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## **The Phenomena Of Acculturation In First-Generation Somali Refugee Women**

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THE PHENOMENA OF ACCULTURATION  
IN FIRST-GENERATION SOMALI REFUGEE WOMEN

By

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of  
The College of Graduate and Professional Studies  
at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Portland and Biddeford, Maine

June 28, 2021

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IN FIRST-GENERATION SOMALI REFUGEE WOMEN

**ABSTRACT**

The decision to relocate and seek refuge from one country to another country is a decision that typically requires careful consideration (Hucklesby & Travis, 2002). The most common reasons refugees decide to flee their country are religious, national, social, racial, or political persecution (Rueckert, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to give a voice to three first-generation adult Somali refugee women who have shared their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States. The research question this study answered was how do first-generation Somali women describe their individual experiences in acculturating within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine? The analysis yielded five themes from the participants restoried narratives as it relates to their acculturation experiences. These themes included (1) cultural differences, (2) mental health, (3) trauma, (4) children and their well-being, and (5) social service programs. There was one major finding of this study pertaining to social service programs and how these programs may set refugees up for failure by keeping them in poverty. The study yielded three recommendations centered around providing a culturally sensitive platform for the immigrant populations voice to be heard as it relates to what is working and what requires improvement to assist with their acculturation.

*Keywords:* acculturation, first-generation Somali women, social service programs, refugees

University of New England

Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my advising committee for the support, understanding, gentle coaching and at times providing the push I needed to keep going. I will forever be grateful to Dr. Cynthia Kennedy, Dr. Audrey Rabas and Dr. Leigh Lardieri. Thank you for helping me along this journey.

A special thank you and recognition to Dr. Brianna Parsons. You were instrumental in helping me develop the focus of this study. Your guidance and counsel will always be remembered.

A special thank you to Dr. Kathy Harris-Smedberg for insisting that I not put this program on hold. I will forever be grateful for your strong advocacy in pushing me beyond what I thought were my limits. You were the catalyst in getting me going. Thank you!

To my husband Troy, I want to thank you for encouraging me to embark on this journey. I am grateful for your listening ear, support, and encouragement when the going got tough. I know it was not easy at times. Thank you for helping me stay on track. We are both Dr. Avery's now.

A big thank you to my three children, Jordan, Ryan, and Nicholas. You have watched me achieve multiple degrees in my adulthood and with each achievement you have been actively present in support, love, and most importantly laughter. I will be forever grateful for all the cheering you have given along this journey's path. You are my chickens, and your love and support has sustained me.

To Lainie, Tom, Eli, and Maxx, you have brought much joy and happiness to my life. You have listened to my frustrations when the journey was tough, you celebrated with excitement when I achieved a milestone, and you stayed the course with me every step of the

way. Your meows and barks were stressful at times and writing with each of you sitting on my lap was not easy. I would not have done it any other way.

I wish to thank my mother, Carol Littlehale. Mom, you are my biggest cheerleader. Through every stage of this research study, you have listened with patience, interest and have relentlessly reminded me that I can do anything I set my mind to. Your love and interest in who I am is pure and I could not have done this without your support. I love you mom! Thank you!

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## CHAPTER 1

By the year 2000, the United States was becoming a haven for Somali refugees who left their homes to escape the instability of their country. Prior to the civil war, the people of Somalia had faced persecution, discrimination, with many experiencing clan-based slavery, oppression, and violence (Ferriss & Forrest-Bank, 2018). Conflict, violence, natural disasters, and food insecurity have been all significant reasons for the displacement of Somali people (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019). According to State.gov (2018), “the humanitarian crisis will continue to present major challenges by displacing large numbers of the population and hindering development throughout Somalia” (p. 3). Rush (2016) reported that between 2000 and 2016, 97,447 Somali refugees arrived in the United States as part of a resettlement effort. Connor and Krogstad (2016) stated that “between 1990 and 2015, the total number of people born in Somalia but living outside the country more than doubled, from about 850,000 to 2 million” (para. 2). As a result of Somali civil unrest, the United States has received a massive influx of Somali refugees, making the U.S. response to assistance critical at the federal, state, and local levels.

The Somalia Human Development Report (2012) reported that 70% to 80% of all refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) are women and children. Kälin (2010) agreed that most of the estimated 1.5 million Somali people who are considered IDP are women and children. Refugee Processing Center (2020) indicated that between 2010 and 2020, 1,129 Somali refugees have resettled within the State of Maine.

Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigration Services (CC) is a faith-based, non-profit organization that provides community-based social services to people of Maine who are the most vulnerable (CC, 2019). According to CC (2019), the term used for newly resettled refugees in

Maine is “New Mainers” which is defined as citizens who originally were residents of Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Ethiopia, Burma, Iran, and Iraq and are now citizens of the State of Maine. Some of the reasons why Somali refugees have resettled in the State of Maine and are now considered New Mainers are related to the internal violence, oppression and persecution, drought, famine, and natural disasters that have afflicted the war-torn region of Somalia (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2019). Filippo Grandi (2018), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated:

In the course of 2018, conflict, persecution, and civil strife continued to uproot millions of people, in harrowing circumstances. In many parts of the world, the politics around refugee and migration issues became more acrimonious and polarized, with direct consequences for the lives of many refugees who were denied refuge, separated from family members, or pushed back to situations of danger. (p.1)

Due to economic and political instability, the lives of many Somali women have been negatively impacted by extreme violence, conflict, and oppression. Understanding the impacts of acculturation may allow social service programs and communities to assist the refugee population in navigating a life where two very different cultures intersect.

Immigrants comprise 12.5% of the U.S. population. Many immigrants have experienced multiple forms of trauma to include subjection to war and other violent acts that might require psychological insight and services designed to meet the needs of acculturating immigrants (DeAngelis, 2011). Acculturative stress attributed to language, culture, religion, and socioeconomic factors impacts this population and can present many challenges. Acculturative stress can include stressful experiences related to conflicts associated with language barriers, the choice in clothing, the extent to which the host community is involved, shifting gender roles, and

discrimination experiences (Hadley & Patil, 2009; Jorgenson, 2017; Lincoln, Lazarevic, White & Ellis, 2015; Magan, 2019; Mooney & Shepodd, 2009; Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy-Brown, 2008). Milner and Khawaja (2010) highlighted the effects of acculturation stress in relocating to a new cultural environment that can have a psychological, social, and physical impact that is exacerbated by the loss of social supports and changes in family dynamics.

The present qualitative narrative study examined the acculturation and adaptation experiences of three Somali women. Specifically, the study expanded upon the acculturation phenomena that Somali women experience when arriving in and adjusting to life within the State of Maine. Over the last 40 years, Refugee, and Immigration Services (RIS) has resettled nearly 10,000 people and has assisted almost 20,000 people with refugee and asylee support services in the State of Maine (CC, 2019). From 2013 through 2018, CC (2019) has provided intake services for 1,117 Somali refugees, with the communities of Portland, Lewiston, and Augusta as the primary resettlement communities. According to Mataan (2018), nearly 4,000 refugees settled in Maine since 2002, and much of this population originated from Somalia and Iraq. It is the hope that this study adds to the existing research so that Maine communities can develop a deeper understanding of how Somali women experience acculturation and how community culture and climate influence these experiences.

This research incorporates Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework to comprehend the acculturation process of female Somali refugees. This model examines the psychological and emotional behaviors that are prevalent during the acculturation process. Berry explained that the idea of cross-cultural psychology demonstrates the influence of cultural factors on the development and display of human behavior. According to Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, and Sam (2011), cross-cultural psychology is defined as the "systematic comparison

of psychological variables under different cultural conditions in order to specify the antecedents and processes that mediate the emergence of behavior differences” (p. 2). Somali women acculturating within the United States bring their Somali culture with them, which intersects with the United States culture. Cherry (2019) explained that cultural differences could include differences in how people think, feel, and act. Understanding how cross-cultural differences influence the behaviors of Somali women informs policymakers and social service providers.

According to Berry (1997), many psychologists conclude that people generally act in ways that align with cultural expectations. Berry wanted to better understand the direct experiences of individuals who come from one cultural context and attempt to live in a new cultural context. Furthermore, Berry wanted to understand how culture can influence behavior and whether behaviors change due to the expectations of the new setting. This research explored the acculturation experiences of three Somali women going through the acculturation process.

Many female Somali refugees who have resettled within the United States have endured pre-migration inhumane conditions that can make acculturation difficult (Bhui et al., 2003). Post-migration stress is common as well. Refugees often do not feel safe when coming to their host country and report having mixed feelings about being here (Finklestein & Solomon, 2009). This study contributes to the ongoing literature related to the understanding of first-generation Somali women’s acculturation experiences.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The decision to relocate and seek refuge from one country to another country is a decision that typically requires careful consideration (Hucklesby & Travis, 2002). The most common reasons refugees decide to flee their country are religious, national, social, racial, or political persecution (Rueckert, 2017). The gendered consequences of war go beyond the

physical and psychological violence that women are subjected through rape and terror and extend to practices that further consolidate patriarchy and exacerbate women's social subordination (Abdi, 2007; Jorgenson, 2017). Resettlement is vital for international protection and a durable solution for the world's most vulnerable people (Swing, 2017). This study may provide information that explores the depth of Somali women's acculturation and adaptation process and what resources are needed to enrich the acculturation transition for Somali refugees. This research explored the lived experiences of three Somali women and the phenomenon of acculturation as experienced only by them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to give a voice to three first-generation adult Somali refugee women who were asked to share their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States, specifically the State of Maine.

Immigration is a national issue, with the capability of transforming the cultural fabric of a given area. Harden, McDaniel, Smith, Zimmern, and Brown (2015) noted that Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, experienced a 14.8% increase of the 2013 total population attributed to foreign-born immigrants. They further explained that this influx of refugees "translated into rapid and highly visible changes across the city's social, economic, and cultural spheres" (p. 118). Kim, Levin, and Botchwey (2018) stated that the demographics of small towns and cities have changed to include permanently settled immigrants, which has led to local leaders advocating for new plans and policies that support immigrants in their communities. Furthermore, the researchers explained that public efforts to become more inclusive are sometimes met with resistance or resentment by other residents. Ramos, Suarez, Leon, and Trinidad (2017) agreed that the demographic, social, and economic structures of rural



communities within the United States are changing rapidly. According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), Maine's population is comprised of 94% Caucasian people.

According to the American Psychological Association (2010), if societies wish to ensure positive outcomes for refugee children and families, stakeholders within clinical practice, research, education, and public-policy sectors must be culturally competent and aware of the interacting factors that influence refugees' mental health. The American Psychological Association (2010) stated that collaboration between stakeholders is vital if improved ethics, feasibility, and effective mental health care are provided to refugee children and families. Factors that influence refugees' mental health status that should be considered through public policy include 1) effects of migration and armed conflict, 2) acculturation, 3) risk and resilience, 4) cultural and religious beliefs and background, 4) age/developmental stage, 5) race/ethnicity, 6) gender, 7) socioeconomic status, 8) sexual orientation, 9) disability/medical needs, 10) characteristics of the family and host community and 11) language barriers/attainment (American Psychological Association, 2010).

### **Research Question**

This study focused on the acculturation experiences of first-generation adult Somali refugee women who have immigrated to the United States. The research question addressed by this study is:

1. How do first-generation Somali women describe their individual experiences in acculturating within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine?

By exploring the acculturation experiences of Somali women, this research may address any gaps in research that specifically exist for first-generation Somali refugees.

## **Conceptual Framework**

A condition of complex and rapid change is often where communities identified as refugee resettlement centers find themselves. This study identifies and explains the experiences of Somali women as they transition through the acculturation process. Fullan (2001) explained that communities, public-school systems, and organizations should consider learning how to become a plural society. Furthermore, Fullan stated that businesses and school systems must serve as learning organizations and cultivate learning under conditions of complex, rapid changes. This research incorporated Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework and Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework to reduce some of the complexity around the understanding of the Somali female acculturation and adaptation process.

Acculturation stems from how individuals of different cultural backgrounds adjust to live side by side with one another, and intercultural work is how two or more cultural backgrounds relate and understand one another (Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis & Sam, 2011). Berry (2005) found that two issues are facing all acculturating people. These distinctions are based on the orientation towards the individual's own group, meaning they prefer to maintain their heritage, culture, and identity. The second has to do with their distinction towards other groups, meaning they have a preference in participating in the larger society.

Berry (2005) stated that "acculturation is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 698). Furthermore, at the group level, it involves changes in social structures and cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavior.

Berry (1997) stated that assimilation occurs when the non-dominant group (ethnocultural group) or individual does not wish to maintain their cultural identity instead choosing to engage in daily activities with different cultures. Furthermore, separation exists when the ethnocultural group or individual chooses to maintain their cultural identity, choosing to avoid interaction with other cultures. Berry (1997) posited that integration occurs when the ethnocultural group or individual chooses to maintain their own cultural identity and chooses to engage in daily activities from different cultures. Marginalization occurs when the ethnocultural group or individual has no interest in maintaining their cultural identity, nor do they wish to engage in daily activities with other cultures (Berry, 1997). Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework provides a lens to examine the challenges faced by Somali women while undergoing the acculturation process. These concepts are explained in depth in Chapter 2.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), limitations are factors that can limit the scope of the study or alter the outcome. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that qualitative limitations are threats to transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability. The researcher has selected purposeful sampling, specifically criterion sampling for participant selection which has some limitations. This sampling method can be viewed as a means of excluding many potential research participants. Suri (2011) described how using a small number of studies that encompass specific criteria enriches the research because it is more narrowly focused; however, it may be limited. The intent is to capture the authentic experience of the participants, and the use of a small sample has allowed the researcher to focus on these findings and reduce the risk of data saturation.

Rettke, Preto, Spichiger, Frei, and Spirig (2018) stated that a reflexivity journal should be maintained to address methodological rigor. They further stated that reflexivity involves continuous self-critique and appraisal throughout the entire research process. Finlay (2002) noted five reflexivity components: the researcher engaging in introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. Furthermore, reflexive practitioners “engage in critical self-reflection: reflecting critically on the impact of their own background, assumptions, positioning, feelings, behavior while also attending to the impact of the wider organizational, discursive, ideological and political context” (p. 6). The researcher attempted to maintain a reflexive journal to document the researcher’s potential for subjective feelings around reported experiences of violence, trauma, and mental health wellness. The researcher noted that when conducting the reflexive journal based on Finlay’s (2002) five ways to approach reflexivity which includes: “introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction the reflexive journal did not prove to be as helpful to the researcher had hoped. The researcher believes this has to do with the researchers ongoing personal and professional development around, diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. The researcher found that as she was journaling, the same reflections were repetitive. The researcher acknowledged that she is a White woman who has a heightened sensitivity to other women who have experienced violence, trauma, and threats to their mental health wellness.

Another potential limitation of this proposed research is Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework. This framework notes that there are four categories that an immigrant/refugee can belong to: 1) Assimilation, 2) Integration, 3) Marginalization, and 4) Separation. Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010) argued that some populations may not fall within

Berry's four categories and that some categories may have multiple subtypes. Many researchers have used Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework, making this theoretical framework a well-respected theory within the social and cultural psychology field. Recognizing that there are several acculturation theories available, this research is grounded in Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework.

A delimitation is defined as "those characteristics that define and clarify the conceptual boundaries of your research. Furthermore, delimitations arise from specific and intentional choices made by the researcher" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 207). This body of research delimitation is the deliberate choice to include only first-generation Somali women who have immigrated to the United States. Another delimitation is the researcher's choice to exclude all Somali women and children who are younger than eighteen years old, who do not speak fluent English, and who have not lived within the United States for at least two years.

### **Scope**

This narrative study has explored the lives of Somali female refugees and has captured their reflection of transition. The scope of the study has incorporated acculturation frameworks such as assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation to understand the entire acculturation process. By focusing solely on the lived experiences of three personal reflections that focus on acculturation, this narrowing of the scope of research allows the researcher to gain valuable information around a specific phenomenon.

### **Sample size**

The sample size of three participants allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth study. Kim (2016) suggested that research that incorporates a small population focused on collecting life experiences could be a lengthy process. Kim stated that limiting the scope of

participants allows the researcher to access quality information over quantity to better understand the phenomenon of acculturation experiences. The emphasis of narrative inquiry consists of focusing on the quality of the interview, gaining rich and in-depth information from the participants engaged in the study.

The sample size consisted of refugees rather than migrants or asylum seekers. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021) defined a refugee as “someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence” (Who is a refugee section, para. 1). A migrant, as defined by UNHCR, is someone who “chooses to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons” (Who is an asylum seeker section, para. 1). The UNHCR (2021) defines an asylum-seeker as “someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed” (para. 1). This research intends to explore the phenomenon of acculturation through the lens of a person forced to flee her home country rather than exercising free will to leave her home country. Limiting this research to refugees rather than migrants or asylum seekers allows a focus to be placed on the forced displacement of Somali women based upon a humanitarian crisis.

### **Significance**

This study may be significant to policymakers, communities, public school systems, and social service program providers invested in understanding the effects of immigration within communities. By identifying the acculturation challenges that Somali woman have faced while residing within the State of Maine, this study may inform communities of the acculturation needs of Somali women. For all stakeholders to better understand the cumulative trauma, pre-resettlement, and post-resettlement stress and acculturative challenges that Somali women

undergo, this knowledge may aid in mitigating any misconceptions that are developed due to lack of understanding.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Acculturation:** Berry (2005) defined acculturation as “the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their members” (p. 10).

**Adaptation:** Berry's (2005) definition of adaptation is “changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands” (p. 14).

**Assimilation:** Truong (2016) defined assimilation as "people who consider their culture of origin not to be important and who want to identify and interact mainly with the new culture" (p. 3).

**Diaspora:** Shandy (2016) defined diaspora as “a scattered or dispersed population from a common geographic origin” (p. 1).

**Ethnocultural:** Berry (2005) defined ethnocultural as relating to an ethnic group (non-dominant group).

**First Generation Immigrant:** Moffett (2019) posited that the United States government accepts the definition of first-generation as the first member of a family who becomes a United States citizen or qualifies for permanent residence.

**Gender Inequity Index:** Gaye, Klugman, Kovacevic, Twiggy, and Zambrano (2010) state that the Gender Inequality Index is designed to capture women’s disadvantage in three dimensions - empowerment, economic activity, and reproductive health, and shows a loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these areas.

**Immigration:** U.S. Immigration (2021) defined immigration as the act of leaving one's country and relocating to another country that they are not a native nor a citizen of for resettlement.

**Integration:** Truong (2016) defined integration as "people who seek to maintain their heritage culture and learn from and interact with the new culture" (p. 4).

**Marginalization:** Truong (2016) defined marginalization as "people who neither identify with their heritage culture nor with the new culture" (p. 4).

**Plural Societies:** Berry (2005) defined plural societies as "people of many cultural backgrounds come to live together in a diverse society" (p. 8).

**Psychological Acculturation Phenomenon:** Graves (1967) stated it is the psychological change that occurs when culturally distinct groups are placed in the first-hand contact with the dominant group.

**Refugee:** United States Immigration (2021) defined a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee their country of nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution based on a race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, political opinion war, or violence.

**Separation:** Truong (2016) defined separation as "people who value their heritage culture and do not want to learn about the new culture" (p. 4).

## **Conclusion**

This study seeks to unveil the struggles that Somali women face in their transition through the acculturation process within the United States, specifically the State of Maine. There is a need to have a greater understanding of the acculturation experiences of Somali women. Due to this need, the purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to give a voice to three first-



generation adult Somali refugee women who have shared their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States, specifically the State of Maine. By exploring the acculturation experiences of Somali women, this research may address any existing gaps in research that specifically exist for first-generation Somali refugees. This research may provide a better understanding of the psychological phenomena of acculturation and all that is involved within the change process, not only for refugees but also for the resettlement community.

Chapter 2 of this study presents the literature review, which demonstrates the significance of the research. The literature has provided essential evidence related to the history of Somalia, the violence that Somali women have endured, the trauma and post-traumatic stress imposed upon the lives of Somali women, the importance of international human rights, and the acculturation literature that supports this research. The conceptual framework of this study is fully explained in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 explains the methodology, research design, and data collection of this research. Chapter 4 explores the data collection approach, and Chapter 5 describes the data analysis and provides a conclusion to the research.

## CHAPTER 2

The period between 1991-1992 was the most intense time of conflict in Somalia. The escalation of violence in these conflicts particularly impacted women, who were forced to consider fleeing Somalia to escape conditions that left them especially vulnerable (Amnesty International, 2019; Gardner & Bushra, 2004). Gardner and Bushra (2004) reported that from 1991 to 1993, 80% of the estimated 300,000 people who sought refuge in Kenya consisted of Somali women and children. The European Resettlement Network (2007) stated that in 2011, Kenya and Ethiopia faced an increase in Somali refugee arrivals and associated this expansion with the drought, famine, and ongoing instability in Somalia. The Somali civil war disrupted many lives, leading to violence and unrest, giving many Somali citizens no choice but to leave their homeland.

Gardner and Bushra (2004) explained that before inter-clan warfare, the Somali pastoral society would honor a code where the elderly, the sick, women, and children would be protected from being attacked. Furthermore, in 1991, inter-clan warfare erupted, leaving women, children, and other non-fighters attacked by warring factions without exemption or compliance with the established code. Gettleman (2017) stated, “Somalia is one of the poorest, hungriest, war-torn countries on earth” (para. 5). Osman (2017) reported that over one-third of the Somali population lives in extreme poverty. Osman further explained that conflict in Somalia is underpinned by the persistent poverty rate, leading to many Somalis seeking refuge across the world. The collapse of the Somali government, civil war, and the humanitarian crisis led to hundreds of thousands of Somali women and children fleeing to refugee camps within other countries.

Connor and Krogstad (2016) described Somalia as having “faced lawlessness and strife during its decades-long civil war. As the country of 10.8 million continues to experience political

and economic instability, its people are increasingly living outside of Somalia” (para. 1).

Furthermore, Connor and Krogstad explained that between 1990 and 2015, the total number of people born in Somalia but living outside their country more than doubled, from 850,000 to 2 million. According to Connor and Krogstad, estimates provided by the United Nations indicate that the total number of Somali refugees living in the U.S. is approximately 2,500 in 1990; however, this number has increased to between 140,000 and 150,000 refugees reported by 2015. Due to inter-clan warfare, the growth rate of displaced Somali refugees has substantially increased between 1990 and 2015.

Connor and Krogstad (2016) stated that in 1990, the “UNHCR estimated that about 470,000 of the total Somali global diasporas (about 55%) was living in a temporary refugee situation” (para. 3). Furthermore, Connor and Krogstad stated that “by 2014, that number had grown to 1.1 million – still about 55% of all Somalis living outside of Somalia” (p. 2). The United States has historically been a global leader in resettling refugees (Alpert & Hussein, 2017). The U.S. is a desired refugee resettlement nation for many people fleeing war-torn nations and nations of poverty and famine. Somali diaspora has been and continues to be on the rise.

Krogstad and Gonzalez-Barrera (2019) stated that under the Trump Administration, immigration policy has changed to include a lower admission cap. In 2018, 22,491 refugees were admitted to the United States, which decreased by nearly 54,000 from the prior fiscal year. Krogstad and Gonzalez-Barrera stated, “for the fiscal year 2019, refugee admissions have been capped at 30,000, the lowest since Congress created the modern refugee program in 1980” (p. 3). This decline in the admission cap creates real concerns for the health and welfare of all immigrant populations.

In response to the refugee humanitarian crisis, in 2017, Catholic Charities Maine created a department called Office of Maine Refugee Services (OMRS), intending to administer the Maine refugee resettlement program. The American Immigration Council (2020) stated that in 2018 Maine was home to 47,418 immigrants, which comprise 4% of Maine's total population. They state that the demographics were divided as follows: 49% women, 39% men, and 12 % children. This study focused on female Somali refugees and has provided rich detail of their experiences fleeing from a war-torn country and finding refuge within the United States of America. This research has unveiled the struggles that Somali women have encountered through their acculturation process.

Acculturation is defined as the process of cultural and psychological change resulting from contact between two or more cultural groups (Berry, 2019; Chun, Organista & Marin, 2003; Graves, 1967; Redfield et al., 1936). By attempting to understand the challenges Somali women face within their communities, individuals who are positioned to help with these challenges may become better equipped to assist with transitions and begin to address the acculturation needs of this specific population. As with any transition, Somali women may encounter some level of insecurities in their new climate.

Perceived discrimination can be linked to a heightened increase in acculturative stress, which can lead to an increase in psychological stress (Johnson-Agbakwu, Flynn, Asiedu, Hedberg, & Breitkopf, 2016; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). These stress factors have contributed to additional discriminatory practices against Somali women within their acculturation process that impacted their ability to thrive within the United States. Acculturative stress can include experiences related to conflicts associated with cultural differences such as language barriers, the choice in clothing, food, and the extent to which the host community is

involved, which lead to discrimination experiences (Bhowmik, Cheung, & Hue, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2015). The transition of cultural norms can add pressure to Somali women in understanding how their customs significantly differ and how to make these changes. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to give a voice to three first-generation adult Somali refugee women who have shared their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States, specifically the State of Maine.

Nakhaie (2017) explained that due to the need for refugees leaving their country unexpectedly, in many cases, they were unprepared to communicate in a new language and were unable to bring their social resources. This has led to a need for a higher level of social resources in which public policy can influence. Bernstein and DuBois (2018) stated, “the recent federal policy changes affecting refugees have caused major shocks to the refugee resettlement system, which supports the complex task of refugee integration in communities across the U.S.” (p. 5). Kallick and Methema (2016) conducted a study that showed gaps in public policy that negatively impacted refugees. Kallick and Methema (2016) stated:

Refugees often require some help getting started, and while they currently receive some aid, there are areas that this report points to where they could use additional supports. Some refugee groups need particular assistance in educational attainment, while others would benefit from attention to homeownership or English language learning opportunities. Federal, state, and local governments have every reason to invest in making sure that refugees reach their full economic and social potential. When refugees succeed, the communities they live in do better, and the U.S. economy grows. (p. 41)

After acquiring a rich understanding of why Somali immigrants have immigrated to the U.S. and fully understanding female Somali refugees' physical and psychological needs, only then can public policy be informed to ensure that more inclusive communities exist.

This study has provided a voice to three first-generation Somali women who are over the age of 18, who speak fluent English, and who have shared their acculturation and adaptation experiences after arriving in the United States, specific to the State of Maine. This study is intended to better understand the psychological variables associated with acculturation and the adaptation process. Also, this study has focused on how Somali women cope with significant life changes.

This chapter is divided into two sections to include the literature review and theoretical framework of this study. The literature review demonstrates the continuous exploration of the history of the Somali diaspora and the female acculturation process. The theoretical framework section explains how theories aid in providing a greater understanding of the complexities of the Somali female acculturation experiences. This chapter presents literature that demonstrates what has been studied and the findings as it relates to acculturation. This chapter also supports the need for further understanding of the challenges associated with the phenomena of acculturation.

### **Review of the Literature**

“Good research could help improve the quality of interventions immigrants receive, but it remains underdeveloped as well” (Birman as cited in DeAngelis, 2011, p. 3). Birman, as cited by DeAngelis (2011) explained that researchers fail to cite each other’s work and use different terms for the same constructs, resulting in difficulty finding accumulated knowledge within the field.

Vroome, Coenders, Tubergen, and Verkuyten (2011) emphasized that refugees are a large group

of immigrants in Western countries; not a lot is known about their integration into their new communities.

The literature reviewed in the next section consists of the historical overview of Somalia, gender, trauma, post-traumatic stress, and the resettlement process. This information is important to understand human rights violations, trauma and stress, and the phenomenon of acculturation that these women have endured.

### **Historical Overview**

The causes of the Somali civil war “lie in a complex set of issues relating to distribution of resources and power, Somalia’s economic marginalization in the world economy, long-term corruption and exploitation, oppression and uneven development” (Gardner & Bushra, 2004, p. 3). According to Sawe (2019), there were two branches of the United Somali Congress (USC). These included the external branch of the USC, which was located in Italy, with the second branch of the USC’s location in Somalia. In 1991, the external branch of the USC launched an attack that led to the fall of then-President Mohamed Siad Barre. As a result of this battle, Ali Mahdi Muhammad, who was the commander of the external branch of the USC became the President of Somalia. This change in leadership inflamed the Somali people, which led to the beginning of the civil war between the two factions (Sawe, 2019).

As a result of the civil war, Mogadishu was attacked, and mass casualties occurred (Abdullahi, 2007). Sawe (2019) stated that violence enveloped other parts of the country between clan-based militia, contributing to civil unrest. The researcher noted that the testimony of survivors described the clan-based militia as killing thirty to forty people at a time, cutting off and burning body parts with acid, and there was a widespread incidence of rape, otherwise known as clan-cleansing to capture the territory. With the break-out of civil war and the

intentional killing of Somali people, this turmoil led to a mass exodus of the Somali people (East, Gahagan & Al Delaimy, 2018; Keating & Waldman, 2019). The civil war brought about displacement to refugee camps for many to stay alive (Creager, 2017).

Stewart (2006) stated that from August 1992 through March 1994, the United States Army and the United Nations moved into Somalia to provide humanitarian support. Stewart reported that the Somali people greeted the U.S. Army in a positive fashion as they believed they were being saved from starvation. Sawe (2019) reported that as the threat of starvation subsided, the U.S. Army turned over the humanitarian mission to the United Nations, leaving a small tactical team to support the UN mission. In 1994 US-UN forces gradually began to withdraw, and in 1995 a final exit of troops occurred. From 1994 through 2003, numerous attempts at mediation and reconciliation occurred over the years. By the year 2004, a transitional government was established, and by the year 2012, the full governmental transition was completed. In 2013, The United States formally recognized the new Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). In 2017, the FGS held its first national electoral process since the transition, such as the nomination of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who was elected as President (U.S. Department of State, 2019). During these 20 years of civil unrest, international support and mediation facilitated the transition from the civil war to the first national electoral vote for president.

Sawe (2019) stated that the civil war and unrest resulted in governmental ineffectiveness in addressing critical state functions like maintaining internal order, tax collection, and economic redistribution. Human Rights Watch (2008) found that in 2007 Somali civil unrest had a devastating impact on Somali civilians. An estimated 2.7 million people continued to face severe abuse from continued political infighting. By the end of 2019, United Nations Somalia (2021) maintained its position that Somalia is still in need of a stable governmental structure. The



humanitarian crisis in Somalia continues despite worldwide efforts to alleviate the violence (Bradbury & Healy, 2010; Njoku, 2013). This lack of stability has led to ongoing violence against Somali citizens.

### **Violence in Somalia**

Understanding the violence in Somalia may inform the level of trauma that many Somali women have had to endure. A study conducted by Bentley, Ahmad, Owens, and Jackson (2008) suggested that Somali society comprises a clan-based social system that places great emphasis on family and communal bonds. According to Farole (2019), over the last two decades, the regional threat in East Africa has been the state collapse of Somalia. The causes of the state collapse were due to internal factors such as competition for political power, a toxic political culture of elites such as despotism, corruption, clannism, and seeking foreign patronage (Abdullahi, 2017). Somalia has a reputation throughout the world as being a country of violence and chaos since the collapse of the government in 1991 (Farole, 2019). Somalia's lawlessness, strife, political, and economic instability have forced its people to live outside of Somalia (Connor & Krogstad, 2016). Abdi (2007) stated that the 1991 collapse of the Somali nation led to mass migration to the United States. Human Rights Watch (2008) stated that local clan militia raped many Somali women who traveled to Kenya, making the travel to safety extremely difficult for many Somali women and young girls. Between the years 1991 and 2017, the people of Somalia began to flee their country due to governmental instability and inhumane living conditions, coupled with violence against women.

Torrente and Weissman's (2009) research described how Somalia remains subjected to anarchic, famine, and drought and is depicted as a country ripped apart by internal feuds, terrorism, and piracy. Torrente and Weissman explained that the war-torn environment of

Somalia is caused by a brutal clash of national, regional, and international political agendas, which have caused high numbers of casualties and war-wounded. The Somali civil war placed its people in significant harm's way creating inhumane living conditions through violence, famine, and drought. Im, Ferguson, and Hunter (2017) found that decades of war and chaos have led to forced emigration to neighboring countries. The cumulative trauma and displacement have created many challenges for Somali refugees. Common issues include the following: the impact of war trauma, torture, post-resettlement stress, and acculturative challenges. Hodan as cited by The World Bank (2021) stated, "Women continue to suffer from the lack of political representation in critical governance sectors, especially parliament with rampant abuses and neglect of women's issues and proposals of violent laws that impede on the human rights of women and children" (para. 4). Similarly, United Nations Development Programme (2012) stated that Somalia is considered the second-worst country worldwide pertaining to violence related to women and attributed some of this violence to the country's position of having no economic boundaries and being embedded in Somali culture. With violence against women woven into the Somali culture and with Somali women being displaced, this demonstrates the need to better understand how Somali women acculturate within a country where violence against women is not embedded within the culture.

### **Gender**

Gender matters in the migration process. Understanding what gender dynamics are at play among refugees allows for a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of migration (Abdi, 2007; Timmerman, Fonseca, Praag, & Pereira, 2018; Višić & Ćosić, 2018). As an example, internally displaced women and girls were at particular risk for gender-based violence by the militia, armed men, government soldiers, and civilians (World Report, 2018). Višić and

Ćosić (2018) explained it is the “interaction of gender relations and gender ideologies in sending and receiving countries in historically changing structures of global inequality” that drives the variations of migrant gender composition (p. 269). According to Narrahn (2008), “sexual and gender-based violence is ongoing and has been used as a weapon of war in Somalia. In Somali society, rape victims are highly stigmatized, and sexual assaults often go unreported” (para. 9). Millions of people are affected by war and conflict throughout the world, which leaves many people with no choice but to flee their homes and countries to escape the violence and struggle (American Psychological Association, 2010).

### **Trauma**

A large and growing body of literature investigates the effects of trauma associated with military and political conflict. A study conducted by Fazel, Wheeler, and Danesh (2005) stated that refugees could suffer from physical and mental deterioration due to forced migration, traumatic events, and resettlement in environments unknown to them. The American Psychological Association (2021) defines trauma as “an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster” (para. 1). Also, trauma can bring about unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, relationship problems, and physical symptoms, such as headaches and nausea. When a person suffers from some form of trauma, behaviors can be altered because some victims of violence may reenact an emotional event that can potentially perpetrate violence against others (Bank, 2017). Trauma and stress emanating from violence and torture undeniably take a toll on the human condition.

According to Gardner and Bushra (2004), “atrocities carried out by individuals and militia groups against women and girls in Somalia between 1991 and 1992 were unprecedented in Somali history” (p. 69). Robertson et al. (2019) stated that “refugee psychosocial response to a

history of trauma exposure is complex and varied, calling for a range of therapeutic support options—from medical to community” (p.1083). Jaranson et al. (2004) conducted a cross-sectional, community-based, epidemiological study on torture prevalence and the associated problems amongst Somali and Ethiopian refugees. This study demonstrated that women were tortured as often as men, which led to more health problems, including posttraumatic stress disorder. There is a need to “recognize torture in African refugees, especially women, identify indicators of post-traumatic stress in torture survivors, and provide additional resources to care for tortured refugees” (p. 591). The psychological effects of torture are considered an essential aspect as it is associated with posttraumatic stress and how it affects a person emotionally and physically, which demands specialized resources. As a result of these heinous crimes of torture and horrific abuse, many Somali women fled to refugee camps searching for safety.

Simon-Butler (2019) stated, “Globally, refugees experience the full spectrum of gender-based violence throughout the refugee experience” (p. 6). Furthermore, “while all persons are affected by violence during times of conflict, women and girls are most at risk of gender-based violence due to the lack of social protection, safe access to services and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war” (p. 6). As Simon-Butler indicated, the pre-migration violence refugee women have experienced can lead to trauma that is experienced post-migration.

Pre-migration experiences have a direct effect on post-migration adjustment (Nilsson et al., 2008). The researchers explained that torture, forced labor, starvation, sexual abuse, and murder/loss of family members and friends contribute to post-migration stressors. Li, Liddell, and Nickerson (2016) focused on how socioeconomic, social, interpersonal factors, the asylum process, and policy affect refugee's psychological well-being. Furthermore, with global displacement increasing, a greater understanding of factors directly associated with refugee

mental health is needed. The living conditions in Somalia were inhumane in 1990 and increased emigration as a direct result of living conditions.

### **Post-Traumatic Stress**

In a systematic review and meta-analysis, Charlson, Ommeren, Flaxman, Cornett, Whiteford and Saxena (2019) “estimated that the prevalence of mental disorders (depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia) was 22.1% at any point in time in the conflict affected populations assessed” (p.244). Lincoln, Lazarevic, White, and Ellis (2015) found that refugees who have fled violence and traumatic events have disproportionately experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and violence. Lincoln stated that “meta-analysis of 181 studies with adult refugees from 40 countries found that the average prevalence of PTSD was 30.6%, and the average prevalence of depression across surveys was 30.8%” (p. 771). Chen, Hall, Ling and Renzaho (2017) stated that post-migration resettlement related stress had a direct and indirect correlation on a refugee’s mental health wellness.

The American Psychological Association (2019) suggested that people who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder may agonize from intrusive memories, flashbacks, and nightmares. They may avoid any situation that reminds them of the trauma they suffered and may experience anxiety that can disrupt their lives. Onyut et al. (2009) performed a study that focused on trauma, poverty, and mental health among Somali and Rwandese refugees and discovered that the mental health consequences stemming from conflict remained with the refugee long after the events were over. Furthermore, Onyut et al. recommended mental health interventions be put into place following the post-migration process.

In contrast, a study conducted by Jorden, Matheson, and Anisman (2009) demonstrated how Somali refugees interpreted war-related violence as not personal but as a political attack on tribal lineage. Jorden et al. (2009) stated that “the feeling expressed most was that of anger at the injustice rather than feelings of fear and sadness” (p. 853). Jorden et al. (2009) suggested that refugees who share collective trauma developed social norms that guided their response to events that reduced the effects of psychological distress. Similarly, significant analysis and discussion on the subject by Mölsä, Hjelde, and Tiilikainen (2010) explained how Somalis face post-war conditions that are new sources of suffering that may place these refugees at higher risk of psychiatric disorders. The studies reviewed in this literature support the hypothesis that wherever trauma comes from, whether war trauma or situational trauma, trauma and post-traumatic stress play an important part in better understanding the psychological needs of Somali refugee women.

### **Human Rights**

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2019) defined human rights as inherent to all human beings, whatever nationality, place of residence, sex, ethnic origin, religion, language, or any other status. People worldwide are equally entitled to human rights without discrimination. According to the OHCHR (2019), international human rights law expects government obligations to act in specific ways or refrain from certain acts to promote and protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups. Furthermore, OHCHR reported that human rights are expressed through treaties and international law. These laws are designed to protect human rights and the fundamental freedoms of individuals and groups. In December of 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) was drafted by representatives of different legal and cultural backgrounds from all over the world. This document established fundamental universal human rights that would be protected and was

adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. According to Amnesty International (2019), the UDHR is a document that serves as a global road map for freedom and equality – protecting the rights of every individual, everywhere. In contrast, according to O’Connor (2014), the UDHR imposes western values which fail to recognize cultural norms and values that exist within the rest of the world. Furthermore, the UDHR does not prevent countries from coups, war, and violence. In summary, The United Nations, through the UDHR establishes basic human rights.

According to Kliesner (2014), “human rights violations include indiscriminate attacks against civilians, displacement of persons, restrictions on humanitarian aid, rape, recruitment and use of child soldiers, unlawful killings and torture by armed groups and armed piracy off the Somali coast” (p. 2). Amnesty International (2019) reported that 1.5 million people had been internally displaced, leading to overcrowding in camps that undermines refugees' access to services such as shelter, medical aid, water, and education. Hill (2010) reported, “massive violations of basic human rights have affected all Somalis, majorities and minorities alike” (p. 4). Given consideration to the conflict that has been going on in Somalia for decades and the vast number of Somali refugees fleeing their home country, the world definition of human rights is relevant.

Gichiru (2012) explained that there is a correlation between individual experiences and the reasons why Somali refugees come to the United States. Gichiru explored some of the reasons for exile, which might include war, environmental catastrophes (e.g., tsunami, earthquake, famine, and hurricanes), or individual persecution. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Somali refugees' inherent human rights were violated

within the country of Somalia, which has left its citizens no choice but to flee their war-torn country in search of safety, prosperity, and a better way of life.

### **Acculturation**

One study that focused on acculturation and its impact is Berry's (2005) article *Acculturation: Living Successfully in Two Cultures*. Berry defined acculturation as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their members" (p. 698). Berry explained that processing cultural and psychological changes is a long-term process that can take years, sometimes generations. A study conducted by Schwartz and Zamboanga (2008) defined acculturation as the contact made by dissimilar cultural backgrounds and the adaptation resulting from these interactions. Berry (2005), Schwartz, and Zamboanga (2008), Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) defined acculturation as those phenomena which result when different cultures encounter each other. Benuto and Meana (2008) argued that for individuals or groups to acculturate, this requires those individuals to adopt the dominant culture's language, customs, values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyle. For historical context, Thurnwald (1932) expressed that acculturation is a process, not an isolated event, and the adaptation to the new conditions of life is called acculturation. Acculturation requires navigating many challenges and managing individual and personal stressors associated with bringing two different cultures together.

Refugees face enormous challenges as they resettle, and they must adjust to a new culture and a new language. Somali women experience discrimination and arrive in the United States recovering from the trauma brought on by war and other violent acts from their country of origin (DeAngelis, 2011; Jorgensen, 2017). Furthermore, immigrants can face many challenges that stem from being statelessness, such as barriers to education and language acquisition (Kingston



& Stam, 2017). This type of treatment can lead to acculturation stress, such as depression and anxiety (Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Fazel et al., 2005; Jorgensen, 2017).

The Somali word for transforming is called "Isbedal." The Somali women immigrating to the United States experience a transformational process when they leave their place of origin and become refugees within a new and dominant culture. Yu's (1984) study explored how immigrants who transfer to a new country are considered strangers in a strange land. Yu further explored how this population has acquired new cultural traits and had to leave behind existing traits as these cultural values may promote issues in the new environment. Refugees often have to give up old values before they can adopt new ones. This can lead to refugees feeling alienated from their former homeland.

Similarly, Wade (2011) stated, "culture serves as a resource with which people strategically and pragmatically make sense of the world" (p. 520). Furthermore, Wade explained that a refugee might feel alienated, yet culture inevitably evolves as people accept and challenge meanings. They borrow from other cultures; they negotiate within society and react to societal influences such as political and economic changes. As Somali refugees become integrated within their community, sensemaking takes form, and the acculturation process begins.

Cheung and Phillimore (2017) argued that because refugees may not be able to return to their homeland, it is vital that refugees can participate across all social policy arenas. Fullan (2001) reflected "that culture of change consists of great rapidity and nonlinearity on the one hand and equally great potential for creative breakthroughs on the other" (p. 31). Somali refugees relocating to a state with a population that is 94% White forces a transformation of culture within communities that may not be prepared to manage the complexities of rapid change. According to the APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration (2012):

In the current anti-immigrant climate, xenophobia (hatred or fear of foreigners or strangers or of their politics or culture), and discrimination significantly impact the lives of immigrants. Many immigrants are discriminated against in employment, their neighborhoods, service agencies and schools. Reasons include immigration status, skin color, language skills, and income and education levels. Immigrants are often negatively stereotyped, and these stereotypes have negative consequences for well-being. (para. 8)

In many communities within Maine where refugees have re-settled, one of the impacts on a community is the change in the racial/ethnic composition of the community. “The persistence of racial and ethnic segregation and inequality belies any claims that race and ethnicity have disappeared into some crucible of American idealism” (Perez & Hirschman, 2009, p. 1161).

Acculturation stems from how individuals of different cultural backgrounds adjust to live side-by-side (Berry et al., 2011; Urzúa, Leiva-Gutiérrez, Caqueo-Urizar, & Vera-Villaruel, 2019). Intercultural work illustrates how individuals from two different cultural backgrounds relate to and understand one another. This research has demonstrated the effects of the phenomena of acculturation by understanding the lived experiences of three Somali women.

### **Policy**

Craig and Lovel (2005) discussed the growing number of refugees entering the United States and how policy responds to the problems associated with resettlement. These policies should respond to the needs of refugees based on how their issues are defined. This population may suffer from mental illness due to war trauma and require individualized psychological treatment to address this type of assistance. In a study that investigated U.S. community development with refugees, Craig and Lovel explained how federal, state, and community policy is a response that is dominated by political intent supported by hostile media, which labels

refugees as economic migrants without understanding the trauma and difficulties they have endured as displaced people. Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, and Baker (2008) explained that hostility themes, as it relates to refugees and how they are seen within the community, “vary in universality – some are general and deny the refugee aspects of common humanity (e.g., not being fit parents); others are transparently contingent on specific social activities such as being a source of specific infectious diseases” (p. 215). Fix, Hooper, and Zong (2017) stated that detailed research provides evidence on how refugee populations fare nationwide, with little research on how refugees fare across states regarding state policies and how these policies affect their long-term integration. Fix, Hooper, and Zong explained that given the decentralized nature of the U.S. Resettlement Program, the placement of refugees in a particular state could have ramifications on the access to public services and assistance. Furthermore, placement of refugees in small communities that may have little experience hosting refugee populations could leave a community ill-equipped in recognizing and treating the signs of trauma.

Pope (2017) stated that using narratives about individuals or groups can garner support or opposition for a belief regarding the development of a policy structure. Furthermore, Pope stated that policy narratives contain a plot, themes, and characters that tell what the public policy problem is. Craig and Lovel (2005) explained that developing policy revisions must consider the needs of the refugee and work to ignore the sense of panic that receiving governments express and ignore the growing tendency of hostility towards refugees.

Humanitarian protection represents a key policy area for many countries receiving refugees and asylum seekers (Monin, Batalova, & Lai, 2021). When policymakers are presented with research on issues, they become more informed and can take a position and weigh in on current events (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). By understanding the refugee population, their

experiences, needs, and culture, community-based policymakers may be better informed, which can lead to greater community-based inclusiveness.

### **Resettlement Process**

According to UNHCR (2019), the resettlement process for a refugee consists of the following steps: UNHCR identifies the most vulnerable people to be considered for resettlement. All refugees who are referred must fall into at least one of the vulnerability categories (medical, women and girls, children at risk, survivors of violence and torture). Countries decide which refugees to admit for resettlement, and persons who pose a security risk are not considered. UNHCR refers a refugee for resettlement and provides background information such as iris scans, fingerprints, facial scans, and biodata. The U.S. screens the refugee through the following process, U.S. government agencies, separate security databases, background checks, and in-person interviews. If the refugee is approved, the State Department assigns the case to one of nine non-governmental organizations (NGO), and the NGO helps the refugee integrate and become self-sufficient (UNHCR, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Up until the mid-1980s, the dominant view of acculturation was that immigrants would typically try to assimilate into the new community culture and leave their old culture behind. This view was challenged by studies set out to examine the effects of assimilation on immigrants. A paradigm shift in the literature showed that assimilation was just one of many outcomes when an immigrant encounters a dominant culture (D'Rozario & Yank, 2015).

Berry's (1997) study titled *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation* explained how acculturation phenomena results from contact between two or more cultures. Berry (1997) stated, "The long-term psychological consequences of this process of acculturation are highly variable,

depending on social and personal variables that reside in the society of origin, and the society of settlement” (p. 5). Berry draws our attention to the idea of cross-cultural psychology and how this has been used to demonstrate the influence of cultural factors on the development and display of human behavior. Berry stressed that examining cross-cultural psychology as it relates to cultural context and individual behaviors is essential. Furthermore, cross-cultural research examines what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context and then attempt to establish themselves within a different cultural context.

Berry et al. (2011) made a clear distinction between acculturation and how individuals of different cultural backgrounds adjust to live side-by-side with one another. Berry (2005) provided four acculturation strategies (Figure 1), which have been derived from two fundamental issues facing all acculturating people. These two issues involve a distinction between 1) whether a person would like to maintain their culture and heritage or 2) whether a person would like to connect with the larger society and other ethnocultural groups. Berry (2005) stated that these two issues for the non-dominant group is based on the “assumption that such groups and their individual members have the freedom to choose how they want to acculturate” (p. 706). These two issues are the underpinnings for Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies, which include 1) Integration, 2) Assimilation, 3) Separation, and 4) Marginalization. Berry (2005) defined the four acculturation strategies as:

**Assimilation:** From the viewpoint of non-dominant groups, the individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures.

**Separation:** In contrast, individuals place value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time, wish to avoid interaction with others.

**Integration:** When there is an interest in both maintaining one's original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups. There is some degree of cultural integrity maintained while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the more extensive social network.

**Marginalization:** When someone rejects their original culture and the cultural norm. Contrary to Schwartz et al. (2010) criticism of Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework, Schwartz, and Zamboanga (2008) conducted a study of Hispanic young adults located in Miami, which found classes that resembled three of Berry's four acculturation strategies. Schwartz et al. called into question the validity of Berry's fourth acculturation strategy, marginalization. Furthermore, Schwartz et al. (2010) believed that the circumstances in which a refugee would feel marginalized would be when the refugee feels rejected by both their heritage cultures and the receiving culture, and the likelihood is minimal.

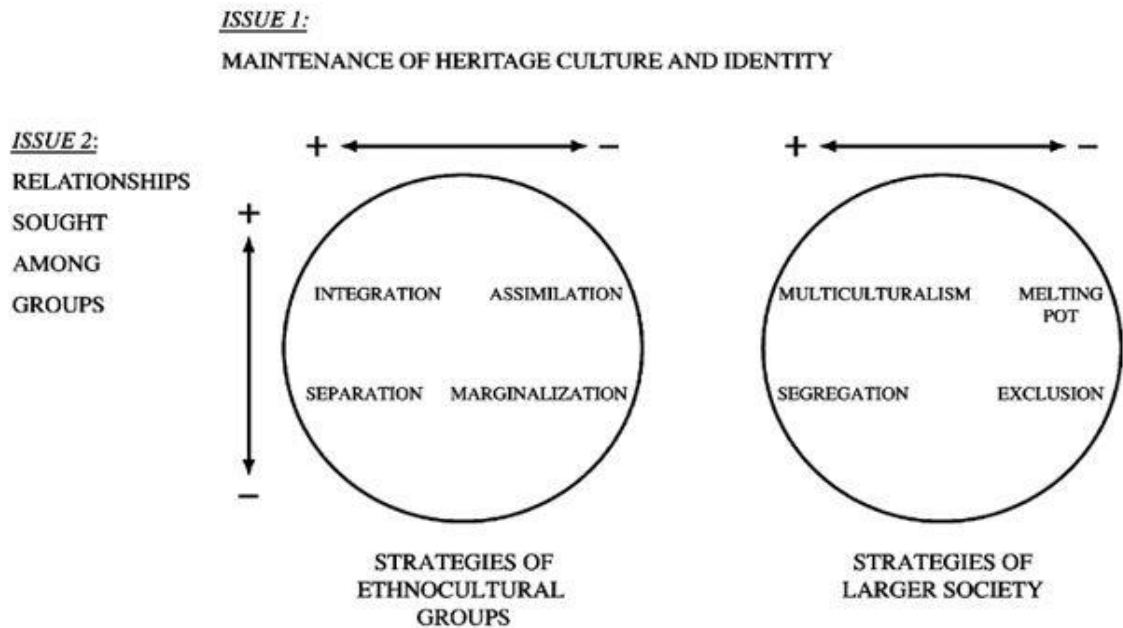


Figure 1. Berry's Four Strategies for Acculturation. Adapted from "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures". By J. W. Berry, 2005, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), p. 705.

Berry (2005) maintained that the acculturation process is comprised of two processes that are occurring at one time. These are the cultural and psychological changes that exist when two or more cultural groups come together. Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework depicts the cultural-level phenomena called situational variables and the psychological-level phenomena, known as individual variables (Figure 2). The top maintains features that existed before the acculturation process. The bottom variables develop during the acculturation process, and the middle section depicts the psychological acculturation phenomena.

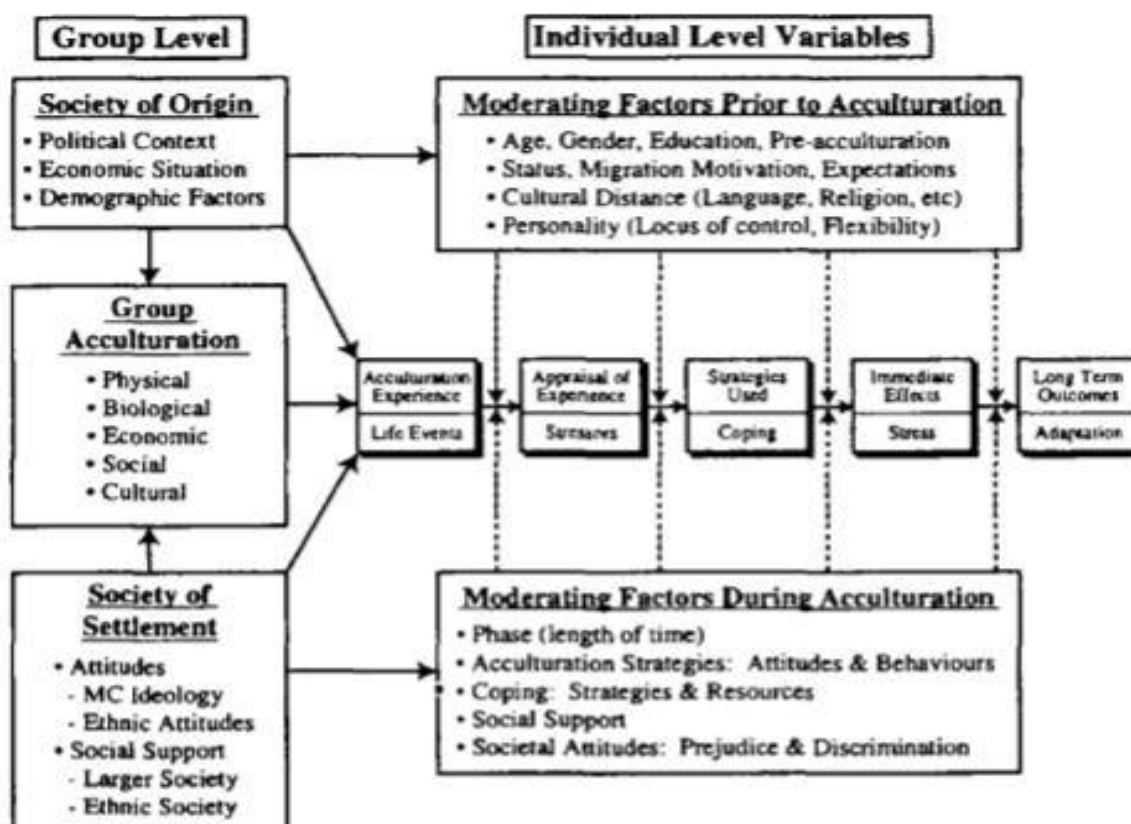


Figure 2. Berry's Acculturation Framework. Adapted from "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation," by J. W. Berry, 1997, *Journal of Applied Psychology: A Framework for Acculturation Research*, 46, p. 15.

This study focused primarily on the middle section of Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework, which aids in understanding the psychological phenomena of the following events and strategies:

1) life events that led up to the acculturation experience, 2) the stressors of beginning the acculturation experience, 3) the coping strategies used leading up to and through the acculturation experiences, 4) the immediate effects of stress, and 5) adaptation and how this integrates with long term outcomes (Figure 2). To address the dual acculturation processes that are occurring at one time, as outlined by Berry (2005) earlier, the theoretical lens this study uses are Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework and Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework. The use of these two frameworks has helped to reduce some of the complexity and generate a greater understanding of the female Somali acculturation and adaptation process.

### **Conclusion**

According to the United States Census Bureau (2019), Maine's population is 94% White. Nassar (2020) explained, it is important to understand whether "prejudice or threat is at the heart of attitudes toward different non-citizen groups which can serve to promote better group relations between White Americans and immigrants" (p. 213). Furthermore, prejudice is found to be the main cause of anti-immigrant attitudes. Positive interactions between White Americans and refugees can serve to improve perceptions of the refugee population. Negative stereotypes of immigrants are common, and refugees are frequently branded as welfare recipients who take advantage of a governmental system designed to assist others (Hedetoft, 2006). A high homogenous population can be a factor leading to the challenges faced by refugees during their resettlement. As a community's racial/ethnic composition rapidly changes, this can force a community transformation in which the community may not be prepared to accept. With community culture change, there is the potential for negativity and discrimination to breed within the changing landscape.

If societal goals are to provide stability for our refugee families, stakeholders within clinical practice, research, education, and public-policy sectors should be culturally competent



and aware of what factors can negatively trigger the mental health of refugees (American Psychological Association, 2010). Furthermore, a collaboration between stakeholders is vital to improve ethics, feasibility, and effective mental health care provided to refugee children and families. A list of factors that influence refugees' mental health status that should be considered by public-policy decision-makers are as follows: effects of migration and armed conflict, acculturation, risk and resilience, cultural and religious beliefs and background, age/developmental stage, race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability/medical needs, characteristics of the family and host community, and language barriers/attainment (American Psychological Association, 2010). By understanding the physical, psychological, and cultural needs of the refugee population, a community-based policy can be well-versed, which has the potential to lead to greater community-based inclusiveness.

Considering the existing evidence, an argument is made that studying acculturation phenomena as it pertains to female Somali refugees is critical. The literature explores how the acculturation process influences Somali women's experiences as they navigate the acculturation experience; however, previous studies have failed to provide evidence related to the acculturation experiences of first-generation Somali women and how they cope with the significant change acculturation and adaptation brings upon their lives.

The literature adds to the evidence about the needs of the female refugee population and how best communities and public policy can meet those needs. Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework and Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework provides an appropriate lens to focus attention on how Somali women acculturate and all the fears, challenges, and problems that these women endured coming to a new and dominant country.

## CHAPTER 3

This study provides a voice to first-generation Somali female refugees who have immigrated to the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, have lived in the United States for a minimum of two years, and speak fluent English. This study examined the challenges associated with the acculturation process looking through the lens of Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework and Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework.

### **Purpose of the Proposed Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to give a voice to three first-generation adult Somali refugee women who have shared their acculturation and adaptation experiences since arriving in the United States, specifically the State of Maine.

### **Research Question and Design**

This study uses a qualitative narrative research methodology, particularly an oral history approach to gain insight into the phenomena of acculturation of three first-generation Somali women who have immigrated to the United States. Creswell (2015) argued that qualitative research is best suited for research studies where variables are unknown, and the research phenomenon is best suited through exploration with participants. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated, "qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants" (p.38). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is a situated activity that positions an observer in the world. Petty, Jarvis, and Thomas (2018) posited that narrative research can educate and transform thought by exploring and understanding experiences.

Using a narrative approach, the researcher immersed herself in the lives of the research participants to ensure that, as Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested, a deep understanding of

the research participant's experiences is thoroughly understood and explained. Using the qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to converse with the research participants by using active listening skills, taking careful notations, and attaining critical reflections of their experiences through a series of semi-structured interviews.

### ***Research Question***

1. How do first-generation Somali women describe their individual experiences in acculturating within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine?

By exploring the acculturation experiences of Somali women, this research may address any existing gaps in research that specifically exist for first-generation Somali refugees.

### ***Narrative Inquiry Design***

Clandinin (2013) explained that “because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others” (p.9). As such, an appropriate research methodology for assessing a person's lived experiences is narrative inquiry. A significant advantage of this approach is that it allows a person's voice to be heard, where it might not have been heard otherwise. Creswell (2015) stated several reasons why a researcher would use a narrative design methodology. The first is that narrative design involves documenting a person's voice and vision. A second reason is that the researchers can establish trust with participants. Creswell stated that narrative research focuses on the micro-analytic picture that focuses on the individuals' stories rather than broader methodologies used in other methodologies such as grounded theory or ethnography. Creswell explained that in contrast to phenomenology, the narrative researchers work to depict the individual's experiences through narrative threads,

tensions, plotlines, narrative coherence, and/or silences which then are composed into the participant's storied experience.

The narrative inquiry methodology provided a framework for the data collection process that depicts the acculturation experiences of Somali women. This method was utilized through an oral history approach unique to narrative design that other methodologies would not provide. The oral history approach allows the subjects to describe their personal experiences without boundaries, freely. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that one significant advantage of oral history is that it allows for gathering personal reflections of events, the causes, and effects of these events in one or more individuals' lives. Macintyre (2007) stated that people live through narratives, and because we understand our own lives in terms of these narratives, the form of narrative research is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told. Wang and Geale (2015) stated, narrative researchers "look for ways to understand and then present real-life experiences through the stories of the research participant" (p. 195). Kim (2016) stated that by using an oral history approach, the researcher determines how the story is told, illuminating specific historical moments that the researcher would like to share.

Kim (2016) argued that humanities-oriented researchers and narrative researchers seek to identify troubling human conditions. Kim stated, "It is critical that we understand these standards for humanities-oriented research as we conduct our research to generate ideas and theories that advance human well-being" (p. 88). Narrative inquiry design is a methodology that accurately explores the phenomenon of acculturation, which can be viewed as a troubling human condition in some individuals (Kim, 2016).

A narrowed perspective was adopted by Clandinin (2013), who defined narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience and is an interaction between researcher and participant.

This includes where the living and telling, reliving, and retelling of experiences is comprised of people's lives on an individual and social level (Clandinin, 2013). Clandinin explained narrative inquiry as a way of better understanding human existence through the telling of stories.

Similarly, Riessman (2008) stated, "that narratives do not merely describe what someone does in the world but what the world does to that someone" (p. 22). The narrative design provides a format in which a research participant may explain their life experiences only as they can.

The narrative approach allows for the participant to narrate or story-tell their experiences allowing for comprehensive information that can be collected, analyzed, validated, and inform the discussion. This approach allowed for a more rich and detailed accounting of the research participant's emotional connection to the story being told. Narrative inquiry methodology allows for flexibility in the storytelling process and best allowed the researcher to uncover the profound experiences and emotions resulting from the acculturation experience.

This research explored the attributes associated with acculturation and adaptation as Somali women transition to a new country. By understanding these attributes, perhaps communities and public-policy decision-makers may use this information to learn more about what culturally supportive social service programs and resources are needed to ensure a positive transition. According to Fullan (2001), "culture of change consists of great rapidity and nonlinearity on the one hand and equally great potential for creative breakthroughs on the other" (p. 31). Fullan also stated, "the paradox is that transformation would not be possible without accompanying messiness" (p. 31). Somali refugees relocating to a predominately White homogenous state forces a transformation of culture within communities that may not be prepared to manage the change.

### ***Berry's Acculturation Theory***

This study utilized Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework and Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework as the lens by which to view this research. Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework was designed to address two questions, whether a refugee would like to maintain their culture and heritage or whether they would like to connect with the larger society along with other ethnocultural groups. These two questions are the underpinnings of Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. This framework demonstrates that there are four acculturation strategies that people may use.

In addition to Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework, this study focused on the middle section of Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework, which aids in understanding the psychological phenomena of the following events and strategies, 1) life events that led up to the acculturation experience, 2) the stressors of beginning the acculturation experience, 3) the coping strategies used leading up to and through the acculturation experiences, 4) the immediate effects of stress, and 5) adaptation and how this integrates with long term outcomes. By using both Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework and Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework, these may aid in the understanding of what refugee's acculturation experiences are coming to the United States.

### **Study Population**

This narrative study explored the lives of three first-generation Somali refugee women who have lived in the United States for a minimum of two years, speak fluent English, and must be at least 18 years of age. The justification for limiting this study to a sample size of three was because the narrative inquiry was grounded in the research by being fully immersed in the lives

of the research participants. Kim (2016) claimed, “If your focus is on collecting life stories, the sample of interviewees will usually be smaller, and the interviewing may be a lengthy process” (p. 160). Kim emphasized that the use of narrative inquiry is appropriate for a smaller pool of participants that focus on the quality over quantity of the experiences shared. By limiting the sample size to three, the researcher was able to fully understand the acculturation experiences of the participants. This research was focused on first-generation immigrants. Moffett (2019) posited that the United States government accepts the definition of first-generation as the first member of a family who becomes a United States citizen or qualifies for permanent residence. This research was limited to first-generation immigrants to ensure that the acculturation experiences gathered through the data collection process yield experiences of Somali women considered new to America rather than born in America.

### **Sampling Method**

The researcher recruited participants through nonrandom, purposeful, and criterion sampling and in one case, the researcher used snowball sampling to recruit the final research participant. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) stated that with purposeful sampling, “researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (p. 206). Creswell and Guetterman stated that the advantages of purposeful sampling are in assisting in a more detailed understanding; more useful information may be collected, it might help people learn about the phenomenon, and purposeful sampling might give voice to silenced people. Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood (2016) stated how the method of criterion sampling identifies and selects research participants based on a specific set of qualifying characteristics. Because this research study was based upon participants having a specific set of attributes, criterion sampling was most suitable for this study.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), criterion sampling works well when participants have experienced the phenomenon in question and meet the researcher's specific criteria as relevant and important. The selection of participants was from volunteers in a community that is considered a resettlement community within the State of Maine. Snowball sampling may be used if a sample size of three participants who meet the study criteria is difficult to acquire for the study. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) explained how snowball sampling might be used after the research study has started, which allows the researcher to ask participants to recommend other individuals to participate in the study. This form of sampling was to be conducted as a last measure in obtaining three participants if purposeful sampling was not successful. Snowball sampling was used to recruit the third research participant. The criteria that this research was based on are age, gender, first-generation, and the consideration of a potential language barrier.

Recruitment began with the researcher providing various non-profit agencies within the State of Maine, who work with the Somali population, a study invitation letter (Appendix C) explaining what the research project was about. This invitation letter also contained the criteria necessary for a volunteer to become a research participant. The researcher also recruited volunteers through professional relationships the researcher had developed over the years with local school departments. The researcher provided these contacts with the same invitation letter described above, which they, in turn, were asked to forward to their professional contacts. The researcher followed up with an email as a means of checking on the recruitment request.

### **Age**

The importance of obtaining informed consent is critical in attaining an ethical aspect of research when researching human subjects. The Office for Human Research Protections (2016) shared the Belmont Report, which considers it a “matter of social justice that there is an order of



preference in the selection of classes of subjects, such as adults before children” (p. 9). Punch (2002) described that when choosing the age bracket in which you interview, considering the age, competence, experience, preference, and social status of the research subject is essential. Selecting an age group of eighteen or older ensures that adults are selected for this research study, which has provided the rich and authentic experiences necessary for this research study.

## **Gender**

Gender matters in the migration process and understanding what gender dynamics are at play among refugees allows for a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of migration (Abdi, 2007; Timmerman, Fonseca, Praag, & Pereira, 2018; Višić & Ćosić, 2018). According to The International Organization for Migration (2019), “gender influences reasons for migrating, who migrates and to where, how people migrate and the networks they use, opportunities and resources available at destinations, and relations with the country of origin” (para. 3). Evidence suggests that men and women have different acculturation experiences due to the resettlement process (Darvishpour, 2002). This research may reveal the dichotomy of empowerment and disempowerment as it relates to the female gender, thereby making this research necessary for a rich understanding of the significant change these Somali women experience through the acculturation process.

## **First-Generation Somali Women**

As Somali women transition to the United States, it may take substantially more time for these women to form profound acculturation experiences than those women who have resided in the United States for over a year or more. To include authentic and relevant experiential data, all research participants have lived within the State of Maine for at least two years. This research was limited to first-generation immigrants to ensure that the acculturation experiences gathered

through the data collection process yielded experiences of Somali women that immigrated directly from Somalia rather than second or third-generation Somali women.

Somali refugees are considered one of the largest refugee populations in the United States, yet there is limited scholarly research on how their intersectional identities may impact their integration within the United States (Magan, 2019). Intersectional identity is defined as understanding the many ways in which we identify ourselves and others and which of these identities form the core of who we are, and how the intersection of these identities affects how we confront our lives (Kort, 2019). Magan (2019) found a great deal of scholarly research pertaining to adolescents and their acculturation experiences as well as much research has been conducted around the health and mental health of refugees. The researcher has identified gaps in scholarly literature related to first-generation Somali women and their acculturation experiences.

### **Language Barrier**

According to Smith, Chen, and Liu (2008), when language barriers exist, translating transcripts to a common language of that of the research team can be expensive, take a lot of time, and the meaning can get lost in the translation of data along with the potential for data to be compromised. Squires, Sadarangani, and Jones (2020) found it surprising that researchers do not minimize the threats to research rigor posed by language barriers. Furthermore, they explained that cross-cultural researchers agree that translation poses a threat to the credibility of qualitative research. To help control interpretation barriers as it relates to the translation of data and the process of coding, this study is limited to research participants that speak fluent English.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures**

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), the most popular approach to data collection within educational research is to perform one-on-one interviews. The interviews were conducted

in a series of three for each research participant. The three research participants were identified, and recruitment followed the University of New England's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. All three participants received a consent form (Appendix B) at the beginning of the first interview. A semi-structured interview protocol developed by the researcher, served as a practical approach as it allowed for some flexibility when asking follow-up questions to participants. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) suggested that probing questions are beneficial in clarifying points and allow the participants to expand upon their thoughts and ideas. The researcher acknowledges that probing questions were asked as this method of inquiry provided a richness and depth of information.

Seidman (2019) recommended that interviews be conducted in a three-interview structure with a length of time not to exceed 90 minutes for each participant and spread the interviews within a three-to-seven-day span. These interviews should build upon a series of open-ended questions within a semi-structured format. Bernard, as cited by Partington (2001), stated that semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to be in control of the process of collecting information yet is free to follow new leads as they arise.

### **Data Collection**

The first interview set (Appendix A) consisted of interview questions specific to the participants' pre-immigration experiences. The intent was that the series of interview questions explored in detail what the research participants social networks looked like, what made up their family dynamics, why they chose to leave their homeland, what was their journey like coming to the United States, and what was their view of the United States before leaving their homeland. The second interview set (Appendix A) was specific to their experiences upon arriving in the United States. The interview questions focused on the research participants' experiences with

immigrating to the United States. What were their experiences upon arrival? What steps did they have to take to resettle within a Maine community? How were they treated by the community upon resettling? What social service programs within the community, if any, did they find valuable? The third interview set (Appendix A) discussed the acculturation process. This included questions that addressed how the interviewees felt towards the community at large and how they felt the community received them. The participants were asked to share their experiences with how their interaction had or had not influenced their adaptation to the United States culture as well as the Maine community culture. This series of questions addressed their identity and whether they felt their identity had changed due to their acculturation experiences, and if so, how. The research participants shared their knowledge on how communities can support and enrich the acculturation process.

According to Majid, Othman, Mohamad, Lim, and Yusof (2017), “piloting for interviews is crucial to test the questions and to gain some practice in interviewing” (p. 1073). The researcher intended to pilot the interview protocol with three female Somali refugees that would not be part of the major study and was not able to accomplish this. The interview pilot did not occur because the researcher could not find three Somali women to help conduct this pilot.

The researcher utilized an EVIDA V618 portable digital voice recorder with a playback function that contains 6-digit password protection to ensure the privacy of all interviews. The researcher utilized a transcription service called Rev.com to transcribe audio to text. Rev.com is a secure software platform in which the researcher uploads an electronic file to be transcribed. Rev.com states that all their professionals sign non-disclosure agreements, and they also sign strict confidentiality agreements. Their work is completed on Rev.com’s secure platform only. Once the transcribed interviews are available, the researcher followed a member checking

protocol to ensure the transcribed interviews were accurate and the participants' intent was captured. It should be noted that two of the three research participants participated in the member checking protocol. Research participant 1 chose not to participate in member checking.

### **Observations**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), one significant advantage of conducting observations as an instrument of data collection is that the researcher may be able to uncover behaviors and interactions that may demonstrate a firsthand account of the phenomenon of interest that a voice recorder would not capture. The researcher's intent was to observe the physical, emotional, and non-verbal responses of the research participants and document these responses within field notes. The University of Southern California (USC, 2020) established that field notes can be accomplished by note-taking, photography, video/audio recordings and illustrations, and drawings. USC defined that the purpose of a field note report is to “describe the observation of people, places or events and to analyze that observation data in order to identify and categorize common themes concerning the research problem” (Definition section, para.1). Focused observation through field notes can be used to explain whether analytic themes explain behavior (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). All interviews were conducted via a cloud-based video communication platform called Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This made it impossible to utilize field notes to capture the non-verbal responses of the research participants.

### **Data analysis**

Creswell and Guetterman (2019) proposed that qualitative data analysis occurs in six steps: 1) preparing and organizing the data, 2) coding of data, 3) develop themes from the coding, 4) represent data through narratives and visuals, 5) interpret the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and the literature that informs the findings,

and 6) conduct strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings. According to Saldaña (2016), a code in qualitative research is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative and essence-capturing attribute for a portion of language-based visual data that can be evaluated for pattern detection, theory-building, or other analytic processes. Like Saldaña, Kim (2016) agreed that the researcher performs multiple coding processes for words or phrases used within the data collection process, the researcher finds a relation(s) between similar codes and combines them to make a category. The researcher can identify an emerging pattern within each of the categories, which then are built into themes. The identifying of themes highlights the complexities of an individual's experience while at the same time adding depth to these experiences (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). In qualitative research, the coding or theme development is how data is organized and then analyzed, leading to the findings and conclusion of the research study.

The researcher utilized a transcription service called Rev.com to transcribe audio to text. Rev.com is a secure software platform in which the researcher uploads an electronic file to be transcribed. Rev.com states that all their professionals sign non-disclosure agreements, and they also sign strict confidentiality agreements. The transcriber's work was completed on Rev.com's secure platform only. Once the transcribed interviews were available, the researcher followed a member checking protocol to ensure the transcribed interviews were accurate and the participant's intent was captured. Participant confidentiality and rights are discussed in depth in a subsequent section.

Member checking occurs when researchers want to ensure the accuracy of their accounts (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Member checking provides an opportunity to gather additional data about the researchers' integrity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2015). Member checking is a "participative and dialogical undertaking and less the monological

activity of the lone fieldworker doing research on respondents” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 195). The member checking protocol provided the research participants with the opportunity to review the raw data to determine if the data was realistic and accurate. This also provided the research participants with the opportunity to clarify or add additional information, which would help further develop the narrative. The research participants who followed through with member checking approved the data collected and did not make any recommendation for changes. Member checking serves as a process of providing validity to the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The member checking protocol helped to ensure that the raw data is of a reliable and credible nature.

Following the transcription and member checking procedures, the researcher used the restorying coding procedure. Creswell and Gueterman (2019) posited that restorying is a practice where the stories are collected, analyzed for common themes, and later organized in chronological order by creating a causal link between ideas. The researchers further explained that “when individuals tell a story, this sequence is often missing or not logically developed. By restorying, the researcher provides a chronological sequence and a causal link among ideas” (p. 520).

This analytical approach is based upon Dewey’s philosophy of experience. According to Dewey (1916), “an ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance” (p. 249). According to Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002), to understand people, we must examine their experiences as well as their interactions with others. The primary lens that was used for analyzing the data collected is Clandinin and Connelly (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Approach to analysis. The researcher utilized the three-dimensional space to organize the participants' shared experiences

into themes as a method of analysis. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described The Three-Dimensional Space Approach as having three aspects: interaction, continuity, and situation (Table 1). Specifically, themes were sorted into categories based on the three-dimensional space narrative structure of interaction, continuity, and situation. The transcripts approved through member-checking were coded by identifying:

(I) for interaction-which consists of an individual's feelings, hopes, reactions, dispositions, and social interactions, including other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view.

(C) for continuity-which consists of where the past is remembered, the present relating to experiences of an event (acculturation), and the future, looking forward to possible experiences.

(S) for situation-is where raw data was coded for context in time and place within the physical setting, with boundaries and people's intentions, purposes, and different points of view.

**Table 1**

*Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

Interaction		Continuity			Situation
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Place
Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions	Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of	Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times	Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event	Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines	Look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes, and different points of view

*Note:* Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000)



Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) described this as a complex analysis process of “reading and rereading through the field texts, considering interaction, continuity or temporality, and situation through personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of the individual” (p. 342). Connelly and Clandinin (2000) described personal practical knowledge as being individualized and pointing inward as it relates to aesthetic, moral, and language constructed as part of individualized experiences. Furthermore, the researchers defined the professional knowledge landscape as contextual and pointed outward to existential conditions in the environment related to an individual’s actions, reactions, intentions, purposes, and assumptions. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) explained that as part of the process, the researcher moves away from the transcript and asks what it means and what the social significance is of which themes, tensions, and patterns become identified. As Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) stated, “finally, the researcher writes interim text that promotes an account of participants’ lived experiences” (p. 342).

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

Limitations are inherent in qualitative research. Limitations are the factors that can limit the study’s scope or may influence its outcome (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Furthermore, Bloomberg and Volpe stated that the criteria for evaluating good and convincing research depend on how well the “researcher has provided evidence that her or his descriptions and analysis represent the reality of the situations and persons studied” (p. 162).

The sampling method the researcher has selected has limitations. Both purposeful and criterion sampling methods can be viewed as a means of excluding many potential research participants. Suri (2011) stated, “very strict criteria for methodological rigor can result in inclusion of such a small number of studies that the transferability of synthesis findings becomes

questionable” (p. 69). In contrast, by utilizing a purposeful sampling method, the researcher collected data specific to the phenomenon of study.

Researcher bias is also a limitation to this study. Creswell (2015) explained that each researcher brings their own epistemological and ontological views to the study. To assist in mitigating any researcher’s bias, the researcher maintains a reflexive journal. The five methods of reflexivity, according to Finlay (2002), are as follows: 1) introspection, 2) inter-subjective reflection, 3) mutual collaboration, 4) social critique, 5) discursive deconstruction. According to Finlay, reflexive practitioners "engage in critical self-reflection: reflecting critically on the impact of their background, assumptions, positioning, feelings, behavior while also attending to the impact of the wider organizational, discursive, ideological and political context" (p. 6).

The researcher attempted to maintain a reflexive journal to document the researcher’s potential for subjective feelings around reported experiences of violence, trauma, and mental health wellness. The researcher noted that when conducting the reflexive journal based on Finlay’s (2002) five ways to approach reflexivity which includes: “introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction the reflexive journal did not prove to be as helpful to the researcher had hoped. The researcher believes this has to do with the researchers ongoing personal and professional development around, diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. The researcher found that as she was journaling, the same reflections were repetitive. The researcher acknowledged that she is a White woman who has a heightened sensitivity to other women who have experienced violence, trauma, and threats to their mental health wellness.

Another potential limitation of this proposed research is within Berry’s (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework. Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework

stated that there are four acculturation categories in which a refugee can fall into 1) Assimilation, 2) Integration, 3) Marginalization, and 4) Separation. Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework is based on a 2x2 matrix of which places an individual on the high end, or the low end of maintenance of heritage, culture, and identity and relationships sought among groups. According to Schwartz et al. (2010), there are more rigorous ways of classifying individuals who are going through the acculturation process, and as such, multiple variants of one or more categories may exist. Schwartz et al. argued that some populations may not fall within Berry's four categories and that some categories may have multiple subtypes.

Finally, the research participants were provided with the transcribed interviews, and all but one of the research participants engaged in the member checking protocol making this a limitation of this study. This protocol consisted of the research participants reviewing the transcribed interviews for accuracy. The research participants were given an opportunity to make changes to the transcripts of which both research participants chose not to make changes and approved the transcribed interviews as presented. The researcher, through multiple attempts, was not able to contact the participant who elected not to engage in member checking.

### **Delimitations**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) defined delimitations as “those characteristics that define and clarify the conceptual boundaries of your research. Furthermore, delimitations arise from specific and intentional choices made by the researcher” (p. 207). A delimitation of this research is to deliberately choose to include only first-generation Somali women who have immigrated to the United States. Another delimitation is the researcher's choice to exclude all Somali women and children younger than eighteen years old, who do not speak fluent English, and who have not lived within the United States for longer than two years. The reason this is a delimitation is due

to the attempt to focus on one specific segment of the Somali population rather than evaluate all Somali segments.

### **Confidentiality**

Researcher trustworthiness is an essential component of building a strong relationship with the research participant. Participant confidentiality is critical and should be protected at great lengths. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), “participant confidentiality will be maintained at all times” (p. 233). Confidentiality is vital to the research process; therefore, pseudonyms are used in place of research participant's names, and the documentation of this is kept in a secured electronic file that is password-protected, known only to the researcher.

### **Credibility**

Bloomberg and Volpe’s (2019) research showed that credibility with research participants significantly influences whether the participant's thoughts, feelings, and emotions match up with how the researcher portrayed them. To control for researcher bias, the researcher used a member checking approach that is used to develop credibility within the interview process with the research participants to ensure accuracy of reflecting the story of the participants.

The researcher utilized a transcription service called Rev.com to transcribe audio to text. Rev.com is a secure software platform in which the researcher uploads an electronic file to be transcribed. Rev.com states that all their professionals sign non-disclosure agreements, and they also sign strict confidentiality agreements. The transcriber's work is completed on Rev.com’s secure platform only. Once the transcribed interviews became available, the researcher followed a member checking protocol to ensure the transcribed interviews were accurate and the participant's intent was captured.

### **Transferability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), “transferability refers to the fit or match between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader” (p. 164). Bloomberg and Volpe stated, “the richness of descriptions included in the study give the discussion an element of shared or vicarious experience. Qualitative research is indeed characterized generally by thick description” (p. 164). Gertz (1973) coined the term “thick description” as it describes qualitative research. Gertz describes qualitative research as a vehicle for thick description for communicating a holistic and realistic picture to the reader. A semi-structured interview protocol was used, which allowed for probing questions. This yielded thick descriptions of the research participants' lived experiences.

### **Confirmability**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that qualitative researchers must be “reflexive and illustrate how their data can be traced back to its origins” (p. 177). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that an audit trail could be used to demonstrate dependability. This can be accomplished by reflexive journaling, as well as a record of field notes and transcripts. As mentioned above, the researcher attempted to maintain a reflexive journal of which it was not as helpful to the researcher as originally thought. All transcripts were reviewed by each research participant in a member checking capacity. All interviews were conducted via cloud-based video communication platform called Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This made it impossible to utilize field notes to capture the non-verbal responses of the research participants.

### **Reliability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), reliability “refers to the extent that the research findings can be replicated by other similar studies” (p. 177). Lincoln and Guba (1985)

argued “in qualitative research the goal is not to eliminate inconsistencies but to ensure that the researcher understands that they occur” (p. 177). The researcher was sensitive to inconsistencies that developed and acknowledges that no inconsistencies exist.

### **Validation**

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that there are nine strategies for validation in qualitative research. 1) Having a peer review or debriefing of the data and research process, 2) Corroborating evidence through triangulation, 3) Discovering a negative case analysis or disconfirming evidence, 4) Clarifying researcher bias or engaging in reflexivity, 5) Member checking or seeking participant feedback, 6) Having a prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field, 7) Collaborating with participants, 8) Enabling external audits, and 9) Generating a rich, thick descriptions. The researcher employed member checking, reflexivity and collaborated with participants, which generated rich and thick descriptions of data.

### **Member checking**

Data collected was validated through a member checking approach. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that this approach involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the research participants for their review of the data for accuracy and credibility. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher provided each research participant with transcription notes. Researcher interpretation notes, data analysis results that come from coding, and the re-storying were not provided to the research participants for member checking. Out of the three research participants two of the participants reviewed and approved the interview transcription notes and one research participant did not respond to the researchers' multiple attempts to seek confirmation.

## **Reflexivity**

As another level of credibility, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal that focused on Finlay's (2002) five ways to approach reflexivity, which include: "introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction" (para. 1). Utilizing a reflexive journal can enhance the credibility of the research and provide transparency of any researcher bias.

Kim (2016) suggested that the researcher must work on their ethical judgment or what Aristotle calls *phronesis*. Kim further explained that *phronesis* is deeply related to the deliberation that requires reflection, action, practice, and practical experience of research. Birmingham (2004) stated, "phronesis is not a moral panacea. It will not obliterate moral dilemmas, erase moral quandaries, or undo the damage that has been caused by immoral or incompetent decisions" (p. 322). Birmingham stated, "reflection-as *phronesis*- is both essentially moral and morally essential" (p. 323). Sound moral judgment was utilized through a reflexive, *phronesis* approach to mitigate possible researcher bias. Additionally, Kim (2016) stated, "quality and validity of the research and recognize the limitations of the knowledge that is produced, thus leading to more rigorous research and making qualitative research "quasi-objective" (p. 104). The researcher attempted to maintain a reflexive journal to document the researcher's potential for subjective feelings around reported experiences of violence, trauma, and mental health wellness. The researcher noted that when conducting the reflexive journal based on Finlay's (2002) five ways to approach reflexivity which includes: "introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction the reflexive journal did not prove to be as helpful as hoped for. The researcher believed this had to do with the ongoing personal and professional development around, diversity, equity, inclusion

and anti-racism. The researcher acknowledged that the anti-racism journey of a White person is a lifelong journey. The researcher found that as she was journaling, the same reflections were repetitive. The researcher acknowledged that she is a White woman who has a heightened sensitivity to other women who come from violence, trauma, and threats to mental health wellness.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), “we are morally bound to conduct our research in a manner that minimizes potential harm to those involved in the study” (p. 200). The researcher adhered to the policies set forth by the University of New England’s IRB to minimize harm to the participants of this study. To assist in doing no harm, the researcher maintained the confidentiality of all research participants identifying information. This includes personally identifiable data, including name, address, email address, data collected, phone numbers, interview site. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants. The data collected is stored on the researcher's laptop and password-protected to ensure data protection and integrity. All data is backed up on an external hard drive and is password protected. The researcher explained the interview process and how the data would be collected, stored, and assembled to ensure the participants understood how their information and identity would be protected throughout the research process and how the data would be stored after the process had been completed.

The Belmont Report which was written in 1978 by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research informs researchers on how to conduct ethical research when using human subjects. Informed consent is an important ethical aspect of research when researching human subjects. Office of Human Research



Protections (2016) stated throughout the report, “it can be considered a matter of social justice that there is an order of preference in the selection of classes of subjects, such as adults before children” (p. 9). According to The Belmont Report, “certain groups, such as racial minorities and the economically disadvantaged, should be protected against the danger involved in research for administrative convenience or due to their socio-economic condition” (Office for Human Research Protection, 2016, p. 9). Consequently, the researcher completed a consent form with each participant and stored these forms in a secure file.

According to the American Psychological Association (2010), ethical consideration is a critical component in conducting research with refugees because of the power disparities and vulnerabilities that exist within the refugee population. Furthermore, the American Psychological Association cautions "given their past experiences of war atrocities and political violence, it is particularly important to address issues of trust, disclosure, and the question of ownership of the narrative" (p. 9). If the research participants experience some form of emotion that stems from the interview process, the researcher maintained a list of social service providers that could assist a research participant emotionally and physically should any of the interview questions triggered negative emotions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explains the methodology that supports exploring how female Somali refugees acculturate within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine. The narrative inquiry approach allows for gathering personal reflections of events, the causes, and effects of these events, in one or more individuals' lives (Bruner, 1986 & Polkinghorne, 1988). The use of a narrative approach allowed the researcher to explore, in detail, the individual experiences of the phenomenon of acculturation.

Berry (2019) stated that acculturation “is the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 10). Berry explained at the cultural level; this includes changes in the social structures, institutions, and cultural norms. Berry stated that it involves changes in behaviors at the psychological level, which include food, dress, language, values, and identities. Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework allows the researcher to explore the behavioral variables that are unique to each research participant. These variables identified through the lens of Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework may inform how Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework is incorporated into the research participant's lives throughout their acculturation process.

This study has some limitations as it examines a small sample size of three research participants; however, as Kim (2016) explained, the use of narrative inquiry is appropriate for a smaller pool of participants that focus on the quality over quantity of the experiences shared. Both purposeful and criterion sampling can be viewed as excluding a large body of research participants. Finally, Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework proposed that there are four categories in which acculturation falls into. Critics of this framework suggest that there may be additional categories to be considered. The last two chapters of this dissertation include Chapter 4, which examines the analysis method and the presentation of results. Chapter 5 provides the interpretation of findings, implications, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and study limitations.

## CHAPTER 4

As noted in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to provide a voice to three first-generation adult Somali refugee women where they can share their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States, specifically the State of Maine. The research participants lived experiences, which are featured in this research, share some similarities but have many differences. The narratives of these women provide insight into how Somali women acculturate within the State of Maine. Each woman's acculturation journey is unique, and each provides important information on what acculturation has been like for them. Verbatim quotes are used to ensure that these women have a voice in explaining their lived experiences of acculturation. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality.

This chapter is divided into two broad sections: the analysis and the presentation of results. The analysis section includes a brief history and background of the research participants as well as the analysis of the participant interviews as it relates to their individual acculturation experiences. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure and Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework were used as an interpretive lens to evaluate the research participants personal and social experiences with acculturation, how their past, present, and future hopes contribute to their acculturation experiences and finally how their physical space and place affect their agency.

### **Method of Analysis**

Three first-generation Somali women participated in the study and were selected according to following IRB approved criteria: (a) age 18 or older, (b) female gender, (c) first-generation, (d) English speaking, (e) State of Maine resident for a minimum of two years. To protect the confidentiality of the study and its participants, the participants were referred to by the researcher

assigned pseudonym of Research Participant (RP1), Research Participant 2 (RP2) and Research Participant 3(RP3) throughout the remainder of this study.

The researcher engaged in purposeful sampling for RP1 and RP2 and utilized snowball sampling for RP3. As stated in Chapter 3 snowball sampling may be used if a sample size of three participants who meet the study criteria is difficult to acquire for the study. RP2 recommended an individual for the third research participant spot. All research participants met the IRB approved criteria, all consent forms were signed, and individual interviews were conducted through three semi-structured interviews which yielded rich and thick data. All interviews were conducted utilizing a cloud-based video communication platform called Zoom. This was selected for use due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the limitations this placed on in-person meetings. It should be noted that the researcher provided beneficence with regarding RP3. RP3 disclosed her experiences with the Somali civil war which included harm to her children. The University of New England's Policies, Procedures and Guidance on Research with Human Subjects (2020) stated that there are two general rules with beneficent actions: (1) do no harm, and (2) maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms. The researcher elected to condense the first two interviews into one to provide the research participant the respect and consideration she deserved considering the sensitivity of the data collected.

One-on-one interviews were conducted over three weeks, and the participants provided narrative responses to questions regarding their lived experiences with acculturating within the United States. The interviews were recorded with participant's authorization, and they were transcribed by a professional transcription service called Rev.com. The research participants were provided with the transcribed interviews, and all but one of the research participants engaged in the member checking protocol. This protocol consisted of the research participants

reviewing the transcribed interviews for accuracy. The research participants were given an opportunity to make changes to the transcripts of which both research participants chose not to make changes and approved the transcribed interviews as presented. The researcher, through multiple attempts, was not able to contact the participant who elected not to engage in member checking. The researcher also read through the transcripts to collect all data that aligned with Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework, specifically, the group acculturation component of this model (Figure 2.) as well as Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Table 1.).

The researcher downloaded each transcript and evaluated the data based on a restorying protocol. Restorying "is the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story, and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 519). The researcher found that the data collected was rich and thick and the data was analyzed using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure approach to analysis.

Each participant's lived experiences were coded based on the personal, social, past, present, future, and situational circumstances of their acculturation experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Following the initial coding process, the researcher then evaluated the significant statements for common themes among participants, as shown in Table 6.

### **Presentation of Results**

The three women who participated in the study were all born and raised in Somalia. All experienced civil war, violence, refugee camps, varying degrees of trauma, and each report that they are resilient women. The ages of each research participant while living in Somalia during the civil war ranged from being a very young girl to being an adult. Each participant currently has

children, and all have lived in Maine for over two years. All three are passionate about children. Two women are professionals conducting community advocacy work within the State of Maine. The third research participant is a mother and grandmother, which is how she defines herself. Each participant has different lived experiences related to the Somali civil unrest, which is the reason why these women immigrated to America.

### **Research Participant 1 Narrative**

Research Participant 1 (RP1) came to the United States from a refugee camp in Kenya. The refugee camp she lived in for many years was one of the first Kenyan refugee camps for people who fled the Somali civil war. To provide some context of what RP1 witnessed while residing in the refugee camp, there was sexual abuse in and around the refugee camp. It was a common occurrence that women, while gathering water, would be sexually assaulted by many men. RP1 reported that the women's mindset was one of which at least they had their lives versus the potential for losing their lives during the civil war. The refugee camp she lived in was eventually burned to the ground by natives who did not want the camp placed there. This forced many of these refugees back to the Northeastern part of Somalia (Table 2, situation, and place).

As a result of the civil war, RP1 experienced a great deal of trauma (Table 2, personal, past). As a young girl, she recalls running from armed bandits while fleeing from the civil war to being thrown into the back of a random truck by a family member who was being chased. The family member was eventually attacked by a man with a machete. She shared:

I remember we were running and flying, and you know this is Africa, so there is not a lot of paved roads. So, if any of you, if any of you had a car the road is not safe. And if any of you have seen in the movies you know these third world countries have got big trucks, they are open and you know you have people piling up on each other and on each other, and on

each other. And so, that was what we were traveling in. And our truck kept tipping because everything was sandy. There is a lot of sand. It is a desert. It is very, very hot and very dry. And so here we are. We have got bullets all over the place. We have got guns all over the place. This thing tipped. And you have nowhere to hide. You know even if we have trees, scattered trees here and there, but there are no leaves. Nothing. Dead. There is nothing that can, like when you are there, the glare of the sun. You know it is that shining on you, you can, I mean you are sweating. It is horrific. But when you are in it though, when you are in that moment, you cannot compare that moment to something like America. Because you have not experienced America (Table 2, past).

It is important to note that it was not unusual for family members to be separated while fleeing Somalia during the civil war. This was the case for RP1.

Upon arriving to the United States and prior to resettling in the State of Maine, RP1 lived in many places throughout America (Table 2, place). Arriving on United States soil for the first time and looking around all she could see was White people. She recalls “coming to America it meant White. Your eyes had to transform themselves. You had to get used to the mixtures of people you were seeing”. RP1 recalls coming to America and seeing “this white stuff (snow) and then you touch it it's very cold. What is that? So that was a big shocker”. In RP1’s case, she did not arrive in the State of Maine originally. She relocated multiple times before arriving in the State of Maine.

RP1 reported that when arriving in Maine, the general population looked old to her. RP1 also expressed that coming from Africa, she was not accustomed to racism (Table 2, social). She stated:

And this looks very old. Everywhere you go. I mean, I have been right down in front of the post office. Everywhere you go it is very old. So that was our second shocker. The vehicle also looked much older, like much older than what we were used to because Maine is an aging state. You know you got a huge population of people who are old. So, like this are not the people that we are used to. And then, the overwhelming White race that lives in Maine. So, all of those were like, whoa, this is crazy. What did we get ourselves into? We had no idea. I mean, nobody... When you are, when you are coming from Africa, it is lonely. If you are coming from middle East, I do not know about that. I cannot speak to that. But if you are coming from Africa, you are not used to racism (Table 2, social).

RP1 explained that she was not used to being judged based on the color of her skin. She was accustomed to judgment due to classism, gender inequality, and socioeconomic status, but not her skin color (Table 2, social). RP1 stated:

We are not used to that. In fact, we are used to a very sense of pride and confidence about your roots and who you are. That is what we pride on. And so, there is a sense of belonging. And you do not... You never questioned that. And so, I think the biggest shocker was, I think on both ends how Maine was not ready for a lot of black people converging at one time. They have seen black people, but not as concentrated as we are. So, that was a huge shocker (Table 2, personal).

RP1 explained that we were not only African people converging on one state, but we were also immigrants (Table 2, personal). African people are very vivid. Our colors are different, our religion is different (Table 2, personal). Not only were we associated with our color, but we were associated with being foreigners as well (Table 2, personal). As a result of this, she reported having to defend herself everywhere she went. Most importantly, she found she had to defend



herself around why she exists, when she came to Maine and whether she was an illegal refugee. She was asked the frequent question, “what are you looking for” (Table 2, social)?

Another concern that RP1 had was the effects immigrating to the United States and specifically to Maine had on her children. She found living in Maine to be very hard on her children, especially when it came to going to school (Table 2, social). RP1 reported that her children had extremely difficult experiences with the school system around the bias that existed. She reported that her children had a very difficult time riding the school bus. RP1 stated:

I think what got to me, is the children. The children, it was extremely, very difficult. The schools and the experiences happened at the time there, were extremely difficult. And, and the bias that existed. In the schools was extremity very difficult. But again, outside the school environment, when you were on the bus and your child has this name brand shirt. The White kid will say, how dare you? They will snatch it from the person. The students say, my dad paid for that. Why would you wear that? How dare you?

Regardless of the tension, RP1 believes in being strong and teaching her children how to have courage and be resilient (Table 2, personal). She frequently reported about the importance of forgiveness. She reported that having to face a war and being displaced provides perspective on your life. This forces you to have courage, resiliency, and recognize what is important in life (Table 2, personal). RP1 stated:

And so, you are going to use that experience to be patient, to be tolerant. It is a lot of fear. That is a lot of fear. You are, you are scared, because you do not, you don't want to, you don't want to get as far as a White person, is. It is an example of government, an example of colonization, an example of intimidation (Table 2, social). Clear. You know, there is just a few different things. But more important, you will hear in my community, over and

over and over so-and-so was racist. I went to that store and that person was racist. My community would say, "Okay. Was that your perception? But did they say, I hate you? No. You know, the way they talk to me, their body language, whatever, whatever. Nope. Were you in their mind? You do not know what their intentions are. In fact, it is deeply rooted into our religion. That you do not come up with assumptions that are not human (Table 2, social). So, you are taught actively every day. Which I have a hard time with my kids as they grow older.

RP1 was very clear that even though she and her family face racism, their religion teaches them to not make assumptions about people. She believes that it is important to understand one's intentions and refrain from judgment, and these are values she works hard to model and pass on to her own children (Table 2, social). RP1 shared:

The journey of acculturation integration is a lifelong journey. You know? It is a lifelong journey. I, I do not think there is, you know, you cannot be competent where you are. You cannot say, okay, I am content here. And that is it. You know? Life is a journey, and you move on and on and on. And there is so much that is thrown at you at any moment. because it is not, it is not a guarantee. And so, to me, the journey of acculturating, the journey of integrating, the journey of making a new place your home, calling it your home, you know, it is something. That is something to say. And so, I am very happy. It was not easy, but I am very happy (Table 2, personal).

RP1 believes that acculturation is a "continuum of progression" for the entire community, not just the immigrant community (Table 2, personal). RPI explained:

You are coming into a community that has nothing in common with you. And how the two work together. And it is so difficult. It is so difficult. Uh, so there are a lot of stresses,

right (Table 2, personal)? This, you know, all the triggers of our mental health, those come running (Table 2, present). They will come back running to you. Everything around you have changed. So, everything has changed, and so I think there is this, so there is this sense of both defeat and liberation. So, you, when I say defeat, I mean by, okay, you got to concede. In your head, you somehow must understand and concede to this new life. So that is, that is a defeat. It is this idea of this. I accept that this is my new home, you know, and, and for the sake of the children, because at the back of our mind, adults, somehow some way we feel like someday we will go back to Somalia. So that, that thought is still there. And so, you fully, somehow you fully think that your purpose is for a child to get a better education, to get a better life (Table 2, personal), whatever, whatever, but for you, as a parent, someday, somehow, you will go back to Somalia, and I think that is delusional (Table 2, personal).

When asked about RP1's views on acculturation, she stated that she believes acculturation is good (Table 2, personal). She explained, "leave your bad culture behind, get the good part of your culture, get the good part of the hosts communities' culture, or country's culture, and blend that. And you have created a fantastic, excellent blend of cultures". She explained, however, that there is an "elite group of people who run everything and everybody else is left behind" (Table 2, present). She expressed that government and systems are not transparent (Table 2, present). She indicated that coming into that culture and environment makes it hard to overcome and adds to the existing wounds. She believes this has an impact on why schools are not performing, why police experience community issues, why taxes go up, why general assistance is adjusted, and why housing is hard to find. She stated that this is not the real problem. The problem is "lack of

coordination, lack of communication, lack of not having intentional way of addressing these issues” (Table 2, present). RP1 stated:

I think that approach of integration and really, really working together with a lot of trust, a lot of trust, a lot of respect is good. I think what we can do better is to work with social service agencies serve communities of color, right? Ethnic community-based organizations there is room to improve specifically. I think there has got be a bridge building mentorship, trust building among the mainstream organizations and the ethnic community-based organizations. Or even the faith community because that is another piece, right? The faith community. So that there is a very well-rounded approach to this (Table 2, present).

RP1 also believes there are things in American society that have been normalized and generally accepted that bring society to our knees (Table 2, present). She explained:

Greed has destroyed a lot of families (Table 2, present). Whether it is greed through drugs, whether it is greed through power it has been normalized and, in turn, has destroyed many, many families in American society.

She believes that American society can learn a lot from the outside world. “People who don’t have much are probably very humbled. They are very authentic, and there’s something about them that you must learn from” (Table 2, social). She also reported that she feels American society is so fast-paced, self-centered and we “forget what the moral obligation and values are collectively” (Table 2, social). She believes that when you lose this, you lose your sense of identity.

RP1 explained that she is grateful to be in America and that she never dreamt of what her family as well as herself have achieved, and she believes it is only the beginning. RP1

believes America is “full of opportunities and it’s full of generous people who are going to give you a helping hand” (Table 2, present). She explained that refugees will always have a shoulder to lean on, “whether it is your coach, your teacher, your social service person, a case manager, I do not know, even the hotel down the road. It does not matter. Someone somewhere will help you because it has been instilled in our values” (Table 2, social).

RP1 concluded that she has hopes and dreams that she is working towards. She is passionate about politics and works each day to effect positive change within her community as well as the State of Maine, and she has reported that she is interested in going back to college one day (Table 2, future).

## **Table 2**

### *Research Participant 1 Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

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#### Interaction-Personal

African	Black
Difference in religion, attire, and culture	Associated as a foreigner
Resilience, courage, and forgiveness	Acculturation-Continuum of progress
Better life for children	Trauma
Stress	Sense of pride

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#### Interaction-Social

Not accustomed to racism	Judged based on appearance
Accustomed to gender inequality, classism, and poverty	Must explain why she exists
Lost sense of identity	White means government, intimidation
Bias in schools	Advocacy work for refugees
Deeply rooted in religion	
Importance of dominant culture understanding	

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**Table 2***Research Participant 1 Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

Continuity-Past	
Civil war Trauma	Suppression
Continuity-Present	
Mental health Lack of communication Normalized negative behaviors	Dominant culture elitism Social service program improvements Triggers
Continuity-Future	
Passionate about politics	Wants to go to college
Situation-Place	
Born in Somalia	Fled to refugee camp in Kenya

**Research Participant 2 Narrative**

Research Participant 2 (RP2) was born in Northern Somalia and came to the United States from a refugee camp in Ethiopia (Table 3, situation, place). She arrived in New York, and within a week, she settled in the State of Maine. Upon arriving in Maine, the community in which she lived had a welcoming immigrant office. General assistance programs were offered to RP2 such as bus passes, tours of the community, and where the bus station and stops were (Table 3, social). Housing assistance was provided, mattresses to sleep on were included, and clothing was provided if needed (Table 3, social). From there, RP2 transitioned to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to apply for the various social service programs that the State of Maine offered (Table 3, social). RP2 explained that DHHS had a Somali person employed who helped Somali refugees navigate the process. RP2 stated that once her basic needs were met, friends of her father from many years ago and who had tribal affiliation brought her food (Table 3, social). When asked

how she felt about coming to the State of Maine, she stated that she did not feel any different. She stated, “she felt at ease” (Table 3, social). RP2 felt the process of resettlement and getting oriented in the State of Maine was a blessing and brought about less stress for her (Table 3, social).

RP2 explained that she does not do well with the Somali culture as the culture is a collective culture that lacks boundaries. She stated:

I do not do so well with Somali culture because it is a collective culture, and it does not respect individual boundaries and spaces. So, it is just that something that does not work for me. So, I always, intentionally move away from where a lot of Somalis are, because I do not know something about it. I do much well with men.

She explained that establishing relationships with men within the Somali community is easier for her as the Islamic and Somali culture maintains cultural expectations, which makes it easier for her to establish boundaries. She indicated that due to these cultural expectations, it is easier for her to know where she stands with men versus women (Table 3, personal).

RP2 explained that between 1995-2003 while living in Somalia she experienced trauma after trauma leaving her to feel as though she did not matter. Coming to the United States changed that for her. She felt as though and still feels as though she is a contributing member of society. This has led her to strong state-wide advocacy work within the Somali community. RP2 acknowledges that there is a dichotomy between the advocacy work she currently does, who she advocates for, and the power and control of state government. She stated:

And, and the funny thing is, the people that work with us every day are people, if I was back home, will be the people I will be running from. People who are in the government, you know, powerful, who will persecute you, who will, you know, admonish you (Table 3, personal).

By coming to the United States, this has blurred the lines between running from people in power to now working with people in power to conduct her advocacy work.

RP2 stated that she struggles with being in Maine and navigating the customs of the Somali culture. She explained that many significant topics are taboo from discussing based upon the Somali culture, such as the abuse of women and children. RP2 is a strong advocate for human rights, and as such, this has left her feeling isolated from her Somali community. She stated:

We do not talk about a lot of things that are still taboo, and I am very blunt. The first time, I was like, nope, it happened to these people. And so up to this day, there are a lot of people who say, you know, I do not think we should talk about this. It is the cultural thing, and our parents, or our community do not, did not know better. But it is something that still happens. You know, maybe not as macro scale, scale as Africa but still the grooming of children and mental abuse of children still happens and women. And so, I feel like the more I am stronger and more self-sure that this is my truth and want to tell my neighbors the truth (Table 3, personal).

RP2 explained that the Somali community does not acknowledge the distractions that occur today. Partly in the schools, within the community, and at the micro-aggression level. She goes on to state that it bothers her when immigrant leaders gather to address the racial inequality within the United States, but the Somali community refuses to acknowledge the inequality within that is not being addressed. She explained that she is often dismissed by her own culture, being labeled as too Americanized (Table 3, personal). RP2 believes in speaking her truth which leaves her in opposition to her Somali culture, leaving her feeling isolated at times (Table 3, present).

RP2 believes in acculturation. She stated that acculturation is a steppingstone to a person's progression. She believes that acculturation is self-initiated (Table 3, present). RP2 stated that a



barrier to acculturation within the Somali community is the collective culture that exists. She explained that while living in Somalia, they existed as Nomads. Rainwater was critical to their existence. As a result of “following the rain,” the collective cultural mindset carried forward while immigrating to the United States. She stated this explains why Somali communities relocate together. It is Somali custom to “following the rain” (Table 3, social, past). RP2 also stated that many Somali people do not believe in acculturation and choose to remain living with a collective mindset. She stated:

You create your own community. You go to your Somali store. You buy the meat. You go to prayer. You sit, you fix all situations, the conflict within your, your community, not the court system. Everything must be quiet. And so, you are never, you know, progressing towards integrating (Table 3, present).

RP2 has indicated that those who have integrated are flourishing (Table 3, present).

Another barrier to acculturation, according to RP2 is how the immigrant community view each other and the differences between the tribes. RP2 stated that the cultural differences between the Muslim community could hinder Somali integration. RP2 explained:

I noticed that Iraqis, majority of time, they can wear, mini-dress and jeans. A lot of times, I see, other Middle Eastern Muslims who can wear jeans and a scarf and can go about their life. I think the number one thing that I feel hinders Somali integration is how we dress. A lot of times it is the long Somali dresses. I also think that Somali culture, itself, is an inward culture. It is a culture that even by DNA that is not diagnosed outside. It is like very genetically isolating, you know, culture so that the inward culture does not help. It is extremely tight, collective culture that only depends on each other. There is a lot of trauma bonding (Table 3, present, social).

RP2 fully believes in encouraging her Somali community to recognize their opportunities to better themselves. She encourages all immigrants to learn the dominant culture's language, learn about the surroundings, and not be scared. She "urgently" encourages her Somali community to not be afraid of your neighbor. She firmly believes that you create your own atmosphere. RP2 stated:

My advice will be when you come, learn your surroundings. Learn the language, do not be scared. But one thing that I will urgently urge you to learn is the surrounding, not to be afraid to know your neighbor, face your next door, and to say hi and smile because I know, from personal experience, we, as humans, create our own atmosphere. If you get out today and you choose to be a hit, you know, pissed-off person, you really create what kind of environment you encountered that day. But if you choose with good intention, and you choose to smile and say hi and integrate people, you choose to create a better environment for yourself (Table 3, present).

RP2 stays true to her belief that to flourish in integration requires the breaking down of walls around collective cultures and cultural suppression (Table 3, past).

According to RP2, the way in which social service programs work can be a barrier to acculturation. RP2 explained that most social service programs are established based on how much money you make. She indicated that as you reach this monetary threshold, your social service programs go away. As an example, she explained that as she made more money, her MaineCare benefit went away. She has experienced that the amount of money needed to come off social service programs is not enough to replace the benefits she received while receiving social service benefits. RP2 stated:

I feel the system can do better as it currently keeps people in poverty. Some people cannot get out of it due to medical health issues or disability. For those who are willing and able

to work to get out of it, I think the government should build a better system to help them out (Table 3, social).

When asked if she had any suggestions on how the system can be improved, she stated:

One system that comes to mind is adult education. It should be a clear structure that gives people a pathway out of welfare and supports them all the way out, including better adult education where, you know, you will learn the skill you need because not everybody is going to sit and academically achieve, you know, higher degrees (Table 3, social).

RP2 also believes that both the dominant and non-dominant communities should work together to create spaces where both communities can come together to get to know one another and learn from one another (Table 3, future). RP2 stated that when you bring together people from different backgrounds, doors open for you. Suddenly you start hearing one another and understanding one another. Bringing together the dominant and non-dominant community, people enrich each other lives, and integration comes naturally as opposed to coercing the non-dominant community (Table 3, future).

RP2 concluded by speaking enthusiastically about her hopes and dreams. She dreams of returning to Ethiopia. She feels she is at a place where she can reconcile her feelings around the trauma of leaving Somalia, fleeing to Ethiopia, emigrating to the United States, and finally closing that chapter of her life (Table 3, future). Ultimately, she would like to build a shelter in Ethiopia for abandoned children that society has neglected (Table 3, future). She also dreams of purchasing a home for her and her children (Table 3, future).

### **Table 3**

#### *Research Participant 2 Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

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Interaction-Personal

**Table 3***Research Participant 2 Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

Collective culture lack of boundaries	Stronger relationships with Somali men
Running from government to working with government	Mental and physical abuse of women and children
Racism	Too Americanized
Discrimination	
<b>Interaction-Social</b>	
Basic needs	Social service programs
Isolation within Somali community	Tribe differences
Attire affects acculturation	Nomadic way of life
<b>Continuity-Past</b>	
Suppression of women and children	Nomadic way of life
Trauma	Violence
<b>Continuity-Present</b>	
Small town	Coming to Maine is a blessing
Less stress than accustomed to	Acculturation is a steppingstone to acculturation
Many Somali people do not believe in acculturation	
<b>Continuity-Future</b>	
Build children's shelter in Ethiopia	Own home in Maine
Break down barriers to integration	
<b>Situation-Place</b>	
Born in Somalia	Fled to Ethiopia refugee camp for safety

**Research Participant 3 Narrative**

Research Participant 3 (RP3) came to the United States from a Kenyan refugee camp (Table 4, place). She was 32 years old when the civil war broke in Somalia (Table 4, place). Unlike the other two research participants, when she arrived in the United States, she came directly to the

State of Maine (Table 4, place). She came to the State of Maine as she already had family living here (Table 4, place). RP3 indicated that prior to the civil war, her life was a good life (Table 4, past). Her father had animals, and she came from a middle-class family (Table 4, past). She explained that she attended school in Somalia and that school was a good experience (Table 4, past). RP3 stated that when the war broke out, “it was very bad, very bad, fight and everyone was killing everyone” (Table 4, past). As part of RP3’s experience with the civil war, she stated that some of her eldest children were killed (Table 4, past). “They came to our house and they, uh, kill some of my eldest children” (Table 4, past).

RP3 stated that living in a Kenyan refugee camp was not safe (Table 4, past). She indicated that she as well as the people living in the refugee camp, were afraid of the bandits. They would try to take their food and their children. She stated it was very bad before, worse than what it is now, she believes (Table 4, past). She stressed throughout the interview process that she was a mother first. That keeping her children safe was a priority (Table 4, personal). RP3 stated:

We try to have a safe place for them, and I think that is the important thing that many mothers to think about that. When you see that there is no safety for you, your children’s life, you will try to escape that place (Table 4, personal).

This unsafe living environment affected RP3 enough to want to immigrate to the United States. When asked what it was like to begin the process of immigrating to the United States, RP3 indicated that was “hell” as the process took a very long time. Upon finding out that she and her remaining family were chosen to come to the United States, she recalls how happy she and her family were (Table 4, personal). She also recalls how she felt when she and her children boarded an airplane for the first time, knowing that they were coming to the United States. That feeling was one of safety for herself and her children (Table 4, personal).

Upon arriving to the State of Maine RP3 immediately connected with all social service programs that were available to her. She enrolled her children in public schools and secured housing (Table 4, personal). RP3 felt access to social service programs was easy and that the community in which she moved to had Somali representatives that helped her navigate the social service and general assistance programs (Table 4, personal).

RP3 stated that the language barrier created a lot of stress for her (Table 4, personal). She stated, "It's been difficult. When you come to the United States the language is very, very hard. You are Black, you're Muslim, and in Maine, I think that we we're the first people of color who came to my community" (Table 4, social). She explained that she did not know what the food was that she was eating, although she did indicate that getting her children established in the public school system was easy. She explained that the public school system sent an interpreter to her home to help her enroll her children into school (Table 4, personal).

When asking RP3 what acculturation means to her, she indicated that it means the dominant community understands her. The dominant community understands her culture and welcomes her as a human being (Table 4, social). RP3 stated that she feels the dominant community judges her before they know her. She expressed that when she wears a hijab, she feels judged. They say you are different (Table 4, social). RP3 explained:

When you are new in this country, you do not think of those things because you already come from a war. You are just trying to get your children to school. This is my experience. But when you live here, it takes time to learn them, to see how they feel about you. It takes time.

RP3 expressed that she believed after many years of living within the State of Maine, the community in which she resides has begun to form an acceptance of the Somali community yet feels there is still a long way to go (Table 4, social).

When it comes to RP3's social network, she explained that her friends are primarily within the Somali community. She does not maintain friendships outside of the Somali community (Table 4, social). RP3 explained that when her children were in public school, she had a lot of interaction with school personnel. Now that they are no longer in school, those connections have not been maintained. RP3 indicated that what makes it easier being a woman in a dominant culture is having children in the school system. This has allowed her to be in contact with people within the community. Now that her children are out of the public-school setting, she has found it more difficult to stay connected with the dominant culture (Table 4, social).

Another challenge that RP3 discussed is how she balances the maintenance of her Somali culture with the way her children view the American culture. The Somali culture is steeped in Muslim traditions. Striking a balance between her views and her children's views is based upon respect (Table 4, personal). She explained,

I am not talking about clothing, but how you live your life. As an example, as a girl you will not go along with what you want, whatever you want, wherever you want. That is not part of our culture and religion. Here our children will have boyfriends that we do not know. That is not our culture. It is very, very difficult (Table 4, social).

RP3 went on to explain that she is not sure about how other Somali mothers feel about this, although she suspects they feel the same as her.

When asked the question about her hopes and dreams, RP3 indicated that she hoped she could go back to Somalia one day (Table 4, future). She expressed her excitement for conducting

charity work, and when asked where, she answered both here in Maine and Somalia (Table 4, future). When asked if she could improve one thing within her community, what would that be, she answered, “to have our own school made up of Somali Principal and teachers” (Table 4, future). RP3 stated that for all new refugees coming to the State of Maine, it is important for them to contact their children’s schoolteachers and maintain that connection (Table 4, future). The next item she would improve upon is having a bigger mosque to worship (Table 4, future).

When asked what would help a refugee adjust to the dominant community, she stated that it is important to put yourself in their shoes. Ask yourself what it might be like if you are an American and go to Africa. How would you want to be treated? She stressed that it is important to understand each other (Table 4, social). She stated, “don't look the colors, don't look at the religion, don't look at anything. Just see a human being. If you are a woman, just understand that woman is like you”. When asked if she believes in the process of acculturating, she stated that when you acculturate, it means you understand more.

#### **Table 4**

##### *Research Participant 3 Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

Interaction-Personal	
Safety of children	Memory of coming to United States
Tradition versus Americanized viewpoints	Language barrier
Interaction-Social	
Some Somali friends	Few American friends
Interaction-Social	
Barrier-skin color	Language barrier
Dominant culture lack of understanding	Wants to be treated as a human being
Lack of acceptance	Somali traditions
Raising children is important to her	School based connections



**Table 4***Research Participant 3 Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure*

Continuity-Past		Civil war
Trauma		
Good life prior to civil war		Middle class family in Somalia
Refugee camp not safe		Good school experience prior to war
Continuity-Present		
Discrimination		Racism
Isolation		
Continuity-Future		
Return to Somalia		All Somali school in host community
Situation-Place		
Born in Somalia		Fled to refugee camp

Table 5 represents a summary of the Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure for all participants of this study.

**Table 5***Summary of Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure for Participant's in Study*

	<u>RP1</u>	<u>RP2</u>	<u>RP3</u>
Interaction-Personal	Black	Self-actualization	Language barrier
	Differences in attire, religion, and colors	Running from government to working with government	Memory of coming to United States

**Table 5**

*Summary of Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure for Participant's in Study*

	<u>RP1</u>	<u>RP2</u>	<u>RP3</u>
	Resilience, courage, and forgiveness	Abuse of women and children	Somali traditions versus Americanized viewpoints
	Sense of pride Stressors	Racism Stronger relationships with Somali men	
	Associated as a foreigner	Trauma	
	Acculturation- continuum of progressions	Too Americanized	
	Better life for children Trauma	Discrimination	
Interaction-Social	Not used to racism	Basic needs	Some Somali friends
	Judged on how she looks	Isolated from Somali community	Not many American friends
	Must explain why she is here	Attire affects acculturation	Barrier: color of skin
	Lost sense of identity	Social service programs	Religion

**Table 5**

*Summary of Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure for Participant's in Study*

	<u>RP1</u>	<u>RP2</u>	<u>RP3</u>
	White means government, intimidation	Nomadic way of life	Wants to be seen as a human being
	Advocacy for refugees		Raising children is important to her
	Accustomed to gender inequality		Dominant culture lack of understanding
	Accustomed to classism and poverty		Somali traditions versus Americanized viewpoints
	Maine is overwhelmingly White		School based connections
	Must defend her existence		
	Bias in public-schools		
	Deeply rooted in religion		
	Important that dominant culture understands		
Continuity-Past	Trauma	Suppression of women and children	Trauma

**Table 5**

*Summary of Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure for Participant's in Study*

	<u>RP1</u>	<u>RP2</u>	<u>RP3</u>
	Suppression	Trauma	Good life prior to civil war
	Civil war	Nomadic way of life	Middle class family in Somalia
	Migration stressors	Violence	Good school experience in Somalia prior to civil war Refugee camp not safe
Continuity-Present	Mental health Many changes Dominant culture elitism Lack of communication-host community Social service programs need improvements Triggers Lack of government transparency	Small town Coming to Maine a blessing Acculturation is a steppingstone to progression Less stress accustomed to Many Somali people do not believe in acculturation	Discrimination Isolation Racism

**Table 5**

*Summary of Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure for Participant's in Study*

	<u>RP1</u>	<u>RP2</u>	<u>RP3</u>
	Lack of intentionality addressing issues within host community Normalized behaviors in host community and the United States		
Continuity-Future	Passionate about politics Wants to go to college	Build children's shelter in Ethiopia Own home in Maine Break down barriers to integration	Return to Somalia All Somali school in Maine Conduct charity work in Maine and Somalia Larger mosque
Situation-Place	Born in Somalia Refugee camp-Kenya Lived in multiple states prior to living in Maine	Born in Somalia Refugee camp- Ethiopia	Born in Somalia Fled to refugee camp for safety Resettled in Maine from refugee camp

Along with Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework which was used as the lens in which to evaluate this study, the researcher also used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure to examine each research participants acculturation

experiences as they relate to 1) Interaction-personal and social, 2) Continuity-past, present, and future, and 3) Situation- time and place within a physical setting. The Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure was used to code each research participant's data sets to uncover emerging themes. Five themes have been identified from the narrative structure and are examined and explored within the context of the literature (Table 6.)

These themes speak to the research participant's past and present experiences and explore their hopes and dreams for their future. The research question that guided this study was:

1. How do first-generation Somali women describe their individual experiences in acculturating within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine?

Each of the three research participants has similar pre-migration experiences as it relates to fleeing from the civil war, living in refugee camps, to the process of immigration. Each has expressed significant emotional distress, and each has expressed the development of resiliency. Their post-migration experiences have been similar with the host community; however, each has different acculturation experiences.

**Table 6**

*Themes*

Main Theme	Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure	Berry's Acculturation Framework
Mental Health	Interaction-Personal, Social  Continuity-Past, Present, Future	Physical experiences, stress, stressors, coping, life events
Children Wellbeing	Interaction-Personal Continuity-Past, Present, Future	Stressors, stress, coping
Social Service Programs	Interaction-Personal	Physical, stress, stressors, coping

**Table 6***Themes*


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 Continuity-Past, Present,  
 Future
 

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**Theme 1: Cultural Differences**

As reported in the literature, cultural differences can make it difficult for Somali women to be accepted by the dominant culture. As Sorrell, Khalsa, Ecklund and Emerson (2019) explained, often the color of a person's skin, and physical features provides a reason for exclusion within the dominant community. As appeared in the Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure, it was found that each has experienced the difficulties of being accepted by the dominant culture based on cultural differences.

Not only do Somali women experience cultural differences within the dominant community, but they also experience cultural differences within their Somali community. RP1 explained that it is not within the Somali culture for women to be community leaders. It is culturally acceptable for Somali women to take care of the home and children. Due to her statewide advocacy work, RP1 experiences a great deal of criticism within her Somali community. There was one experience where she was yelled at and called names while presenting within a Maine community. She explained that this resulted from Somali men not seeing her as a viable leader within the community. All three women expressed some level of difficulty with being a Somali woman living in the United States. There is a clash between Somali culture and the ideology of what a women's position is within the Somali culture and the freedom Somali women have now that they live within a country with all the rights and equality the United States has to offer.

All three research participants expressed experiences with racism. RP1 stated that she was accustomed to racism based on skin color. She explained that she was used to gender inequality, classism and judged on how rich or poor they were, but not based on her skin color. She expressed that she is not comfortable with people assuming what judgment occurs based on how a person looks. RP1 stated,

We are not used to that. In fact, we are used to a very sense of pride and confidence about our roots and who we are. That is what we pride ourselves on. And so, there is a sense of belonging. And you do not question that. And so, I think the biggest shocker was, I think on both ends, how Maine was not ready for a lot of Black people converging at one time. They have seen black people, but not as concentrated as we are. So, that was a huge shocker.

RP1 explained that when you come from Africa and are not used to seeing predominantly the White race, it is overwhelming to them. She explained that it was lonely for her. She was not used to racism.

## **Theme 2: Mental Health**

The literature stated that pre-migration experiences can lead to stress, which can negatively impact a person's acculturative experiences. According to Sam and Berry (2016), some acculturative challenges refugees encounter is learning a new language, being under- or unemployed, experiencing discrimination, dealing with acculturative hassles, and facing cultural bereavement. Not surprisingly, the stress of these factors negatively affects the well-being of the refugee (Beiser, 2010; Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans & Asic-Kobe, 2011).

Bjertrup, Bouhenia, Mayaud, Perrin, Farhart, and Blanchet (2018) conducted a mixed-method study on refugees who fled to Greece and examined the mental health effects on these



refugees when they experienced the European border closing unexpectedly in 2016. A correlation can be made between those refugees waiting to emigrate to their destination and the research participants of this study who lived in refugee camps for years, often decades waiting to come to the United States. Bjertrup et al. (2018) stated,

This study has described how refugees in Greece, in the context of the European border closures of March 2016, are experiencing deep psychosocial distress and social suffering because of the uncertainty of their future, worsened by impediments of bureaucracy, and because of the severe disruption of their lives compounded by the loss of social networks. Refugees experience little or no attachment to, or connection with, the surrounding Greek and European society and feel socially marginalized and isolated. Consequently, it is not surprising that many also report that they experience distress and existing mental and emotional trauma from the experiences that rendered them refugees in the first place.

RP1 stated that upon coming to the State of Maine, everything around her was different. Her surroundings were not the same, and there were triggers associated with the stress and trauma of coming from a refugee camp to a predominantly White state. Miller and Rasmussen (2017) explained that for many refugees during the resettlement process, refugee families struggle with symptoms of trauma, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues that stem from the conflict they experienced from their country of origin than to add to that the hurdles of learning how to adjust to a new culture and environment. RP1 stated that the host community also has its share of mental health needs and trauma to navigate, making it challenging to support refugees in crisis adequately. RP1 shared,

And sometimes, you know, our host community, there are many families that are struggling. Such as intergenerational poverty. People who have dealt with a lot of

substance use. Mental health for generation and generation, the system has failed them.

They cannot help themselves and eventually give up.

She further explained that when the host community knows nothing about the immigrant community, she realized that the immigrant community and the host community had nothing in common, making it very difficult to work together. She explained that when the host community has a significant section of the population requiring social service programs themselves, it is difficult to fully address the immigrant community's needs. She reported that this is a trigger affecting our mental health. She stated about the host community,

We are not going to forget our poor people. We are going to do whatever. Do you know what I am saying? So that people feel involved, and people feel counted, and people feel part of, and people feel like they have a voice. All of those, you know, sort of disconnect and lack of communication and not having a coordinated approach to both resettling people here while taking care of your own business. 'Because, if your house is not in order, how can you put my house in order?'

She asked the question; "How can you even fix me if you need fixing?" She stated that "these are the kinds of things that make people angry and upset." She stated, "and these are the very same people who work within the systems that we are supposed to access". She continued by stating that she believed the biggest challenge is that we have a government that is not transparent; systems are not transparent. She stated that these systems do not do what they need to do to make people feel counted.

### **Theme 3: Trauma**

Given the adversities faced by refugees both premigration and during flight, it is not surprising that a significant number of refugees exhibit mental health issues which lead to

adjustment difficulties upon arrival (Hollander, Bruce, Burstrom & Ekblad, 2011; Stewart, 2011). Each research participant spoke about the trauma associated with coming from a civil war environment to living in a refugee camp to waiting, in some cases years, to emigrate to the United States to attain safety and stability. All three expressed the experiences they have endured around abuse directed towards women and children. RP1 stated she experienced trauma throughout her life. She witnessed violent acts because of living through the Somali civil war. She remembers bullets flying all around her; wounded and dead people were everywhere. She spoke about domestic violence and how this was a way of life. She stated that these stressors could break you, making you numb from experiencing and seeing so much pain. She explained that she thought about killing herself. She stated, "sometimes you try to kill yourself". And then, she stated, "you realize you must survive". To survive, "you become numb to everything". She explained, "you cannot put human beings through that". RP3 chose to share minimal traumatic experiences except she did state, "civil war is very bad. It is the worst thing that can happen to a woman". They each described the physical and sexual abuse of living in a refugee camp. RP2 explained based on culture; there are discussion topics considered taboo within the Somali community. Therefore, discussion about women and children's mental, physical, and sexual abuse are topics of discussion that are not acceptable topics to discuss within their ethnic culture.

#### **Theme 4: Children and Their Well-being**

All three women reported that the reason they came to the United States was to provide a safe and stable life for their children. During the interview process, RP3 answered almost every question with her children and grandchildren in mind. RP1 and RP2 discussed the significance of bringing their children to America in hopes that their children would realize greater opportunity

for their life. RP1 explained that coming to America was a way to ensure that her children would get a better education and have a better life. She explained,

I will be here for my children's sake, but then I have other plans, and you do not see yourself in the picture. This has tremendously affected the immigrant community.

Particularly Somalis. You talk to all the Somalis, and instead of buying a home here, they are building a home in Somalia.

She came to the State of Maine knowing that her children would forever have a brighter future than she had growing up. RP1 expressed her gratitude for being in America. She stated that she could never have imagined that she and her family would achieve so much. She believes it is just the beginning for her family.

RP2 stated that it became essential to her that life in Maine would assist in helping her raise her children with morals and values. She stressed how important it was that her children be grounded within the community and care for and contribute to the community. She also reported that she did not insist that her children wear Islamic attire; she teaches them right from wrong and believes living in Maine has afforded her children opportunities to choose their path.

RP3 stated that she loves her children, and everything she does always comes back to her children. RP3's contact outside of her Somali community has been limited to connections made with her children's teachers and her waitressing job within her community. She stated that she has very few friends outside of the Somali community. Her experiences in raising children within the United States, specific to the State of Maine, have to do with the expectations of the Somali culture related to child-rearing and what freedoms children of the United States enjoy. She reported that the Somali culture is restrictive regarding what children can and cannot do while in the United States culture allows for greater freedom. For example, she reported that her

children liked to have sleepovers with friends; some girls would have boyfriends that would not necessarily be allowed under the Somali or Islamic beliefs. She stated that navigating the American culture while raising her children was very difficult in maintaining her Somali culture.

### **Theme 5: Social Service Programs**

Each research participant shared their experiences with community and state social service programs. They reported that the social service programs helped them get settled within their host community; however, they reported that they share concerns around how the social service programs are set-up and the barriers that exist to inclusivity.

RP1's experience with the social service programs within her community is mixed. She explained that there is much work to improve the social service programs at the community and state level. She reported that community-based organizations schedule meetings to discuss how to improve social service programs during the workday. RP1 presented workday scheduling as a barrier to her involvement as she maintains a job during the workday. She reported that this creates a barrier to inclusiveness. RP1 believes that integration is an excellent acculturation strategy and one she respects. She acknowledges that if the immigrant community is not at the table discussing social service programs, it is challenging to recognize integration when discussing how to improve social service programs.

RP2 stated that the social service programs and how they are set up bother her a lot. Through her advocacy work, she has witnessed how the system makes life miserable by forcing refugees out of the system. She explained that most social service programs are based on income. She stated that just as soon as your income exceeds the minimum required to receive welfare, Mainecare is taken away as a medical benefit. RP1 explained that this does not help acculturating refugees get ahead as they do not make enough income to pay for health insurance. She

explained that she has children that require ongoing medical care and maintaining health insurance is necessary. RP2 stated,

The way I saw it was like, okay, wait a minute. The system should help if I am trying to get out of it. And I am taking the self-initiative to go to school, to get a job. They should create an element that helps you to continue ahead until you all get out of it. The system I see forces people to not even look for a job. Because you get a job, you make enough income; they take your childcare away from you, which then forces you to go back to the system. And you are like, wait a minute. I am making \$1,000, and I pay \$800 for childcare; what is the point?

RP2 reported that she feels the system can do better as it currently keeps people in poverty. When asked if she had a suggestion on improving the system, she reported that the adult-education program within Maine communities should be expanded so that the program can accommodate many more of the immigrant community. She stated,

I do not think the system is structured enough to make sure that people are aware of their opportunities. It should be a clear structure that gives people a pathway out of welfare, including better adult ed education where you know you will learn the skill you need because not everybody will academically achieve. A pathway to earn a higher degree.

RP2 also reported that communities must work together to ensure that the immigrant community receives credit for their education and work experience from the country of origin.

RP3 reported that when she came to her host community, she received the help she needed. She received housing assistance; her children were enrolled in the public school, and she had access to a hospital. She reported that she felt as though she “had enough”. RP1 stated that her children had difficult experiences within the public school. She reported that the bias within

public schools was and is very prevalent. She stated that her children had difficulty on the school bus as White children would make fun of her children for wearing a name-brand shirt. RP2 reported that when it comes to school, the Somali culture believes that children first go to school to learn Islam until age seven. She stated that when they came to America, this was an adjustment given that children are expected to attend public school at age five.

### **Conclusion**

All research participants have had similar pre-migration experiences. Their acculturation experiences have been vastly different. Berry (1997) reminds us that not everyone acculturates in the same way, and therefore, it is essential to conceptualize differing ways of acculturation. Berry (2019) stated, at the individual level of acculturation strategies, both the behavioral changes and acculturative stress phenomena are a function of what people try to do during their acculturation. Berry (2019) stated that people hold different views about how they want to live upon contact with the host community. Berry (2019) explained that not everyone seeks to change their culture and behavior to be more like the dominant group.

The conceptual framework this study was built upon was Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework. This study focused on the group acculturation component of Berry's framework which includes life events, stressors, coping, stress, and adaptation. Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure was also used to examine each research participants acculturation experiences as they relate to 1) Interaction-personal and social, 2) Continuity-past, present, and future, and 3) Situation- time and place within a physical setting.

The data shows similar pre-migration experiences, and, through analysis, five themes were identified by analyzing the data. All three participants experienced adverse experiences when it came to cultural differences, ranging from being treated differently due to the color of

their skin, the way they dress (e.g., hijabs and long gowns), difficulties around the language barrier and negativity for worshipping the Muslim religion. The research participants reported the effects of pre-migration and post-migration experiences on their mental health.

The effects of pre-migration and post-migration experiences on their mental health were reported by the research participants. Along with the mental health experiences reported, trauma is also associated with their individual mental health wellness and the impact this has on acculturation. When immigrating to the United States, each reported their main concern was to provide a safe life for their children and opportunities. And finally, each research participant reported their experiences as they pertained to navigating the social service programs available within their community and at the state level.

Chapter 5 explores the interpretation and implications of the study findings. The researcher provided recommendations for further action and future study and limitations of the study are presented.



## CHAPTER 5

Berry (2019) stated that “from early in the appearance of human beings, all the world’s peoples have been in contact with cultural others” (p. 1). Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936) stated that whether through colonization, immigration, or other intercultural meetings, this has historically induced acculturation which bring about cultural changes and behavior changes. The world continues to experience large population flows from one country to another due to instability in political, economic, ecological, and military events making a profound impact on the arriving populations psyche (Berry, 2019). According to Ferguson and Birman (2016), a groundswell of immigration in the last 50 years has brought about a transformation that features growing racial and ethnic diversity.

Berry (2019) stated “the degree to which individual’s change their behaviors (psychological acculturation in the middle of Figure 2) as a result of such intercultural contact is assessed by noting their behavioral changes and their experience of acculturative stress” (p. 28). Berry (2019) explained that the topic of acculturation has come to the fore due to dramatic increases in intercultural contact, migration, globalization, and cultural change.

This study focused on Berry’s (1997) Acculturation Framework, specific to the group acculturation component of this model which also includes the individual level variables of acculturation. The group acculturation component is specific to how an individual goes through the acculturation process based on their physical, biological, economic, social, and cultural experiences.

According to Berry (2019) these events are linked to life events that led up to the acculturation experience, the stressors of beginning the acculturation experience, the coping strategies used leading up to and through the acculturation experiences, the immediate effects of

stress and adaptation and how this integrates with long term outcomes. In this study, the researcher used narrative inquiry to gain detail, rich, and in-depth firsthand accounts of first-generation Somali refugee women's acculturation experiences.

The themes that emerged from the narratives include (a) cultural differences, (b) mental health, (c) trauma, (d) children and their well-being, and (e) social service programs.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

One research question guided this study in developing a deeper understanding of the acculturation experiences of first-generation Somali women.

RQ1: How do first-generation Somali women describe their individual experiences in acculturating within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine?

Chapter 5 provides a detailed interpretation of the results of the data collected in this study. The identified themes associated with acculturation experiences are thoroughly discussed. A major finding of this study is the barrier to social service programs.

### **Interpretation of Theme 1: Cultural Differences**

The findings in Chapter 4 affirm the research of Sam and Berry (2016) who find correlation between the difficulties of acculturation and racial discrimination. The literature shows that cultural differences can make it difficult for Somali women to acculturate (Bhowmik, Cheung, & Hue, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2015). The findings showed that all three participants cited negative experiences that ranged from being judged for how they dress, (e.g., long gowns and hijabs), the existing language barrier, the color of their skin, and the Muslim religion in which they worship.

The findings show that each research participant has experienced the stress of racism and discrimination and the implication this has on their acculturation experience has been

challenging. The literature concurs that this type of treatment can lead to acculturation stress, such as depression and anxiety (Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Jorgensen, 2017). Berry (2019) stated, there are three aspects of security: cultural, economic, and personal,

Cultural security refers to the feeling that one's cultural values, traditions, norms, language, and other ethnocultural traits are accepted in the larger society. Economic security refers to the sense that the socioeconomic position of oneself and one's group will remain intact despite the presence of cultural others. Finally, personal security includes the feeling that oneself and one's family is not in any personal danger from cultural others. These three forms of security are considered a psychological prerequisite for positive intercultural relations in all groups, both dominant and non-dominant (p.26).

The data reflected that each research participant was conscious to varying degrees about their personal and familial security. RP1 reported her interest in respecting her cultural values and traditions, while at the same time taking a leadership position within the community that at times put her at odds within the Somali community. Similarly, RP2 reported that she was interested in advocacy work with the community which brought about economic security to some degree. However, the data shows she wasn't concerned about maintaining her cultural values and traditions as the other two research participants. RP3 reported that her main contact with the dominant community was primarily through her connections with her children's schoolteachers and her waitressing job. The findings show that RP3 has preserved her cultural values and traditions and has limited contact with the dominant community.

These findings affirm the research conducted by Sam and Berry (2016) and Suzuki (2002) where acculturation is difficult when racial discrimination is prevalent. Berry (2019)

explained one of the psychological prerequisites of positive intercultural relations is for the person to feel a sense of personal safety. Based on the presentation of data, each research participant reported their experiences with racism and discrimination. The findings show that the research participants are not used to being judged based on how they look. RP3 reported that she wished that the dominant community would get to know her before judging her. An additional finding was that the research participants had to explain and defend themselves and their existence to the dominant community. RP2 stated that she believes the cultural differences and how Somali women dress and look directly affect their acculturation experiences.

### **Interpretation of Theme 2: Mental Health**

The literature about trauma and mental health implications on acculturation intersects with the research participants experiences. Scuglik, Alarcón, Lapeyre, Williams, and Logan (2007) stated, that the acculturation outcomes of Somali immigrants are complicated by the impact of premigration stressors, traumatic events, as well as the adaptation to many differences including weather, religion, language, clothing, legal principles, and financial expectations which all carry substantial mental health implications. Beliefs, values, and traditions of the dominant community that can be perceived as incompatible with immigrant families can create distressing conflicts such as racism and exclusion which can impact the mental health of immigrants (Sam & Berry, 2006). As reported earlier, each research participant has experienced a great level of racism and discrimination as part of their acculturation journey.

The findings in Chapter 4 show, as reported in the following section on trauma, that premigration experiences had a significant impact on the mental health of the research participants. According to Bustamante, Cerqueira, Leclerc, and Brietzke (2018) explained that many authors have stated that the migration process carries intense levels of stress, which can

overwhelm human adaptive capacity and trigger mental or physical problems. The findings reveal that the research participants suffered mental health distress in the form of stressors and triggers coming from a war-torn country and refugee camps to a state that is predominantly Caucasian.

Another finding showed that the research participants acknowledged that when the dominant community has mental health needs of their own, it makes it difficult to support refugees who are in crisis. A qualitative ethnonursing research study by Wolf (2013) uncovered that it is critical that health care staff and providers realize the serious trauma that Somali immigrants have been through so that there is more culturally congruent mental health care. The findings of this study are supported by Wolf (2013) as the data reflects a need for the healthcare system to better understand the medical needs of the immigrant community.

### **Interpretation of Theme 3: Trauma**

Each research participant reported that they experienced violence because of living through the Somali civil war. They also reported that taking flight to various refugee camps placed them in a vulnerable position as sexual violence was rampant throughout the camps. The literature concurs that pre-migration experiences of violence, human rights atrocities, and impact of civil war on the individual agency is complex and may require therapeutic interventions for some (Gardner & Bushra, 2004; Robertson et al., 2019). Bustamante et al. (2018) stated:

Migration is associated with specific stressors, mainly related to the migratory experience and to the necessary process of acculturation occurring in adaptation to the host country. These major stressors have potential consequences in many areas, including mental health. The prevalence of PTSD among migrants is very high (47%), especially among refugees, who experience it at nearly twice the rate of migrant workers. (p. 220)

Each research participant spoke about the trauma associated with coming from a civil war environment to living in a refugee camp to waiting, in some cases years, to emigrate to the United States to attain safety and stability. All three expressed the experiences they have endured around abuse directed towards women and children. The research conducted by Nilsson et al. (2008) reported that torture, forced labor, starvation, sexual abuse, and murder/loss of family members and friends contribute to post-migration stressors. The findings of trauma in Chapter 4 are supported by the literature as it relates to the difficulties refugee women experience when acculturating.

#### **Interpretation of Theme 4: Children and Their Well Being**

Sam and Berry (2006) stated that one major motivating factor in migration is to improve one's personal, social, and economic situation. A finding of this study shows that the main reason why the research participant's chose to emigrate to the United States was to provide opportunity for their children. Kumar and Agrawal (2017) stated that a student's education is linked to their positive life chances, income, and wellbeing. In most societies, education is the key to social progress with active parental involvement being considered a vital component of the child's educational success in primary school" (Daniels, 2017, p. 1).

The findings show that educational opportunities, a stable and safe environment as well as living within a community where morals, values and community involvement could be taught was a determining factor in the decision-making process to settle within the State of Maine. Schachner, Schwarzenhal, Moffitt, Civitillo, and Juang (2021) stated, "as cultural diversity is increasing around the globe, a more nuanced understanding of the cultural diversity climate in classroom settings is needed, including how its different aspects relate to student outcomes" (p.

64). The findings stress that education and community involvement are the top priorities of these research participants.

### **Major Finding: Social Service Programs**

A major finding emerged from the results and analysis of the data collected in this study. Two of the participants of the study reported that social service programs set refugees up for failure. It was reported that these social service programs are often based on income. RP2 reported that the moment your income reaches the threshold of making too much, social service programs are cut off. She explained that this creates a problem as the income threshold is not very high leaving a gap in resources such as healthcare coverage that resettled refugees need. RP1 reported that when this happens, the income that they make from their jobs is not enough to cover the cost of health care premiums. She further explained that she has family members that require ongoing medical care and maintaining health insurance is necessary. It was reported that the way the system is set-up, it keeps people living in poverty. RP2 reported,

I do not think the system is structured enough to make sure that people are aware of their opportunities. It should be a clear structure that gives people a pathway out of welfare, including better adult education where you know you will learn the skill you need because not everybody will academically achieve. A pathway to earn a higher degree is needed.

Included in this major finding, the data shows a significant barrier for the immigrant community to secure higher paying employment due to the difficulty in receiving credit for the education and work history they attained from their country of origin.

## **Implications**

Although there is an abundance of literature that supports the acculturation experiences of refugees, the literature is limited that describes the experiences of first-generation Somali women. As stated in the literature review, changes to public policy and social service programs cannot occur until there is a deep understanding of the physical and psychological needs of Somali refugee women. The findings of this study contribute to the body of literature on the topic of acculturation, providing in-depth narratives on the acculturation experiences of first-generation Somali women.

This study implies that the findings bring awareness about the acculturation experiences of Somali women. The participants in this study have first-hand experience in how prepared host communities have been regarding resettlement support and services. All three participants have reported that there were social service supports in place at the community level as well as the state level. However, the host community was not well prepared to receive an influx of refugees. The findings show that a review of social service programs may be needed at the state and community level to ensure cultural, economic, and personal safety is ensured.

This study highlights the language barriers that existed and continue to exist today. The participants of this study reported that this was and continues to be a big contributor to the lack of understanding and acceptance of the Somali community. Each participant reported that they have found themselves in a position of having to defend themselves as to who they are and why they are here.

It should be noted that one of the participants reported that she had experienced cultural differences within her Somali community. She explained that Somali women are traditional homemakers, and they care for their children. Given her statewide advocacy work, and being a



community leader, she reported that many Somali men do not agree with her non-traditional role as a leader within the community.

RP1 reported that a barrier to social service program improvements is the lack of immigrant community participation. She attributes this to the timing of when community-based organizations hold meetings to discuss social service program improvements. She explained that these meetings are held during the community-based organizations' workday, and this presents a barrier for the immigrant community to attend because they have careers of their own that require their attendance during the workday. She reported that this presents a barrier to inclusiveness.

Another implication of this study is that each participant experienced a level of racism that they were not prepared for. They have been judged based on the color of their skin, the clothes they wear, and the religion they worship. They reported that racial tensions existed when they first arrived, and they still exist today. RP1 said she was not used to being judged on the way she looks. She explained that she was accustomed to gender inequality and classism, however, she was not used to being judged on skin color. RP3 stated, she wished the dominant culture would get to know her before passing judgment. RP2 stated that she believes the cultural differences between the host community culture and the Somali culture affect the way Somali women acculturate.

The last implication of this study is the mental health wellness and the impact this has on acculturation experiences. As stated earlier in this chapter, given the adversities faced by refugees both premigration and during flight, it is not surprising that a significant number of refugees exhibit mental health issues that lead to adjustment difficulties upon arrival (Hollander et al., 2011). The findings of this study show that each participant had many pre-migration

experiences that influenced their mental health wellness. Each participant of this study also reported that they experienced post-migration trauma associated with racial discrimination, having a direct impact on their mental health.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Sam and Berry (2006) stated that receiving countries may be concerned with ethnic conflicts and social problems; however, on the positive side, immigrants contribute to the demographic base and contribute to economic development. From the participant narratives and the presented findings, the researcher offers three recommendations for action that has the potential to positively impact the acculturation experiences of first-generation Somali women. By implementing these recommendations this may foster communities of inclusiveness and understanding which could positively impact the acculturation experiences of Somali women as well as lower any concerns the dominant community may have with resettling refugees. The researcher acknowledges that generalizability is not guaranteed due to the small sample size of this study.

### **Recommendation for the Host Community**

Host communities have significant influence on facilitating a positive transition for refugees. The collection of research presented in the literature review for this study points to the integral relationship between positive acculturation experiences and the feeling of belonging. As stated in Chapter 2, Berry (1997) explained that “The long-term psychological consequences of this process of acculturation are highly variable, depending on social and personal variables that reside in the society of origin, and the society of settlement” (p. 5). The literature explains that immigrants can be targets of discrimination which may lead to a feeling of being not welcomed. As the literature shows, the host community has a vested interest in developing an understanding

of what psychological variables lead to the wellness of its immigrant population. The recommendation is for host communities to organize culturally sensitive community-based focus groups where the immigrant community is given a platform to discuss what challenges and barriers impact their acculturation experiences.

### **Recommendation for Community-Based Organizations**

The research participants of this study reported that their experiences with host communities lack understanding, coordination, and intentionality with addressing gaps in resources. Community-based organizations who provide social service programs have an opportunity to promote and expand upon community-based equity and inclusivity which may lead to positive acculturation experiences. As reported in the findings of this study, meetings to discuss improvements to social service programs are held during the workday making it difficult for the refugee community to attend as they are working at the same time these meetings are scheduled. It is recommended that community-based organizations consider holding focus groups that are inclusive of the immigrant community, where local social service programs are examined and optimized to ensure positive steps towards refugee self-sufficiency.

### **Recommendation for State Government**

State leaders are powerful actors in determining public policy and state law. The literature review of this study demonstrates that political and economic factors influence the acculturation experiences of refugees. As stated in Chapter 2 of this study, if societal goals are to provide stability for our refugee families, stakeholders within clinical practice, research, education, and public-policy sectors should be culturally competent and aware of what factors can negatively trigger the mental health of refugees (American Psychological Association, 2010). Furthermore, a collaboration between stakeholders is vital to improve ethics, feasibility,

and effective mental health care provided to refugee children and families. A list of factors that influence refugees' mental health status that should be considered by public-policy decision-makers are: effects of migration and armed conflict, acculturation, risk and resilience, cultural and religious beliefs and background, age/developmental stage, race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, disability/medical needs, characteristics of the family and host community, and language barriers/attainment (American Psychological Association, 2010). By understanding the physical, psychological, and cultural needs of the refugee population, a community-based policy can be well-versed, which has the potential to lead to greater community-based inclusiveness.

As reported in the findings of this study, the current structure of social service programs offered within the State of Maine may be perpetuating refugee poverty. The literature showed that there has been little research on how refugees fare as it relates to state policies and how these policies affect their acculturation experiences. Berry as cited by Emanzadeh (2018) stated:

I do not understand the concept of racial makeup. If you mean ethnocultural background, evidence shows the more homogeneous is the existing population, the more likely they are to not accept others. A culturally diverse population is more open to more cultural diversity (para. 24).

As referenced in Chapter 1, according to the United States Census Bureau (2019) Maine is 94% homogeneous which according to Berry, may lead to the likelihood that the immigrant population may not be fully accepted.

The literature demonstrates that the immigrant population can add to the economic base of a community. According to Bellows (2011):

Immigrants tend to be highly entrepreneurial, creating jobs here in the United States. Research from the Small Business Administration suggests that immigrants are more likely to start a business than are non-immigrants: while they are only 12 percent of the U.S. population, immigrants represent 16.7 percent of all new business owners in the United States. Immigrants own businesses in a variety of industries and make substantial contributions to both low-skilled and high-skilled sectors: 28.4 percent of businesses owned by those with less than a high school education are owned by immigrants, and 12 percent of businesses owned by those with a college education are owned by immigrants. Overall, immigrants own 10.8 percent of all firms with employees, providing job opportunities for thousands of Americans. (para. 2)

According to the American Immigration Council (2020) “Maine residents in immigrant led households had \$1.4 billion in spending power (after tax income) in 2018 (p. 4). Furthermore, the American Immigration Council stated that “2,368 immigrant business owners accounted for 2% of all self-employed Maine residents in 2018 and generated \$15.3 million in business income” (p. 4). The literature demonstrates, local communities’ benefit when refugees are successful, which contributes to local economic growth.

As Maine’s moto states, “Welcome to Maine, the way life should be”, state and local government have a vested interest in understanding the complexities around the immigrant populations acculturation experiences and the effect these experiences have on the non-dominant as well as dominant community. As an effort to recognize the importance of inclusivity and belonging as critical pillars of acculturation, it is recommended that the State of Maine establish

an ongoing series of discussions with the state's immigrant community, community-based organizations, and ethnic-based organizations to explore how to better understand the complexities that affect the acculturation process for first-generation Somali women as well as the state's immigrant population.

### **Recommendations for further study**

From the limitations and findings of this study, further research is recommended to better understand the acculturation experience of Somali women. It is recommended that consideration be given to conducting research on a sample size greater than three research participants. A greater sample size would demonstrate a deeper understanding of emerging acculturation themes that Somali women experience, providing greater validity to the findings.

Further research opportunities may include a comparative gender case study that compares the Somali female acculturation process to the Somali male acculturation process. This research study revealed that gender cultural expectations within the Somali community exist. Understanding the gender roles between Somali men and women may clarify what is needed at a community level to better support new Somali immigrant needs.

This study has also revealed that there may be a gap in social service programs that limit Somali refugees from moving out of poverty and into prosperity. The purpose of further researching Maine's social service programs would be to examine how the established social service programs help or hinder the eventual independence of female Somali refugees.

An opportunity for further research would be on how religious affiliations affect the acculturation experiences of refugee women. The literature as well as findings of this study show that the Islamic religious affiliation of Somali refugee's brings about discrimination from the dominant community.

Lastly, an opportunity for further research would be a comparative case study on the acculturation experiences of Somali women within other states that have similar demographics to the State of Maine, specifically a high percentage of Caucasian population.

### **Limitations of the Research Study**

There are limitations that exist with the research study that pertain to researcher bias. A reflexive journal was attempted to document the potential for subjective feelings around reported experiences of violence, trauma, and mental health wellness. The researcher noted that when conducting the reflexive journal based on Finlay's (2002) five ways to approach reflexivity which includes, introspection, inter-subjective reflection, mutual collaboration, social critique, and discursive deconstruction. The reflexive journal did not prove to be as helpful as the researcher hoped for. It is believed this has to do with the researchers ongoing personal and professional development around, diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. The researcher acknowledged that the anti-racism journey of a White person is a lifelong journey. It was found that as journaling was conducted, the same reflections were repetitive for each semi-structured interview. The researcher acknowledged that she is a White woman who has a heightened sensitivity to other women who come from violence, trauma, and threats to mental health wellness.

Another limitation of this study is that generalizability is not guaranteed due to the small sample size of this study. Kim (2016) stated, if the focus of the study is on collecting life stories your interviewees will typically be a smaller sample. Furthermore, Kim stated that if the researcher is looking to study the world as experienced by one specific person, it is appropriate to rely on one person. Sandelowski (1995) stated, an adequate sample size in qualitative research

is one that permits case analysis that is the hallmark of qualitative inquiry and a new and rich understanding of the experience.

A potential limitation of this research is Berry's (1997) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework. This framework notes that there are four categories that an immigrant/refugee can belong to: 1) Assimilation, 2) Integration, 3) Marginalization, and 4) Separation. Schwartz, et al. (2010) argued that some populations may not fall within Berry's four categories and that some categories may have multiple subtypes. Many researchers have used Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework making this theoretical framework a well-respected theory within the social and cultural psychology field. Recognizing that there are several acculturation theories available, the lens used for this study is Berry's (2005) Four Acculturation Strategies Framework and Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework.

Finally, the research participants were provided with the transcribed interviews, and all but one of the research participants engaged in the member checking protocol making this a limitation of this study. This protocol consisted of the research participants reviewing the transcribed interviews for accuracy. The research participants were given an opportunity to make changes to the transcripts of which both research participants chose not to make changes and approved the transcribed interviews as presented. The researcher, through multiple attempts, was not able to contact the participant who elected not to engage in member checking.

## **Conclusion**

This study may be significant to policymakers, communities, public school systems, and social service program providers who are invested in understanding the effects of immigration and acculturation within communities of Maine. By identifying the acculturation challenges that these Somali women have faced while residing within the State of Maine, this study may inform



communities what the acculturation needs are of Somali women. For all stakeholders to have a better understanding of the cumulative trauma, pre-resettlement, and post-resettlement stress and acculturative challenges that Somali women undergo, this knowledge may aid in mitigating any misconceptions that develop due to lack of understanding.

Gendered sensitive measures are necessary to ensure that Somali women are fully included at the discussion table and to forego this only risk long-term exclusion of more vulnerable members of our communities. Implementing social constructs that better support Somali women may be challenging based on the community in which they have resettled and how much the community understands who Somali refugees are, why they are here, and how best the community can support them. This research demonstrates that the understanding of acculturation strategies and experiences are not only impactful to the refugee, but also for the larger society.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**

**First-Generation Somali Women Acculturation Experience Protocol**

**Interviewer:**

Bobbi L. Avery

**Interviewees:**

Participant #1

Participant #2

Participant #3

**Setting:**

Interviews will be conducted via an electronic interview due to COVID-19.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to give a voice to three, first-generation adult Somali refugee women who will be asked to share their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States specifically the State of Maine.

**Script:**

Following is a series of semi-structured interviews that are broken into a series of three: first, pre-immigration experiences, second, arriving in the United States and third, acculturation and adaptation experiences. The interviewer will follow this simple script.

**Member-Checking Follow-Up Interview:**

The member-checking procedure will allow for the researcher to ensure that there are no errors or misrepresentations that have occurred during the transcription process. Each research participant will receive a transcribed copy of their interviews via email. The research participants will have the opportunity to add additional information following the review of the individual transcripts. They can share this additional information either through an email or an additional electronic interview. The researcher may ask additional probing questions as it pertains to subsequent information received.



## **Pre-Migration Interview Protocol (Interview #1 Script)**

### **Opening:**

Hi (Name of Interviewee). Thank you very much for allowing me to sit down with you today. This interview will be used as part of a study on the acculturation experiences of first-generation Somali women. This study is an inquiry into how first-generation Somali women acculturate within the State of Maine.

For your information, this interview will be transcribed and presented in a report. To aid in the transcription, do I have your permission to record our conversation? If you feel at any point you would like to go “off record” please let me know.

### **Question 1**

What is your name?

### **Question 2**

How old are you?

### **Question 3**

What is your marital status?

### **Question 4**

Do you have children? If so, how many? What are their ages?

### **Question 5**

What was your life like prior to the civil war? With possible probing questions such as:

- a. Occupation
- b. Family (Tell me about your extended family. Are they living in Somalia, United States, or both)?
- c. Social network
- d. Education
- e. Hobbies
- f. Challenges
- g. Stress
- h. Dreams
- i. Personal goals
- j. Personal challenges
- k. Political position
- l. Ethnicity
- m. Religion
- n. Racially
- o. Languages spoken
- p. Socio-economic status

**Question 6**

What was it like when civil war broke out in Somalia? With possible probing questions such as?

- q. Country
- r. Politically
- s. Clan ware-fare
- t. Personally
- u. Barriers
- v. Opportunities

**Question 7**

What were the psychological stressors associated with civil war for you and your family?

**Question 8**

How did you make the decision to leave your homeland? Possible probing question: Why did you make the decision to emigrate to the United States?

**Question 9**

Did you come to the United States alone and if not, who came with you?

**Question 10**

Who did you leave behind?

**Question 11**

What was your journey like immigrating to the United States?

**Question 12**

Did you live temporarily in a refugee camp? Possible probing questions:

- w. Where?
- x. How long?

**Question 13**

What were your experiences living in a refugee camp? Possible probing questions: What were your experiences like as a female?

**Question 14**

How did you view the United States prior to immigration?

**Question 15**

Is there anything else that you would like to add that has not been asked?

**Closing:**

Thank you, (Name of interviewee) for sharing your insights on your pre-migration experiences. I will follow up with you once I have our conversation transcribed. In the meantime, if you have any additional thoughts you would like to add, please let me know.

## **Arriving in the United States Second Interview Protocol (Interview #2 Script)**

### **Opening:**

Hi (Name of Interviewee). Thanks for meeting with me again. This interview will also be part of the study on how first-generation Somali women acculturate within the State of Maine. For your information, this interview will be transcribed and presented in a report. As before, to aid in the transcription, do I have our permission to record our conversation? If you feel at any point you would like to go “off record” please let me know.

### **Question 1**

What was it like to arrive in the United States? Possible probing questions:

- a. Psychological feelings/stress
- b. Physical feelings
- c. Fears
- d. Excitement

### **Question 2**

How were you initially treated when arriving in the United States?

### **Question 3**

What type of stress did you experience immigrating to the United States? Possible probing question: How did you manage the stress of arriving in the United States?

### **Question 4**

Where did you first resettle?

### **Question 5**

What were the steps in the resettlement process?

### **Question 6**

How were you treated when you arrived in your resettlement community?

### **Question 7**

What social service programs were available?

### **Question 8**

Were the social service programs easily available?

### **Question 9**

How did you learn about social service programs and their availability?

### **Question 10**

How did you prepare emotionally and psychologically to come to the United States?

**Question 11**

What types of stressors did you experience once you arrived to the United States?

**Question 12**

Is there anything else that you would like to add that has not been asked?

**Closing:**

Thank you (Name of interviewee) for sharing your insights on what your experiences were when arriving in the United States. I will follow up with you once I have our conversation transcribed. In the meantime, if you have any additional thoughts you would like to add, please let me know.

## **Acculturation and Adaptation Protocol (Interview #3 Script)**

### **Opening:**

Hi (Name of Interviewee). Thanks for meeting with me again. This interview will also be part of the study on how first-generation Somali women acculturate within the State of Maine.

For your information, this interview will be transcribed and presented in a report. As before, to aid in the transcription, do I have your permission to record our conversation? If you feel at any point you would like to go “off record” please let me know.

### **Question 1**

Where are you now resettled?

### **Question 2**

Why did you choose to resettle there?

### **Question 3**

How were you received by the community at large?

### **Question 4**

What interactions do you have within the community at large?

- a. Caucasian groups
- b. Other ethnic groups

### **Question 5**

How have your interactions with the community at large influenced your adaptation to United States culture?

### **Question 6**

How has your identity changed now that you are resettled?

- c. Occupation
- d. Family
- e. Social network-Tell me how you have made friends and connections?
- f. Education
- g. Hobbies
- h. Challenges
- i. Stress
- j. Dreams
- k. Personal goals
- l. Personal challenges
- m. Political position
- n. Ethnicity
- o. Religion
- p. Racially
- q. Languages spoken
- r. Socio-economic status

**Question 7**

What are your experiences with being an immigrant and a woman?

**Question 8**

How do you manage stress?

**Question 9**

What are the challenges you face, adjusting to the United States?

**Question 10**

What promotes adaptation to United States cultures?

**Question 11**

What hinders adaptation to United States cultures?

**Question 12**

How are the social service programs in the resettlement community?

**Question 13**

What are the barriers to social service programs?

**Question 14**

Would you suggest improvements with social service programs?

**Question 15**

If so, what would you improve?

**Question 16**

What types of relationships have you made since living in the United States?

**Question 17**

Is it important to you that you adapt to United States culture?

**Question 18**

If so, what could be done to help you adapt?

**Question 19**

If it is not important, why not?

**Question 20**

Is it difficult to acculturate to the United States?

**Question 21**

If so, how can communities assist in making the acculturation and adaptation experience easier?

**Question 22**

If you could give advice to another refugee coming to the United States, what advice would that be?

**Question 23**

Is there anything else that you would like to add that has not been asked?

**Closing**

Thank you (Name of Interviewee) for sharing your insights into your acculturation and adaptation experiences within the State of Maine. I will follow up with you once I have our conversation transcribed. As always, if you have any thoughts that you think may fit well into this research, please let me know.

**APPENDIX B**  
**INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**  
  
**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND**  
**CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH**

**Project Title:** The Phenomena of Acculturation in First-Generation Somali Refugee Women

**Principal Investigator(s):** Bobbi L. Avery

**Introduction:**

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
  
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this research study being done?** This research is being conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the acculturation experiences of first-generation Somali refugee women who have resettled in the State of Maine.

**Who will be in this study?** This study will consist of a group of participants who are three first-generation Somali women who are over the age of 18, who speak fluent English, who have lived in the United States for at least two years and who currently live within the State of Maine.

**What will I be asked to do?** Participants will be asked to participate in a series of three 60-90-minute interviews, where they will be asked questions on their pre-migration experiences, their experiences with coming to the United States and their acculturation and adaptation experiences specifically to the State of Maine. Participants will also be asked to review the transcripts of their interviews and provide additional information during the review process. The study will run from



January 2021 to April 2021, with results and findings published May 2021. Upon your request, I can send you a copy of the completed dissertation.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?** This research present minimal risk which is not greater than the risks typically encountered in daily life. Risks of participation may include, but not limited to, recalling of adverse emotions or experiences as they relate to their pre-migration experiences as well as being resettled within the United States.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?** Possible benefits from this study include but are not limited to gaining new perspectives on how others who have resettled to the State of Maine have acculturated.

**What will it cost me?** No compensation will be distributed to any participant. The primary cost to participants is an expenditure of time to participate in the interview, to conduct transcript reviews and to provide additional information, as necessary.

**How will my privacy be protected?** Privacy will be protected by using a pseudonym for participants. Interviews will be conducted individually and privately to reduce peer pressure on participants or to protect those who may be mentioned during the interview process.

**How will my data be kept confidential?** Interviews will be transcribed by Rev.com. Rev.com is a secure software platform in which the researcher uploads an electronic file to be transcribed. Copies of transcripts will be transmitted to participants via email attachment. Electronic copies of interview transcripts and other identifying documentation will be password protected on the researcher's computer. Printed copies of interview transcripts and other documentation that may identify participants will be shredded and discarded. Hard copies of documents that the researcher deems necessary to document this research will be kept in a locked storage cabinet at the researcher's home. Documentation will be stored for three years after the completion of the researcher's dissertation. At that time, identifying documents will be shredded and subsequently discarded.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Bobbi L. Avery.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
  - If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.

**What other options do I have?**

- You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researchers conducting this study is Bobbi L. Avery. For more information regarding this study, please contact Bobbi L. Avery at (207) 515-0634 or [Bavery2@une.edu](mailto:Bavery2@une.edu).
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Bobbi L. Avery at (207) 515-0634 or [Bavery2@une.edu](mailto:Bavery2@une.edu). You may also contact Dr. Cynthia Kennedy at the University of New England at [ckennedy5@une.edu](mailto:ckennedy5@une.edu) or by phone at 413-427-0557.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary DeSilva, Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

---

**Participant's Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed name

**Researcher's Statement**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

**APPENDIX C**  
**STUDY INVITATION LETTER**

October 19, 2020

Dear Potential Study Participant:

As a doctoral student completing my dissertation study through the University of New England, I am inviting you to ***complete three interviews to share your experiences on acculturating within the United States, specifically to the State of Maine***. As a refugee who has resettled within the State of Maine, you have significant knowledge and experiences as it relates to acculturation. By volunteering to be a participant in this study you are providing a valuable contribution to the understanding of first-generation Somali women's acculturation and adaptation experiences.

***Criteria:*** Research participants must be first-generation Somali refugees, female, over the age of 18, must speak fluent English, must have lived in the United States for at least 2 years and must currently live in the State of Maine.

***Research Question:*** How do first-generation Somali women describe their individual experiences in acculturating within the United States, specifically, the State of Maine?

***Study's Purpose:*** The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to give a voice to three, first-generation adult Somali refugee women who will be asked to share their acculturation and adaptation experiences upon arriving in the United States specifically the State of Maine.

***Procedures:*** Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. The study requires a signed informed consent. It also includes a series of three interviews. The first focuses on pre-migration experiences. The second interview focuses on what it was like to arrive in the United States and the third interview focuses on acculturation and adaptation experiences within the State of Maine. Results and findings from this study will be published by \_\_\_\_\_. I do not foresee this study presenting any risks or hardship on you, other than the time you invest in it and the possibility of recollecting adverse experiences. Your participation will contribute to the benefits of providing a richer understanding of first-generation Somali women and the acculturation experiences specifically to the State of Maine.

***Confidentiality:*** Your identity will be protected throughout the study and thereafter, in compliance with the University of New England's research with human participants' policies and procedures. In addition to myself as the principal investigator, the Institutional Review Board, dissertation advisor, and committee will have access to your information.

**Compensation:** No monetary or non-monetary compensation will be provided for your input or time.

Questions: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or your participation in it, please feel free to contact me, the researcher, via email at [Bavery2@une.edu](mailto:Bavery2@une.edu) or [bobbilavery@gmail.com](mailto:bobbilavery@gmail.com). You may also contact me by phone or WhatsApp at 207-515-0634.

Thank you for your consideration to participate and for the valuable insights you offer to this research study. Once you sign the consent form, I will contact you to schedule an interview time.

Sincerely,

Bobbi L. Avery  
Doctoral Candidate in  
University of New England's