenly leave everyone behind, she began to feel excited for the move,

> I was happy because I was imagining what America would be like. I would dream, I was in heaven. I did not know anything about America or see a picture of America, but I would imagine what it would be like. I would have my own apartment, my own bedroom, my own bed. I imagined I would get to go outside and have a bicycle because girls in Afghanistan are not allowed to play outside on bicycles. (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017)

Even though she was not supposed to ride bicycles outside, Roya would secretly ride her cousin's bicycle and stop as soon as she saw someone coming. Roya's dreams of riding her bicycle in the United States would come true, but her perfect image of a heaven-like United States began to fall apart when she started school.

When Roya first arrived, she was sent to the International School for three months. She said she did not learn much English and suddenly she was told that she was ready to go to high school. Roya recollected her transition to the high school, "I was just sitting there and could not

talk. I couldn't understand the teachers when they talk. I feel like they are rapping. They talk very fast without any break" (First interview, September 23, 2018). Roya remembered one day when she lost her headphones and she wanted to let her teacher know. She could not say the words so she pointed to her ears and then pointed to her phone. However, the teacher did not understand what she was trying to communicate and began to get agitated. The teacher told her "Go away. You are crazy." Roya was frustrated that she could not communicate and her teachers were not helpful at all. She said, "Those days are just like a movie stuck in my mind. I can't forget them. And then, three months later I could speak a little more English, but I failed all my classes" (First interview September 23, 2017).

In addition, Roya felt that many of the teachers were disrespectful and unsupportive. Her math teacher would not help her at all and she was failing his class. One day, he told the class "All of you will end up in the chicken factory" (First interview, September 23, 2017). This teacher was referring to a chicken factory where many refugees had to go work because of their limited English and education. His comment infuriated Roya and she said, "Those words I will never forget. I hated him from that day on. He's not the teachers we need in our future" (First interview, September 23, 2017). She began to get extremely stressed because of the lack of support and her failing grades. She described her physical reaction to the stress, "When I would get home from school, I would get nose bleeds. I felt there was so much pressure from school and my nose would start bleeding and under my eyes was black" (First interview, September 23, 2017). Every day she would cry to her mom that she was failing and did not know what to do.

Luckily, Roya and her family had a sponsor, David, from a nearby church who had a ministry helping refugees. He would come over to their home often to see what type of help they needed. Parisa explained how Roya was failing school and so stressed. David suggested that

Roya apply to go to World Refugee School (WRS), an all-girl preparatory school for refugees with interrupted education and limited English proficiency. WRS admits young women between the ages of eleven to eighteen, who usually have between kindergarten and second grade reading and math skills. The local public schools are not able to provide individualized intensive support for these young women so they attend WRS, until they are ready to move to their local high school.

Roya was so happy that she was getting a chance to leave her high school, but she was embarrassed because moving to WRS meant that she would have to move from ninth grade to seventh grade as a fifteen year old. She had to move down to seventh grade in order to learn foundational skills for high school. Nevertheless, Roya immediately saw a difference between her high school and WRS. She described meeting the head of the school, Dr. Sue,

> When I saw Dr. Sue in front of my face, she looks like an angel. I felt this amazing breeze that came through me and I felt so comfortable. And when I stepped inside the office and saw all the teachers smiling and welcoming me, I was just shocked and felt like they were all angels. (First interview, September 23, 2017)

When they left the school, David asked Roya if she wanted to go to WRS. Before he could even finish asking the question, Roya responded, “Yes!” David told her she would have to wait to see if would be accepted to attend and if she was, then she had to wait until the start of the next semester, which was three months away. Immediately, Roya felt like she “dropped down from the sky where she was flying” she felt like “her wings broke and she was falling to the ground” (First interview, September 23, 2017). However, WRS did accept Roya to attend and finally January came.

When Roya started at WRS her reading level was a level K and by the end she moved to the last level, Z. Roya described that she and her friend "were the first students to get to level Z in school" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). Roya excelled at WRS because of the individualized support she received. In addition, the school provided many opportunities for students to go on field trips and try out activities that may interest them. For example, a teacher found out that Roya enjoyed acting, so she helped her get involved in a drama program in the summer. During our last interview, I asked Roya to bring something of significance that we could talk about. Roya brought a yearbook from WRS and showed me all the pictures from field trips, poetry slams, and singing at the state capitol. The teachers at school challenged Roya and supported her learning. Roya felt that "School was a second home and Dr. Sue was like a second mother" (Last interview, October 28, 2017).

Eventually, after two years, Roya was prepared to go to high school. David helped Parisa find an apartment in a better high school district. The teachers in this high school were supportive of Roya and helped facilitate her learning. She specifically described her math teacher:

> The way she talks makes me fly. She cares about everybody in the class. I don't feel like I hate math anymore. I feel like I can do anything. The way she explains is like a key into your brain. She would turn the key and make me fly. Every Monday and Thursday we have after school help. I would get extra homework to get extra points. In class, I would sit in the front seat and give the answer, if it's wrong or right, I would just say it because that's what she likes most. She said, 'I want you all to shout out the answer. I don't care if it's right or wrong because I want to see what you have learned.' So that way she

> knows if she needs to teach more or move on. I love school. (Last interview, October 28, 2017).

Roya had only attended the high school one semester and she was already being promoted to the next grade. She started in ninth grade and by second semester was ready to move on to tenth grade. In addition, Roya is involved in extracurricular activities after school, such as international club, drama club, leadership club, and the soccer team. Everyday afterschool she either attended an extracurricular activity or went for tutoring. Overall, she is succeeding in high school and is progressing nicely.

Future

As a result, of Roya's success in school, she had a positive outlook for her future. As previously mentioned, one of the artifacts Roya showed me was her WRS yearbook and one of the pages that stood out to her had Henry David Thoreau's quote, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined." Roya explained its significance to her,

> That is the best quote ever. It says 'follow your dreams.' It does not say to follow others' dreams. And it says, 'live the life you have imagined.' I have a lot of things that I imagine doing in the future and I'm still working on them and getting to it. (Last interview, October 28, 2017)

Roya had many goals she was working towards. For example, she said she wanted to go to college. However, she was not sure what she wanted to study because she said her "mind changes every time" and she was "thinking about wildlife firefighter or actress" (Last interview, October 28, 2017). Nevertheless, one thing was certain for her that in the future she wanted "to help someone else that is new to America." Furthermore, she stated, "I support refugees and I

hope one day I can talk to people around the world about refugees. I care about refugee people and I will inspire people to help refugees more and welcome them" (Last interview, October 28, 2017). She was already inspiring me to reach out to refugees and help them more.

Amina's Story

I love to be here in America. I feel safe, comfortable, happy, lucky, everything" (Amina, Last interview, October 29, 2017).

When I first met Amina, she and her family had only lived in the United States for ten months. However, her English was exceptional for only being in the United States for such a short amount of time. She was living in a three-bedroom apartment with her parents and six siblings. Amina, a sixteen-year-old ninth grader has a twin brother. They have an older sister, who is seventeen, and four younger siblings. Amina explained,

> My mom had eleven children, but four of them died as babies. They died from things that are easily treatable here. For example, my sister that was just born in the US had jaundice and they were able to treat it in the hospital. In Afghanistan, the other babies had jaundice and died. (Last interview, October 29, 2017)

She said, "The last baby to die was right before we came to the U.S." (Last interview, October 29, 2017). However, not long after, her mom got pregnant again. I had to delay our last interview because her mom went into labor early and delivered a baby girl. Luckily, Amina's newborn sister was able to receive proper medical care for her jaundice and went home after a few days. Amina described life in Afghanistan and the United States and medical care is only one of the many differences.

Life in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Amina lived with her parents and siblings in the city of Kabul. She recollected where she lived:

> I lived in a high rise building on the sixth floor in Kabul. We had three rooms and there were eight of us living there, my parents and five brother and sisters. We lived there the whole time I was growing up in Kabul. My grandmother was our neighbor and other family was close to us. Everything was close to the house: the mosque, the market, my school. Even though everything was close and we lived in a safer area, we were still worried. We stayed home most of the time and if we needed something we would ask my dad to go get it for us. There were always explosions so we wanted to be careful. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Amina explained how her home in Kabul was nicer than her apartment in the United States. She said, "It was new and now where we are living is so old" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). However, even though Amina lived in a relatively safe area in Kabul, her family was not immune to the Taliban's relentless attacks. She sadly explained life controlled by the Taliban,

> Life in Afghanistan is very dangerous. There are always explosions by the Taliban. We don't feel secure. It was so dangerous to live there. Two times there were explosions close to my house. I was going to my English course one day, but my mom needed me to stay and talk to her before I left. I talked to her for just two minutes and then the explosion happened. I am so happy that she needed me to talk because if I didn't I would have been killed in the explosion. I knew neighbors that got hurt in the explosion. This was the Taliban. (Last interview, October 29, 2017)

This devastating attack scarred Amina and showed how the area her family lived in was not as safe as they thought. Although, Amina was not personally hurt in the attack, she was still emotionally affected because she knew people who were both killed and injured in the attack. Amina repeatedly thought about the "what ifs" after the attack. What if her mom didn't need to talk to her before she left? What if she was at school during the explosion? These questions always stayed with her.

Amina's family lived in a more upscale part of Kabul because her father made more money working for the U.S. military. Amina detailed her father's work and their home,

> My dad worked for the military for twelve years. He was translating and driving for the military. Because he worked there we were a little richer than other people in Afghanistan. We lived in a good place and we went to a little bit better school. The school was safer and had more security. (First interview, August 27, 2017)

When I met Amina's father for the first time, he spoke proficient English and described his work with the United States in Afghanistan. After he worked for the U.S. army for twelve years, he then opened up his own hardware store a couple years before he moved his family to the United States. He explained how much respect he had for the U.S. army and how he benefitted so greatly from being able to work with them, such as providing more for his family. Due to his more proficient English skills, he was more easily able to secure a job once he came to the United States. He works at a carpet factory, where he works long hours and often six days a week. His work is physically demanding, but he is happy to be employed, especially since he is the only one working in the family.

Schools in Afghanistan

Although Amina's school was safer than most schools in Afghanistan, there were still many issues she faced there. Amina said,

> I went to the same school the whole time in Kabul. It was a school just for girls and in each class there were about fifty students. It was hard to live in Afghanistan because many times we can't go to school. We had lots of problems. There were many explosions and it was very scary to go out. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Amina missed many days of school because her parents were worried for her safety on the way to school and at school itself. The Taliban launched numerous deadly suicide bombings in Kabul. In 2017 alone, hundreds were killed and injured from various suicide bombings targeting police training centers, a funeral gathering, government buildings, and countless other crowded places in the city. Amina's family was always cautious and anxiously dreading the Taliban's next attack. Several times in our interviews Amina spoke about "never feeling safe in Afghanistan."

Whenever there were lessened threats of security breaches in the city, Amina would be able to attend school. She described the schools in Afghanistan,

> They teach so differently in Afghanistan. The teachers don't know how to teach us because they don't know how to explain things. They don't show us anything, but instead they just tell us facts and we memorize it. We just read the textbooks and memorize everything. The teachers in Afghanistan will hit you if you do not know the answer and they really can't help us with our homework. (First interview, August 27, 2017)

Amina experienced rote learning in school, where she repeatedly read the same thing again and again in an attempt to memorize the content. The teachers did not explain the content, but rather

they gave out answers to textbook questions that the students had to memorize for the exam. Amina further explained,

> We don't have a lot of opportunity there. We don't have internet to explain the lesson in Afghanistan. We sit in one class and the different teachers come in to teach different subjects. I would have six classes in one day. (First interview, August 27, 2017)

I asked Amina, "Why did the teachers not explain the information in class?" She said, "The reason they can't explain is because they learned the same way as us. There was no explanation for them either" (Mid-point, September 17, 2017). Amina's teachers learned the same way they were teaching, so for them this was all they knew. Amina was mainly memorizing information, rather than learning in a meaningful and engaging way.

Transition to United States and Schools

Eventually Amina's parents felt that the opportunities were limited for their children and they feared for their safety, so they applied for a SIV. Once their application was processed the family had to go in for an interview. Amina said her "dad was the only one interviewed because he was the only one who knew English" (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017). Finally, they were accepted and had a little over a month to pack and prepare for their move to the United States. Amina described the process,

> My uncle lives here in the U.S., so that is why we decided to come here. He worked at a famous jail in Afghanistan. It was very dangerous for him. If people know you work for Americans you will be killed. If the Taliban found out it would be very dangerous for our family. We had one year to prepare to come to the US. We applied and it took one year. We went with my parents and they were interviewed. When we were approved I was so sad to say goodbye to everyone. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Amina had to say the hard goodbyes to all her friends and family. She was very close to their family in Afghanistan and would spend "every weekend together." It was hard for her to leave all her extended family behind and move to a foreign place. Nevertheless, Amina did describe the sad goodbyes, but was very hopeful about her new life in the United States. She said,

> I was happy about being able to go to the US. We thought when we came here everything would be different. I thought the schools, teacher, cultures, home and everything would be different. All I knew about America was from pictures. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Although Amina was very happy to move, when she arrived she was scared. She sadly said, "We were happy to be here, but it was very hard for us" (First interview, August 27, 2017).

When I asked her what the hardest part was, she explained how she had to go to school right away. She recollected, "When I came here I took an English test. I had to read a passage and then answer many questions. After the test they told me I can go on to eighth grade" (First interview, August 27, 2017). Amina had finished ninth grade in Afghanistan but would have to start at eighth grade in the United States to improve her content area skills and background. Without any real support to transition to a U.S. school, which is completely different from schools in Afghanistan, Amina had to start eighth grade. Based on the English test, Amina knew enough English to forgo going to the International School. In Afghanistan, she went "to two months of English courses," where she was able to gain an understanding of some foundational English skills. However, her other siblings had to go to the International School first. Therefore, Amina went to middle school by herself. She explained the experience,

> The first day when I went to middle school I was shocked. In Afghanistan, the students respect the teacher and listen, but when I went to the middle school the first day in

> America I was scared. The students were very disrespectful to teachers and loud. They didn't listen and were doing bad things, like smoking. I did not know anyone there. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Middle school can be an intimidating place in general, but this is especially true if you are new to the United States and the school systems. Amina was in ESL classes; however, she was not doing well in school.

When I first met Amina, she was eager to participate in my study and be interviewed. She said it would help her English skills and I offered to have an English tutoring session before each interview, which she accepted. Therefore, before our first interview we began our tutoring session. Amina's older sister asked if she could also participate and I gladly said yes. A few minutes into the tutoring session, Amina's mom came and asked if Amina's twin brother could also be part of the tutoring session, which I again gladly said yes.

During the session, we talked about plural nouns and verb tenses. At the end of the session we each wrote a paragraph about how our week went. Then, I talked to them about keeping a notebook of new words they learn. They agreed and said they would show me at our next session. The following weekend I came back for the second tutoring session and interview. This time I brought Eve Bunting's (2006) book titled, *One Green Apple.* The book is about a young Muslim immigrant, Farah, who starts school in the United States. She is alone at school and does not understand what the teachers or other students are saying. However, one day the class goes on a field trip to an apple orchard and Farah begins to connect to other students and communicate in her own way. I did a read aloud of the book for Amina and her sister and brother. After I read the book I asked Amina if she could relate and she said,

> I feel just like her when I came here. I felt like I'm stupid and can't speak English when the teachers and students were talking. I could not understand what anyone was saying and it was very hard for me. My family told me 'This will take time, so don't worry because soon you will understand everything.' They were always saying that and today I see that I have learned a lot. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Fortunately, Amina's transition to high school was much smoother and by this time a few months had passed so she knew more English and was able to communicate more easily with her teacher and classmates. She described,

> I love my high school because the teachers are so kind. They explain everything so well and show us how to do things. Whenever I have a problem or do not understand something, the teachers help me. I ask them for help, when I do not understand. (First interview, August 27, 2017)

Amina's experience in U.S. high school was vastly different than the teaching in Afghanistan. In the high school in the United States, she did not understand something in school the teachers were able to explain it to her.

In addition, Amina felt positive about her progress in school and happily detailed this:

> I think I am doing well in school. I have all A's in all subjects, except for math where I have a B. This is my second language and before I came my English was not so good. I have not even been here one year, but when I first came I did not know what the teachers were saying. Now I understand the teachers and my grades are so much better. (Mid-point interview, August 27, 2017)

In under a year, Amina had progressed so much and felt so much more comfortable in school. She was doing great in her classes and every time I went to her home she told me all about what

she was studying and how she was up to date on all her homework and assignments. She explained,

> I spend a lot of time studying here because English is my second language. I don't have many friends here. I have some friends in school, but they do not live close to me. I do have one Afghani friend that I sometimes go visit with my mom. (First interview, August 27, 2017)

Since Amina does not have many friends here, she spends much of her time studying and improving her English skills. One way she improves her English is by listening to American music. She said,

> I love to listen to American music. I love Shakira and Ed Sheeran. I love his song "Shape of You." In Afghanistan, I didn't listen to American music, but here I do because I understand what they are saying. It also helps me learn more English because it improves my listening skills. I want to know singers in America because if you want to be here you have to know about America. (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017)

Amina felt that in order to live in the United States she needs to learn and embrace the culture and one way she does this is through the music she listens to.

Another way that Amina improves her English is by taking part in Aspiring Girl Leaders, a program for high school refugee young women that helps them foster academic success and emotional support. The program helps the young women adjust to life in the United States and confront hardships they face, such as separation from family, linguistic isolation, and conflicting cultural expectations. One major aspect of the program is the mentorship they provide. Each girl is assigned her own mentor, who takes her on outings, helps with school work, and overall

provides any type of emotional support she needs. Amina was happy to be part of the program and detailed her experience,

> I am part of something called Aspiring Girl Leaders and they gave me a mentor. In the program, they ask us to share memories we have as a child and they help us with our English-speaking skills. Also, we do crafts like making jewelry and we just started making Christmas ornaments. My mentor is an American and she helps me. I'm new to the program so I've only seen her two times. She came here and told me she would help me with my homework. I read a book with her, but it was too hard. I got the book in school and I texted her to come over to help me. She came here and we read the book. She helped explain the parts I did not understand. (Last interview, October 29, 2017)

The program provides an avenue for Amina to experience things she may not have otherwise gotten a chance to do. Furthermore, her mentor can provide additional support she needs with school. In addition to her mentor, Amina continually spoke about how kind her teachers are and how much they help her. For example, she said,

> My favorite teacher is my science teacher. She speaks so clearly and explains everything with lots of detail. When I ask her a question, she doesn't get mad at me or yell. She knows I am from another country, so English is my second language. She always tells me, 'You don't need to worry. I will help you.' (Mid-point, September 17, 2017)

Amina felt comfortable with her science teacher and when she does not understand something she can ask her for help. During our second interview, Amina showed me her vocabulary handout for her science class. The handout included words such as "pathogen," "infrastructure," and "deforestation." These are difficult words for most ninth grade students and for someone who's English is a second language then these could be especially hard. However, Amina was

excelling in learning her science vocabulary. When I told her that words seem difficult, she replied, “Yes. But I love it. I know them” (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017). She was proud that she was able to successfully learn these challenging words. Overall, she is adjusting to high school and life in America. When she first arrived, she was intimidated and scared at school, but now she feels much more at ease. She perfectly summed it up, “I love to be here in America. I feel safe, comfortable, happy, lucky, everything” (Last interview, October 29, 2017).

Future

During our third interview, Amina explained how it was only a few weeks away from her family’s one year anniversary of moving to the United States. She said, “I miss my family in Afghanistan.” Even though she was happy about her new life in the United States, she deeply missed her extended family in Afghanistan. Also, one of the struggles she faced in the United States are people’s negative sentiments towards Afghan refugees. She sadly described her feelings,

> I do not mind telling people I am a refugee, but I do not like to tell people I am from Afghanistan because they will think I am a terrorist. The Taliban has made it bad for us, but this is not true. We are not all bad people. When people really get to know me they say ‘Wow! I was wrong you are so nice.’ (Last interview, October 29, 2017)

Unfortunately, there are many that wrongfully believe that just because someone is from Afghanistan then he or she is automatically a terrorist. When others take the time to get to know refugees from Afghanistan, such as Amina, then they realize that they are people too just like themselves with hopes and dreams and they are not terrorists. Even though Amina has come across individuals who label her as a terrorist, she is still positive about her life in the United States and her future. She described,

> In America there is more opportunity. We have freedom. If you want to be a teacher or a police officer you can. You can be anything you want, but this is not true in Afghanistan. As a woman, it is hard. Women are not at the same level as men. They think they need to stay home and work. Here in American men and women are equal. You have freedom to dress how you want and be what you want. (Last interview, October 29, 2017)

As a girl in Afghanistan, Amina did not have the same education, rights, or opportunities as boys. She was treated as a second class citizen. Now, in the United States, she feels that she has equal opportunities and freedom as men. For her, education, is a vital tool for her future success. Although, she felt equal to men she still had some reservations,

> In Afghanistan, I had dreams of being a doctor. Now I feel like it is too hard. I have to know better English. When I was in the hospital, the doctor asked me what I want to be when I grow up. I told her I used to want to be a doctor, but I don't think I can. She told me that I can. Maybe she is right. (Last interview, October 29, 2017)

Amina felt that her lack of English skills would be a road block to becoming a doctor. The doctor she spoke to in the hospital was during her mom's stay when she delivered Amina's sister. Amina spent four days with her mom in the hospital. She said after the doctor talked to her that she felt a bit more hopeful. When she was in the hospital she was "reading all the information [she] could" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). For example, the baby had "jaundice and [she] was reading about what this was and why it happened" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). She was in the delivery room and even got to cut the umbilical cord, which was a truly unique and exciting experience for her. She said, "I was scared, but so happy I did it" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). She showed me a list of medical words she wrote down in the hospital, such as "epidural" and "jaundice." She was trying to learn as many medical terms as she could and

wanted me to help her learn more. Even though, Amina voiced doubts about her ability to become a doctor, she was still remaining motivated to strive towards this goal.

Cross-Case Findings

This section is a cross-case analysis that emerged from all three participants. Each finding did not necessarily relate to each participant the same. However, I specifically connect the findings to a participant through the use of data. The four findings that emerged are (1) participants need a support system, (2) participants express themselves through activities and connection to home country, (3) participants have positive future aspirations, (4) participants indicated an importance of place in literacy practices, sense of security, and family connection.

Participants Need a Support System

One of the first cross-case findings that emerged from the participants' narratives was the importance of a support system. The support system was necessary in their home country and then once they were resettled to the United States this support system was extended and utilized to help them transition. In a sense, these are transnational support systems because they include people from different places and spaces by crossing and extending past borders. For example, the participants spoke of the closeness they had with extended family in Afghanistan and once they moved to the United States this connection was not broken, but maintained through communication mainly through social media. Their familial support system included their immediate family in the United States and then relatives in Afghanistan.

Therefore, one of the most important support systems, as cited by all three participants, was their family. For example, Amina spoke of her father throughout all of our interviews. She adoringly stated, "I love my dad. He helps and supports me in everything in my life" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). Her father helped support her in learning English, transitioning to

the United States, and ensuring she had countless opportunities for success. When I spoke with her father, he emphasized that the reason he came to the United States was for his children's safety as well as for a chance for them to have a better education. In addition, Salma spoke of her family's support and as previously mentioned her mom was always present for the interviews to help her daughter. Salma explained, "They do everything for me," referring to her parents (Last interview, October 14, 2017). She felt that it was imperative for her to excel in school because her parents had done so much to support her education. For Roya, her father was not present in her life, however her "mom was both [her] dad and mom" (First interview, September 23, 2017). One of the artifacts she presented to me was one of her social media posts in the form of a poem to her mother. She wrote,

> mom help you to grow
>
> mom feed you
>
> mom take care of you
>
> mom know everything about your life cuz she is the one that loves you
>
> mom work hard only for you
>
> mom get pain but she never told you cuz she don't want to hurt your feeling

Roya's poem acknowledged the ways her mom supported her. She felt indebted to her mother because without her support she would not be where she was in life. Similarly, Ramsden and Ridge's (2013) study on Somali refugees' narratives found that family was a central source of their support and "the concept of family involved a strong obligation to help each other" (p. 233). However, the Somali refugees felt a sense of lost connection and longing for their extended family left back in their homeland.

In addition to the participants' immediate family as a support system, they were supported by their extended family who lived in Afghanistan. They stayed in touch with their immediate family through various forms of social media. Salma claimed, "Afghanistan is important to me because my family is there" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). The participants' communication with their extended family helped them keep their connection with Afghanistan. Their extended family let them know what was going on in Afghanistan, essentially they were a lifeline to the participants' homeland.

Another influential role in their support system were mentors. Roya's family was connected with a mentor, David, through a church refugee ministry. When I spoke with David, he told me that he asked Roya' mom, Parisa, what their most dire need was and she explained that her daughter was stressed and miserable in school. Therefore, David quickly began a search for schools and came across WRS. David acted as an advocate for Roya's education. Since David knew more about the educational systems in the United States and which schools may be a best fit, he was able to successfully help Roya find a school that met her needs. David, according to Vygotsky (1978), was a "more knowledgeable other," because he had a better understanding and grasp of the problem at hand and was able to offer solutions and suggestions. The same was true for Amina. She was struggling with a book she was assigned at school, so she contacted her mentor who was able to come over and offer support. Not only are mentors vital in the support system, but so are others from the resettlement NGO. When a refugee comes to the United States, they are sponsored by a specific resettlement NGO. Then, there is someone from the airport to pick them up and take them to their apartment. This person is typically their case manager, the individual assigned to their case and help them to become self-sufficient. When the participants first arrived to the United States, they all described how their case manager helped

them out for the first few months. The participants' mentors and case managers are the "more knowledgeable others" and advocates for refugees, until they are able to be more self-sufficient.

Unfortunately, the support systems at school, were insufficient when all three participants first arrived to the United States. They all described feeling lost and confused because they did not know what the teachers or students were saying. They did not feel supported. Amina said, "I felt like I'm stupid. I can't speak English. When the teacher was talking, when the students were talking, I couldn't understand what they were staying" (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017). The participants all described these same feelings in school when they first arrived. There was not an adequate support system in place, to help them navigate and communicate more easily in school. Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009) argued that teachers need to establish a strong and positive relationship with parents because this helps foster an environment where students' needs are met. Unfortunately, for the participants in my study, the schools did not establish these relationships with home. When they either left the International School or just started at their regular school, they felt isolated and as if they were managing it alone. However, after a semester or two passed, and they were able to strengthen their English skills and better able to communicate with teachers, then they felt more supported by their teachers. Once they were able to articulate their questions to teachers, they felt these teachers were willing to explain the content. Roya described her teacher as having a "key to [her] brain" because she knew exactly how to support Roya's learning (Last interview, October 29, 2017).

Overall, Salma's support system afforded her more opportunities and set her up on a path towards success. The other two participants had support systems, but Salma's was much more advanced in terms of individuals outside of family. The key aspects of Salma's support system that set it apart are that it was individualized, integrated, and all-encompassing. Her family's

support system included various individuals whose role was to offer individualized and specific support. For example, she had an individual that helped with the family's healthcare. This person answered any healthcare questions they had or helped arrange doctors' appointments. Salma also had individualized and specific help in regards to school. David was responsible for helping Salma enroll in school, set up teacher conferences, and any other aspect in regards to school. Second, the support system was integrated, meaning that all the individuals helping Salma and her family worked and communicated together. For example, if Salma had a doctor's appointment the person in charge of healthcare would talk to the person helping out with school. All the individuals would communicate to set up the best course of action to help Salma's family. Third, the support system was all-encompassing, meaning that almost all aspects of Salma's life were covered by different individuals. Roxas and Roy (2012) argued for a whole-school approach when serving refugee students. This approach involved families, educators, support staff, and administration all working together to serve the students. This study confirms these scholars' findings and extended their work. Roya had a similar support system, however it extended past school and involved all aspects of her life. Parisa was a single refugee mother, who was new to this country. It would be overwhelming for her to solely meet the needs of her children while at the same time transitioning to life in the United States. However, with the help of her support system she was able to more easily and successfully transition to life in the United States.

Participants Need to Express Themselves through Activities and Connection to Home Country

The second cross-case finding that emerged was the participants need for self-expression through various modes and need to maintain a connection to their Afghan culture. The ability for

participants to express themselves allowed for an increase in self-esteem, greater success in school, and an overall aid in transition. In terms of self-expression, each participant found a different avenue to express themselves.

Self-expression through extracurricular activities.

One of Salma's interests was gardening and the outdoors. She wanted to be able to practice gardening more, so she joined a gardening club at her school. In addition, to that she joined 4-H club, a youth development program that incorporates hands-on projects and mentorship. Salma described,

> I like working with plants and I work in a garden. I started a project last year in 4-H club. If you work for four years on the project then you get a scholarship. I am working on the project and I got accepted, so I get to present the project. This is my second year and I will continue all four years. I did a project on a topic I know about. (Last interview, October 14, 2017)

Salma's involvement in the gardening club propelled her to pick gardening for her 4-H project. The work on the project allowed her to hone her writing and presentation skills, two vital skills for school. The clubs were a venue where Salma could get together with like-minded students to work on something that interested her, while also working towards a scholarship for college.

Roya, was involved in countless extracurricular activities and events that involved self-expression. In fact, it was often hard for me to schedule an interview with her because her calendar was inundated with activities. Roya was very vocal and used much figurative language to describe events in her life. Often, I would ask her one question and this would lead to her talking for several minutes. She loved expressing herself and sharing her memories. As a result, she was involved in many events where she would talk about her life and experiences. For

example, during the time of our interviews she was also working with other students at a nearby university. She was invited to come speak to their class about being a refugee and her life. Her mentor, David, said that Roya was being asked more and more to speak at places, such as college classrooms. Roya recently published her story online on a teen publishing site. In addition, another medium for her to express herself is on social media. During one of our interviews, her social media posts were the artifacts she showed me that day. She described how she posted,

> I like to look up quotes and poems on Google, but I don't copy the exact words they say. I make it in my own words. I use theirs as an example and then rewrite it for my own life. This post is about coming to the US and how much I've change through time and my experiences. I like making people smile when they've had a bad day, so I post positive stuff. Sometimes, I get good comments and it makes me feel good and proud. And I get encouraged by them and I try more. (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017)

For Roya, social media provided a platform for her to share her thoughts, experiences, memories, and ideas through poetry, figurative language, pictures, and more. The comments she received provided the positive feedback she desired. She wanted a venue to express herself and then receive responses from others, so she knew to continue with her posts.

Also, Roya was part of a drama club because acting was an important activity in her life. She was in the "Girls Making Plays" program, where she would gather with girls from her school and a foster program. The girls would be given a "picture and from that picture you write out a play, the beginning, middle and end." Then the girls would act out their plays. I asked Roya why she liked acting and she said,

> You have to stand in front of a couple hundred people. I had so much fear and nerves inside of me, but they just went away. It makes me feel confident. It makes me feel brave

> and that I can do this. It helps me to be open people. (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017)

For Roya, acting was an opportunity to write plays about things that interested in her and then overcoming her fears of presenting these plays. The process of moving past her fears allowed her to build confidence and gain the self-esteem she needed.

Lastly, Amina was involved in the Aspiring Girl Leaders program. In the program, Amina was able to share memories of past and her current experiences with her mentor and other young women in the program. She spoke positively of the program and felt that it allowed her to have more opportunities she may have not had otherwise. In the program, Amina enjoyed how "everyone shares their culture and I get to share my culture" and "we get to do many fun events" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). The program provided a platform for Amina to hear other refugee young women's stories and a chance for her to share her story.

Overall, creative expression programs and workshops have a positive effect for young refugees' self-esteem and helps decrease any emotional or behavioral issues they face (Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2005). Extracurricular activities are used to assist refugee children in overcoming the traumas of conflict and displacement (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). These extracurricular activities provide an opportunity for refugees to express themselves and share their stories. Ramsden and Ridge (2013) found that when refugees share their narratives of the past this helps them cope with the present. Salma's gardening project, Roya's poetic social media posts, and Amina's gathering with other refugee girls were all helpful in their transition to the United States and preparing for the future.

Participants Expressed Themselves Through Connection to Home Country.

One way the participants were able to express themselves was through their connection to Afghanistan. All three participants emphasized the importance of maintaining and connecting to their Afghan culture. The main ways they stayed connected to Afghanistan was through preparing and eating Afghan food and practicing Islam.

Salma said she stays connected to Afghan culture by "eating Afghan food" that her "mom makes and [she] helps her" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). However, eating in the United States was different for her. She longingly said, "We used to buy fresh cooked bread every day in the bakery in Afghanistan. Here, you can't find that" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). Our talk about food included me telling her my favorite Afghan food, mantu. Later, her family invited me to learn how to make mantu, which I wrote about previously. I completely understood what the participants meant about food and connection to their culture. I often cook Iranian food at home, not only because it is my favorite food but it allows me to stay connected to Iranian culture. Cooking Iranian food for me reminds me of my Iranian grandmother and mother and all the times they spent in the kitchen cooking for the family. For Afghans, the Central Asia institute claimed, "Afghan food is more than just sustenance or a gesture of kindness and love for family and friends. It holds a key to the history and cultural story of Afghanistan" (https://centralasiainstitute.org/afghan-food-celebrates-culture-tradition/).

When I asked the participants how they stay connected to Afghanistan, they all cited the importance of Islam. Roya explained how she was Muslim, but did not wear the hijab, the religious head covering for women. She said, "I do not wear the hijab. You have to follow your own heart. Our religion doesn't depend on our hijab. You pray and follow God's rules and respect people. That's enough" (Last interview, October 28, 2017). For Roya, she did not have to

wear the hijab to show she was Muslim, but rather she followed the other tenets of Islam. Amina described how she stayed connected to Afghanistan, “My religion, to pray all the time, to pray five times a day” (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017). She explained how in school in Afghanistan she learned how to read the Quran, which is in Arabic. She said after she moved to the United States she no longer had her Quran class, so she found new ways to find the meanings of the Quran. She said, “I go on YouTube and they have translations” (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017). Salma stated, “Religion is really important to me. I thought when I moved to the US they won’t let you wear hijab or anything, but when I came here I felt so free” (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). For refugees, religion can serve as a source of continuity, one of the few things in their life that is relatively unchanged from their home country (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016). In other words, religion is a constant that they can depend on and utilize as a source of strength from their home country.

They all saw Islam as a link to Afghanistan, however they did not get to practice their religion the same way they did in Afghanistan. All three participants described how they missed being able to go to the mosque and missed their Quran classes. Roya described, “We are Shia Muslims and there isn’t a mosque here because there are less Shia living here. So we just pray at home” (Last interview, October 28, 2017). Roya was describing a sect of Islam, Shia, which is the second largest sect of Islam. Sunni is the largest sect of Islam and the mosques that were in Roya, Amina, and Salma’s neighborhood. For a while, there was a Shia mosque and Salma went to the Quran classes there, but she “did not learn anything there.” Eventually she stopped going to classes and not long after the mosque closed down. All three participants missed going to the mosque, but they continued to practice Islam in the United States. They felt that practicing Islam

was a way for them to stay connected to Afghanistan. In their lives, when many things have been out of their control and changed, religion remained a constant and a connection to Afghanistan.

Participants Have a Positive Outlook for the Future

Even though all three participants were Afghan refugees they had very different stories. Salma was born in Iran and then had a hard transition to Afghanistan, growing up with no dad. Roya moved countless times and never had a positive experience in school. Amina lived in the same home and went to the same school in a more upscale part of Kabul, her whole time in Afghanistan. However, all three participants had gone through hardships in Afghanistan, such as lack of safety and instability. They all had very positive hopes for moving to the United States and then all three felt let down when they started school here. They felt lost and confused in school. Many newly resettled refugees describe a lack of adult support, such as teachers not supporting them (Sarr & Mosselson, 2010). In addition, they must quickly learn how to navigate a new school system, whose policies and standards are completely foreign and unfamiliar to them, while trying to learn English and content information (Bartlett, Mendenhall, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017; Blanchet-Cohen, Denov, Fraser, & Bilotta, 2017).

However, at the time of my interviews all three participants felt that they were currently very successful in school and enjoyed their teachers and assignments. In addition, all three participants had positive outlooks for the future. Salma was involved in 4-H and for the past two years was working on gardening project. She really enjoyed gardening and "watching and helping [her] dad or grandmother planting fruit trees and flowers was a favorite thing to do. Now with 4-H [she] had the opportunity to learn more about gardening" (Last interview, October 14, 2017). Her goal was to continue with the project for all four years of high school because then she would be able to get a scholarship for college. In college, she wanted to study biomedical

engineering and eventually become a doctor. She was already signed up to take ACT classes next semester, so she could get into a good college. She said, “I want to be a doctor so I am always pushing myself and my family supports me” (Last interview, October 14, 2017). Salma was currently making all A’s in school and very pleased with her progress. She had specific goals for her future and was making conscious decisions to ensure she reached her goals.

Similarly, Amina had a positive outlook on her present life and towards the future. She states, “I think I’m doing well in school because this is my second language and before we came I couldn’t speak any English” (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017). She had made so much progress in the one year that she had been in the US. She felt that in the US “there is more opportunity,” especially for her as girl because those were very limited in Afghanistan. Now she had dreams of going to college and becoming a doctor. Recently, she asked me if I could get her a high school biology book so she could get prepared for next school year. Amina is constantly thinking about her future and what steps she can take to reach these goals, such as studying biology for future classes.

Lastly, Roya is also a very successful student in high school and when we met she told me how she was going to start tenth grade in spring semester because she had advanced so much. In a recent social media post she showed me, she acknowledged how far she had come. She said, “I posted this on our four year anniversary of coming to the US. I said how my mom, my sister and me went through so much. We changed from what we were and came so far” (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). She had aspirations of going to college, therefore she was conscious of her decisions in high school. She claimed, “The first thing colleges look for is what kind of activities you did in high school, so I am always thinking about that.” One of her most

important goals was to “help refugees more and welcome them” (Last interview, October 28, 2017).

All three of the participants were very positive about their current lives and the future. They had determination to reach their goals and took necessary steps to reach these goals. Optimism is an invaluable resource for refugees (Bartlett et al., 2017). Refugee students often view education as vital for acquiring employment and for their overall success in the future (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017). This study confirms the work of these scholars.

Participants Noted Importance of Place

The fourth theme that emerged was the importance of place in the participants’ lives. Place influenced participants’ literacy practices, peace of mind, and family connections. Muir and Gannon (2016) argued that considerations of refugees’ relation to places may provide understandings of their psychological understanding of their experiences. In addition, they stated that place as “recursively constructed through social forces as well as the everyday practices of people (Muir & Gannon, 2016, p. 280). In other words, places are dynamic and created by social structures. The participants’ narratives were influenced and shaped by their places (Massey, 2005).

Place was deeply influential on participants’ literacy practices. I draw upon Barton and Hamilton’s (2000) definition of literacy practices as “the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives. In the simplest sense, literacy practices are what people do with literacy” (p. 8). All three participants noted that in Afghanistan the only books they read were textbooks for school and the Quran. When reading the schools textbooks, their main goal was to memorize the content. Salma stated, “In Afghanistan we read the schoolbooks, but not storybooks. I don’t even think they have storybooks for kids there. I’ve

never heard of it" (First interview, August 26, 2017). However, once all three participants arrived in the United States they began to read novels, a concept that was new to them. Salma struggled with this at first, but said her English teachers supported her. Especially her tenth grade English teacher, "during his reading of the play, he would act it out for students" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). Thus, Salma said "I understood it much better because I could see what was happening" (Mid-point interview, September 16, 2017). Now, Amina enjoys reading and her "teacher helps find a book at [her] reading level." Roya described how the teachers taught her reading comprehension skills necessary to understand both fiction and nonfiction texts. "I would read a book and then when I finish the teacher would have me to summarize what happened. She would tell me to brainstorm. I would be able to explain everything. The more you read the better you get" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017).

Roya's literacy practices changed drastically from Afghanistan to the United States. In Afghanistan, a few of her literacy practices involved memorizing her textbooks and the Quran. However, once she resettled in the United States her literacy practices allowed her to express herself more. For example, she began to use social media and this allowed her to write about her life and feelings. Roya described, "I like to look up quotes and poems on Google, but I don't copy the exact words they say. I make it in my own words. I use theirs as an example and then rewrite it for my own life" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). She was repurposing the words for her own use and this was a transnational literacy practice. Transnational literacy practices include meanings and interconnections that extend beyond and across national borders, places, and times. For example, Roya was creating poems that included her past experiences in Afghanistan and her current life in the United States. These poems crossed and extended past borders. In one such post she stated, "How far I've come. Everything I have gotten through. All

the times I have pushed on even when I felt I couldn't." She explained the post, "this one is my life in Afghanistan and then coming to the US" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). Roya explained how in Afghanistan, "I did not have time to read poems. And that time I did not understand any poem. What does the poem mean?" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). However, now in the United States, Roya was able to analyze poems and repurpose them as a transnational literacy practice in order to express her feelings and share her story. Therefore, leaving home does not mean there has to be an absolute disconnect from home because social media is the tool to keep this connection (Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009). The move from Iran to Afghanistan to the United States and all the experiences in those places shaped her perspective and her literacy practices.

Place also affected the participants' peace of mind and connections with family. In Afghanistan, the participants did not feel safe. Their safety and security was constantly threatened by Taliban attacks. Roya was at school during a lockdown when armed men came in and killed a few students. Amina missed a Taliban explosion by only a couple of minutes. Salma's family was constantly moving because of fears for their safety. Once, all three participants moved to the United States they went through many hardships resettling in school, but their sense of security increased. Amina said, "I love to be here in America. I feel safe, comfortable, happy, lucky, everything" (Last interview, October 29, 2017). She no longer had the fears of the Taliban attacking her and her family. Now she had a sense of safety that allowed her to feel happy and comfortable in her new life. Although, participants felt safer in the United States, they were longing for their extending family in Afghanistan. The distance between their relatives saddened them and was often what they missed most from Afghanistan. Salma sadly stated, "Afghanistan is very important to me because all my family is there" (Mid-point

interview, September 16, 2017). To her, Afghanistan was a place far away and out of reach where all her extended family lived. On the other hand, for Amina place was not important, but what was important was that she was living with her immediate family. She described, "America is my home, not Afghanistan because my family is here: my mother, father, brothers, and sisters" (Mid-point interview, September 17, 2017).

Overall, place played an important role in the participants' lives. The places they inhabited shaped their literacy practices. The literacy practices they took up varied based on the opportunities afforded in their place. In addition, Roya enacted transnational literacy practices through the creation of her poetry. Her stories and life were influenced by her places, which was evident through her poetry. Lastly, place influenced the participants' sense of security and their connection to family. In Afghanistan, they were constantly in fear of their lives, but the moves to the United States, albeit stressful and scary, still offered a sense of safety. They are far from their extended families, but able to keep in contact through social media.

Summary of Key Ideas

From data collected across the initial, mid-point, and final interview transcripts and supported by field notes and artifacts, four key findings emerged. First, support systems play a vital role in the lives of refugees. Support systems are utilized and necessary in both home country, in transitioning, and in resettlement. The most successful support systems are those that offer individualized support and encompass most of issues a participant faces. Second, self-expression through various activities and connection to home country culture is important. Refugee students should be able to express themselves through various literacy practices and extracurricular activities. They need an outlet to share their stories and lives. In addition, they have a need to stay connected to their home country, such as eating food from their home

country and practicing the religion they took up in their home country. Third, refugee students maintain a positive outlook on their present lives and future. They have specific goals for the future and make deliberate decisions in their present lives to reach their future goals. Fourth, place was influential in their literacy practices, feelings of safety, and connection to family.

In the next chapter, I discuss this study's four findings in relation to the research questions. I also provide implications for practice about how best meet refugee students' needs and support them, as well as the importance of getting to know students. I also provide implications for future research. I conclude by sharing my narrative of this research journey.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Since beginning my dissertation journey, there have been a slew of stories about refugees in the news. Unfortunately, many of these stories portray refugees in a negative light. At the start of my dissertation, the President Trump administration tried to enact the immigrant and refugee ban. This was just one of the many negative policies and headline stories about refugees and the role of the United States. Unfortunately, if all the refugees in the world made up a single nation, then that nation would be the twenty-first most populous in the entire world (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2016). These statistics alone show the magnitude of the refugee crisis. The world is in the midst of one of the greatest tragedies of all time, but many world leaders are continuing to dismiss refugees and tout negative policies and reactions to the refugee crisis.

Recently, over a dozen Syrian refugees were found frozen to death near the border of Lebanon (Alkhshali & Capelouto, 2018). They were desperate to find safety and shelter for their families, so they were fleeing in the freezing weather. This is just one of the many horrific headlines during the week of January 20, 2018 on refugees. Therefore, not enough is being done by countries with more resources and power, such as the United States. Instead, there have been recent allegations that during talks on an immigration deal including protections for people from Haiti and some nations in Africa, President Trump protested the deal saying these were “shithole countries” and the United States should instead help individuals from places like Norway (Davis, Stolberg, & Kaplan, 2018). These disparaging remarks do nothing to aid in the refugee crisis, but rather create more of a divide. Therefore, more stories should be shared about refugees to counter negative remarks about refugees and illustrate how much they have to offer.

This study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their past schooling? (2) How do Afghan refugee young women describe their transition experiences to the United States? (3) How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces? From data analysis of the participants' narratives, artifacts, and field notes, four findings emerged in relation to Afghan refugee young women's home country lives and schooling, transitions to the United States, and transnational literacy practices:

1. Support systems were a vital part of life in the home country, transitions, and resettlement in the United States.
2. Self-Expression and connection to home country assist in transitioning, building confidence, and academic success.
3. Future goals and aspirations reveal a positive outlook.
4. Place is influential on literacy practices and outlook.

In the following sections, I discuss these findings guided by the research questions and through the lens of critical literacy (Vasquez, 2014) and space and place (Massey, 2005).

Past Experiences

The first research question was, "How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their past schooling experiences?" According to the literature review, there is scant research on refugee students' past lives or schooling experiences (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Therefore, this study aimed to shed light on the past schooling experiences and lives of three Afghan refugee young women. The findings revealed that pre-migratory experiences matter and these experiences influenced the participants making sense of their world.

Pre-migratory Experiences Matter

Researchers have illuminated the need for educators to understand and know each refugee student's pre-migratory experiences (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; McBrien, 2005; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). The lack of sensitivity and attention to pre-migratory experiences may "create feelings of alienation and othering, which impacts youth's integration of self in society, and resettlement" (Blanceht-Cohen et al., 2017, p. 167). As noted in my second finding, all the participants wanted to express themselves and remain connected to their home country because their past lives and experiences played a large role in who they are as individuals. Therefore, since these past experiences play such a large role in refugee students' lives then they should be encouraged to be shared. When these pasts are not shared and are stifled, this can create a sense of alienation. For example, the participants in my study all described extremely difficult transition to schools in the United States. They felt misunderstood and confused. A reason for this misunderstanding is that educators did not know the participants' pre-migratory experiences. For example, all three participants described how they all struggled when they first arrived at schools in the United States. Furthermore, none of them described any of their teachers making efforts to know their pre-migratory experiences.

When refugee students resettle, they are in the midst of dealing with and making sense of their pre-migratory experiences, such as trauma and fragmented schooling (McWilliams & Bonet, 2016). These students are thrown into a completely new culture, school system, and overall way of life, all the while dealing with their past experiences. When Roya was trying to figure out the schools she went to in Afghanistan, she could not count them all. She was constantly moving and changing schools. In addition, she started first grade much later because of her move from Iran to Afghanistan and her need to learn Dari as well as getting over her fear

of school. Therefore, she had an extremely fragmented schooling career in Afghanistan, affecting her transition to U.S. schools. However, her teachers in the United States did not know about her background. She was not supported in school and began to fail. Eventually, she moved to WRS where all teachers were “angels” and she began to soar in all her classes. She described the teachers as “angels” because they supported her and one way they did this is by getting to know her more.

One reason that refugee students do not share their pre-migratory experiences is because many teachers in U.S. schools have instincts and guidelines to not inquire or explore refugee students’ pre-migratory experiences, especially those concerning violence and trauma. The instincts and guidelines are based on the notion that these students should not be re-victimized (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017). However, refugees’ experiences of war, trauma, and hardships in their home country shape the person they have become. Thus, the need to understand these pasts is vital because it helps us understand refugees as individuals. Salma explained that her favorite teacher was her biology teacher who would invite her to eat lunch with her. Often during lunch, they would talk and she got to know all about Salma’s past. The teacher’s efforts to learn more about Salma and her past was important to Salma. She said, “I really like my biology class. She was really nice” (First interview, August 26, 2017). Salma often spoke of her biology teacher and how much she felt supported in the class and how successful she was in this class. This teacher made the effort to create a relationship with Salam and get to know her more, which should be the goal of every teacher of a refugee student.

The purpose of learning refugee students’ pre-migratory experiences is not to re-traumatize them, but rather to understand the hardships they faced and how they are still resilient in spite of those hardships (Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2016). When students share about their

past this can be extremely empowering. In their home country, they were marginalized and oppressed, losing so much, but sharing their past can "allow them to reclaim part of what they have lost" (Lacroix & Al-Qdah, 2012, p. 234). This study affirmed the idea that when educators fail to understand and acknowledge refugee students' previous experience there may be negative consequences (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Nilsson & Bunar, 2015).

Also, pre-migratory experiences connected to the third finding and centered on future aspirations. Since the participants had much struggle and hardships in their pre-migratory experiences, this propelled them once they resettled in the United States and they eventually crafted many goals in order to reach their high aspirations for the future. Roya used social media posts as an avenue to talk about her pre-migratory experiences. For example, she often talked about how she "went through so much" and how she "came so far." Even though she went through so much in Afghanistan, she is now able to voice those hardships through social media. In addition, she has begun to create plays that often include experiences from her life and stated, "It helps me be brave" (Mid-point interview, October 14, 2017). The sharing of her past through different modes empowers Roya and allows her to reclaim her past. Refugee students should be given many opportunities to share about their lives through various modes.

Making Sense of the World

Resettlement and integration is a dynamic process where refugee students are simultaneously dealing with their past. Researchers described this process involving "sense-making" that is "back and forth between past and present experiences, alongside future expectations, where pre-migratory experiences of trauma are highly present" (Blanchett-Cohen et al., 2017, p. 165). For example, for the participants it meant realizing the sacrifices their parents made for them, which then motivated them do well in school to get a good job. They

viewed school as the key to success in the United States. Their past experiences in unstable and poor schools influenced their sense making of their present situations (Prior & Niesz, 2013). Connected to the second finding, the participants made sense of the world through extracurricular activities. The participants were able to express themselves through various modes in these extracurricular activities, which in turn helped them to make sense of their experiences and lives.

Vasquez (2014) argued that texts are never neutral and individuals read the world from a particular point of view. The point of view the participants took up was influenced by the spaces they inhabited, including their home country of Afghanistan and then resettlement in United States. For example, in Afghanistan the participants had very few opportunities because there were few good schools and resources. In addition, as girls, they were treated as inferior citizens with fewer rights for them. As such, when they came to the United States they were determined to take advantage of the rights afforded U.S. residents. In the United States, they took advantage of their new found freedom which presented them with a positive outlook for their present lives and the future. The experiences of war and trauma, while devastating, create growth and resiliency (Patel, Staudenmeyer, Wickham, Firmender, Fields, & Miller, 2017), and was evident in the stories of these participants.

The power-geometries that were present in the places participants inhabited further shaped their sense-making (Massey, 2005). In Afghanistan, as girls, they did not control much power at all. When they first moved to the United States, the power-geometries, in terms of who had power, seemed to not be in their favor. Their initial space in the United States was not inviting towards them because they did not have access to the dominant discourses, such as English. However, in our interviews they all seemed to exude a sense of empowerment in

regards to their present lives and future, as mentioned in the third finding. As time passed and as their English skills improved they were able to gain more power and access in the school systems, which will be further examined in the next section.

Transition Experiences

The second research question was, "How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their transition experiences from their home country to the United States?" Unfortunately, all three participants described their initial transition to the United States as very rough and full of confusion and isolation. They were struggling in school and began to fail their classes. Evidence suggests that they were disempowered because of their language skills and the role of place and their support systems.

Disempowered because of Language

All three participants described an overwhelming sense of isolation, confusion, and frustration once they started school in the United States, which is in line with previous research on refugee students (Bartlett et al., 2017, Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Sarr & Mosselson, 2010). Before they moved to the United States, they were excited and positive especially around ideas of attending school in the United States. Yet, this bubble was quickly popped as soon as they started school and were treated as outcasts. These negative feels stemmed from feeling disempowered because of their language skills. Janks (2010) argues there needs to be a focus on the relationship between language and power. The "critical" component of literacy is to focus on the power structures in place (Janks, 2010). All three participants narrated experiences that brought to light the relationship between power and language in classrooms in the United States.

As noted in the fourth finding, place played a vital role on the participants' outlook. Roya had a devastating experience in her first high school in the United States because a teacher told

her that she would not equate to anything, and was destined to "work in a chicken factory" (First interview, September 23, 2017). Roya, a newly resettled refugee, was completely crushed by his remarks and grew to absolutely hate school. Another instance, Roya lost her headphones and did not know the words to say this to her teacher. She tried to mime what happened and use the few words she knew. Her teacher did not help, but instead grew frustrated and said, "Go away! You're crazy!" (First interview, September 23, 2017). Roya's teacher did not try to understand or support her even though he knew she was new to the United States and knew limited English. Instead he dismissed her plea for help and moved on to someone else. Similarly, Amina discussed "feeling stupid" when she first arrived to the United States. She did not know what was going on and felt ignored. The educational systems completely failed in providing these refugee students with respectful initial support and guidance (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017).

These young women were marginalized in class because they did not speak English and did not know how to navigate classrooms in the United States. In other words, they were disempowered because of their lack of language skills. Language is deeply influential and can shape agency, passivity, and power (Gee, 1999). When Roya's teacher told her she would end up in the "chicken factory" was an attempt—conscious or unconscious--to take away her power and agency. Fortunately, the participants did not take heed to the negative and dismissive comments they experienced in their school environment. Instead, they persevered and were successful in school.

Furthermore, diversity is imperative and it is vital to "think about how teacher insensitivities and institutional practices with regard to difference impact children and their families" (Janks, 2010, p. 100). Roya's teacher's insensitivity deeply impacted her and eventually Roya began to have a negative and physical reaction to school. For example, Roya

would cry almost every day after school and began to have nose bleeds from the stress. Therefore, we should ask, when refugee students resettle to classrooms in the United States, "Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged?" (Janks, 2010). Vasquez argued (2014) that we need to interrogate the positions we take up. In other words, educators should examine the extent to which the positions they are taking up support and encourage refugee students. Educators need to critically examine the positions they are taking up in the classroom and how and why they interact with some students and dismiss others. Newly arrived refugee students should not be at a disadvantage in school or in the community. They have escaped from places of persecution and oppression, in hopes of gaining freedom and rights. Fortunately, in this study, participants were able to overcome their very rough beginnings in U.S. schools, largely because of their support systems and determination.

Place and Support Systems

In response to question two, a major factor in participants' lives were their support systems. As noted in the first finding, support systems play a major role in the participants' home country, transitions, and ultimately in resettlement. The spaces participants inhabited influenced the type of support system they had. Furthermore, in Afghanistan the participants had an extensive support system that included their family and friends. The participants faced many challenges and unknowns, but their family support remained constant. The participants continually referenced their family as a source of strength, support, and encouragement. When they left Afghanistan, they no longer had such a close connection to extended family, but still relied heavily on immediate family for support.

Salma continually talked about her parents and how much she owed them for her success in school. When Roya faced the many struggles in school, she turned to her mother for guidance.

Amina had a very large immediate family who supported her when she struggled in her first weeks and months in the United States. In addition, the participants had mentors, sponsors, and teachers who were part of their support system. The spaces they inhabited resulted in interactions with organizations such as with resettlement NGOs that provided connections to a more extended support system. Massey (2005) cited interactions as a characteristic of space. In the case of a support system, this was a result of interactions at an intimate level, where individuals that are part of the support system aimed to understand the refugee family's most immediate and dire needs.

Plurality, another characteristic of space, suggests that there are multiple interactions in which people engage (Massey, 2005). The participants spoke about how individuals in their support systems did not merely help one time, but this help was integrated over an extended period of time. For example, Roya's sponsor worked with other members of the support system to help her out. In addition, he helped her countless times over the years. His first major mission was to help her relocate in the WRS schools. Once she finished there he helped her find a suitable high school. Therefore, the interactions and plurality of the support systems created a space where the participants were not left to fend for themselves. They had support systems that continually helped them through their transition and beyond.

Roya's support system was the most advanced because it included so many individuals outside of her family. She had a main sponsor who then enlisted others to form a comprehensive support system. This support system encompassed most aspects of her life where she needed assistance, such as healthcare and tutoring. Her support system was integrated because they all worked together. Since Roya had such an intricate and extended support system, she was

afforded more opportunities than the other participants and transitioned more quickly to schools in the United States.

For Massey (2005), an important characteristic of space is that it is dynamic. At first, the schools in the United States were extremely uninviting spaces in which the participants were marginalized. However, once their English skills became more advanced and they better understood how to navigate U.S. schools, then these spaces changed for them. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, these spaces were less open and supportive of the participants, and shifted when they gained more mastery of English. As Barlett et al., (2017) found, when refugee students face negative experiences in school, they often attribute these difficulties with their own lack of English or because they are a culture outsider. Participants were outsiders in school initially; yet after they learned how to do school in the United States, they were more successful. However, the reality is these negative experiences are a result of the places they are in rather than their own short comings. Schools need to do more to be supportive and inviting places for refugee students, especially in their first months of being in the United States.

A space is socially constructed and is, therefore, more or less inviting to different individuals (Massey, 2005). In Afghanistan, the school system as a space was not inviting for the participants to actively participate. Rather, they had to merely memorize the textbook and provide the correct answers to avoid punishment. Afghan schools were spaces in which the participants felt that they had few opportunities and they did not see much for themselves. They were influenced by the time-space compression or the amount of "movement and communication across space" (Massey, 1991, p. 24). In other words, the participants' "movement and communication" was stifled in their classrooms. However, once they resettled in the United

States and became accustomed to school and learned more English, they began to have hopes and dreams by means of the education they received.

Therefore, a space was created where they were able to express themselves more and they began to have positive outlook of their present lives and the future. Overall, in response to question two, participants felt disempowered because of their English language skills when they first transitioned to the United States. Research has shown that the transition of refugee students to school in their resettled country is full of challenges including new learning styles, systems of rules, and lack of English language skills (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017). This study extends the findings that there needs to be more supports in place to help refugee students' transition to U.S. classrooms. In addition, the spaces participants inhabited influenced their place and support systems. Certain spaces were more or less inviting to the participants and determined the level of mobility and communication for the participants.

Literacy Practices

The third research question was, "How do Afghan refugee high school young women describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces?" Even though all three participants were from Afghanistan, they all led extremely different lives. Each participant expressed themselves differently through various literacy practices. In response to question three, I found that the participants' texts are never neutral and their Discourses and literacies must be valued.

Texts are Never Neutral

Two of the participants brought artifacts to their interviews. These artifacts were not neutral and demonstrated the point of view of the participants. In addition, participants' narratives were also examined as texts. Texts are never neutral (Freebody & Luke 1990; Vasquez, 2014). In other words, these texts use language and as such "when people use

language, they have to select from options available in the system" (Janks, 2010, p. 61). All the selections from these options are motivated and driven by the individuals and the meanings they want to convey. For example, I examined the participants' positioning by analyzing the meanings and experiences they conveyed in their narratives and artifacts. I examined how these texts were positioned by the participants' point of view and the semiotic choices they made. I examined how these texts "enticed us into their way of seeing and understanding—into their version of reality" (Janks, 2010, p. 61). The participants' artifacts provided a glimpse into their reality. I found that the participants were positioned as motivated and positive individuals. In addition, my own positioning influenced my reading of the text. Both of our positions were influenced by our cultural, social, familial, (etc.) knowledges (Vasquez, 2014). Said another way, the participants' creation of their texts and my reading of the text were influenced by our realities.

In Afghanistan, the participants were marginalized and oppressed because they were female and had a weak education. However, they did not let this oppression defeat them. The positioning they took up in Afghanistan was a student who persevered and cared about their family. Salma, Roya, and Amina described spending hours reading their textbooks and trying to memorize the material. Participants realized that no matter how much effort they put forth their opportunities in Afghanistan were still limited. Their perseverance and caring attitudes carried through to their transition to the United States. However, when they first arrived in the classroom in the United States most of their narratives revealed that they felt initially like an "other" (Sarr & Mosselson, 2010; Ghorashi, 2007), outcasts and unsupported by their teachers. As time passed, their positioning changed as well. They began to feel more like a member in the classroom community and more belonging.

Once participants' English language skills improved, their positioning changed as well. They felt more empowered and successful in the classroom. They all spoke about the importance of self-expression and extracurricular activities. Participating in activities created a platform for participants to share about their lives and experiences. The different modes of self-expression in after school activities helped change their positioning. Salma's participation in 4-H positioned herself as a student with goals that she was striving to reach. She incorporated her memories of gardening in Afghanistan in her 4-H project, which would ultimately result in a scholarship that she could use for her long-term goal to attend college. She was very much goal-oriented and ensured that actions she was taking in the present, such as 4-H membership, would help her achieve her future goals, such as attending college. Roya, was a refugee who wanted to advocate for other refugees. She spoke at several community events and college classrooms describing to attendees her experiences as a refugee in order to "support refugees" and "inspire people to help refugees more and welcome them." Her experiences as a resettled refugee, motivated her to want to support other refugees. Likewise, Amina was involved in Aspiring Young Leaders, where she was able to share her life experiences with other refugee young women and her mentor. She was positioned as a student who wanted to share about her experiences as a refugee and she was focused on excelling in school.

Through analyzing the participants' narratives and artifacts, I also took up certain positions. In this study, I deliberately took up a position as an advocate for refugees to bring light to their stories. However, I did not have first-hand experience as a refugee, so I was positioned outside of the refugee community. In addition, I was positioned as a person who wanted to move away from a deficit view of refugees and focus on the positive attributes and narratives of refugees. Therefore, my positioning influenced my reading of the refugee narratives. In order to

move away from a deficit lens, I often only focused on positive aspects of the participants' lives. However, I quickly realized that highlighting negative aspects of their lives would not promote a deficit lens, but rather helped illuminate all that they had overcome and how they developed agency in the United States and in Afghanistan.

Valuing Literacies

Often, a deficit model persists in our educational system, where the focus is more so on the students' difficulties (Uptin et al., 2016). A deficit model creates an environment where opportunities are missed to build onto students' strengths (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2017; Kaur, 2016; Nilsson & Bunar, 2015). As noted in the fourth finding, place plays a major role in participants' literacy practices. Unfortunately, school as a place did not always value participants' literacy practices, especially when they first transitioned to the United States. This study revealed the importance of refugee stories and how each person has unique cultural and multimodal literacy practices that should be valued and used. All three participants had transnational literacy practices because their literacy practices crossed and extended past borders (Lam & Warriner, 2012). Salma gained a love for gardening in Afghanistan and continued this passion in the United States through joining a gardening club. She began a project on gardening and was going to receive a scholarship for her work. The literacy practices included reading, writing, researching, and presenting about gardening, all which crossed and extended from Afghanistan to the United States. Roya created poetry on social media where she connected her experiences from Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States. Amina used digital tools to search for the meaning of verses in the Quran, in order to continue her practice of Islam, which was a constant in her life from Afghanistan.

In addition, digital spaces were influential in the participants' literacy practices. Whether it was social media or different online venues for sending messages to family back home in Afghanistan, digital tools allowed the participants opportunities for transnational literacy practices. They were able to maintain place and space by maintaining a connection to their home country through their extended family. Omerbasic (2015) found that digital spaces afforded refugee students validation for their literacies and a venue for their stories to be shared and converge. For example, Roya researched poems online and then repurposed these to create her own poems, which she then posted on her social media accounts. The digital tools afforded her a space where she could create poetry as a transnational literacy practice because she connected her experiences in Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States which her poetry conveyed, thus she was able to cross and extend these spaces.

In the sharing of refugee stories and different viewpoints, this study disrupts the dominant deficit model narratives (Hattam & Every, 2010; Uptin et al., 2016). Refugee students are not helpless victims, but rather they have agency and powerful literacy practices. Whether refugee students' cultural and multimodal literacy practices involve their passions such as gardening projects or creating social media posts, these experiences and activities should be valued (Kaur, 2016). According to Gee (1990), literacy practices are part of the one's Discourses, "ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (p. 142). The participants' narratives revealed their Discourses and their "ways of being in the world." Through participant interviews and artifacts, I was able to see how they transnationally integrated their words, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities from Afghanistan and the United States because every text is an "instantiation of a discourse" (Janks, 2010, p. 55). For example, the narratives revealed the

importance of Islam in the participants' lives and cultures in Afghanistan and how this permeated into their lives in the United States. In their Discourses, Islam was revealed through their clothing, talk about their favorite parts of the Quran, how they missed going to the mosque, how they interpreted the Quran in the United States through the use of the Internet, and more. The participants' desire to maintain and practice Islam revealed how literacy practices are influenced by culture. Sarroub's (2002) study similarly revealed the importance of religion in literacy practices and as a means to stay connected to home country culture.

Gee's (1990) notion of Discourse further substantiates the importance of refugee students' "virtual school bags" (Thomson, 2002). Inside these "virtual schools bags" are the participants' transnational literacy practices and Discourses. One way to unpack these "school bags" is through getting to know refugees better and inviting them to share their narratives. Less would be fully understood regarding participants' literacy practices and how they were transnational had I not conducted interviews from which their narratives were constructed.

Overall, in response to question three, the findings revealed that texts are never neutral and transnational literacy practices must be valued. The participants' texts, such as the narratives and artifacts, represented their positioning. For example, the participants' narratives revealed their experiences, point of view, beliefs, and overall realities. In addition, their positioning was influenced by the places they inhabited and their experiences. For example, Afghanistan as a place influenced their positioning much differently than the United States because they were much more limited in opportunities. My reading of their texts was also influenced by my positioning, which I clearly laid out. Furthermore, the participants' literacy practices were transnational and part of their Discourses around religion, culture, and language. Participants' literacy practices revealed how they crossed and extended past any borders to merge their pasts

and present. In addition, their literacy practices were part of what was available in their "virtual schools bags."

Implications for Practices

As the refugee student population increases in the United States, changes must be made to the educational system to support these students' needs. Currently, much of the research and this study reveal how schools are failing refugee students in their transition to schools in the United States. This section highlights implications for practices based on the findings: Teaching matters, transitional spaces should be reimagined, and support systems should be integrated and comprehensive.

Teaching Matters

Teachers' classroom practices, curriculum, and words matter and influence refugee students' success and ability to feel comfortable and supported. The participants in this study were greatly affected by their teachers' attitudes and level of support. The words teachers use have great gravity to them and can either help a student or set them back (Johnston, 2003). Therefore, teachers should be mindful of how they speak to refugee students. In addition, teachers should use words of encouragement and appreciation for these students. Refugee students are new to the educational systems, teaching practices, language and curriculum. Therefore, they need words of encouragement and approval. When teachers display negativity, students feel unwelcome and as though their voice does not matter in the classroom. Students should feel like they are successful even if they have not mastered the language (Bartlett et al., 2017).

Teachers should receive advanced professional development on how to meet refugee students' need. Research shows that ongoing professional development supports teachers as they encounter new experiences (Mac Nevin, 2012). The influx of refugee students in the classrooms

in the United States calls for an increase in professional development on teaching these students. Teachers should be empowered with the appropriate tools, curriculum, and wording to use with these students. Not only should refugee students be set up for success, but also teachers of refugee students should be set up for success by implementing effective professional development. Roya mentioned how she goes and speaks to university students about her experiences as a refugee student. Teachers may find it very beneficial to have former refugee students come speak at professional development and give them advice. Even though each refugee student is different, she or he may be able to offer generalized support that instructional coaches cannot.

Reimagining Transitional Spaces

A second implication for practice is that we need to reimagine transitional spaces for refugee students. Although refugee students go through a series of English language tests that determine whether or not they go to the International school or their districted school, this is not enough. An English test is not enough to gauge how they can be supported. Schools should do more to understand these students' backgrounds. Many are coming from war-torn countries and may need emotional or psychological support as well. In addition, the schooling system in the United States may be completely different from what they are used to, so they should be offered support and information on how the school system works. Only providing intense English lessons is not sufficient (Blanchet-Cohen et al, 2017).

That two participants that went to the International school and found it was ineffective indicates that more is needed to support refugees in schools. The schools are overwhelmed with students and not enough resources. Districts should look into providing more resources and funding for these schools because they are for such a high-risk group. Then once these students are ready to move from the International school to their district school they should be given more

support. The students described that they were thrown into a whole new environment and felt deeply overwhelmed. Newcomer refugees should be assigned a peer mentor who can help them navigate from class to class and understand what is expected in class. In addition, their teachers should be given some background on newcomer refugees as well. Two participants explained that when they started school their teachers did not seem aware that they were refugees. The next step for the teacher, then, should be to work on developing a rapport and relationship with newcomer refugees. One way for educators to understand the refugee experience more deeply is learn the pre-migratory experiences of newcomer refugees. For example, if educators learn that newcomer refugees have not had the experience of reading narrative texts, as was the case for all three participants, then they can introduce narrative reading comprehension strategies. Knowledge of pre-migratory experiences and a deeper relationship with refugee students provides a strong foundation in the classroom for their success and motivation. More effort must be made towards moving away from deficit model of learning and building upon the strengths that refugees students possess.

Integrated and Comprehensive Support

The third implication for practice is to have an integrated and comprehensive support system. This type of support system would extend and connect in and out of school needs. An ideal support system for refugee students should strengthen the links between communities, schools, families, and other refugees. This type of support system would require multiple individuals all working together to cover all these aspects of a refugee students' life. Often, the only support a refugee student may receive is from a teacher or a case manager from the resettlement NGO, and often these individuals are not working together. One individual working as the entire support system for refugee students can be overwhelming and ineffective. However, if there are multiple people working with refugee students, their needs can be spread across

personnel and assigned accordingly. Schools must be more open on working with individuals outside of the classroom to meet refugee students' needs, especially in connecting with their families. Overall, these support systems should be individualized, all-encompassing, and integrated.

Implications for Research

This narrative inquiry illuminated the importance of relating refugee stories and how their stories can shed light on improving the role of education and policy in resettlement. Refugee students' past, current and future stories are important to articulate as action research. Through reflection on their past and current experiences, refugees may be more able to cope with the present and prepare for the future. There were no current studies on Afghan refugee students' pre-migratory and transition experiences in resettlement found in the literature. Therefore, additional research is needed on Afghan refugees', especially as it relates to their pre-migratory experiences. Further, many refugees are part of a niche group who resettle in the United States through SIV. The process refugees on SIV go through is vastly different than most refugees. Additional research would offer insights into the differences in refugee newcomer experiences. In addition, additional research is needed on the countless number of refugee groups. Refugees from different countries go through a variety of hardships. Research that recognizes these hardships would offer insights into education and policy and identify needed support systems. Also, more narrative inquiries are needed on refugees to increase exposure to their stories including their pre-migratory experiences. In addition, narrative inquiries are vital because researchers provide opportunity for refugees to share their stories first-hand and generate significant implications for education, literacy, and research.

Also, research that studies professional development around educating refugee students and strategies for refugee student success would add to the field. Research that is located in

classrooms from educators' points of view regarding work with refugee students would strengthen the literature in teacher education. Finally, a follow-up narrative inquiry with these three participants would offer insight into the extent to which they met their goals they in high school and the extent to which their outlooks changed.

My Experiences in this Study

To say that this study taught me a great deal would be an understatement. The relationships I formed with the participants and the narratives we constructed were life changing for me. I met all three participants right before the study started and by the end we formed life-long relationships. I met their families, tutored them in English, helped them welcome newborn siblings, and spent numerous occasions and meals with them. Amina's family indicated that I was now family. I truly do feel like family—to all three participants. All three participants and their families welcomed me into their homes and lives.

The first interviews with each participant helped me gain some general background knowledge on their lives. Before I started the first interviews, I was anxious and concerned. I had these feelings because I wanted to make sure I did my best in capturing their stories. However, once the interviews started, they quickly became relaxed and easy going conversations. Our conversations even continued past the interviews. With Salma, we talked about her future plans and the ACT exam she wanted to take. After her mother had the baby, I brought baby clothes and we just spent time holding the baby and talking. After Roya's interviews, her mother and their mentor updated me on Roya's mother's job search and life and Roya told me about all the exciting events she in which she would participate. After Amina's interviews, I talked with all of her siblings and we often had English tutoring sessions. After Amina's baby sister was born, my husband I brought over a crib and put it together. During this time, we learned so much about her

home in Afghanistan. These conversations before and after the interviews helped me paint a better picture of their lives. I gained more insight into the everyday spaces and practices they had shared during our interviews. I was able to see how their families lived and worked together.

Overtime, I not only learned the participants' stories from themselves, but also from their family members. The first time I went to Roya's house, I spoke with her mother for hours. Her mother told me her life story and how she ended up in the United States. We talked, ate, and even cried together. After that first encounter, I felt like I knew so much about their lives. When it was time for me to put the participants' narratives together, I felt overwhelmed. I had pages and pages of interview transcripts, but I did not know where to start. As I read the interviews and began to analyze them, the stories began to form and fall together. In each interview, I gained a small piece of their narratives. However, once I began to piece the interviews together, the larger narrative unfolded. I was able to see how life events were connected and influenced the participants and the overall family dynamics. Roya, a young girl with a single-mom, made a daunting move from Iran to Afghanistan and moved again and again. Salma, the oldest of her siblings, also moved numerous times and faced a challenging time in her transition to the United States. Amina barely escaped an explosion in Afghanistan and, when I met her, she had only been in the United States for a year. Their stories painted a vivid picture in my mind and, with careful attention to their stories, I wrote them down on paper.

Once their stories were pieced together, I was able to truly grasp all that they had gone through and the magnitude of their lives hit me. I realized how these young women had left all they had ever known behind to come to a completely new place. However, at the time of the interviews, they were full of hope, happiness, and motivation.

In the news, I continue to hear much negativity about refugees and how they are unwelcomed by some of the U.S. top leaders. The narratives about refugees are generalized and essentialized, and some media outlets have presented a particular story line, one in which refugees are cited as security threats or helpless victims with no agency or motivation. People then are to believe that all refugees fall into this storyline. However, the more time I spend speaking with refugees and volunteering at refugee centers, the more I learn that each refugee has an amazing and unique story to share. It is my hope that the United States will step up efforts to aid in the refugee crisis and the negative rhetoric around refugees will cease. This study is hopefully a start in crafting a new storyline that presents the amazing lives of Afghan refugees.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Interview Guide for Initial Interview

1. How long did you live in Afghanistan? Describe your life in Afghanistan.
2. Describe your educational experience in Afghanistan.
3. Where was your first country of asylum? What was the transition to get there?
4. Describe your educational experience in your first country of asylum.
5. Describe your transition to the U.S.
6. Describe your life in the US.
7. What is your educational experience like in the US?
8. How do you identify yourself culturally?
9. How do you feel or act differently when you are at school than when you are with only other Afghans?

Appendix B

Parental Permission Form

Georgia State University

Department of Education, MSE

Title: A Narrative Inquiry OF Afghan High School Girls: Experiences and transnational literacy practices from home country transitioning to resettlement

Principal Investigator: Dr. Peggy Albers, professor of Language and Literacy

Student Principal Investigator: Sarah Turnbull, doctoral student

Dear Participant:

Please read this Consent form. If you give your child permission to be digitally recorded in this research please sign the form.

I. Purpose:

Your child is invited to participant in a research study. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand refugees' school and life experiences in their home country and in the United States. The current study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do Afghan refugee high school girls describe their past schooling experiences while in their home country? (2) How do Afghan refugee high school girls describe their transition experiences from their country of first asylum to the United States? (3) How do Afghan refugee high school girls describe their literacy practices across these transitional and transnational spaces? (4) What are the multiple spaces and subjectivities they inhabit and the ways they disrupt dominant discourses and relations of power? Your child is invited to participate because she is an Afghan high school refugee student in the United States. A total of up to 3 participants will be

recruited for this study. Participation will require no more than 6 hours of your child's time. All data collection will occur between June 2017 and August 2017.

II. Procedures:

If you give your child permission to participate in this study, she will be asked to participate in 3 digitally-recorded interviews which will occur in your home and later be transcribed. Each interview will take no more than 1 hour of her time. To member check, I will invite her to review each of the transcripts for accuracy. I anticipate that this review will take approximately 30 minutes of her time (total of 3 hours). You will incur no costs for these interviews. You will not be compensated for these interviews.

III. Risks:

In this study, your child will not have any more risks than she would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit your child personally. Overall, I hope to gain information about Afghan refugees' educational and life experiences.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. Your child does not have to be in this study. If you give your child permission to be in this study and you or your child change your mind, she has the right to drop out at any time. Your child may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you and your child decide, you both will not suffer any negative consequences.

VI. Confidentiality:

I will keep your child's records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the study PI will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (GSU Institutional Review Board, the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) and doctoral committee members). I will use codes to identify your child's information (e.g. S2017_P1_Jun [Summer 2017 Participant 1 June Interview]) rather than name your child's records. The information provided will be stored on a secure, password-protected computer. The code sheet to identify research participants will be stored separately from the data to ensure privacy on a secure, password-protected computer. This code sheet will be destroyed at the end of the study. Your child's name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. I will use a pseudonym for your child in the findings section. Your child will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Sarah Turnbull (Student PI) at 678-437-0429, swilliams99@student.gsu.edu or Dr. Peggy Albers (PI) if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

Sarah Turnbull (Student PI)	Dr. Peggy Albers (PI)
Doctoral Student, Language and Literacy	Professor, Language and Literacy
College of Education	College of Education

_____

Printed Name of Parent

_____	_____
Signature of Parent	Date
_____	_____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent	Date

Appendix C

Minor Assent Form

Hello,

I am Sarah Turnbull, a graduate student at Georgia State University and I am conducting a study on Afghan high school refugee girls' life and school experiences.

You are being asked to participate in a project that will be used to learn about your life. If you agree to be part of the project, you will answer some questions about your life in Afghanistan and then moving to the United States. I will also ask you questions about school. We will meet three times for an hour each time.

You do not have to do this project. You can stop whenever you want. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you can skip them. You can refuse to do the project, even if your parents say you can.

No other people will see the answers to the questions I ask you. All of the answers you give me will be kept on a password-protected file on my computer that only I (or my teacher) will see your answers. I am not going to put your name one the answers that you give, so no one will be able to know which answers were yours.

If you or your parent/guardian has any questions about this form or the project, please call me at 678-437-0429. Thank you!

If you understand the information above and want to do the project, please sign your name on the line below. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don't sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Yes, I will participate in this project: _____

Child's Name: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____

Date: _____