

2022

Refugee Women's Post-Resettlement Experiences in the United States

Dr. Kristen M. Curry, PhD
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Kristen M. Curry

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Geneva Gray, Committee Chairperson, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Jason Patton, Committee Member, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Marilyn Haight, University Reviewer, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Refugee Women's Post-Resettlement Experiences in the United States

by

Kristen M. Curry

MA, Alliant International University, 2013

BS, California State University - Fresno, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2022

Abstract

Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and community members of the host country make decisions regarding refugee lifestyles during and post-resettlement rather than the refugee women themselves. This research study informs the development of and provision of multiculturally appropriate counseling services to refugee women living in the United States from the perspective of the refugee women themselves. The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences and related meanings of a group of Hmong refugee women living in post-resettlement in the United States. This hermeneutic phenomenological study was developed with a feminist multicultural theoretical foundation. The primary research questions for this study were used to explore the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement and how refugee Hmong women make meaning of their post-resettlement experiences in the United States. Eight participants were interviewed and data were analyzed in reflection of existing literature and confirmed by the participants for accuracy of data collection. Three key themes emerged from this study: basic human rights, loss of culture, and security. Implications for positive social change include informing refugee policy change and development across multiple systems and levels of government, potentially decreasing the gaps in access to culturally competent counseling services.

Refugee Women's Post-Resettlement Experiences in the United States

by

Kristen M. Curry

MA, Alliant International University, 2013

BS, California State University - Fresno, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

November 2022

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, my children, and my grandchildren.

None of this would be possible without them.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband for encouraging me to keep going when I needed it most and for championing my process hearing every whisper and scream. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee for all of their support through this process. In particular, I would like to thank my dissertation chair for sticking with me and believing in my research from the beginning. Lastly, I would like to thank my entire family for their patience and understanding as I travelled through this process which meant a lot of personal sacrifices and missed events.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Conceptual Framework	5
Theoretical Framework	7
Nature of the Study	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Assumptions.....	10
Scope and Delimitations	10
Limitations	11
Significance.....	12
Summary	13
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	37
Research Method	37
Phenomenology.....	38
Identified Gap	39
Research Design and Rationale	40

Research Questions	41
Hermeneutic Phenomenology	42
Role of the Researcher	43
Bracketing	43
Researcher Bias	44
Methodology	45
Participant Selection	45
Data Collection	47
Data Analysis	50
Trustworthiness	52
Credibility	53
Transferability	53
Dependability	54
Confirmability	54
Ethical Considerations	55
Summary	55
Chapter 4: Results	57
Introduction	57
Research Questions	57
Setting and Demographics	58
Data Collection	59
Data Analysis	60

Trustworthiness.....	61
Results.....	64
Basic Human Rights	66
Loss of Culture.....	68
Security	69
Summary	70
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	73
Introduction.....	73
Interpretation of Findings	73
Limitations of the Study.....	77
Recommendations.....	79
Implications.....	81
Conclusion	86
References.....	87
Appendix A: Participant Flyer	95
Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire.....	96
Appendix C: Interview Questions.....	97

List of Figures

Figure 1 *Data and Codes* 66

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

It is important to research women refugees' needs to determine factors specific to willingness or ability to seek mental health, career, academic, individual, or family counseling help in post-resettlement (Baines, 2002). Baines (2002) outlined the history of resettlement policymaking citing the *UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women* (United Nations, 1990) regarding the needs of women and the inclusion of a woman in the administrative policy process. Baines (2002) identified the need for continued inquiries into understanding the specific factors associated with women refugees' post-resettlement mental health, career, academic, individual, or family counseling help-seeking behaviors. In this study, I explored women refugees' post-resettlement experiences as a social justice catalyst thus potentially decreasing the gaps in access to culturally competent counseling resources.

Background

Mossaad (2017) purported that approximately 50% of all refugees entering the United States between 2012 and 2014 were female; thus highlighting the need for representation of the subgroup of women within the broader refugee population. Research suggests that principal asylees are male heads of households and only if the principal asylee is granted asylum are the 'derivatives' granted asylum too (Mossaad, 2017). Thus, women and unmarried children are only granted asylum status if the male head of household is granted asylum status. The existing research does not assert the need for women to be considered as independent from children or male heads of household for the purposes of granting asylum or resettlement in the United States.

Additionally, Hyndman (2010) posited that women refugees are vulnerable through the assertion of male dominance in the United States and more vulnerable as people who identify as non-Caucasian. Hyndman (2010) reflected that women are considered as a subsidiary of men in the United States. Refugee women are usually non-Caucasian identified, which makes the refugee women more susceptible to prejudice and discrimination. While Hyndman (2010) has researched the potential for discrimination of non-Caucasian refugee women in the United States, experiences of such discrimination have not yet been explored.

Smith (2015) and Wachter et al. (2015) identified refugee women's post-resettlement issues as being academic, economic, socialization, and childcare. Researchers identified post-resettlement issues but not the precipitating causes for such issues. Smith (2015) asserted that hearing women refugee's narratives in their own words is a form of social resistance by and personal empowerment to the refugee women. Wachter et al. (2015) discovered that the indications of the women-at-risk category assigned to independent women refugees is exacerbated and that intersectionality of non-Caucasian refugee women's experiences is more influential on women's experiences in post-resettlement. These studies suggested that further research is needed to explore independent women refugees' experiences post-resettlement in the United States.

In this chapter I discuss the problem leading up to this research, the purpose and nature of this research, and the frameworks for this research. Older research supports the understanding of early resettlement processes for Hmong women refugees, yet newer research is imperative to understanding of ongoing struggles that Hmong refugee women

may be experiencing (Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017; Patton, 2015; Pfeifer et al., 2012; Xiong et al., 2018). I also outline the stated research questions, define terms, provide an overview of the research design, significance, assumptions and limitations. I used hermeneutic phenomenology as the research design of this study to capture the understanding of Hmong refugee women's latent resettlement experiences.

Problem Statement

The President of the United States, Congress, and United Nations officials use government policy to restrict access to resettlement for tens of thousands of refugees around the world (Dussich, 2018). According to current U.S. resettlement policy, refugees are admitted into the country based on a tiered priority system with a plethora of criterion related to homeland of the refugee, health, level of persecution, and morality (Dussich, 2018; Office of Refugee Resettlement [ORR], 2012). Many women refugees may not meet criterion for independent refugee status to enter the United States in the priority one category; thus, leaving many of the women to fend for themselves in hostile countries or temporary refugee camp locations (Haffejee & East, 2016).

Women refugees likely experience oppression, microaggressions, and discrimination in the United States (Bemak & Chung, 2017). The expectation for all refugees in post-resettlement is to be financially independent within 6 months and begin repayment of the government loan that was provided to cover the costs of resettlement travel to the United States (ORR, 2012). Some of the decisions made about women refugees' post-resettlement lifestyle include housing placement, employability, education, and financial independence (Hyndman, 2010; Smith, 2015). Decisions regarding refugee

lifestyles during and post-resettlement are determined by local nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and community members of the host country (ORR, 2012) rather than the refugee women themselves (Haffejee & East, 2016). Counselors and counselor educators may use the findings from this study to develop and provide appropriate counseling services to refugee women living in the United States. Outcomes from this research may be a source of education for counselors on appropriate counseling services for refugee women living post-resettlement in the United States (Bustamante et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences and related meanings of such experiences of a group of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement. A gap exists in the current literature regarding understanding refugee women's post-resettlement experiences. Hmong refugee women face traditional social justice issues in access to resources due to challenges associated with low income, language barriers, and lack of culturally competent services (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Dussich, 2018; Pfeifer et al., 2012; Smith, 2015; Sue & Sue, 2016; Xiong et al., 2018). I will use information generated from this study to increase social justice knowledge and awareness of refugee women's needs in the counseling field. I captured the phenomenological understanding of women refugees' experiences and meaning-making of such experiences. I used a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method to understand post-resettlement experiences of Hmong women refugee survivors in the United States and identified how women refugees make meaning

of such experiences. I conducted structured interviews with Hmong refugee women who speak the English language and when I reviewed the interview transcripts within the context of existing literature have developed a deeper understanding of the data.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do refugee Hmong women make meaning of their post-resettlement experiences living in the United States?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was built upon a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach to interpret experiences of phenomena through the lens of the individual or group that experienced the phenomena (Cammell, 2015; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). Hermeneutics emphasizes how human understanding is possible through linguistics and how human understanding is bound by the consciousness that is situated in historical perspectives (Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a way of understanding human relation to the world by maintaining an interactive human relation to the world (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Heidegger's philosophy of hermeneutics is that language is universal in the constriction of meaning (Ho et al., 2017). Heidegger posited that understanding experiences is a state of being, and the state of being is interpreted through the language of the being of study (Ho et al., 2017). To truly understand the experiences of others different from ourselves, we must first acknowledge our own understanding and consider

alternative understandings by both removing our own understanding and remaining present in the language (Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). This is the essence of Heidegger's state of being (Ho et al., 2017).

Per hermeneutics, I removed existing knowledge of phenomena from the data collection processes for exploration of phenomena through the experiences, or language, of the individual or group being interviewed (see Cammell, 2015; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). I used hermeneutic phenomenology to use existing common knowledge between researcher and participant for conducting structural analysis and interpretation of meaning (see Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

The hermeneutic circle is central to data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Researchers enter the hermeneutic circle during the ongoing process of data analysis, moving between pieces of text and whole of the text for understanding of meaning and interpretation of data (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). The hermeneutic circle is the action of Heidegger's philosophy of hermeneutics, being with the data to identify key aspects of the data for better understanding of the data through interpretation (Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Interviews are a primary method for data collection in a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Cammell, 2015; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenology also suggests multiple data reviewers to decrease the likeliness of researcher bias in data analysis and interpretation of findings (Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). Using the hermeneutic circle, researchers can

be with the data, extracting themes for interpretation in context of the whole of the data, and extracting the essence of meaning through interpretation of the data (Ho et al., 2017).

I used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore the participants' lived experiences through the participants' narration of their lived experiences. Alase (2017) and Creswell (2013) posited the use of IPA to explore lived experiences of participants through the participants' narration of their own experiences. In IPA, the researcher encourages participants to tell their own stories without risk of persecution, which results in more in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the lived experiences being studied from the perspective of the participant (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 2013). The first step of IPA approach is defining the researcher's understanding of the phenomena being studied as a means to prevent interjection of subjective interpretation of data (Creswell, 2013). I used three cycle coding to identify themes for categorization of what and how the phenomena was experienced by the participant. Creswell (2013) asserted that three cycle coding is an appropriate option for phenomenological research. Comparative data analysis helps the researcher to identify the point of data saturation (Creswell, 2013). I utilized comparative data analysis to identify the point of data saturation at 8 participants.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was feminist multicultural theory. Researchers suggest that the merging of multicultural theory with feminist theory embraces the empowering of individuals through the perspective of the individual (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Williams & Enns, 2013). Feminist multicultural

theory developed out of the need for diversity in social research and is an integrated theoretical framework that emphasizes intersectionality (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Williams & Enns, 2013). Intersectionality is the merging of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013), such as the identity of refugee women as women, refugees, non-Caucasian people, and so forth. Intersectionality, as espoused in feminist multicultural theory, is a salient component to refugee women's experiences when defined through multiple social identities and cultural identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013).

Nature of the Study

My goal for this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to further understand refugee women's post-resettlement experiences. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to qualitative research aligns with seeking to understand the post-resettlement experiences of refugee women by gathering information through the experiences of refugee women. Hmong women refugees have been living post-resettlement in the United States for at least twenty years at the time of this study as the last large number of Hmong refugees placed in the United States occurred in 1997. I gathered information about Hmong women refugees' experiences through structured interviews in the women refugees' native Hmong language or English language, in keeping with multicultural feminist theory (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Using phenomenological interviewing and transcripts of the interviews, I identified common and emerging themes of refugee women's experiences. Hmong language interpreters were considered but not needed to conduct phenomenological interviews or to translate Hmong language in

transcripts. Interpreters and translators were not needed due to all participants were English speaking and all interviews were conducted in English only. Identifying experiences of post-resettlement lives of refugee Hmong women and the influence of such experiences on meaning making may inform the provision of multiculturally competent counseling services and multicultural competence education. I used semistructured phenomenological interviews using open-ended questions conducted face-to-face with refugee Hmong women living in the United States post-resettlement. I used triangulation of data including my journal, data collected directly from the participants of this study, and demographic information collected from a basic demographic survey given to the Hmong refugee women.

Definition of Terms

I used the following terms throughout this study:

Help-seeking is seeking support from community based social services type organizations including, but not limited to, individual and/or family counseling, career counseling, and mental health counseling (Bemak & Chung, 2017).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology commonly found in social science research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Hmong are an ethnic group of people traditionally living in the mountain regions of Southeast Asia with strong political ties to the United States (Bensen, 2015; Dentice, 2018; Pfeifer et al., 2012; Terjesen, 2022).

Post-resettlement is the living position of refugee people after they have been resettled into a foreign country under resettlement conditions (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012; United Nations, 1990).

Refugee is having or have had displaced status from one's homeland under duress of war, genocide, persecution, or other qualifying factor of forced displacement in the preservation of one's own life (Baines, 2002; Boyd, 1999; Kerwin, 2018).

Resettlement is the process of settling refugee people in a foreign country and providing temporary food and shelter assistance with the expectation of the refugee person to become self-sufficient with earning a living wage within a period of less than one year (Kerwin, 2018; Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2012; United Nations, 1990).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants would answer questions honestly and candidly, all participants would have similar experiences, and participants had a genuine interest in participation. I assumed that all participants participated in genuine interest to expand the body of literature and share their story. I assumed that participants answered honestly and candidly, openly sharing their lived experiences in my presence as I am of different culture and language than the participant.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations of this study included the research questions and use of hermeneutic phenomenology. Several methodologies are considered appropriate for qualitative research including hermeneutics and phenomenology (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). I considered other methodologies inappropriate for this study, as the information I

sought was consistently changing through the hermeneutic circle . As knowledge is gained, perception is changed, and the research methodology changes accordingly (Hays & Singh, 2012). I used the research questions to understand the lived experiences of refugee women living in the United States in post-resettlement.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included language barriers, cultural differences, and limited existing literature. I am an English-speaking American born citizen of European descent and the participants were native Hmong-speaking foreign-born Hmong descent having refugee status and living in the United States. Differences in cultural norms can create challenges and biases in research (Ho et al., 2017; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, (2013).

To mitigate language and cultural barriers, I considered interpreters but did not use them throughout the participant selection and data collection process. Utilizing interpreters of Hmong culture may have helped with communication in a manner that is culturally consistent for the participant population if participants did not speak English. Language interpreters can act as cultural brokers to support with cross-cultural communication in a manner that is culturally consistent for the participant (Xion et al., 2018). Hmong interpreters would also have acted as trust builders between me and the participants. Trust is important in the Hmong population, as is the respect for traditional patriarchal familial dynamics (Sue & Sue, 2016; Xiong et al., 2018). Hmong interpreters of Hmong culture understand how to respectfully navigate the traditional Hmong familial system throughout the data collection process, decreasing the likeliness of

microaggressions from researcher to participant (Sue, 2010). Hmong language translators were used to review interview questions and participant outreach and selection documents prior to interviewing participants to screen for potential cultural bias.

Significance

Understanding how Hmong women refugees make meaning of experiences may explain factors influencing refugee women's mental health, career, academic, individual, or family counseling help-seeking behaviors and inform multicultural competence training in counselor education (Minas et al., 2013). Approximately 300,000 Hmong refugees resettled from refugee camps into the United States from 1975 through the early 2000s (Pfeifer et al., 2012). The majority of Hmong refugees resettled in the United States were placed in urban locations of Fresno, California, and Minneapolis, Minnesota where access to mental health, career, and academic counseling are readily available. Due to the longevity of time of Hmong women refugees' experiences of living in resettlement, participants will likely provide rich data for this research. I addressed the gap in the literature by providing rich data that is specific to the underrepresented population of refugee women resettled in the United States.

Women of color have historically been marginalized and discriminated against in the United States (Israel, 2006). The marginalization and discrimination of women of color is in one part due to gender and doubly discriminated against due to their race or ethnicity (Israel, 2006; Ratts et al., 2010; Sue, 2010). Because refugee women have historically been marginalized and categorized with children (Baines, 2002; Boyd, 1999),

this research highlights the needs and experiences of refugee women as a unique subgroup of the refugee population.

Professionals within the counseling field abide by a social justice framework in counselor education, supervision, and practice (Ratts et al., 2010). This includes the acknowledgment and awareness of social justice issues, microaggressions, and cultural differences that exist among diverse communities (Ratts et al., 2010; Sue, 2010). Counselor education and supervision includes training and practice of such competencies as an evolving dynamic (Ratts et al., 2010; Sue & Sue, 2016; Toporek & McNally, 2006). Research related to this field can be wrought with microaggression without proper exploration, training, and understanding of the dynamics associated with intersectionality among diverse populations (Toporek & McNally, 2006). The unique experiences of Hmong refugee women encompass the challenges that may be associated with the dynamics of intersectionality and microaggression in research. This research contributes to the existing literature in a meaningful way to increase the knowledge and awareness of refugee women's specific needs as they relate to the social justice component of counselor education, supervision, and practice (Bustamante et al., 2016; Hyndman, 2010; Ratts et al., 2010; Sue, 2010; Toporek & McNally, 2006).

Summary

Current literature within the last 10 years is limited, as the Hmong refugee influx has dissipated since the late 1990s (Pfeifer et al., 2012). Older research is imperative to the understanding of Hmong refugee women's experiences during early resettlement processes as outlined by government construct (Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017; Patton,

2015; Xiong et al., 2018). Older research is focused on needs associated with attaining the foundations of educational, financial, and housing stability during refugee resettlement and post-resettlement as expected by government regulations for all refugees to be fully self-sufficient within 6 months of arrival in the United States (Ho et al., 2017). My goal for this study was to understand Hmong refugee women's experiences of latent resettlement processes in post-resettlement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences and related meanings of a group of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement. A gap exists in current literature regarding understanding of refugee women's post-resettlement experiences. It is important to explore these experiences to address the gap in the literature and to inform multicultural competence training in counselor education and supervision and the development of policies and procedures specific to the population of refugee women. This research increases social justice knowledge and awareness of refugee women's needs in the counseling field. This research captures the phenomenological understanding of women refugees' experience and meaning making of such experiences. I used the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method to understand post-resettlement experiences of Hmong women refugee survivors in the United States and identified how women refugees make meaning of such experiences. I conducted structured interviews with only English-speaking Hmong refugee women and reviewed the transcripts with existing literature to develop a deeper understanding of the interview data. The interview data informs current and future policymaking around refugee resettlement, multicultural counselor training and practice, and social services support and outreach.

According to current literature, there is a dearth of research regarding lived experiences of Hmong refugees post-resettlement that explores the nuances of the Hmong refugee women's experience (Hyndman, 2010). Researchers have long studied the influences behind the transmigration of the Hmong refugee population and the financial

implications of such on Hmong refugees (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Benson, 2015; Dentice, 2018; Kerwin, 2018; Mossaad, 2017; Smith, 2015; Terjesen, 2022). Further, authors have highlighted the historical context of the Hmong experience with the United States government and possible issues associated with cultural assimilation (Benson, 2015; Hyndman, 2010; Terjesen, 2022). Across all studies, it is posited that further inquiry is needed to explore the nuances of cultural assimilation and the Hmong struggle post-resettlement in the United States (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Benson, 2015; Dentice, 2018; Hyndman, 2010; Kerwin, 2018; Mossaad, 2017; Smith, 2015; Terjesen, 2022).

In this chapter, I discuss my literature search strategy leading into a literature review, including familiarizing myself with various databases and key terms to narrow my search. I also discuss how I truncated key terms and further narrowed my literature search using a spreadsheet to organize relevant literature by theme. I also discuss, in further detail, the conceptual framework of hermeneutic phenomenology and theoretical foundations of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and feminist multicultural theory. I discuss the origins of phenomenology as posited by Martin Heidegger (Cammell, 2015; Davidsen, 2013; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016) and the underpinnings of hermeneutics as posited by Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gadamer, 2011; Moustakas, 2010). I include both historical foundations with feminist multicultural theory as it applies to intersectionality (Williams & Enns, 2013) and the relevance to Hmong women refugees.

Literature Search Strategy

I began the literature review process with familiarizing myself with the different databases and search engines available to me and a broad search of key terms that were then truncated to fit the scope of this research. The broad search of corresponding key terms yielded a large body of antiquated and banal literature that was unusable for this research. I used a spread sheet system to identify appropriate literature organizing categories by age of the literature, trustworthiness of the literature, population, and topic. The spreadsheet provided a clear reference point for identifying key terms that were more specific to this research. Narrowing the key terms naturally narrowed the literature search to reduce padding the literature with loosely related information. The narrowed search resulted in a scarcity of research which required that I go back and pull seminal research related to the topic of this research to support the need for this research beyond scarcity.

Using existing knowledge to guide my initial broad search, I used the following databases which were then used again for the truncated search of specific key terms literature: EBSCOhost, Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies, Academic Search Complete, ERIC, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Sage, SocINDEX with full text, and Thoreau. I also used broader databases including Google Scholar and Research Gate. Included in my literature search were printed seminal works by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Clark Moustakas, and Martin Heidegger. Journals reviewed include *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *Hmong Studies Journal*, *Gender Issues*, *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria*, *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *Stanford Law Review*, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *Journal of*

Human Lactation, Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, International Journal of Research & Method in Education, Journal of Advanced Nursing, International Journal of Qualitative Methods, Gender, Place & Culture, Journal on Migration & Human Security, International Journal of Mental Health Systems, Quality & Quantity, ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies, Women & Therapy, The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy, and International Social Work. Keywords and terms searched among digital databases: *Hmong, women, refugee, Hmong women, Hmong women refugee, Hmong women refugee United States, women refugee, resettlement, refugee resettlement, refugee resettlement United States, hermeneutics, phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, qualitative methodology, and qualitative methodology refugee research.*

My original search was broad in nature, using keyword searches across the digital databases. I used citation chaining to further narrow my search when reviewing journal articles and books under the broader search terms. Citation chaining includes reviewing sources of information found in existing literature to search other sources of information in a forward and backward direction (Hays & Singh, 2012). I reviewed works citing the works I had found and used the existing references to work backward and locate other relevant literature including seminal works. This pattern was repeated across sources researched helping to assure literature review saturation (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015).

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this hermeneutic phenomenological study was feminist multicultural theory. Researchers have found that the merging of multicultural theory with feminist theory embraces the empowering of individuals through the perspective of the individual (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Williams & Enns, 2013). Feminist multicultural theory is an integrated theoretical framework that emphasizes intersectionality (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Williams & Enns, 2013). Intersectionality is the merging of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013), such as the identity of refugee women as women, refugees, non-Caucasian people, and so forth. Intersectionality is a salient component to refugee women's experiences when defined through multiple social identities and cultural identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of one's experiences through the interpretation and intention of the individual experiencing the experiences (Moustakas, 2010; Patton, 2015). Phenomenology is better known as a method of study within the overarching banner of philosophy. Some define the phenomenology as a form of study within philosophy, while others define phenomenology as a movement in the history of philosophy (Moustakas, 2010; Patton, 2015). Either interpretation yields the same understanding that phenomenology is the study of phenomena through the interpretation of the individual experiencing the phenomena. Heidegger is commonly referred to when discussing

phenomenology in philosophy and the use of phenomenology as a method of study (Moustakas, 2010).

Heidegger

Martin Heidegger was the German philosopher credited with significant contributions to hermeneutics in phenomenology (Cammell, 2015; Moustakas, 2010). Heidegger focused his contributions to phenomenology on the essence of being and time; understanding that humans exist in time and space among each other creating meaning and understanding through the interpretation of experiences had (Moustakas, 2010). As a primary influencer of Hans-Georg Gadamer's work, Heidegger's thought around phenomenology embodies the concept of hermeneutics where the experience of an individual is interpreted through the lens of both the storyteller and the listener in an evolving interpretation of phenomena across time and experiences (Cammell, 2015; Gadamer, 2011).

Hermeneutics

The art of knowing and being as it relates to truth is defined by the individual whose experience is being explored (Cammell, 2015; Gadamer, 2011; Heidegger, 1962; Moustakas, 2010). Hermeneutics is used in the attempt to interpret and understand the experiences of others through an unbiased lens with clear knowledge and sharing of knowledge through the story of another's true experience utilizing what is known as the hermeneutic circle (Cammell, 2015; Moustakas, 2010). Hermeneutics is the art of understanding something through the reading and interpretation of text about that something as it is intended by the author of the text (Moustakas, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Gadamer

Hans-Georg Gadamer (2011) posited the prehistory of hermeneutics as the rediscovery of something that is not absolutely unknown but rather that the understanding of something that had become inaccessible. Influenced by Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology, Gadamer asserted that to fully understand something, it must be revisited as it is not possible to fully understand something in one interpretation but to consider the collective whole as it changes over time (Cammell, 2015; Gadamer, 2011). Gadamer (2011) proposed that experiencing happens through self-knowledge and that interpreting experiences happens through self-knowledge. The matter of interpretation is not without bias or the influence of existing knowledge. Gadamer (2011) understood that consciousness is affected by history and our awareness of our own knowledge can mitigate some insertion of bias in the interpretation of other's experiences.

Hermeneutic Circle. The hermeneutic circle is the concept of analyzing data as a circular process (Cammell, 2015; Ho et al., 2017; Moustakas, 2010; Patton, 2015). The researcher analyzes the data with their own biased knowledge when identifying themes that are present. The researcher then reviews the data with a clearer lens to find the perspective of the participant, sometimes needing additional interview time for clarification of meanings (Cammell, 2015; Patton, 2015). Finally, the researcher takes the new information and further refines the themes that were originally identified to match the intention of the participant that creates a new biased perspective for the researcher (Patton, 2015). This is a circular pattern where I start with my own biased lens and assumptions to learn new experiences outside of my own and create a new biased lens

and set of assumptions that include the learned knowledge. The idea is that I can never really attain true knowing of what the participant has experienced as each experience is unique to the individual and can only be truly understood by the individual as we each bring our own experiences and perceptions to any situation (Ho et al., 2017; Patton, 2015).

Feminist Multicultural Theory

Feminist multicultural theory is a foundation for understanding the dynamics of being a refugee woman living post-resettlement in the United States. Feminist multicultural theory is an integrated theoretical framework that emphasizes intersectionality (Williams & Enns, 2013; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Intersectionality is the merging of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013), such as the identity of refugee women as women, refugees, non-Caucasian people, and so forth. Intersectionality is a salient component to refugee women's experiences when defined through multiple social identities and cultural identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Acumen of the essence of the experiences of refugee women requires refugee women to share their personal stories (Smith, 2015). Empowerment is a natural byproduct of sharing personal experiences through individual narratives (Williams & Enns, 2013). Feminist multicultural theory embraces the empowering of individuals through the perspective of the individual (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Williams & Enns, 2013).

Feminist multicultural theory is the integration of feminist theory and multicultural theory into one meta-theory (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Williams

& Enns, 2013). Feminist theory asserts empowerment through the acceptance and sharing of marginalized experiences that are rooted in discrimination based on gender stereotypes (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Multicultural theory is the essence of embracing difference without judgment (Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). The merging of feminist theory and multicultural theory is a theoretical concept rooted in intersectionality (Williams & Enns, 2013; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Intersectionality is the merging of multiple identities across cultures (Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Refugee women, for whom intersectionality is particularly salient, represent a plethora of cultures and identities that have developed, and continue to develop, through a multitude of transnational experiences (see Crenshaw, 1991; Smith, 2015; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Identifying intersectionality as the merging of multiple social identities and cultural identities, intersectionality becomes hallmark in the understanding of refugee women's experiences (see Crenshaw, 1991; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was built upon a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach to interpret experiences of phenomena through the lens of the individual or group that experienced the phenomena. Hermeneutic phenomenology is one approach researchers use to interpret the experience of an individual or group through the lens of the individual or group reporting the experience (Cammell, 2015; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). Hermeneutics emphasizes how human understanding is possible through linguistics and how human

understanding is bound by the consciousness that is situated in historical perspectives (Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a way for researchers to understand human relation to the world by maintaining an interactive human relation to the world (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Heidegger's philosophy of hermeneutics is that language is universal in the constriction of meaning (Ho et al., 2017). Heidegger posited that understanding experiences is a state of being, and the state of being is interpreted through the language of the being of study (Ho et al., 2017). To truly understand the experiences of others different from ourselves, we must first acknowledge our own understanding and consider alternative understandings by both removing our own understanding and remaining present in the language (Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). This is the essence of Heidegger's state of being (Ho et al., 2017).

Hermeneutic phenomenology requires that the researcher remove existing knowledge of phenomena from the data collection processes to allow for exploration of phenomena through the experiences, or language, of the individual or group being interviewed (Cammell, 2015; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Researchers use hermeneutic phenomenology to use existing common knowledge between researcher and participant for conducting structural analysis and interpretation of meaning (Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

The hermeneutic circle is central to data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Researchers enter the hermeneutic circle during the ongoing process of data analysis, moving between pieces of text and whole of the text for understanding of meaning and interpretation of data (Sloan

& Bowe, 2013). The hermeneutic circle is the action of Heidegger's philosophy, being with the data to identify key aspects of the data for better understanding of the data through interpretation (Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Interviews are a primary method for data collection in a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Cammell, 2015; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Data analysis in hermeneutic phenomenology also includes the use of multiple data reviewers to decrease the likeliness of researcher bias in data analysis and interpretation of findings (Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). Using the hermeneutic circle, researchers can be with the data, extracting themes for interpretation in context of the whole of the data, and extracting the essence of meaning through interpretation of the data (Ho et al., 2017).

Literature Review

The Hmong refugee population has been living in resettlement in the United States since the mid-1970's. Understanding the experiences of refugee women living in the United States is best explored through the experiences of a population that has been resettled in the United States long enough to have moved beyond the early resettlement years, but still living as non-citizens with refugee status. Knowledge of the Hmong culture's relationship with the United States is imperative to the understanding of the reason for exploring this population. In this section I discuss the literature as it relates to the history of Hmong with the United States government, women's history in the United States, and refugee resettlement in the United States.

Hmong Refugee Experiences

Rocky Lo (2019) used the theory of sojourners to explore the lived experiences of Hmong refugees living in the United States. Exploring men's and women's experiences separately is recommended to identify gender specific differences while deepening the learning and understanding of the lived experiences of Hmong refugees. Lo conducted a qualitative phenomenological study and explored two research questions of: (a) what are the cultural experiences of Hmong refugees living in America, and (b) how have acculturative challenges constructed Hmong refugees lived experiences in America? No specific sample size was set at onset of study. The final sample size included in the study was eight participants when data collected reached saturation and participants were no longer contributing new information to the phenomenon being studied. Participant criteria for Lo's (2019) study included any male or female Hmong refugee who immigrated to the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s, participant must be at least 30 years old, must speak English, and voluntarily participates. The methods used included semistructured interviews of participants recruited through local Hmong cultural centers and Giorgi's five-step coding process in conjunction with NVivo coding for common themes (Lo, 2019).

The main themes discovered in Lo's (2019) research were divided into two categories: themes for clarity and themes for applicability. Themes for clarity included cultural dissonance, environmental adaptation, and gender roles. Themes for applicability included loss of traditional practices and participation, collective to independent lifestyles, and acculturative approach (Lo, 2019). There were four subthemes associated

with each main theme under themes for clarity. The subthemes for cultural dissonance were realization of independent and collective differences, differences in family and/or community values, differences in respect with elders and feelings of disconnect with language barriers. Under the theme of environmental adaptation were the subthemes of interaction and exposure to American culture, English proficiency, education and religion. The final four subthemes in the clarity category are associated with gender roles (Lo, 2019).

The subthemes for gender roles were being independent and self-reliant, expectations of a traditional housewife, submissive and obedience, and lack of academic support or encouragement (Lo, 2019). Themes for applicability elicited three to five subthemes under the respective main themes. The subthemes for loss of traditional practices and participation were the greatest number of subthemes in the study: converting to Christianity, speaking English as a primary language, female preferences for independence, loss of ritual and ceremonial understanding and conduct, and disinterest in cultural participation and preparations with rituals, ceremonies, and social gatherings. The three subthemes of collective to independent lifestyles were making individual decisions, self-expression and equality with women. The last main theme of applicability, acculturative approach, included the subthemes of assimilation, marginalization and integration (Lo, 2019).

Lo highlighted the need for gender specific research to explore the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women separate from the lived experiences of Hmong refugee men (Lo, 2019) and outlined the gender differences prevalent in a patriarchal

culture both in the Hmong culture and the dominant discourse of the United States (Lo, 2019). Lo's (2019) assertion aligns with assertions put forth by other researchers regarding the gender specific research that is needed when considering lived experiences of refugees in resettlement (Baines, 2002; Boyd, 1999; David, 2014; Haffejee & East, 2016; Hyndman, 2010; Smith, 2015; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Wachter et al., 2015). Lo also acknowledged that younger generations are more susceptible to loss of tradition due to the length of time Hmong refugees have lived in the United States and challenges associated with preservation of Hmong traditions. Lo's (2019) study is important to my study in that it is the underpinnings of exploring the lived experiences of Hmong refugees in the catchment areas outlined for my study, providing foundational data for further exploring the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women separate from that of Hmong refugee men.

Preliminary limitations during the development of the methodology of Lo's (2019) study included cultural biases due to differences in culture between researcher and participant. Collectivist cultures may perceive independent cultures as being selfish, potentially changing the way the participant responds. Other limitations included language barriers due to varying levels of proficiency among participants with their use and understanding of the English language, and potential priming by me with leading questions (Lo, 2019).

Limitations of Lo's (2019) study included participant validation, demographics and generalization. Generalization was not attainable for this study due to the participant pool of eight being too small for generalization of findings to the greater population and

the nature of the study being phenomenological in design and not intended for generalization. Participant validation was incomplete in that refugee status and age were not independently verified. These challenges are commonly found in qualitative research (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Lo (2019) considered participant self-disclosure of age and refugee status as sufficient evidence for qualifications to participate. Participant demographics were a limitation due to the non-English speaking participants being left out of the participant pool. Rich data can be gathered when interviews are conducted in the participant's native language (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Community members who are non-English speakers could have added significantly to the data if included (Lo, 2019).

Hmong History with the United States

Benson (2015) and Terjesen (2022) asserted the historical context of the Hmong population as a patriarchal nomadic people with no true homeland and a culture of displacement and genocide across countries, governments, and centuries of time. Researching the historical context of the Hmong population highlighted the Hmong people's most recent history as the most prevalent involving an undeserving loyalty to the United States government with the promise of lifelong protection and sustenance (Benson, 2015). With a history of being enlisted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to fight the communist party in Laos during the Vietnam War, the Hmong were abandoned by the United States government to fight against eradication for their treasonous acts against the communist regime (Benson, 2015; Dentice, 2018). This

abandonment left millions of Hmong people, many widowed women and orphaned children fleeing Laos to Thailand seeking refuge from genocide (Dentice, 2018).

Following the displacement of Hmong people from Laos to Thailand, hundreds of thousands of Hmong people were forced into refugee camps run by international aid groups as they waited for the United States government to help them (Dentice, 2018). Some Hmong were resettled in the United States within one year following the 1970's exodus from Laos, while others were forced to live in the refugee camps along the Northern Thailand boarder with Laos across generations with the last group of Hmong refugees being resettled in the United States in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California in 2004 (Dentice, 2018). It is presumed that the current Hmong population still struggles with cultural identity issues and assimilation due to the short amount of time that many Hmong have living in resettlement in the United States (Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019). It is also presumed that younger generations born in the United States to refugee Hmong parents appear to have adapted more quickly to American culture (Dentice, 2018).

Hmong culture is a farming culture and urban resettlement is not ideal for finding work, independence, and easing challenges associated with acculturation (Dentice, 2018; Terjesen, 2022). Many Hmong refugees resettled in the United States were resettled in urban communities such as Fresno, California and St. Paul, Minnesota (Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019; Terjesen, 2022). Making a way for themselves, many Hmong have been forced to work in low pay day labor or relying on government assistance for families with dependent children. Living in low-income housing projects and working for below minimum wage pay is not a living wage or a way of sustenance in a new home country

(Dentice, 2018). All of these documented factors support Dentice's (2018) and Lo's (2019) claim that Hmong people as a population continue to struggle with cultural identity issues and assimilation in the United States without exploring the lived experiences of the individual demographics of this population. Lo (2019) recommended research of Hmong women's experiences separate from Hmong men's experiences to explore the nuances specific to each gender.

Women's History in the United States

Basic equity among sexes is an evolutionary concept in the patriarchal structure of the United States (Crenshaw, 1991). Women in the United States fought for and gained the right to vote in 1920, yet their male counterparts have had voting rights for centuries. Currently, there is an unspoken disparity in pay between sexes in the workforce, yet there is an expectation of equal productivity between sexes in the same job or career position. Women are viewed as the weaker sex, the homemaker, the child bearer, and caretaker of others (Crenshaw, 1991; Hyndman, 2010). While some women may hold this true to their own values, it is not the norm across all women and thus should not be expected of all women.

In the United States, there is a dominant discourse of patriarchal perspective that all women are equated with children and treated as subsidiary to a male head of household (Hyndman, 2010). Historically, the United States constitution implemented the protections of men as heads of households, protectors and leaders of women and children (Kendall, 2012). The historical context of a government established under the influences of early European cultures and religious doctrines that espouse an affinity for men to be

bold leaders of the vulnerable and the weak, implying that women and children are the vulnerable and the weak (Kendall, 2012; Khoshkish, 1979). Mainstream media perpetuates this misogynistic socio-political concept through music, cinema, and television, thus portraying women as the *softer gender* characterized by being passive and submissive to their male counterparts (David, 2014; Khoshkish, 1979).

While still privileged under the premise of whiteness, Caucasian women in the United States have a second-class status in comparison to their Caucasian male counterparts (David, 2014; Kendall, 2012). Caucasian women did not procure the right to vote until 1920 only after aligning with racist Caucasian male Southerners, while Caucasian men across the country held the right to vote since 1776 (Kendall, 2012; Khoshkish, 1979). Caucasian women were denied the right to a fair education while their male counterparts were offered academic positions in some the country's institutions of highest regard (David, 2014). Caucasian women's clothing was designed and determined for Caucasian women by Caucasian men to ensure Caucasian women were "respectable", expanding on this was the expectation for Caucasian women to sit a certain way, to be seen and not heard, and only to be seen when it was of benefit to the male head of household (Khoshkish, 1979). Women were, and still are, denied positions of power in government, denied personal rights to certain medical procedures such as birth control and abortion rights, and paid significantly less than their Caucasian male counterparts in positions of equal status and labor (Kendall, 2012). During the write up of this research the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in a landmark move that

removed women's right to abortion as a federal statute and put the control of abortion rights in the hands of State legislation (Lazzarini, 2022).

Non-Caucasian Women in the United States have even less authority than the dominant discourse of Caucasian identified women (Anderson, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Hyndman, 2010; Smith, 2015). Non-Caucasian identified women, in the hierarchy of -isms, are at the top of the list being entrenched in racism, sexism, genderism, and ageism to name a few (Anderson, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Hyndman, 2010). Financially, non-Caucasian women make less money than Caucasian women, and both categories of women make less than their male counterparts in the workforce (Anderson, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991). Non-Caucasian women are likely to experience incidents of microaggression and racism in addition to sexism in the United States (Anderson, 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Smith, 2015; Sue, 2010). Hyndman (2010) asserts that a plethora of scholarship has been done to study the impact of labor migration on gender identities, forgetting that refugee migrants have a very specific identity and significantly different experience than non-refugee migrants. Hyndman (2010) asserts that there is a need to deepen our understanding of the ways in which refugees are enabled, excluded, recruited and hidden through engendered and racialized power relations in the United States. This research addresses this gap by identifying the lived experiences of refugee women that can be parsed apart from the existing literature of the lived experiences of non-refugee migrant women living in the United States, and by highlighting the lived experiences of refugee women of color through their journey of resettlement in the United States.

Refugee Resettlement in the United States

Refugee resettlement in the United States decreased since 2016 with the dismantling of the refugee resettlement programs (Kerwin, 2018). Refugees seeking resettlement in the United States must navigate a long and arduous process to gain approval for resettlement in the United States as their forced migration is seen as a burden and detriment to the nation by the Trump administration instead of a source of strength and inspiration (Kerwin, 2018; Lo, 2019; Mossaad, 2017). This research will highlight the challenges that refugee Hmong women face every day with this type of thinking of the previous Trump administration and any hopes for the future with the current Biden administration.

While living in resettlement in the United States, refugees are expected to integrate into American society and begin the process toward gainful employment (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Kerwin, 2018; Lo, 2019; Mossaad, 2017; Smith, 2015). Refugee resettlement involves being connected to a refugee resettlement support center where refugees are offered basic English classes, both before and after resettlement, basic finance management classes, and are involved in determining their own marketability in the workforce (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Kerwin, 2018; Smith, 2015). The expectation from the United States government is that refugees will be self-sustaining within six months of arrival to the United States (Kerwin, 2018; Mossaad, 2017). This rigorous approach to integration and rapid expectations to assimilate into American culture can be challenging to the refugee psyche (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Lo, 2019). Understanding the pre and post-migration experiences of refugees is imperative to understanding how to

engage this population in supportive services (Lo, 2019). This research addresses this gap in research and informs multicultural competency education for helping professions including counseling and related mental health services (Lo, 2019).

Summary

In this chapter I discussed the literature reviewed for the development of this study. Current literature identifies the need to research the experiences of Hmong refugee women separate from that of Hmong refugee men due to the inherent gender differences that may influence differences in experiences. Historically, Hmong people have been loyal to the American government with little support from the American government (Benson, 2015; Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019). Hmong women experience the nuances of intersectionality being non-Caucasian, refugee, and woman in a patriotic Caucasian dominant patriarchal society. This study addresses the gap in current literature through exploring the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women living in the United States by informing current and future multicultural competence training in counselor education and supervision programs, practices in client engagement, community outreach and multiculturally competent interventions, and the development of refugee resettlement policies and procedures.

In keeping with existing literature, for this study I used qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women. The qualitative framework for this research is hermeneutic phenomenology which allowed me to continuously develop my understanding and interpretation of the findings through a continuous

learning loop as more information was obtained from each interview. In chapter 3, I discuss the methodology used for this research in further detail.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Research Method

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences and related meanings of a group of Hmong refugee women living in the United States post-resettlement. In this chapter I outline the research design and rationale, methodology including sample selection and data analysis, and ethical procedures. To identify and explain factors that influence refugee women's help seeking behaviors, it may be helpful to understand how Hmong women refugees make meaning of their experiences (Minas et al., 2013). Equally, understanding how Hmong women refugees make meaning of their experiences informs multicultural competence training in counselor education (Minas et al., 2013). This research resulted in rich data due to the length of time of Hmong women refugees living in resettlement in the United States beginning in 1975 and continuing with forced transmigration into the early 2000's (Pfeifer et al., 2012). In this research, I highlighted the needs and experiences of refugee women as a unique subgroup of the refugee population. This research contributes to the existing literature in a meaningful way by informing current and future policymaking and curriculum for multicultural counselor education, training, supervision, and practice, increasing knowledge and awareness of refugee women's specific needs as they relate to the social justice component of counselor education and supervision (Bustamante et al., 2016; Hyndman, 2010).

Phenomenology

The essence of phenomenological research comes from the concept put forward by Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl in an attempt to understand the essence of experiences of individuals within the framework of the individual's life or reality (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). A strength of phenomenology is the reflective nature of phenomenology, with rich and detailed descriptions of the essence or meaning of an experience or phenomena as it is experienced by the individual (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). Weaknesses of phenomenology include the dependence upon the ability of the participant to articulate their experience which may miss broader exploration of the experience if what is shared is specific to a point in time reflection of experiences. Another weakness of phenomenology is that the data is only as suitable as the participant pool, meaning participant selection influences the quality of the data collected (Patton, 2015).

Hermeneutics

Stemming from one of Husserl's students, Heidegger, the theory of using hermeneutics in phenomenology grew out of the identification of the need for understanding of action and motivation, not just a mere description of the action or motivation of human action (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Moustakas, 2010). The essence of hermeneutics is to understand meaning beyond just a description of consciousness. Strengths of hermeneutics include the use of researcher knowledge as a guide to the interpretation of experiences and the inclusion of multiple sources of knowledge to create an understanding of meaning of experiences, actions and motivations (Hays & Singh,

2012; Moustakas, 2010). Weakness of hermeneutics is the concept of situated freedom or that individuals have freedom of choices, but that freedom is not absolute as it is dictated by social, cultural, and political contexts (Moustakas, 2010; Patton, 2015).

Identified Gap

A gap exists in the literature regarding refugee women's post-resettlement experiences. The gap is addressed by directly exploring the lived experiences of refugee women living in post-resettlement in the United States. The problem in current and past research is the lack of understanding of women refugee's post-resettlement experiences and how these experiences influence meaning making. It is necessary to understand these components to inform multicultural competence training in counselor education and supervision programs, including informing advocacy practices and advocacy training in counselor education and supervision programs. It is equally imperative to use this understanding to inform client engagement, community outreach and multiculturally competent interventions and practices. This information obtained from the data of this research informs the development and implementation of policies and procedures specific to the population of refugee women and serves as seminal research on the topic.

I will use the knowledge gained to increase social justice knowledge and awareness of refugee women's needs in the counseling field. As a social justice advocate, and counselor educator, conducting this research has furthered my understanding of the use of hermeneutics in research as it applies to underserved and underrepresented populations different from my own. I will use the knowledge gained to not only inform my own multicultural competence and understanding, but to inform my practices as a

counselor, counselor educator and researcher. This research experience enhances my own research methodology knowledge to include the use of hermeneutics as it relates to understanding the experiences of cultures that are different from my own while using my own understanding of certain factors associated with the population to inform my interpretation of participant meaning of experiences. The cyclical nature of hermeneutics is researcher learning and growth through the exploration and interpretation of the experiences of others (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Moustakas, 2010). By conducting this research, I enhanced my understanding of self in relation to others as well as supporting advocacy for underserved populations.

Research Design and Rationale

This chapter includes a discussion of the research design and rationale, including the purpose of the study and its potential significance. The role of the researcher is discussed as it relates to qualitative research in general and more specifically as it relates to this study directly. I provide a detailed data analysis, including the steps for collecting data and the steps for coding and triangulation of data. This chapter also includes a discussion of the trustworthiness of the data after analysis including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

The purpose of this study was to describe the lived experiences and related meanings of a group of Hmong refugee women living in the United States post-resettlement. Understanding how Hmong women refugees make meaning of experiences may explain factors influencing refugee women's help-seeking behaviors and inform multicultural competence training in counselor education. Minas et al. (2013) posited that

exploring factors influencing refugees' help-seeking behaviors is needed to inform multicultural competence in community based services. Approximately 300,000 Hmong refugees resettled from refugee camps into the United States from 1975 through the early 2000s (Pfeifer et al., 2012). The Hmong women refugees provided rich data for this research in part due to the length of time that Hmong women refugees have lived in resettlement in the United. The identified gap in research in the literature is addressed through the rich data gathered that is specific to the underrepresented population of refugee women resettled in the United States. Because refugee women have historically been marginalized and categorized with children (Baines, 2002; Boyd, 1999), the needs and experiences of refugee women as a unique subgroup of the refugee population is highlighted in this research. This research contributes to the existing literature in a meaningful way to increase the knowledge and awareness of refugee women's specific needs as they relate to the social justice component of counselor education and supervision Bustamante et al. (2016) and Hyndman (2010) posited the need to increase knowledge and awareness of refugee women's specific needs in counselor education and mental health training programs.

Research Questions

RQ₁: What are the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement?

RQ₂: How do refugee Hmong women make meaning of their post-resettlement experiences living in the United States?

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

For this qualitative research I chose to implement a hermeneutic phenomenological design. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the merging of two philosophical concepts where the interpretation of data is in constant change as the knowledge of that data or subject continues to develop (Ho et al., 2017; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Hermeneutics is the interpretation of verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and written text within the context of the hermeneutic circle (Ho et al., 2017). The hermeneutic circle is a framework for deepening the understanding of something through the interpretation of the whole where the individual components are explored, and the individual components are explored through the understanding of the interpretation of the whole (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Phenomenology is the knowledge that something changes with every endeavor to explore and understand that something (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015).

I considered other research designs and methodologies unsuitable to the purpose of this study. Quantitative methodologies would not capture the depth of the lived experiences of the population without researcher bias of assumption (see Creswell, 2013). I chose qualitative methodology for this study for the purposes of exploring the lived experiences of the population through the telling of their own stories (see Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative methodology appropriate for this study as it elicits the interpretation of an everchanging phenomena through the everchanging experiences of the people living the phenomena. Sloan and Bowe (2013) posited hermeneutic phenomenology is appropriate for the interpretations of phenomena

that is everchanging through the experiences of the individual or group living the phenomena.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is defined by the nature of the study (Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). I am responsible for maintaining safety of the participants throughout the entirety of the research process. I am responsible for ensuring participants were fully informed and consented to their participation in the research, that confidentiality is maintained, and that the participant was not harmed throughout any portion of the research process . I am also responsible for maintaining the integrity of the research by adhering to relevant ethical considerations and protecting the integrity of the data collected. Patton (2015) and Sutton and Austin (2015) identified the role of the researcher to include protecting participant safety, confidentiality, integrity of the data collected and to adhere to relevant ethical considerations.

For this study, the researcher role was also one of minimizing my personal biases and experiences while reflecting on knowledge relevant to the study that was not disclosed by the participant directly. I am responsible for identifying and retelling participants' experiences in a way that was true to the participants' telling of their experiences. Sutton and Austin (2015) posited that researchers are responsible for making sense of the data through the thoughts and feelings of the participant.

Bracketing

Bracketing is an imperative series of steps in the process of this research (Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). I acknowledged and remained aware of existing

knowledge of the phenomena without letting the existing knowledge interfere with the interpretation of the experiences being told. I used a series of reflective researcher notes through journaling to accomplish bracketing. I journaled throughout the research process for reflexivity to address the influences of me and how these influences shape the research design, methodology, data collection and data interpretation. Hays and Singh (2012) posited journaling as a form of bracketing through self-reflection.

Researcher Bias

I mitigated researcher bias through addressing alternative explanations, providing participants with summaries of the interpretation of their stories, and having peer review of the data in the form of dissertation committee review and feedback. Sutton and Austin (2015) purported researcher bias can be addressed in several ways including peer review of the data, participant confirmation and feedback, and considering alternate explanations. Addressing researcher bias strengthens the findings of the study through eliminating or minimizing researcher influence on data collection and interpretation (Hays & Singh, 2012). Considering alternative explanations of why I chose the questions for inquiry and collected the chosen data increased understanding of why I determined this study was important. This also brought to light any biased issues associated with assumption that resulted in the shaping of this research study. Providing participants with summaries of the interpretation of their data ensured that I had captured their story accurately. Patton (2015) outlined the importance of participant feedback to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of participant data. Peer review through the dissertation

committee review process mitigated any missed data points and/or alternative interpretations of existing data.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study consisted of Hmong women identified as refugees living in post-resettlement in the Central Valley of California in the United States. The sample was small and was chosen using both convenient and purposeful sampling techniques (see Creswell, 2013; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). The convenience sampling technique is geographic region. Snowball sampling was considered but not used. I selected my sample of participants in the Central Valley of California in the United States and utilized the local Hmong cultural centers to recruit participants. The Central Valley of California has a dense population of Hmong refugees that were resettled from Thai refugee camps during the 1970s through the early 2000s. Hmong cultural centers are central to the Hmong communities and most Hmong refugees relate to such community resources as a means to retain cultural relevance.

The purposeful sampling technique included three sampling criteria (see Creswell, 2013; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012): (a) Participants must be Hmong identified as this is an imperative sample criterion as I am studying the lived experiences of Hmong women; (b) Participants must be female identified is another imperative sample criterion is to remain integral to the research questions of the lived experiences of Hmong women; (c) Participants must have been resettled in the United States with refugee status during the mass resettlement movement of Hmong refugees during the 1970's through the early

2000's. The relevance of these criterion to this study is that I focused on the lived experiences of Hmong women refugees living post-resettlement in the United States. I considered snowball sampling of participants recruiting their acquaintances under the premise participants may have referred acquaintances who fit the purposeful sampling criteria. Snowball sampling is an effective way of building sample size to reach a point of saturation in data collection.

Advertising and Recruitment

Because my target population was Hmong women with refugee status living in the United States, participants were recruited through local Hmong cultural centers using flyers and direct contact through cultural center staff and community leaders. I screened interested participants to ensure that they met sample criteria. Screening was conducted post-referral, pre-interview, and included an initial meeting with the potential participant through either telephone conversation, videoconference using Zoom or Skype technology or an in-person face to face meeting. I considered the use of interpreters identified by me from a professional interpreter service and had knowledge of both academic research and Hmong culture. Interpreters were not needed due to all participants interviewed were English speaking. Basic questions were asked of the participant to ensure that minimum criteria were met. Questions for screening included: (a) Do you identify as a woman, (b) do you identify as Hmong, (c) did you relocate to the United States as a refugee, (d) were you a part of the mass migration of Hmong people for resettlement as a result of the Vietnam War, (e) are you willing to discuss your experiences of living in post-resettlement in the United States as a Hmong woman refugee. Participants answered all

screening questions to be considered for the participant pool for this study. Once a sample of 8 participants were selected, participants were notified and interviewed (see Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). Upon completion of the formal interview portion of the study, I gave participants a \$10 gift card for their involvement in the study. See Appendix A for participant recruitment flyer.

Data Collection

I contacted selected participants via in person and by telephone at the discretion of the participant. I established a set date and time for interviews and I met with participants at the local Hmong Community Center Hmong New Year event during the scheduled time for their interview. Two of the interviews were conducted by telephone approximately 3 weeks after the Hmong New Year event. Interviews were conducted face to face and by telephone, and were audio recorded for transcribing purposes. Informed consent was obtained prior to interviewing participants. See Appendix B for informed consent information. Demographic data, found in Appendix C, was collected using a verbally conducted interview as an icebreaker for the semistructured research interview. I will store data for a period of five years using password encryption of digital data, triple locked file cabinets for paper documentation and all personally identifying information (e.g. names) will be destroyed by digital deletion and paper incineration. Access to the raw data is limited to me.

I conducted interviews in the local Hmong Cultural Center Hmong New Year event located in the heart of the community with ease of access to public transportation.

Private space was provided to conduct the interviews and confidentiality about the nature of the participant's visit to the site was maintained.

I obtained informed consent using a standardized form addressing key aspects of the research study with ethical and legal considerations for protecting confidentiality and data storage (Hays & Singh, 2012). Informed consent required a wet signature from the participant to ensure participant acknowledgment and understanding of their role, rights, and participation guidelines. Upon completion of informed consent, demographic data was collected using verbal recitation of a printed demographic data collection tool.

I used demographic data to inform the current research and expect that the demographic data will inform future research. All consent forms and demographic data collection tools were printed in English and Hmong. A verbally administered demographic survey was completed at the beginning of each interview as an icebreaker into the interview process. I collected demographic data on gender, ethnicity, refugee status/citizenship status, age, employment status, marital status, level of education, primary language, income level, number of children, year entered the United States, place of birth, year of birth.

The interviews were conducted in English language only and were audio recorded for transcribing purposes. Transcribing audio recordings of interviews is one way of capturing data for analysis and confirming accuracy of the data captured (Xiong et al., 2018). Interview data was collected using semistructured interviews of selected participants. The interview questions were developed by me to elicit participants' sharing of her lived experiences. Reflecting on answering the broader research question, I used

deductive reasoning for question development, confirmed no leading questions were included, and ensured that all questions asked were open ended. Creswell (2013) posited semistructured interviews with open ended questions are one way of collecting data using deductive reasoning to mitigate any potentially leading questions from the interview. See Appendix D for interview questions. I conducted the interviews in a face-to-face setting in the community in which the participant lives for ease of access to the participant. I conducted two interviews by telephone at the request of the participant. I took notes during the interviews and documented any remarkable instances of body language, voice tone, or environmental factors such as symbolic interactionism through clothing and physical presentation that may occur during the interview process. Creswell (2013) and Patton (2015) purported notetaking of any nuances during the interview including body language, behaviors, environmental factors, voice tone, and physical presentation captures additional context relevant to the interpretation of the meaning of the data.

Records will be kept confidential with no personal identifying information connected to any one set of data (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). In lieu of using names for storage, participants were given a randomized participant number for data tracking purposes (Patton, 2015). Records will be kept both electronically and in hard copy format. All hard copies will be stored in a triple locked storage system with electronic records being stored with encryption standards and rolling passwords.

Data Analysis

I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) for interpreting the lived experiences of the participant from the perspective of the participant (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 2013). Early analysis of data included defining my understanding of the phenomena being studied as a means to prevent subjective interpretation of data collected (see Creswell, 2013). I used three cycle coding incorporating at least one additional reviewer to account for bias and inter-rater reliability to identify themes for categorization of what and how the phenomena was experienced by the participant (see Creswell, 2013). I used comparative data analysis to identify the point of data saturation that was estimated between 5 and 10 participants and finalized at 8 participants (see Creswell, 2013). I maintained a journal to record and process experiences while facilitating the study as a method of bracketing (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 2010). Triangulation was established through using demographic information collected from participants, researcher journal notes, and semistructured open-ended interviews (Creswell, 2013; Davidson, 2013).

I used Excel for tracking and organizing data. For the first cycle of a three-cycle coding process, I analyzed interview data using written transcripts of the recorded audio interviews conducted (Saldaña, 2016). I completed written transcripts using confidential Microsoft Word audio transcription software and researcher review to ensure accuracy. Themes extracted from the first cycle of coding and demographic data informed the second cycle of coding to further disseminate commonalities across interviews. Notes completed by me were used to augment transcript data in further identifying common

themes across participants. Researcher notes used with transcript data during analysis captures observations of symbolic interactionism and nonverbal communication (Saldaña, 2016). Utilizing the hermeneutic circle, where new knowledge gained informs the next cycle of interpretation of new knowledge, information gathered in the literature review informed the first cycle of coding that in turn informed the second cycle of data coding and finally provided an informed foundation for the third cycle of coding (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015). I completed three cycles of the hermeneutic circle throughout the data analysis process.

Transcribing

I completed verbatim transcripts of the audio recordings of the interviews for a written form of language to capture the details of the interview for coding purposes. I used confidential transcription software to transcribe audio recordings with researcher editing to ensure accuracy. I used transcripts for coding purposes and to develop a transcript summary for feedback from the participants after the interview was completed to ensure that the essence of the participant's experience was captured accurately. Participant feedback is a form of bracketing to prevent researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldaña, 2016).

Member Checking

I asked participants to correct me on any information that may be misleading or misinformation from what the participant originally reported during their interview. Member checking occurred during the interview to ensure that information was being captured accurately in the immediacy. Member checking ensures the researcher has

accurately captured the data reported by the participant (Harvey, 2015). I inquired the participant's disclosure by repeating either verbatim or a summary of what the participant had shared in the moment. I captured any corrections or clarifications from the participant in the audio recording with member checking occurring during the interview. This let the participant know that the interviewer was actively listening. Member checking is one way of letting participants know that the interviewer is engaged and listening (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Coding

Utilizing three-cycle coding posited by Saldaña (2016), data was hand coded utilizing visual data, analytic memos, and typed transcripts with line by line annotation to identify and refine codes. First-cycle coding was eclectic coding, imploring concepts of initial coding, concept coding, emotion coding and outline of cultural materials (OCM) coding (Saldaña, 2016). Second-cycle coding was focused coding to further refine first-cycle codes into categories and themes (Saldaña, 2016). Third-cycle coding was the synthesis of first- and second-cycle coding for theorizing and writing (Saldaña, 2016). Transcript summaries were provided to participants upon completion to ensure true representation of their responses and to increase credibility. Participant review of transcript summaries increases credibility by confirming accurate representation of participant responses (Harvey, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is defined by four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Credibility links the research findings to reality, strengthening the findings of the research study (Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Transferability is how well a qualitative study results can be generalized to the greater population (Creswell, 2013; Ogunbanjo et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Dependability is determining if the findings of the study can be replicated (Creswell, 2013). Confirmability is the degree of which the research findings can be corroborated by others (Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Credibility

Credibility for this study was confirmed with triangulation, member checks and peer briefing as necessary. Ogunbanjo et al. (2014) asserted credibility is achieved through triangulation of data. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data for cross-referencing and informing the interpretation of data collected. Member checks are confirmation of accuracy of data collected through the participant's review of transcript summaries (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Peer briefing for this study includes the review of data collected with the interpreters for accuracy of data interpretation and verbatim transcripts.

Transferability

Purposive sampling with consistent criterion identified for participant selection is one form of ensuring transferability (Ogunbajo et al., 2014). Transferability was confirmed by purposive sampling with specific criteria to determine participant eligibility. Criteria for purposive sampling for this study included being self-identified as a Hmong woman having or had refugee status living in the United States post-

resettlement. All other participant candidates were respectfully declined as not meeting criteria for the study.

Dependability

I used triangulation and created an audit trail that does not contain personally identifying participant information to confirm dependability. Triangulation of data cross-references data collected with existing data for confirmation that the research study has studied what it was intended to study (Ogunbanjo et al., 2014). An audit trail tracks the data collection process from first contact with participants to final contact with participants while remaining confidential and removing personally identifying information (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Tracking participant contact beginning with the initial offer of participation through the final confirmation of data accuracy, with last contact of confirmation of transcription summary, provided a comprehensive overview of the data collection process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is done through triangulation and reflexivity (Ogunbanjo et al., 2014). Reflexivity in qualitative research is researcher self-reflection to ensure that the integrity of the data and the research design are adhered to, minimizing researcher influence and bias (Dodgson, 2019). For this study, reflexivity was accomplished through a series of journal notes I collected throughout the research process to mitigate the influences of prior knowledge, personal privileges, and implicit biases.

Ethical Considerations

Before I began data collection this study underwent Internal Review Board (IRB) review and approval. The IRB approval number for this research is 09-09-21-0647898. Participant information is kept confidential, all data collected is protected using encrypted digital storage and a three-lock system for physical storage. All personally identifying information is omitted from all publications. Removing any personally identifying information from publications protects participant identity (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I assigned random participant numbers in lieu of using participant names to identify related data collected. Best practices include participant informed consent and ensuring participant understanding of rights and research process (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2016). Participants were informed of the purposes of this research and the confidentiality procedures in place. Participants signed an informed consent form to participate in the study. Participants were informed of their right to terminate participation in the study at any time without repercussions. I conducted all interviews in the English language and all consent forms were made available in the participant's preferred language including Hmong, Thai, Mien, and Lao.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed several key points of the research method for this study. The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences and related meanings of a group of Hmong refugee women living in the United States post-resettlement. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the chosen design for this study to analyze data in the hermeneutic circle where each cycle of analysis results in researcher learning and

understanding of the data (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 2010). The results of this research will inform multicultural competence training in counselor education and supervision programs, including informing advocacy practices and training, and policy development within counselor education and supervision programs.

I have discussed in detail the role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The role of the researcher is to safeguard participants and ensure that consent is informed while accounting for bracketing and researcher bias. Participant selection was purposeful, and data was collected in person during the local Hmong Community Center Hmong New Year event. Data analysis included the use of IPA, transcribing, member checking, and coding. Ethical considerations included IRB review and approval, approval number 09-09-21-0647898 with an expiration date of 09-09-2022. All data is kept confidential and stored in a manner consistent with the university privacy and protection guidelines. All consents were available in English as well as well as Hmong, Thai, Mien, and Lao, as is typical of the languages associated with Hmong communities.

In chapter 4 I discuss the results of this study in detail. I include direct quotes from participants and themes that emerged. I also discuss in detail the setting and demographics of the study, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences and related meanings of a group of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement. Current literature is limited regarding understanding refugee women's post-resettlement experiences. Hmong refugee women face traditional social justice issues including limited access to resources due to low income, linguistic differences, and a lack of multiculturally competent services (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Dussich, 2018; Pfeifer et al., 2012; Smith, 2015; Sue & Sue, 2016; Xiong et al., 2018). Information generated from this study will be used in counselor education and supervision programs, refugee services programs, and governmental agencies serving refugee populations to increase knowledge and awareness of refugee women's needs in the counseling field to inform policy development and social change. I captured the phenomenological understanding of eight women refugees' experience and meaning making of such experiences. Using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological method, I sought to understand post-resettlement experiences of Hmong women refugee survivors in the United States and identify how women refugees make meaning of such experiences through semistructured interviews reviewed with existing literature to develop a deeper understanding.

Research Questions

1. RQ₁: What are the lived experiences of Hmong refugee women in the United States post-resettlement?

2. RQ₂: How do refugee Hmong women make meaning of their post-resettlement experiences living in the United States?

Setting and Demographics

All participants in this study identified as Hmong women living in the United States post-resettlement. All participants were born in Laos and previously lived in Thailand in large refugee camps for periods of time between 5 and 17 years before coming to the U.S. as a refugee. Participant's ages ranged from 46 years old to 75 years old and employment statuses were varied. Two participants hold master's degrees; one is a nurse and one is a business woman. Two participants have high school diplomas or equivalent, one is a homemaker and one is an in-home caregiver for an elderly parent. One participant has an eighth-grade education, and three participants have third-grade education or less, all have vacillated between manual labor jobs and homemaker statuses. All participants currently live in the Central Valley of California and are fluent in both English and Hmong with Hmong being their primary language and English being their second language. I did not use interpreters for this study as all participants interviewed in English only as all participants were required to be interviewed in English only by IRB approval.

I collected data during Hmong New Year and immediately following Hmong New Year, which may have influenced some of the responses given in reference to cultural significance and the importance of holding onto Hmong culture for current and future generations. Soliciting participants through the local Hmong Community Center, religious organizations, and local Hmong businesses over several months yielded no

return in interest to participate. The Hmong Cultural Center informed me of the Hmong New Year celebration and offered me a private space to solicit and interview participants in person during the Hmong New Year celebration event. Environmentally, there is a current refugee crisis occurring with Afghan refugees with circumstances similar to the forced migration of Hmong refugees (Macaraig & Mursyid, 2021; Yang, 2021). The Afghan crisis was mentioned by several interviewees indicating that there may have been some self in reflection of the Afghan crisis occurring and likely influencing the responses to the questions asked. At the time of the study the COVID-19 pandemic is in effect which has incited an increase in hate crimes against Asian populations in the United States. Some of the responses may have been influenced by hate crimes experienced at the personal and community level. Losses of family and friends to COVID-19, life changes due to pandemic restrictions and guidelines, and the treatment of pandemic stressors may influence participant responses (Kaushal et al., 2021; Tai et al., 2021).

Data Collection

I interviewed eight participants for this study. I conducted five interviews in a private outdoor setting during a Hmong New Year celebration. I conducted two interviews in a private office 3 weeks after the Hmong New Year celebration, and I conducted one interview by telephone. All interviews ranged in time between 15 minutes to 35 minutes each. The longest interview I conducted was 35 minutes long during the Hmong New Year celebration. I used audio recording and wrote journal notes during each interview. One variation in the data collection process is the contingency of

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval stipulating interviews can be completed with only English-speaking participants who do not request or require an interpreter present.

Participants appeared cautious of me when first solicited to participate.

Participants appeared to be more open with me when a level of trust was developed between myself and participant. Trust was built upon my disclosure of the purpose of the study, my background knowledge that led to the development of this study, and the intent for the use of the data collected. Participants appreciated my knowledge of the culture and the history of Hmong forced migration. My disclosure was to inform potential participants of the background driving the research and thus resulted in participants appearing to be interested in the research and expressing trust of me. Some potential participants solicited appeared continually suspicious of me and declined to participate without repercussion.

Data Analysis

I used three cycle coding to identify codes that were then categorized by similarity to shape the larger themes that emerged. First cycle coding included concept coding, emotional coding, and outline of cultural materials (OCM) coding. Concepts explored were cultural changes, freedom of choice, legal protection, and family systems. Emotional codes included in first cycle coding were fear, gratitude, shame, and safety. The cultural materials codes referenced here are reflective of those listed in the OCM subjects list index system. The OCM subjects list index system is an exhaustive list of cultural materials grouped by likeness and assigned codes accordingly (Saldaña, 2016). Broader cultural materials coding included 190 language, 180 total culture, 170 history

and culture change, 150 behavior processes and personality, 510 living standards and routines, 450 finance, 570 interpersonal relations, 740 health and welfare, 860 socialization, 870 education, and 900 texts.

Using Excel spreadsheets to further refine first cycle codes, second cycle codes included identified categories and themes (Figure 1). I identified categories as human rights, legal rights, and social structure. Within these categories, several raw data quotes are substantiated. One of the prominent human rights codes was “You have more choice safely, your rights just like same people.” Another participant stated:

I don't wanna go back to the country because you be live in United States so much freedom do anything you want to do I don't wanna go back you know I cannot go back to live over there no more.

Legal rights were equally discussed. Participants said, “Law is much better” and “With the writing, reading, we don't know, we need someone to help us.” Participants also disclosed several statements of changes in social structure. Social structure supporting statements are “When I was married to my husband it was very traditional and he make all the decision, now I make my own decision, culture is different.” I used third cycle coding to synthesize first and second cycle codes to theorize and write the study results and discussion.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is defined by four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Credibility links the research findings to reality, strengthening the findings of the

research study through triangulation of data and member checking (Ogunbanjo et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015). Transferability is how well a qualitative study results can be generalized to the greater population through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013; Ogunbanjo et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). Dependability is determining if the findings of the study can be replicated through triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013). Confirmability is the degree of which the research findings can be corroborated by others including using reflexivity to manage researcher influence (Ogunbanjo et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Credibility

I confirmed credibility with triangulation and member checking. Peer briefing with interpreters was not necessary as all participants were English speaking and declined interpreter services. Triangulation included review of existing literature, audio recording of interviews, and transcripts of interviews (see Creswell, 2013; Ogunbanjo, et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). I reviewed existing literature for nuances associated with cultural expectations and disclosures of statements regarding patriarchal culture, transmigration experiences, and timelines of entry into the United States. Participant disclosures were in keeping with existing literature around financial challenges, language barriers, and decision-making about major life decisions. I referenced notes that I took during the interview process for clarity of understanding and confirmation of participant disclosure (see Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). I also used the research notes I took during the interview to highlight key points and terms that were disclosed by the participant during the interview for points of reference in the transcripts later.

I completed member checking in vivo with interviewees (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). In lieu of participants reviewing transcript summaries, participants were asked for confirmation or changes that needed to be made in my understanding of the data that the interviewee shared during and immediately following the interview. Follow-up questions were part of the semistructured interview approach and used to gain clarity of the information participants shared (see Creswell, 2013). Information confirmed during the interview were included in my notes taken during the interview for continuity of understanding and reference to transcripts completed later. I provided participants with a copy of the url link to access the research results where available online for public view

Transferability

I did not make any adjustments to the transferability process of purposive sampling with specific criteria . The criteria participants were required to meet included being self-identified as Hmong woman and having or had refugee status living in the United States in post-resettlement. Participants also had to identify as having resettled in the United States as refugees following the Vietnam War. I asked participants a series of screening questions on a demographic survey to confirm eligibility to participate under the criteria listed.

Dependability

I used triangulation of data to confirm dependability as well. Cross-referencing data collected with the existing data including cross-referencing interviews with existing literature and existing interview data as more interviews were collected (see Ogunbanjo et al., 2014). I identified the point of saturation as the point of replication of information

shared from participants as a key indicator the study explored what it is intended to explore. I asked primary interview questions with consistent follow up questions for clarity. An audit trail was used to track the data collection process, including the accuracy of audio recording and transcription (see Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Confirmability

Primary consideration for researcher self-reflection is imperative to the data collection and data analysis processes (Ogunbanjo et al., 2014). I used reflexivity to mitigate implicit biases and influences of personal privilege and prior knowledge protecting the integrity of the data and research design (see Dodgson, 2019). I collected a series of journal notes throughout the research process including notes taken during interviews, notes during participant outreach and screening processes, and notes during data analysis (see Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Reflecting on personal influence and perceptions during the process highlighted the potential for implicit bias based on researcher prior knowledge and experiences with the demographic of participants, including the history of the circumstances leading up to the transmigration of Hmong people from refugee camps following the Vietnam War. I used mindfulness during the data collection and analysis process to minimize the influence of implicit bias, personal privilege, and prior knowledge, ensuring that I addressed and acknowledged these factors with intentionality.

Results

The lived experiences of Hmong refugee women included the increase in basic human rights, loss of culture, and concerns with safety and security. Broader themes that

emerged from this study were human rights, social structure, and legal rights (Figure 1).

Hmong refugee women make meaning of their post-resettlement experiences living in the United States through reflection on the differences in their experiences prior to resettlement and post-resettlement, through shared experiences with other people that have experienced forced migration, and through the lens of preserving traditional cultural practices and values.

Figure 1

Data and Codes

raw data	raw code	category	code	theme
Allowed much better here, there is opportunity for work, women freedom, you know woman has more rights and freedom to go anywhere and be anybody want to be and explore you know	freedom	human rights	hr	more basic human rights
You have more choice safely, your rights just like same people	choice	human rights	hr	more basic human rights
Law is much better	legal protection	legal rights	lr	more basic human rights
When I was married to my husband it was very traditional and he make all the decision, now I make my own decision, culture is different	husband	social structure	ss	loss of culture
To come here the first day is really hard for us, but we have friend that they come here for the United States first they thought be easy but they help you with transportation for doctor, to store, pay bill for house and you have show you have like more money or can't be in the house, like we can only me and my mom and we just like \$300 for how to live and kind of things like that	children	social structure	ss	loss of culture
With the writing, reading, we don't know, we need someone to help us.	school	legal rights	lr	more basic human rights
We came into the United States in 1986 I was 10 years old and I only know two words, we had no things and first come with only the clothes on our body. When we get off the plane I'm not sure but somebody gave us jacket from last people a lady told me on the street she took us to the church and was able to go pick up, for us it was hard when it my dad the only one that spoke a little bit	language	social structure	ss	loss of culture
I don't wanna go back to the country because you be live in United States so much freedom do anything you want to do I don't wanna go back you know I cannot go back to live over there no more	freedom	human rights	hr	more basic human rights
United States for myself everything changed. No one come for us, we don't know how to go to store or we don't know like work.	change	social structure	ss	loss of culture
I pray, I am praying today	pray	social structure	ss	loss of culture
I heard my neighbor or my friend or people that is Asian like us, people say they treat presence not good, they get like or face or tell them to go back to their country	hate crime	safety	s	security
I won't to go out to the store by myself because every time I go to the store for long time I worry that I need to be careful for that to happen	hate crime	safety	s	security
Everything natural and yeah let it be as it supposed to be yeah	natural	human rights	hr	more basic human rights

Basic Human Rights

One of the primary themes to emerge through data analysis is the concept of basic human rights. All participants expressed statements of the increase in human rights under United States government while living in post-resettlement. This comparison was made in reference to life in their country of origin, Laos, and their life in Thailand living in large refugee camps after forced migration. The following are some examples of statements made by participants regarding basic human rights.

Participant 6 stated, “You have more choice safely, your rights just like same people.” Participant 2 said,

I don't wanna go back to the country because you believe in United States so much freedom to do anything you want to do I don't wanna go back you know I cannot go back to live over there no more.

Participant 5 also said, “Allowed much better here, there is opportunity for work, women freedom, you know woman has more rights and freedom to go anywhere and be anybody want to be and explore you know.”

Existing literature reflects similar themes regarding gender roles discovered in their research. Lo (2019) outlined subthemes as being independent and self-reliant, expectations of a traditional housewife, submission and obedience, and lack of academic support or encouragement. The findings of this research highlight similar concepts in the experiences of Hmong refugee women. Aligning past research with the current study of Hmong women refugees’ experiences of living in resettlement in the United States to include being able to make their own decisions, obtain or continue their education, and functioning independently from the men in their lives.

Researchers suggest that current generations of Hmong people living in the United States have assimilated to the dominant culture easier than past generations (Dentice, 2018). Dentice (2018) asserted that this phenomenon is due in part to younger generations having much of their exposure to engendered cultural norms be that of a patriarchal society that has equal rights for women. Younger generations were either born into United States culture or were raised in United States culture from a very young age making their experience very different from the experiences of the older generations of Hmong refugees. Although the dominant discourse in the United States is still patriarchal

in nature, the equal rights afforded to all women living in the United States increases access to education, independence, and thus changes women's interactions and engagement in United States society (David, 2014; Williams & Enns, 2013). All are factors in increasing employability which is imperative for refugee women living in resettlement under current policy for refugees to be self-sufficient and financially solvent within 90 days from arrival (U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, n.d.).

Loss of Culture

Participants expressed a sense of loss of their culture in post-resettlement. It was discussed that many of the youth who either came to the United States as babies or were born in the United States do not have the same cultural experiences and/or ideologies as Hmong people who were born in Laos or Thailand. The importance of ancestral culture and preservation of traditional cultural practices was particularly prevalent during the Hmong New Year celebration that was happening at the time of data collection. The following quotes are examples of participant statements regarding loss of culture.

Participant 6 stated, "Everything natural and yeah let it be as it supposed to be yeah." Participant 5 stated, "When I was married to my husband it was very traditional and he make all the decision, now I make my own decision, culture is different." Authors of existing literature posited many Hmong traditions have been lost during resettlement living in the United States (Lo, 2019; Terjesen, 2022). Losses of Hmong traditions identified by the Hmong women refugees interviewed were loss of Hmong language, younger generations loss of interest in cultural rituals and ceremonies, women having

independence, and a preference for organized Christian religion. The results of this study align with the Hmong cultural losses outlined in the literature by Lo (2019). This is in part due to United States laws protecting women's rights and giving women equal legal rights to those already afforded to men (see David, 2014). This dynamic has afforded many Hmong women to assert themselves against the submissive and obedient expectations of traditional Hmong culture, making independent decisions, obtaining education, working outside of the home and divorce as posited by Terjsten (2019) and Xiong et al. (2018). These cultural changes among Hmong women living in resettlement in the United States have been slow and are present in more of the younger group of refugees than the older group.

Security

All participants discussed the difference in security and safety practices living in the United States. One participant expressed that in the United States "Law is much better". Other participants expressed concerns for personal safety living in the United States. Considerations were made for current pandemic changes in which hate crimes toward Asian populations have increased. Some examples of the security and safety concerns are:

Participant 4 stated, "I heard my neighbor or my friend or people that is Asian like us, people say they treat presence not good, they get like your face or tell them to go back to their country." Participant 3 also stated, "I won't to go out to the store by myself because every time I go to the store for long time, I worry that I need to be careful for that to happen."

Asian experiences of the current COVID-19 pandemic in the United States have been documented well in current literature. Reny and Barreto (2022) asserted that many communities are suffering with pandemic changes, primarily within non-Caucasian identified communities in the United States. The racial divide has not only impacted access to resources for Asian communities during pandemic time, but the racial divide has also generated decreases in a sense of safety among many Asian communities (Cheng et al., 2021; Lee & Waters, 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2022). Cheng et al. (2021) highlighted the increase in hate crimes against Asians regardless of ethnic identity have shifted the dynamic in how Asian community members engage in the communities in which they live. This shift in safety is reflected by the participants in this study to confirm that the unjust hate insinuations toward Asian communities during the current COVID-19 pandemic has created a less safe environment for Hmong refugee women living in the United States (Cheng et al., 2021). There were no discrepant cases as all participants expressed some form of direct or indirect experience with violence and racial discrimination leading to a threat to safety during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary

I asked each participant demographic questions to inform me of participant qualifications to the necessary criteria to participate (see Creswell, 2013; Davidsen, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). All participants identified as Hmong women living in the United States post-resettlement having or having had refugee status. I asked all participants the same primary questions with varying follow up questions for clarification of meaning and understanding. Participants responded consistently overall with small variations in

personal experiences. One participant disclosed an ongoing experience worthy of further consideration that will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

Participants disclosed consistent experiences of loss of culture, increased safety and security, and basic human rights. Losses of cultural traditions are particularly prevalent in younger generations of Hmong refugees. Many of the participants highlighted the importance of holding cultural events that engage the youth to keep traditions alive and carry forward the richness of the Hmong culture. Differences in laws and rights of women in the United States has directly impacted the experiences of younger generations of Hmong women, including refugee women who migrated to the United States at very young ages. Having the protections under United States law to be an independent person regardless of gender has in part shaped the development of young Hmong women away from the traditional patriarchal discourse of the traditional Hmong demographic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Hmong women's sense of safety and security. At the time of this study, Asian hate is at an all-time high and Hmong women have been subjected to the blatant racism that exists toward anyone of Asian descent in the United States (Cheng et al., 2021). Participants identified basic human rights being infringed upon in part due to Hmong women resembling an Asian demographic that is targeted due to COVID-19 pandemic fears in the United States, and also in part due to Hmong women being gender identified as women and, at the time of interviews, at risk of losing federal protections of the right to choose abortion regardless of reason (Cheng et

al., 2021; Lazzarini, 2022). I discuss these identified themes and experiences in further detail in chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Using a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry method, I sought to understand post-resettlement experiences of Hmong women refugee survivors living in the United States. I also sought to identify how women refugees make meaning of such experiences. The information learned from this study will be used to add to the current body of literature on the re-settlement experiences of Hmong refugee women. In addition, findings from this study may increase knowledge and awareness of Hmong refugee women's needs in the counseling field to inform policy development and social change. Responses to lived experiences were mostly consistent among participants with small variations in personal experiences that will be discussed in this chapter. Themes included experiencing personal loss of culture, having a sense of increased safety and security living in the United States, and experiencing an increase in basic human rights. One participant disclosed an ongoing experience worthy of further consideration that would likely make for a good case study. In this chapter, I will discuss the research findings and the limitations of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

Lo (2019) purported subthemes regarding gender roles discovered in their research as being independent and self-reliant, expectations of a traditional housewife, submission and obedience, and lack of academic support or encouragement. Much like Lo's (2019) findings, many of the participants of this research alluded to similar concepts in the experiences they shared. Thus, participants shared concepts highlighting the ability

for women to make their own decisions, obtain an education, and function independently from men as being part of their experience living in resettlement in the United States.

Loss of culture is another common theme that has been reported in previous research. For example, Lo (2019) asserted that loss of traditional practices occurs among Hmong people living in the United States. I noted similar findings with women preferring to have their independence and education, and the assertion that youth have a disinterest in cultural traditions and practices. The latter was particularly relevant during the data collection process for this study as the interviews were conducted during Hmong New Year celebrations and many of the events were focused on engaging younger generations in the traditional activities of the Hmong culture.

Gender differences are prevalent in both Hmong culture and United States culture (Lo, 2019). The assertions put forward by the participants of this study align with the concept of Hmong culture and United States culture being patriarchal and the limited opportunities for Hmong women to share their lived experiences of resettlement. Hmong women are discouraged from sharing their experiences with anyone outside of the family unit or without the permission of a male head of household or a respected male community leader present (Lo, 2019; Xiong et al., 2018). Hmong women fall into the category that many women do in the United States, particularly women who identify as non-Caucasian, in that they are ignored, overlooked, or not seen as being important enough to validate their experiences or stories (Anderson, 2017; David, 2014; Haffejee & East, 2016; Lo, 2019; Smith 2015). The results of this study confirm researcher recommendations highlighting the need for gender specific research of Hmong women

separate from that of Hmong men (see Baines, 2002; Boyd, 1999; David, 2014; Haffejee & East, 2016; Hyndman, 2010; Lo, 2019; Smith, 2015; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Wachter et al., 2015).

Hmong youth and adults who were born in the United States have lost a lot of the traditional practices, language, and cultural meaning of many foods and activities that older generations value and try to carry forward into younger generations (Lo, 2019; Terjesen, 2022). Cultural festivals and events are important to keep the traditions relevant to younger generations and to provide older generations with respite from the dominant discourse of United States culture (Lo, 2019; Terjesen, 2022; Xiong et al., 2018). The findings from this research confirm that Hmong traditional practices are fading and that the Hmong refugee women experience cultural loss. This is in part due to the changes in women's rights as a collective demographic across races and ethnicities living in the United States and expectations of Hmong women within their culture (Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019).

United States laws protect women's rights and give women equal legal rights (David, 2014). This dynamic affords Hmong women the right to assert themselves against the submissive and obedient expectations of traditional Hmong culture (Terjesen, 2022). This is evidenced by the choices of the Hmong women participants choosing higher education, choosing to work outside of the home, and choosing to divorce or remain unmarried. Hmong women are making independent decisions, obtaining education, working outside of the home, divorcing, and assimilating to United States culture away from traditional Hmong culture (Terjesen, 2019; Xiong et al., 2018). These

changes in Hmong women living in resettlement in the United States have been slow and are present in more of the younger group of refugees than the older group.

The idea of loss of Hmong culture among younger generations is validated through the findings of this study and there is an importance of maintaining Hmong cultural events to keep Hmong traditions relevant. As stated by participants of this study and researchers in the broader community, Hmong cultural celebrations, such as the Hmong New Year celebrations (which were happening at the time of data collection for this study), support the continuance of Hmong traditional practices while honoring the duality of equal rights among Hmong men and Hmong women living in the United States (Benson, 2015; Teriesen, 2019).

Dentice (2018) suggested that younger generations of Hmong-identified people have assimilated into United States culture easier and more quickly than older generations of Hmong people. This is likely due to the younger generations having much of their exposure to engendered cultural norms be that of a patriarchal society that has equal rights for women under color of law. Equal rights for women increase access to education which increases women's independence and changes women's engagement in society. Dentice (2018) further noted that education leads to employability, and this is an imperative factor for refugees living in resettlement as is represented by the participants sharing their careers and academic achievement.

More recently the current COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the Asian community's experience of personal and physical safety living in the United States (Cheng et al., 2021; Lee & Waters, 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2022). Many hate statements

and unjust racial accusations have been asserted to blame the current COVID-19 pandemic on Asian communities due to the illness being first reported from China (Cheng et al., 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2022). This new shift in perception of Asian people living in the United States has increased hate crimes against them and decreased personal safety of all Asian communities, including Hmong communities, living in the United States (Cheng et al., 2021; Lee & Waters, 2021). Asian communities are experiencing blatant racism, aggression, assault, and even death at the hands of non-Asian identified United States citizens (Reny & Barreto, 2022). This increase in hate crimes and deadly assaults have decreased the feeling of safety across all Asian identified communities (Cheng et al., 2021; Lee & Waters, 2021; Reny & Barreto, 2022).

While living in resettlement in the United States, refugees are expected to integrate into American society and begin the process toward gainful employment (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Kerwin, 2018; Lo, 2019; Mossaad, 2017; Smith, 2015). The expectation from the United States government is that refugees will be self-sustaining within 6 months of arrival to the United States (Kerwin, 2018; Mossaad, 2017). This rigorous approach to integration and rapid expectations to assimilate into American culture can be challenging to the refugee psyche (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Lo, 2019).

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are inevitable in any research (Hays & Singh, 2012). One limitation of this research is the interviews were conducted with English speaking participants only. A condition of IRB approval was that I could only interview English speaking participants who did not request or require an interpreter. Many members of the Hmong

community do not speak English and given the constraints by the IRB, their experiences were not captured during this research. In addition to the language limitation, this research was limited to the topic at hand and one participant disclosed an ongoing experience involving the United States government and international policy issues with Thailand and Laos. Further exploring the participant's experience as a case study could elicit further discussion around specific policy changes related to international law and government collaboration.

Trust of me was a barrier in obtaining participant concession to participate in this project (see Dodgson, 2019). I am an America-born Caucasian of European descent, similar to the dominant discourse of the American population responsible for the atrocities that happened to the Hmong population in their country of origin and the controlling body of the United States government. Trust among Hmong people is culturally significant and outsiders to the Hmong culture must earn trust for acceptance and/or engagement (Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019). Many potential participants appeared cautious and/or suspicious of me and declined to engage with me. Many of the participants who did engage with me only did so after I disclosed personal knowledge of the Hmong culture, the historical context of the Hmong forced transmigration from Laos and Thailand, and the personal reason behind choosing to study a subset of the Hmong population (see Dodgson, 2019). Once trust was obtained, participants were willing to review the consent forms and appeared interested in the dissertation.

These specific limitations of this study might have been mitigated if approval had been given to interview non-English speaking participants using Hmong language

interpreters (Harvey, 2015). Language interpreters also act as cultural brokers, supporting with the trust building process as they have first-hand knowledge of the familial dynamics and navigating the cultural nuances specific to the Hmong population reducing the incidence of any microaggressions that may have come forward from me (Lo, 2019; Sue, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2016). No microaggressions were pointed out to me in the participant selection and data collection process, nor were any observed in my notes. One Hmong community member not participating in the study disclosed to me that Hmong people tend to have a distrust of non-Hmong people at first introduction and using cultural brokers would help with gaining access to participants and engaging.

Recommendations

Continuing to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of refugee women living in the United States in resettlement should include the understanding of other cultures aside from Hmong only (Dussich, 2018; Israel, 2006). In recent years an influx of refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Cambodia, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and other countries have experienced forced migration due to terrorism, civil unrest, and civil war with many of these populations resettled in the United States (Dussich, 2018; Mossaad, 2017). It is recommended that future research include these identified populations to explore and understand the experiences of women refugees of many cultures in the interest of multicultural competence in policy development and accessibility of multiculturally appropriate resources.

Additionally, it is recommended that this research be expanded to include Hmong refugee women living in different regions of the United States. This research only

included participants living in the Central Valley region of the state of California in the United States. If this study was not limited in time to completion the participant pool could be much larger to include Hmong women refugees living in other locales of the United States. Including the same demographics living in regions where Hmong refugees were resettled in other states could further benefit the information of policy change and development. Hmong refugees were resettled in several states including California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and New Jersey (Pfeifer et al., 2012). The experiences of Hmong refugee women living in resettlement in these other environments should be explored to determine if the experiences are similar or different from the experiences collected in the Central Valley region of California. Hmong women are often unable to access formal education to learn new skills like speaking the English language (Lo, 2019; Xiong et al., 2018) It is also recommended that future research include non-English speaking Hmong refugee women for similar reasons to determine if the experiences are similar or different from the experiences collected from English speaking Hmong refugee women.

Further research recommendations also include exploring the lived experiences of Hmong women refugees who entered the United States as young children. It is important to explore this demographic for a comparison of perspective and experiences to determine if there are varying needs for Hmong women who were adults that later impact the experiences and perspectives of the very young children who entered the United States with them.

Implications

Many recent refugees coming into the United States as families with women as heads of households (United Nations, 1990). As a result, it is important to acknowledge the relevance of women's specific experiences to support the families with developing self-reliance and sustainable living without causing harm. The information gathered from this study may inform refugee policy change and development on multiple levels within agency, local government, federal government, international organizations, and beyond.

This study may be used as a social justice reference to future research exploring the lived experiences of refugees from different demographics as a baseline for research development through a hermeneutic phenomenological framework. It is imperative that future research include the continual learning perspective to fully capture the experiences and meaning making of these experiences shared by participants. Reference to this research may also inform graduate student education when considering multicultural implications in counselor education and training, and continuing education to develop better understanding of the needs of the Hmong refugee women community when developing community-based resources. This research may inform or inspire future research regarding demographics outside of the Hmong refugee women population to include refugee women from other ethnicities living in the United States post-resettlement.

This study may inform the development of social policies including, but not limited to, refugee resettlement policy, immigration policy, and counselor education and supervision (CES) policies for students, faculty, and internal program policies regarding

diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices. Participants shared their experiences with discrimination in the modern world based on predispositions to racism and prejudice during the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences can serve to inform the DEI practices of CES programs involving both academic policies and employment policies. Additional information shared of the experiences of women finding independence and desiring to attain higher education can inform refugee resettlement and immigration policies to extend support beyond 90 days and support women refugees with entering educational programs to support independent living from familial or male heads of households.

The information from this study may also inform the development of resettlement policies related to the specific needs of women to address nuances associated with forced migration and the engendered resettlement adjustments. Developing policies that are gender specific will support the integration of women from different cultures into American society and improve access to culturally appropriate services that include counseling, social services, education, finance, and housing stability (Baines, 2002; Bemak & Chung, 2017; Boyd, 1999; Bustamante et al., 2016; Dussich, 2018; Haffejee & East, 2016; Israel, 2006; Kerwin, 2018; Minas et al., 2013; Tummala-Narra & Kaschak, 2013; Xiong et al., 2018).

It is imperative that women have access to multiculturally competent and services that integrate the use of traditional practices in counseling and social services that are specific to women within their respective cultures, especially for women of different cultures who have migrated as refugees to the United States (Bemak & Chung, 2017;

Bustamante et al., 2016). Currently, only access to general services such as aid for families of dependent children (AFDC), physical healthcare, and limited housing resources that are short term and grounded in traditional United States cultural practices are readily available (Bemak & Chung, 2017; Tummula-Narra & Kaschak, 2013). Education is equally important, not only education that affords refugee women with degrees and certification for employment or job skills training, but education that includes English language classes not only for speaking English but also for reading and writing in English (David, 2014; Haffejee & East, 2016). To further expand on the existing policies of finance and housing stability, these policies would extend beyond the 90-day window that currently exists to ensure that families with female heads of household can obtain and maintain gainful employment, childcare if needed, and affordable housing. Current policies do not extend beyond the 90 days that the United States government provides and this is not enough time for women who are non-English speaking, who have limited or no job skills or formal education to sustain their families (Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, n.d.; Kerwin, 2018).

The results of this study demonstrate that Hmong refugee women experience a higher sense of safety and security living in the United States than they did while living in their country of origin. These changes in feeling protected by law and the ability to make choices and decisions independent of their male heads of household and other male members of their culture is due to the protections of women and women's rights under United States laws (Lo, 2019). Experiencing the changes of protection under law in the

United States has likely contributed to the changes in cultural norms that has shifted the experience of Hmong refugee women to include loss of culture.

Historical context affords us the ability to view what would be viewed as a patriarchal society with the expectation of women's submission to men that has now become a society with high-ranking statuses to include women independent of men and independent decision making (Lo, 2019; Terjesen, 2022). As a result of living in the United States, no longer are women expected to go uneducated and marry with the purpose of providing multiple children for a large family to care for the family farm in the interest of survival and sustenance. This new perspective is held by the women interviewed and more research is needed to determine if this new perspective is held more broadly or equally by men. As participants stated, women are now independent of their families, to a degree, as there are still cultural ties to the familial collective, and have the opportunity to obtain an education, higher education, positions of power in the workforce, and choose when or if to marry (Terjesen, 2022). Women do not have to accept engendered violence or decision making and have rights of protection and decision making equal to that of men (Crenshaw, 1991; Dussich, 2018).

A paradox exists as loss of culture is not the most preferable outcome when considering cultures living in resettlement under forced migration terms, yet some loss of culture is inevitable with the process of acculturation (Sue, 2010). The embodiment of different cultures is what makes for a peaceful society part of the embodiment of cultures is the acceptance of cultural norms and integration of understanding of said norms (Anderson, 2017; Sue, 2010). Through the experiences shared by participants in this

research, participants allude to the loss of culture as part of the acculturation process without the embodiment of the cultural practices that do not conflict with United States law. As a minority population in the United States, Hmong culture is not widely celebrated and has only in recent years become consistent with some Hmong celebrations in locales with higher Hmong population density like is true in the Central Valley region of California (Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019). Cultural events like the Hmong New Year celebration that was occurring during the time of the collection of data for this research are imperative to the continuance of traditional practices and cultural significance among current and future generations of Hmong identified people (Benson, 2015; Dentice, 2018; Lo, 2019).

It is important to understand the historical context of the Hmong people and the relationship between Hmong people and the United States (Lo, 2019). This research was designed as a hermeneutic phenomenological method within the theoretical context of a multicultural feminist perspective. To understand what we have learned from the experiences captured in this study, we must carry forward an open-minded approach to the mutual learning process that comes from a multicultural feminist perspective (see Cammell, 2015; David, 2014; Ho et al., 2017; Williams & Enns, 2013). While I hold background knowledge of the relationship between the United States and Hmong people, I have learned new perspectives and experiences through the exploration of the stories that were shared by the participants of this study. This context was imperative to the analytic process of this research as I continued to learn from the experiences shared shaping the perspective from which I further analyzed the data at hand, in keeping with

the value of the hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 2011; Ho et al., 2017). The hermeneutic perspective was imperative to the continual learning process of a culture that is both underrepresented and under researched in social sciences (Ho et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Hmong women who are living in the United States with or having had refugee status experience a plethora of changes from legal rights to cultural losses. While both Hmong and American cultures are patriarchal, women's rights are imperative to the experiences of Hmong refugee women living in the United States (Dentice, 2019; Lo, 2019; Terjesen, 2022). Knowing that women's rights are central to the experience, it is important to consider this perspective when changing and developing resettlement policies. How many women are at the table when policy change and development is happening that directly affects women's experiences and needs? The implications here are boundless as I continue to explore the lived experiences of refugee women living in the United States in resettlement. What I do know is that women have a voice, refugee women have a voice, and incorporating the experiences of refugee women in the change and development of resettlement policies is imperative to establish services and processes conducive to the cultural needs and changes of refugee women's experiences.

References

- Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9>
- Anderson, C. (2017). *White rage: The unspoken truth of our racial divide*. Bloomsbury USA.
- Baines, E. (2002). Becoming visible: Transnational advocacy and the UN policy of refugee women, 1980-1990. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 21, Special Issue, 2002, 60–77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45053860>
- Bemak, F., & Chung, R. C. (2017). Refugee trauma: Culturally responsive counseling interventions. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 95(3), 299–308. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12144>
- Benson, F. C. (2015). Genesis of the Hmong-American Alliance, 1949-1962: Aspirations, Expectations and Commitments during an Era of Uncertainty. *Hmong Studies Journal*, 16, 1–62. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A451311503/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=ab066951>
- Boyd, M. (1999). Gender, refugee status and permanent settlement. *Gender Issues*, 17(1), 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-999-0008-6>
- Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. (n.d). *U.S. Refugee Admissions Program: Reception and Placement*. U.S Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/reception-and-placement/>

- Bustamante, L. U., Leclerc, E., Mari, J. J., & Brietzke, E. (2016). It is time to prepare mental health services to attend to migrants and refugees. *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria*, 38(3), 263–264. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1516-4446-2015-1883>
- Cammell, P. (2015). Relationality and existence: Hermeneutic and deconstructive approaches emerging from Heidegger’s philosophy. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 43(3), 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873267.2014.996808>
- Cheng, H.-L., Kim, H. Y., Reynolds (Taewon Choi), J. D., Tsong, Y., & Joel Wong, Y. (2021). COVID-19 anti-Asian racism: A tripartite model of collective psychosocial resilience. *American Psychologist*, 76(4), 627–642. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000808>
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and research design choosing among five approaches* (3rd Ed). Sage Publications.
- David, M. E. (2014). *Feminism, gender and universities: politics, passion and pedagogies*. Ashgate.
- Daidsen, A. S. (2013). Phenomenological approaches in psychology and health sciences. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 10(3), 318–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2011.608466>
- Dentice, D. (2018). Hmong immigrants. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 470–472. Salem Press.

- Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 35(2), 220–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334419830990>
- Dussich J.P.J. (2018) Refugees in the United States of America from a Victimological Perspective. In: Kury H., Redo S. (eds) *Refugees and Migrants in Law and Policy* (pp. 423–436). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72159-0_19
- Gadamer, H. (2011). *Truth and method*. Continuum.
- Haffejee, B., & East, J. F. (2016). African women refugee resettlement: A womanist analysis. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 31(2), 232–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109915595840>
- Harvey, L. (2015). Beyond member-checking: A dialogic approach to the research interview. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 38, 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2014.914487>
- Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. Guilford Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. HarperCollins.
- Ho, K. M., Chiang, V. L., & Leung, D. (2017). Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis: the ‘possibility’ beyond ‘actuality’ in thematic analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 73(7), 1757–1766. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13255>
- Horrigan-Kelly, M., Millar, M., & Dowling, M. (2016). Understanding the key tenets of Heidegger’s philosophy for interpretive phenomenological research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406916680634>

- Hyndman, J. (2010). Introduction: The feminist politics of refugee migration. *Gender, Place & Culture, (17)4*, 453-459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2010.485835>
- Israel, T. (2006). Marginalized Communities in the United States: Oppression, Social Justice, and the Role of Counseling Psychologists. In R. L. Toporek, L. H. Gerstein, N. A. Fouad, G. Roysircar, & T. Israel (Eds.), *Handbook for Social Justice in Counseling Psychology: Leadership, Vision, and Action* (pp. 149–154). Sage.
- Kaushal, N., Lu, Y., Shapiro, R. Y., & So, J. (2021). American attitudes toward COVID-19: More Trumpism than partisanship. *American Politics Research, 50, 1*, (67-82). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X211046251>
- Kendall, F. (2012). Understanding White Privilege. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203114162>
- Khoshkish, A. (1979). *The socio-political complex: an interdisciplinary approach to political life*. Pergamon Press.
- Kerwin, D. (2018). The US Refugee Resettlement Program - A Return to First Principles: How Refugees Help to Define, Strengthen, and Revitalize the United States. *Journal on Migration & Human Security, 6(3)*, 205–225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502418787787>
- Lazzarini, Z. (2022). The end of Roe v. Wade – States’ power over health and well-being. *New England Journal of Medicine, 387-393*. <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2206055>

- Lee, S., & Waters, S. F. (2021). Asians and Asian Americans' experiences of racial discrimination during the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on health outcomes and the buffering role of social support. *Stigma and Health, 6*(1), 70–78.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000275>
- Lo, R. (2019). *Lived Experiences of Hmong Refugees in America* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Walden University.
- Macaraig, C. E., Mursyid, F. P. (2021). The plight of refugees in ASEAN member countries. *Technium Social Sciences Journal, Vol. 15*, 633-646.
<https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v15i1.2520>
- Minas, H., Kakuma, R., Too, L., Vayani, H., Orapeleng, S., Prasad-Ildes, R., Procter, N., & Oehm, D. (2013). Mental health research and evaluation in multicultural Australia: developing a culture of inclusion. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems, 7*(1), 23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1752-4458-7-23>
- Mossaad, N. (2017). *Refugees and Asylees*. Retrieved November 07, 2017, from <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/refugees-asylees>
- Moustakas, C. (2010). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Office of Refugee Resettlement. (2012, August 29). *The refugee act of 1980*. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/policy-guidance/refugee-act>
- Ogunbanjo, G. A., Mabuza, L. H., & Govender, I. (2014). Qualitative data analysis and writing results. *Conference: 17th National Family Practitioners conference incorporating the 8th Annual Pain and Guidelines Symposium, at Pretoria, South Africa*. Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280917835_Qualitative_data_analysis_and_writing_results_workshop

- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Pfeifer, M. E., Sullivan, J., Yang, K., & Yang, W. (2012). Hmong population and demographic trends in the 2010 census and 2010 American community survey. *Hmong Studies Journal*, 13(2), 1-32.
- Ratts, M. J., Toporek, R., & Lewis, J. A. (2010). *ACA advocacy competencies: A social justice framework for counselors*. American Counseling Association.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Sage Publications.
- Reny, T. T. & Barreto, M. A. (2022) Xenophobia in the time of pandemic: othering, anti-Asian attitudes, and COVID-19, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 10:2, 209-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2020.1769693>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.
- Sloan, A., & Bowe, B. (2013). Phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology: The philosophy, the methodologies, and using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate lecturers' experiences of curriculum design. *Quality & Quantity*, 48(3), 1291–1303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-013-9835-3>
- Smith, K. (2015). Stories told by, for, and about women refugees: Engendering resistance. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(2), 461-469.

- Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. Wiley.
- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2016). *Counseling the culturally diverse theory and practice*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, 68(3).
<https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456>
- Tai, D. B. G., Sia, I. G., Doubeni, C. A., & Wieland, M. L. (2021). Disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States: A 2021 update. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01170-w>
- Terjesen, N. C. (2022) Hmong Americans. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.
- Toporek, R., & McNally, C. J. (2006). Social justice training in counseling psychology: Needs and innovations. In R. L. Toporek, L. H. Gerstein, N. A. Fouad, G. Roysircar, & T. Israel (Eds.), *Handbook for Social Justice in Counseling Psychology: Leadership, Vision, and Action* (pp. 37–43). Sage.
- Tummala-Narra, P., & Kaschak, E. (2013) Women and immigration: Feminist and multicultural perspectives on identity, acculturation, and implications for clinical P\practice. *Women & Therapy*, 36(3-4), 139-142.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2013.797755>

- United Nations. (1990). UNHCR Policy on Refugee Women, 1990. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/women/3ba6186810/unhcr-policy-on-refugee-women-1990.html>
- Wachter, K., Heffron, L. C., Snyder, S., Nsonwu, M. B., & Busch-Armendariz, N. B. (2015). Unsettled integration: Pre- and post-migration factors in Congolese refugee women's resettlement experiences in the United States. *International Social Work, 59*(6), 875-889. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872815580049>
- Williams, E. N., & Enns, C. Z. (Eds.). (2013). *The Oxford handbook of feminist multicultural counseling psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Xiong, E. T., Dauphin, B., & Weisfeld, C. (2018). The Influence of Hmong Americans' Acculturation and Cultural Identity on Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Mental Health Care and Services in Comparison to Traditional Health Beliefs and Practices. *Hmong Studies Journal, 19*(2), 1-45.
- Yang, H. (2021, September 27). Hmong Minnesotans see parallels in Afghan refugee crisis. *MPRnews*. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2021/09/27/hmong-minnesotans-see-parallels-in-afghan-refugee-crisis>

Appendix A: Participant Flyer



\$10 Gift Card

Change the way the world sees you by sharing your experience living in refugee resettlement in the United States.

All selected participants who meet criteria and complete the research study will be provided a \$10 gift card for their full participation in this graduate research study.

How to participate:

Participants will be selected if meeting the following criteria.

1. Must identify as BOTH of the following: Hmong, woman.
2. Must have migrated to the United States as a refugee having lived or living in resettlement program.
3. Must be willing to be interviewed and discuss personal experience(s) of living in resettlement in the United States.
4. Must complete all consent forms and screening interview prior to participating in research study.
5. Email your interest to

Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire

Do you identify as a woman?

Do you identify as Hmong?

Did you relocate to the United States as a refugee?

Were you a part of the mass migration of Hmong people for resettlement as a result of the Vietnam War?

What year did you enter the United States?

Are you willing to discuss your experiences of living in post-resettlement in the United States as a Hmong woman refugee?

Do you have citizenship in the United States?

Any other country(ies)?

What is your age?

Are you employed?

What type of work do you do?

What is your current marital status?

What is the highest grade you completed in school?

What is your primary language?

How much money do you make in one year?

Do/did you have children?

How many? Ages?

Where were you born?

In what year?

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Tell me about your experience of entering the United States as a refugee in (year)?

Tell me what a typical day was like for you after you first arrived in the United States?

Tell me what a typical day looks like for you now?

Tell me what it is like for you to live in the United States?

Tell me how living in the United States is different from living in your native country?

How do you make big decisions? Small decisions? Medical decisions?

Tell me what you would change about your experience of living in the United States?

Is there anything else you would like for me to know?