Dynamic Acculturation among Emerging Adult Syrian Refugees in the United States

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Abstract

Refugees are vulnerable populations who experience premigration traumatic events and postmigration acculturation stress. While research on immigrant mental health issues has been plentiful, there has been a clear lacuna of scholarly investigation into the acculturation experiences of Syrian emerging adults, particularly as it relates to the types and dynamics of acculturation behaviors. Acculturation is a factor that predicts emerging adults' academic and occupational success and their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. This qualitative investigation was conducted within the framework of interpretative phenomenology, which allows for meaningful, organic exploration and description of participants' stories. Data were collected from 12 emerging adult Syrian refugees who were at least 18 years of age. Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) was used as a theoretical framework to understand and analyze the data collected. This research found out that their acculturation behavior appears to be described better as "dynamic". The most ubiquitous dynamic acculturation behavior was characterized by constant progress and effective change, promoting positive personality growth among refugees and immigrants. Dynamic acculturation provides a broader set of strategies utilized by an individual.

Keywords: *Dynamic Acculturation; Acculturation; Trauma; Resilience; Refugees; Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA)*

Introduction

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2015) reported that more than 200 million individuals have migrated from their native countries. People frequently migrate in search of food, lodging, freedom, and security [1]. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2018), nearly 68 million individuals worldwide have been involuntary removed from their homes; more than 25 million of these individuals are refugees, and the majority are younger than 18 years old [2]. The UN (2018) reported that, since 2011, more than 11 million individuals have escaped the conflict in Syria to live in neighboring countries, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan, where millions of Syrian refugees have been displaced. Furthermore, approximately one million Syrians have arrived in Europe as asylum seekers or refugees [2].

The number of Syrian refugees has become a major focus of the US Refugee Administration over the last ten years. For example, Felter and McBride reported that, in 1990, the United States admitted more than 120,000 refugees, but only 85,000 refugees were admitted in 2016 [3]. A total of 33,000 were from Syria [4]. Of the Syrian refugees who were admitted to the US since the beginning of the civil war, 72% of the refugees were women and children younger than the age of 14 years old [5]. Emerging adults constitute an important refugee group and represent one of the fastest growing sectors of the population in several Western countries [6]. This population is a significant source of labor in many Western countries because of falling fertility rates and the aging of the population [7]. For instance, refugees account for approximately 18% of the population of Erie, which is a city located in northwestern Pennsylvania. This proportion is relatively significant because the refugees contribute to Erie's financial development and diversity enrichment [8].

Zong reported that the Migration Policy Institute resettles Syrian refugees in 36 states, including California, Texas, Michigan and Pennsylvania [9]. The PennLive website reported that Pennsylvania has resettled 1,204 Syrian refugees. Among the cities in Pennsylvania, Erie (363), Philadelphia (289), and Pittsburgh (222) have high rates of Syrian refugees compared to other cities, such as Harrisburg and Lancaster [10].

Syrian refugees experience several challenges that can be categorized into the following five major themes: health, education, unemployment, safety, and social integration [11]. Another study suggested that the incidence of anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) increased among Syrian refugee children after two years of resettlement in the US, which could negatively impact their mental health throughout their lives [12]. To the best of my knowledge, no previous investigation has explored Syrian refugee emerging adults who resettled in the US. Therefore, Syrian refugee emerging adults represent the core of this research because they have experienced a multitude of life stressors: premigration war, transition stressors, postmigration acculturation and adjustment issues.

Leaving one's home country and settling in a new city and country is a daunting task that requires the refugee emerging adult to learn and adapt behaviorally, psychologically, and socially. To settle and move forward, these emerging adults must acculturate to the values, lifestyle and culture of the dominant culture. Acculturation occurs in the context of settling into and adjusting to a new place and new culture.

Acculturation is a process involving the psychological, social and cultural engagement of an individual in another culture and learning about the values and lifestyle of the mainstream culture while simultaneously maintaining one's native culture. Acculturation refers to the cultural changes that result from an encounter with a different culture because of migration [13]. Berry mentioned that the eventual accommodation of the groups in contact is not always assimilation. Individuals can develop other positive outcomes, relationships, and adaptations [14].

Studies have increasingly highlighted the positive outcomes of acculturation. Positive acculturation results in a clear sense of personal identity and cultural belonging. Berry and Sam [15] stated that acculturation is positively associated with psychological well-being, high self-esteem, and the achievement of cultural and social competencies. Individuals with unhealthy acculturation strategies are more likely to experience several mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, identity confusion, psychosomatic symptoms, and anomie [15-17]. Therefore, acculturation is an important component of immigrant well-being that must be emphasized and addressed in counseling research.

The need for acculturation among immigrants and refugees has emerged as a topic in counseling since the 1980s [18]. Scientific investigators have highlighted that the acculturation strategies of assimilation and separation are associated with a high level of acculturative stress and a higher risk of psychological maladjustment [19]. Furthermore, low self-worth, a poor sense of belonging, and low overall life satisfaction are linked to immigration-related acculturative stressors, such as language problems, a lack of social support, confused gender roles and marriage-family conflicts [20]. Currently, refugee youth and families are considered among the top clinical populations with mental health issues.

Most studies investigating the acculturation behaviors of immigrants and refugees have focused on measuring the level of acculturation and its correlation with immigrant well-being [21-24]. However, research examining the life experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults has been limited. This research aimed to fill this gap by investigating the experience of Syrian refugee emerging adults who reside in Pittsburgh, PA, which is the city that has welcomed the most Syrian refugees in the state of Pennsylvania. As scholars, we have a moral, social, and professional responsibility to study such issues and to identify possible means of intervention. Therefore, the adjustment and acculturation behaviors of this population are concerns for professionals, particularly those in helping professions.

For many emerging adults worldwide, the years between their late teens and their twenties are important and are associated with frequent changes, including educational, occupational, and social-emotional achievements [25]. Several theories have indicated the importance of the age range (late teens to twenties) of the participants in this study. Erikson's psychosocial development theory indicates that, during the stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, adolescents aged thirteen to nineteen years old form their identities and must explore and anticipate the future. Additionally, Intimacy vs. Isolation is the first of stage of adulthood (from twenty to thirty-five years of age); during this stage, people form intimate relationships with other people, and the failure to achieve love generates feelings of loneliness and isolation [26].

A study reported that immigrant emerging adults might have a higher rate of mental health issues and acculturative stress than older immigrants [27]. The literature has shown that immigrant emerging adults experience several complex challenges as they resettle in host countries [28]. For instance, newcomers face identity confusion [29], vocational issues [30] and issues with adaptation to new environments [31]. Thus, understanding immigrants' acculturation behavior is essential for providing holistic mental health services via counseling.

Trauma and grief have been emphasized in refugee and immigrant studies. Intense traumatic events, such as witnessing the homicide of family and friends, sexual abuse, rape, and persecution, have been very frequently reported by refugees [32]. According to Fazel, Wheeler and Danesh, 9% of adult refugees and 11% of child refugees who have resettled in Western countries reported symptoms related to PTSD [33]. During the premigration phase, refugees witness mass murders and live with multiple losses in their countries of origin. These difficult experiences increase the likelihood of developing PTSD. Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, and Asic-Kobe revealed that postmigration living challenges have an influence equivalent to that of traumatic events in predicting trauma symptoms in refugees [34].

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the lived experience of acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. In addition, the United States is one of the few countries worldwide to admit refugees from all over the world, including Syrian refugees. Because the issue of Syrian refugees is relatively recent, only a limited number of studies have focused on Syrian refugee emerging adults in North America.

A study reported that there are approximately three million Syrian refugees in Turkey and that more than 10% of this population is between 18 and 22 years of age [35]. Also, the study indicated that Syrian university-aged emerging adults face the following three major challenges: difficulties in learning foreign languages and the complexity of the educational system [35]; financial problems in supporting themselves and their families [36]; and alterations in their social roles and a sense of insecurity [37].

Karipek asserted that less attention has been paid to the experience of Syrian university-aged adults undergoing acculturation in Turkey [38]. Recent research has proposed that language acquisition, cultural distance, ethnic identity, and a desire to return to the homeland are factors contributing to acculturation among Syrian refugees in Turkey [38]. However, this research did not focus on acculturation behavior among the participants to understand the strategies used to minimize the gap between their culture and Turkish culture. Additionally, the researcher did not include the similarities between the Syrian and Turkish cultures, such as religion and proximity between the two countries, which contribute to reducing postmigration stress [39]. Moreover, a study exploring Syrian refugees' coping skills in Jordan reported that more than 63% of Syrian refugees use avoidance and withdrawal from the host community as coping strategies [40]. Utilizing unhealthy coping strategies such as avoidance negatively impacts acculturation to the host country in emerging adult refugees.

This research could contribute to the literature by determining how counselors can become involved in preventing or addressing the mental health and adjustment issues of refugee emerging adults that might develop as a result of the failure to positively acculturate to the dominant culture. I strongly believe that this research is justifiable; hence, spending time, effort and resources on this research is

warranted to obtain a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of refugee emerging adults with acculturation and adjustment, their experience of leaving their home countries and settling in Pittsburgh, and their evaluation of the support provided by the system and society in the US, as well as to determine what shapes their experiences, how their past and present experiences are interconnected, and what strategies or means that they used to survive as refugees and develop positive acculturation behaviors. This research aimed to answer the following question: What are the lived and living experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults related to learning and the acculturation process in the United States?

Significant of study: Refugees are vulnerable populations who experience premigration traumatic events and postmigration acculturation stress. Women and children have an increased vulnerability to mental health issues as a result of traumatic events, such as war. To provide appropriate support to these populations, it is necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences by designing research studies that emphasize their issues and needs. Refugees and immigrants have participated in only a limited number of studies.

The importance of this research lies in its focus on psychological trauma and acculturation stressors. Additionally, this study aims to show the value of psychological support for learning coping skills and for behavioral acculturation in minimizing the effects of trauma after war. This study aims to highlight acculturation behaviors among Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. Several studies have addressed mental health issues among Syrian refugees, but no studies have yet explored acculturation among emerging adults. Acculturation is a factor that predicts emerging adults' academic and occupational success and their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Additionally, this study could be beneficial for counselors and teachers who directly interact with refugees.

Methodology
Acculturation

Berry conceptualized four strategies to indicate an individual's level of acculturation. The four strategies are assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Assimilation is described as a "melting pot", in which individuals contact the dominant culture and lose their cultural identity. Individuals who assimilate have a positive relationship with the dominant society and feel ashamed of their cultural identity. Integration occurs when individuals maintain their culture of origin and accept contact with the new culture [15].

Separation (Rejection) refers to self-imposed withdrawal from the larger society and the maintenance of the inherited culture. Thus, individuals who use the separation strategy have a good relationship with their own people and avoid interacting with the dominant culture. Marginalization (Deculturation) occurs when individuals avoid psychological and cultural contact with both their traditional culture and the dominant society. Therefore, individuals who use this strategy have a negative view of both their culture and that of the host society [15].

A study involving Central American refugees found that integration was favored over the three other acculturation strategies [41]. Consequently, individuals who integrate their own culture with the new culture have better acculturation outcomes. Yako and Biswas measured acculturation stress among Iraqi refugees and found that female refugees reported significantly higher acculturation stress levels than male refugees. Refugees from a Muslim background have a higher level of acculturation stress in the United States than Christian refugees [42].

Behavioral acculturation refers to the actual acts performed, and it is assumed to be related primarily to acculturation outcomes. External adjustment is the result of an individual's interaction with the dominant culture, and it involves the acquisition of culturally

appropriate skills and knowledge [43]. Therefore, behavioral acculturation is the set of adjustments to living within a dominant and/ or new cultural context across places and over time. It is fundamental to understand the behavioral acculturation of the Syrian refugee emerging adults as problem-solving skills that reduce the impact of the acculturation stressors caused by the challenges that they experience.

Theoretical foundation of the study

Erikson's psychosocial development theory

Many emerging adults worldwide, the years between the late teens and the twenties are considered important because they are associated with frequent changes in education, occupation, lifelong achievements, etc [25]. Several theories have explained the importance of the age range (late teens to twenties) of the participants in the current study. In the present research, Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory was used to promote an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences.

Erik Erikson described eight developmental stages from infancy to adulthood. This theory provides a significant understanding of the crisis that emerges from conflicts between psychological needs and societal needs. According to this theory, the successful accomplishment of each stage manifests as a healthy personality and the acquisition of strong characteristics that help the individual to resolve crises. However, if a person's developmental needs are unmet, the likelihood of successfully resolving crises during future stages decreases, resulting in an unhealthy personality [26].

There were two focal developmental stages related to the present study: Identity vs. Role Confusion; and Intimacy vs. Isolation. Erikson illustrated that, during the stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, youths tend to explore their values and goals to search for a personal identity and a sense of self. At this age, emerging adults become more independent and focus on their educational and vocational futures. In addition, such individuals seek a sense of belonging and focus on fitting into society. Those who receive proper reinforcement and support tend to emerge with strong self-esteem and become independent [26]. The progress during this stage leads to commitments to others and the formation of an identity based on the outcomes of explorations. Failure to accomplish this goal can lead to role confusion, a negative identity, and unhappiness.

Sense of identity refers to all of the individuals' values, attitudes, and beliefs that map a person's behavior to live by society's standards and expectation. Erikson emphasized the development of ego identity, which is the proper focus of this psychosocial developmental stage. It refers to the conscious sense of self that emerges through the interaction between an individual and society. Ego identity progresses consistently because of the continued learning and interaction with the society that generate challenges to shape the individual identity [26].

Intimacy vs. Isolation is Erikson's sixth psychosocial development stage. During this stage, emerging adults explore relationships and share more intimately with others. He emphasized developing committed relationships among people, which provides a sense of security and attachment. This stage is marked by the ability to build meaningful, secure relationships that last for a long time. Accomplishment during this stage leads to happy and healthy relationships and increased commitment and care within relationships. However, the avoidance of intimacy and fear of commitment can lead to isolation, depression, and loneliness [26].

Intimate relationships among refugees have been examined in several studies [44-46]. The acculturation stressors among refugees impacted their parental and marital relationships. Limitations in satisfying the need for secure attachments and long-term relationships increase the likelihood of divorce, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence [47]. Hence, both of the psychosocial developmental

stages in this section are fundamental to emphasizing emerging adults refugees' sense of identity, their relationships with their families, and their acculturation with the host society.

Research design

This study was an exploratory qualitative research study, as prior studies have not examined the lived experiences of Syrian refugee emerging adults in the US. Exploratory research designs are useful when knowledge of a new phenomenon or group of people with similar human service needs is limited. Creswell asserted that researchers should rely on qualitative approaches to seek understanding of a concept by exploring the gap in the existing knowledge [48]. Marshall and Rossman defined exploratory studies as research that investigates phenomena to obtain understanding, discover important meaning, and generate hypotheses for future research [49]. Exploring a phenomenon is performed by questioning the research participants about experiences with the same questions to understand how they have constructed meaning from these experiences [48]. Thus, constructivism leads to valuing and negotiating the final interpretation of the experience [48].

Since this study was interpretive and interactionist, I applied Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) [50]. IPA investigates and highlights lived experiences using systematic procedures and appropriate methods developed for the human sciences [51]. The use of IPA to understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences of illness is well established in health psychology and is a developing research method in counseling, clinical, and social psychology [52].

Researchers performing an IPA study play an active role in a dynamic research process [53]. IPA focuses on the following two levels of interpretation: the participants make sense of their experiences; and the researcher makes sense of the participants making sense of their experiences [53]. Thus, IPA is not a rigid data analysis method, and the researcher can adapt and modify the methods depending on the research process. The following requirements suggested by scholars in the interpretive interactionist design field [54].

Sampling

In the present research, twelve participants were selected for individual interviews. The selected participants were emerging adult Syrian refugees ranging in age range from 18 to 25 years old. Two participants were related to each other. This relationship did not impact the participants' confidentiality because they came from a collective society in which they value the familial relationship over confidentiality.

In the present study, the participants were considered Caucasian and refugees in the US because of the Syrian civil war. The age range of the participants in the present study was between 18 and 25 years old; seven men and five women agreed to participate. The participants were born and raised in Syria and shared the experience of the civil war in Syria. The participants had witnessed the process of migration by being in a third country, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, or Egypt. Three participants were in the US educational system at the high school level, five participants had applied to community college, and four participants were seeking English language programs. Seven participants were single, two were married, one was engaged, one was separated, and one was divorced. Eleven participants were Muslim and spoke Arabic as their first language; one participant was Yazidi and spoke Kurdish and Arabic. The interview language preference was Arabic.

The reasons for focusing on this age range were as follows: a) these refugees experienced living in Syria before the war and resettled in the United States; b) these refugees faced considerable challenges in the workplace and/or US educational system; and c) these refugees might experience challenges at multiple levels in acculturating to American culture due to family and peer pressure.

Description of the research site and recruitment procedures

Ansar of Pittsburgh is a nonprofit organization located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This organization is one of the primary agencies that provides social services for refugees resettling in the Pittsburgh area. Ansar provides not only services and advocates for immigrants but also workshops to empower emerging immigrants to achieve their potential. Ansar plays a significant role in addressing emerging immigrants' academic needs and career development. I volunteer at this agency, and I met the participants at the Ansar of Pittsburgh offices in Carnegie and Duquesne, Pennsylvania.

Data collection

Semistructured in-depth interview format

Because of the flexible nature of semistructured interviews, these interviews have the best fit when a researcher aims to determine "why", rather than "how many" or "how much" [55]. Therefore, in the present research, semistructured interviews were utilized to obtain an in-depth understanding of acculturation among Syrian refugee emerging adults and to provide an opportunity to explore open-ended questions more freely. In the present study, each individual interview lasted between one and two hours, during which the participants were asked to share their lived experiences and to provide deep information regarding the meaning that they created from their experiences.

Consistent with the research design, I used IPA as the primary technique to analyze the collected data. Smith and Osborn described the following four major research analysis stages with seven substeps [53]:

1. **Searching for themes in the first case:** This step involves reading and rereading the transcripts and taking meaningful notes. The researcher transforms the initial notes into themes that incorporate more psychological terminology. The number of emerging themes reflects the richness of the data.

2. **Connecting the themes:** During this step, the researcher makes sense of the connections among the themes that can be clustered or that emerge as superordinate concepts. The researcher then creates a table of the themes that identifies and names the clusters of themes that represent the superordinate themes.

3. **Continuing the analysis of other cases:** During this step, the researcher transcribes the next case and identifies themes. The researcher has the following two options: a) using the themes and table from the first transcript to organize the subsequent analysis or b) working on the second transcript from scratch without utilizing the themes from the first transcript. The researcher then identifies patterns across the cases and constructs a final table of the superordinate themes.

4. **Writing:** During this final stage, the researcher translates the themes into a narrative account and reconstructs the final themes into meaningful statements that reflect the participants' lived experiences.

Considerations for enhancing the quality of the research

Qualitative research adheres to standards of validity to maintain the credibility of the research. Maxwell listed the following validity strategies: searching for alternative explanations, searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases, triangulation, soliciting feedback, participant checks, comparisons and rich data [56].

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is defined as evidence of the rigor of the study resulting from the dependability, credibility, and transferability of the data collected [57]. Several methods were utilized to enhance the trustworthiness of the present study's findings. Through the analysis process, I engaged in debriefing and discussed the research with peers to receive accurate support, challenge the study assumptions, and evaluate the data interpretations [57]. Additionally, I consulted my dissertation committee members to obtain additional feedback that could strengthen the credibility of the research.

Credibility

The credibility of qualitative research aims to explore a problem or describe a pattern of a social group interaction [49]. The major goal of obtaining credibility in qualitative studies is to demonstrate that the inquiry is used appropriately and sufficiently to explain and describe the phenomenon [49]. Bracketing is identified as an essential step to ensure validity and quality [58]. To facilitate the bracketing of personal biases, I engaged in reflective activities and peer and committee consultation. Moreover, I continued reviewing previous studies to add validity to this study.

Transferability

Phenomenological studies focus on the uniqueness of a specific experience by distinguishing accurate details [59]. Marshall and Rossman reported that transferability occurs when research findings would be useful to other research in similar settings with similar research questions [49]. Robinson introduced Yardley's criteria for thick descriptions that emphasize elements considered to be guidelines for evaluating the validity of a study, including sensitivity to context, rigor, transparency, coherence, impact and importance [60]. As a researcher, I used my counseling skills and demonstrated sensitivity during the interviews.

Dependability and conformability

As previously noted, I obtained feedback from the participants regarding the accuracy of the data interpretation. Furthermore, I reviewed the field notes to collect additional information, in addition to the transcribed interviews. This process, called triangulation, aims to use several different strategies to gather data [61].

Confirmability is a way for qualitative researchers to maintain objectivity and discuss whether the findings could be confirmed by another study [49]. Confirmability emphasizes minimizing researcher bias. To maintain self-awareness and to control personal biases, Lincoln and Guba suggested reflective journaling to document the research process [57]. Therefore, I documented the process and reflected on the interviews by journaling. Validity and reliability must be measured in all studies. Phenomenological research depends on the research design and research tradition. Through several strategies, such as triangulation, semistructured in-depth interviews, debriefing with peers, consulting with my dissertation committee, and minimizing risks related to confidentiality, the trustworthiness of the present research was enhanced.

Findings

Acculturation strategies

The acculturation strategies reflect the methods used by the emerging adult Syrian refugees to interact with the American culture. The main interaction strategies were assimilation, integration, and rejection (separation). The following section explains these strategies as

problem-solving skills used to promote acculturation among newcomers and provides examples of how the strategies were utilized by using quotations from the participants' narratives.

Assimilation

Assimilation is described as a "melting pot" in which individuals connect with the dominant culture and lose their cultural identity [15]. Individuals who assimilate have a positive relationship with the dominant society and feel ashamed of their cultural identity. Newcomers use assimilation to resolve issues, and in the present research, the participants employed the strategy of assimilation.

Assimilation occurred when a refugee wanted to be a part of the majority, which receives privileges. It seems that age influenced this strategy as the younger participants were more willing to assimilate at school to blend in and develop friendships with other people. Participant 10 wanted to improve her English skills to make friends at school as follows: "I tried to speak American English; I take ESL classes, and my teacher helps me fix my accent, but I still speak British English because I am used to it. I tried to speak like an American and…to have American friends". Moreover, the younger refugees adapted faster and became the communication nodes between their family and the outside world, which strengthened their personality and boosted their egos that they used to be followers in their cultures. Participant 3 reflected on this process that led the young refugees to assimilate with their American peers as follows: "children are encouraged to voice their opinion…They participate in the family decision making…I have not seen shy or avoidant children here so far; instead, they became very strong [personalities]".

Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 6 and Participant 12 used assimilation to learn about how people live in the US from their American friends. Participant 2 described the meaning of friendships as friends providing aid and support as needed as follows: "…I do not like to make friends with Arabs. I like American friends. They want to help me…[My] Arab friends do not want you to be better than them…do not want to help you". Participant 12 added that when she was in high school, she was classified in a category with non-English speakers, which impacted her learning and practicing process as follows: "…high school was very diverse, but the students were divided into two groups: American and everybody else, including refugees, Mexicans, and Africans…I did not want to be friends with people who were not American because their English was not good…their speaking was not clear".

A similar thought was reported by Participant 3, who became friends with Americans to improve his English speaking skills as follows: "…I always tell my parents and others that they need to make friends with Americans if they want to improve their language skills…". Participant 6 believed that he needed to adapt to be able to live in the US as follows: "all youths should feel that this is our home, like Syria…My American friend comes to visit…she respects our religion and is modest. I like to let them know about our culture".

Assimilation involves learning about the lifestyle of the dominant culture. Assimilation emerged among several participants' families, including Participant 2 and Participant 7. Participant 2 noted that his younger brother adapted a new lifestyle compared to that of the other family members as follows: "…my brother (18) is in high school…He works, but he keeps the money in his pocket. I tell him that he needs to share the money with the family, but he refuses...[looks down]".

Participant 11 valued work to promote economic stability as follows: "…'Adaptation' is my life theme. I always adapt whenever I go…I have never asked anyone to change for me. You have to adapt with wrong stuff to protect myself; you have to adapt to an unhumanitarian job to provide for your family". Participant 7 stated that fostering acculturation is important for fostering knowledge and tolerance between the dominant society and the refugees as follows: "…we [Syrian young adults] need to learn how to adapt to know different types of people…to become friends with good people and to avoid bad people…My brother and I visited a church; I like to learn about other

cultures". Thus, the informants in the present research viewed assimilation as a strategy to learn English, value work, adapt a new lifestyle, make friends, and foster knowledge.

Integration

Integration occurs when individuals maintain their culture of origin and accept contact with the new culture. Integration has been viewed positively in previous studies because the individuals keep their heritage culture and learn a new set of skills from the dominant culture. Integration minimizes the impact of acculturation on individuals' mental health because it reduces the stress and guilt associated with connecting with the dominant society. Compared with the younger participants, the older participants seemed to use integration to minimize the challenges they encountered after resettling in the US, which required them to have a specific set of interpersonal and communication skills.

Participant 3 stated that she preferred to integrate with others in American society. She depended on her personal strengths, level of maturity, and social skills to balance the two cultures. Therefore, integration allowed her to learn from other people about their culture and educate others about her culture as follows: "My friend lives in a different state, and she told me that she experienced racism because of the way she dresses. She used to be fully covered, and now, she wears casual clothes. She told me that I needed to change the way I dress as a young Muslim woman in the US. If people struggle with their faith and identity, they will lose their identity as Arab Muslims. I do not think that I will dress like an American when I go to college. Instead, I will build good relationships with my classmates and let them know who I am. I will openly discuss and answer all their questions".

Participant 11 stated that integrating with others helped him accept people from different cultures, develop his interpersonal skills, and give back to the community as follows: "You can meet people and be open and accepting of all people to learn from them. I learned English by interacting with others and using my personality. This country did not treat me like my country did. I want to give back to this country".

Integration promoted better decision making among the newcomers. Participant 7 and Participant 9 mentioned that integration aided individuals in making healthy choices. Integration helped Participant 7 make good judgments in developing friendships as follows: "We need to learn how to adapt to different types of people, make friends with good people and avoid bad people. My brother and I visited a church; I like to learn about other cultures". Moreover, Participant 9 believed that she had to integrate with the US culture to educate herself to be able to promote good parenting skills and help her children have a better life as follows: "...I want to improve my adaptation because my youngest baby was born in America...She is American...I want to learn more about the American life to help my kids with school and find a good job".

Participant 10 viewed integration as a way to have successful accomplishments as follows: "adaptation is important for developing yourself in a positive way, like learning new stuff...discovering places...adapting to the good lifestyle of American society. I have heard from a lot of people that they want to make random friends who could cause trouble...not everybody is trustworthy...young adult refugees should focus on their future and not become frustrated by educational difficulties. For me, I am focusing on going to college because it is going to help me get a good job".

Employment was a reason that led the emerging adults to utilize integration to interact with coworkers. Participant 11 stated that he has to integrate to promote economic stability as follows: "I am not afraid of workplace racism, and I do not want to isolate myself...If I do not help myself and my family, who is going to do so? No one will come to help you if you do not help yourself".

Participant 9 noted integration differences between men and women refugees. She believed that male refugees adapt faster than female refugees because the gender roles assigned lighter responsibilities at the home and more responsibilities outside the home to explore the surroundings as follows: "Young adult men learn how to adapt by learning English and meeting new people outside the family…Men adapt easier and faster than women…and they go out and meet new people". Thus, integration is linked to educational and occupational success, which is indicative of life accomplishments, and augments problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Separation (rejection)

Separation (rejection) refers to self-imposed withdrawal from the larger society and the maintenance of the inherited culture. Individuals who use the separation strategy have a good relationship with their own people and avoid interacting with the dominant culture. Separation has been viewed negatively in previous refugee studies because individuals avoid involvement with the dominant culture. This strategy emerged among the informants in the present research.

The emerging adult Syrian refugees escaped the civil war during their early developmental stages (late childhood and adolescence). They resettled in transitional counties for several years and adapted to the new environment. By moving to the US, the participants coped with two layers of grief, which involved missing the homeland country and missing the transitional county. Separation from the dominant culture was used as a coping skill to address homesickness. Participant 10 lived in a transition country for five years, and she became attached to her friends as any school-aged child. She avoided making friends when she came to the US at the age of 14 years. "[head down and a low voice]… I was the last person to adapt compared to my older siblings…I miss my old friends in Jordan [looked out the window]; I get depressed when I think about it".

The refugees, who were considered a minority in the homeland country, countered a different style of separation. For instance, Participant 12 was Kurdi, and she believed that rejecting both Arab and American society could ensure that she did not offend anybody by asking about their cultural background. "I do not have friends, not Syrians, not Americans… I spend my weekends at home; I go shopping and talk to my relatives over the phone. I also do not have friends at the tailor shop where I work…I sometimes speak to other coworkers, like three Arab women, but our relationship is only in the shop. I do not like to talk too much because if you ask people anything, they are going to ask you…I am worried that they may get offended by my questions. They do not understand that asking questions is a way to introduce yourself and make friends". Thus, she chose to interact with her minor community and avoid the Arab and American cultures.

Separation occurred when the emerging adult refugees evaluated their friendships. Several participants indicated that they live in low-income neighborhoods where they have been exposed to people engaged in drug-related and dangerous behavior. The informants chose to be isolated from this community because it affects them negatively. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 8, Participant 9, and Participant 12 shared similar narratives of being invited to engage in misconduct behaviors, such as drugs. However, they were not involved in these behaviors because they had strong relationships with their families and the community, which provided support to the emerging adults. Therefore, separation was a healthy choice in such situations.

Separation occurred when the emerging adult refugees did not have strong English language skills or communication skills. Many older refugees avoided interacting with people from different cultures and felt more comfortable spending time with their own people. Participant 1 mentioned this when describing his own and his parents' acculturation strategies as follows: "My mother spends times with Arab ladies from the complex, and my father with his friends. The older men like to do their daily stuff together…you know… our culture and tradition; we are about 8 Syrian families in the same complex…The area that we settled in is filled with Syrians. I advised my parents that they needed to learn English…Mother speaks with American neighbors sometimes…Ten Arabic sentences and one English word…

they understand her! [laugh]. I cannot be strong like my mother; my English sentences should be perfect. Our neighbors are an American family, and I learned English from them. Language is an important skill wherever you go".

Participant 2 outlined that the older refugees did not want to learn how to adapt in the US; instead, they asked their sons and daughters to facilitate and translate everything as follows: "My family's adaptation has been different from my adaptation. My parents do not speak English at all, and they do not want to learn. My father does not tolerate learning, and my mother spends the day organizing and running the household. My younger siblings speak English very well, especially my sisters; they speak English very well, translate everything for my parents and read their mail for them because my sisters go to school here".

Participant 3 noted that the parents depended on their children to translate and speak for them, which strengthened the child's language skills and confidence as follows: "Refugee families depend on their school-aged children to help them out. This impacts the child by strengthening the child's sense of self-worth and self-esteem because the parents depend on him/her for help. All families used to underestimate their children back home, like 'my son is young, and he will not understand'. But now, children are encouraged to voice their opinion and participate in family decision making. I have not seen shy or avoidant children here so far; rather, they became very strong because their families depend on them". Separation was a strategy used among the refugees, especially among the informants' parents. The age of the individual was the main indication of the acculturation strategy. Although separation among older refugees has been viewed negatively in previous studies, it impacted the younger refugees positively by strengthening their personality, communication skills, and leadership skills.

Discussion and Conclusion

Acculturation behavior of emerging adult Syrian refugees

Acculturation is the result of the interaction between different cultures. It is the psychological and social change occurring among people from a minority culture who interact with a dominant culture. Strategies of acculturation were introduced by Berry [15]. These strategies are assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. Berry noted that assimilation occurred when an individual from a minority culture assimilated into the dominant culture and had a negative view of his/her native culture. Rejection (separation) led to the opposite: an individual interacted with the native culture and avoided the dominant culture. An immigrant is considered integrated when both the dominant and the native culture are maintained. Finally, an immigrant is considered marginalized when the individual avoids both the native and dominant cultures.

Previous studies have viewed acculturation as stages or strategies separated from each other. The present research found the acculturation strategies among the sample involved dynamic acculturation. This finding was not supported by previous studies considering dynamic acculturation a new strategy that required further assessment. The dynamic acculturation presented in this research could be defined as a flexible, changeable, and balanced strategy that can utilize the strategies of assimilation, integration, and rejection after an evaluation of the situation.

Dynamic acculturation is characterized by constant progress and active change, promoting positive personality growth among refugees and immigrants. Dynamic acculturation provides a wider set of strategies for an individual to utilize. Unlike previous studies suggesting that an immigrant use one rigid acculturation strategy, dynamic acculturation encourages an individual to evaluate the situation and choose the response before acting.

Acculturation strategies differ among different age groups. Participants' parents seemed to utilize separation due to difficulties learning a new language at older ages. Participants' younger siblings tended to assimilate with their peers at school, learn the language faster, and

take leadership positions in the family. The emerging adult participants, aged between 18 and 25, demonstrated dynamic acculturation compared to their parents and younger siblings.

Some of the findings of this study were consistent with previous studies, as presented in the proceeding section. Three new findings have been presented (dynamic acculturation, interpersonal skills, and community support) that differ from our everyday thinking and the literature. First, participants' resilience and their coping ability could bridge the gap between the Syrian community and the US society, which included the interaction of participants' cultural backgrounds, dealing with traumatic experience, and adopting to the American culture, which I describe as dynamic acculturation.

Dynamic acculturation depicts the process of how an individual or a group endures physical, emotional or cultural adoption; reacts to such conditions with a sense of helpful and reciprocally valuable relationships; and shows the ability to integrate their cultural practice, accept and learn to change to gain mastery over the majority culture. The acculturation behavior in this study's participants found ways to not fit into the existing acculturation stage and level framework [15,41]. Hence, this study focused on presenting and discussing the process of acculturation-dynamic acculturation-rather than the acculturation type and level.

Dynamic acculturation (Assimilation and integration)

Assimilation to the dominant culture has been viewed negatively. Immigrants at this stage are considered westernized individuals who have lost their native identities. Assimilation may cause intergenerational familial distress. In assimilation, refugees meld their characteristics into the dominant culture, which reflects the superiority of the dominant culture. However, assimilation was not viewed negatively in the present research.

Informants in the present study reported they wanted to learn English and pursue higher education. Additionally, their ways of dressing in their home country were different from those in the US, especially among females. Participants found that a balanced strategy helped them maintain their identity and allowed them to assimilate into US culture. Instead of wearing darker clothes, they wore brighter colors. They may wear darker colors in their community and brighter colors at school. Language and food preferences were also discussed by participants in the interviews. They spoke Arabic and were passionate to learn English to be able to work and to achieve higher education. The strategy they used was a combination of assimilation and integration.

Dynamic acculturation (Assimilation and rejection)

Rejection (separation) refers to a withdrawal from the dominant culture and a maintenance of the native culture. Individuals who use the separation strategy have a good relationship with their own people and avoid interacting with the dominant culture. Rejection has been viewed as negatively impacting immigrants' mental health and the acculturation process. Rejecting interaction with the dominant culture influences personal growth, financial status, and educational achievement. The opposite of rejection is assimilation into the dominant society.

In the present research, assimilation and rejection were utilized by participants at the same time. Participants learned from their American friends a healthy lifestyle and the English language; these friends had good occupations and pursued their goals. They also rejected interactions with friends who may have affected them negatively, such as joining gangs or becoming involved in substance abuse or other illegal behaviors. Therefore, participants maintained assimilation by embracing a positive lifestyle and rejecting a negative lifestyle. Rejection and assimilation were thus used dynamically among informants.

Dynamic acculturation (Integration and rejection)

Integration is reported to be the most positive and acceptable acculturation strategy across immigration studies. Integration occurs when the individual maintains a positive relationship with the native culture as well as with the dominant culture. Integrating with the dominant society provides more opportunities for personal, occupational, and educational development. Rejection has the opposite impact of integration because of the nature of avoidance among refugees and immigrants.

In the present research, participants utilized both strategies at the same time. Participants maintained dynamic acculturation by maintaining a positive relationship with the dominant and native cultures (integration), maintaining a good relationship with family and friends and avoiding involvement in dangerous or illegal situations (rejection). Participants showed a tendency to analyze the situation in a unique way, to evaluate which strategy to utilize at certain times, and then to act depending on the results of their evaluation.

Dynamic acculturation is considered a problem-solving skill to reduce the acculturation stress that occurs when a refugee or immigrant must choose one culture over another. Adopting more than one acculturation strategy and problem-solving skills requires higher cognitive functioning skills-such as analyzing, evaluating, communication, flexibility, and emotional regulation-to make an effective decision. Therefore, participants who utilized dynamic acculturation were better able to solve their problems creatively and reduce the stress of migration.

Participants' positive attitudes promoted the strategy of dynamic acculturation. Dynamic acculturation can be viewed as a result of the resilience they developed after the traumatic events in their home country and the refugee camp. Below, I discuss the interpersonal skills associated with dynamic acculturation informants used to minimize the challenges of living in the US.

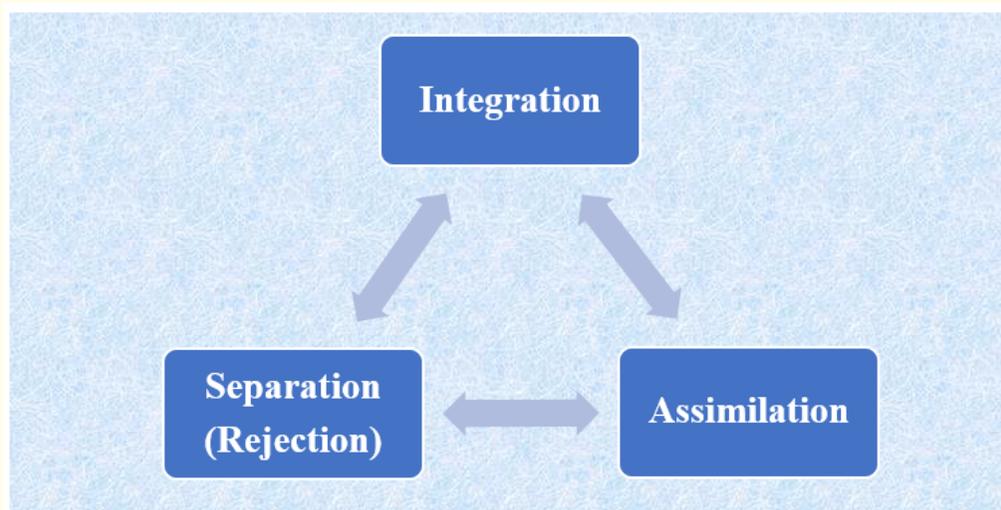Figure 1 illustrates the concept of dynamic acculturation.

Figure 1: Dynamic acculturation.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of the present study have implications for potential positive understanding at the individual, the organizational and the community levels. The results of this study indicated that managing acculturation stressors and challenges using dynamic acculturation

was beneficial for maintaining psychological well-being. Dynamic acculturation provided a wide range of problem-solving skills that helped refugees and immigrants to live in the dominant culture. Counselors should not consider acculturation strategies by viewing them as good-bad or positive-negative strategies. Dynamic acculturation promoted involvement with the native and dominant culture after evaluating the situation. Multicultural understanding was beneficial to understanding refugees' challenges and strategies.

Moreover, the findings of this research indicated that the refugees came from a collectivist society that values personal relationships with the larger group. Counselors should focus on counseling or advocacy projects providing social and community support. Community support played a significant role for emerging adult refugees in maintaining their mental health and dynamic acculturation. Emerging adult refugees need support groups focusing on acculturation, law and regulation, parenting in Western culture, learning English and pursuing a higher education.

Research Recommendations

Recommendations for counselors

- Mental health counseling for refugees must be improved to develop multicultural tools and interventions that rely less on the medical models of psychotherapy.

- The family must be involved in the counseling process, and the community must be involved in programs promoting dynamic acculturation.

- Counselors should work collaboratively with interpreters to provide an in-depth understanding of the acculturation challenges and strategies.

- Counselors should also advocate for refugees by providing career counseling as well as law and regulation workshops to facilitate financial stability and help refugees learn new skills.

- Support groups for refugees should be developed, which can be led by peers who have been in the US for a longer time and have the requisite knowledge and personality traits to lead the group.

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