FORCED MIGRANT WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES: EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES INVOLVING SPORT AND PHYSICAL EXERCISE

by

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(Under the Direction of Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson)

ABSTRACT

Sports-based initiatives catered toward the successful resettlement and social inclusion of refugees and migrants have emerged as a preferred method to promote social and cultural integration worldwide. However, despite the growing number of programs since the Mid-1990s, academic research regarding its effectiveness and impact is still scant, with current research mostly focused on specific refugee communities and program structures (e.g., voluntary sports clubs and community sport events) in Europe and Australia. In the United States, only a few research studies have been conducted pertaining to similar physical exercise or sports-based interventions and programs. The purpose of this study, therefore, was twofold: (a) to explore the meaning and role of sport and physical exercise for forced migrant women in the United States, especially refugees and asylum seekers, and (b) to identify barriers and constraints that impact their sport and exercise participation, helping specify reasons and antecedents that deter or influence psychosocial development and welfare of forced migrant women. Using an interpretive multi-case study qualitative research design guided by the concept of belonging, acculturation theory, and an intersectional feminist lens, data were collected through a virtual qualitative questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

Findings of this study amplified voices of a historically marginalized population, highlighting the positive impact of sport and physical exercise on the participants' lived experiences that emphasize concepts of belonging, inclusivity, positive health outlook, and creation of new identities. Theoretical implications and practical recommendations derived from this study include specific strategies and a conceptual model that may inform the development and implementation of more gender-accommodative and culturally sensitive program policies and structures. The significance of this study lies in its ability to corroborate the notion of sport and exercise as an effective tool to improve forced migrant women and refugees' mental and physical well-being, to create opportunities for education, socialization, and to foster cross-cultural understanding and relations between the newcomers and their host communities. Ultimately, this study further extends the current body of sport forced migration literature, specifically in the context of sports programs promoting the social inclusion of forced migrant women and refugees, in the United States.

INDEX WORDS: Interpretive multi-case study; concept of belonging; forced migrant women; sports-based programs; social inclusion; positive health outlook

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DEDICATION

*This dissertation is dedicated to **Tanja Chaudhary**, my older sister, role model, closest confidante, and biggest cheerleader.* I always wanted to be like her; waking up in the morning with a smile upon knowing that I will be doing something that I love and enjoy. If it were not for her unwavering "tough love" support, I would have never embarked on this long and difficult doctoral journey. Through long talks before bedtime and countless dog walks after overcoming too high hanging doorknobs to pick me up from the kinder garden, my sister instilled in me the deep desire to pursue my dreams and goals relentlessly, and all the values and beliefs that have guided me throughout my life. Our success story is just one example of the power of female role models and empowerment.

To the beautiful game of basketball that taught me to defy the odds, to be confident, to be resilient, and to belong while pursuing my dreams with passion and an open heart and mind.

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An homage to basketball, family, and friends, this work is also dedicated to hope – the hope to be an inspiration for all women and girls out there to dream big and embrace discomfort and potential challenges as valuable learning lessons. ***Be a champion for yourself and others, tap into your women's power and never give up – things always happen for a reason!***

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Human migration is a worldwide phenomenon. People have always been on the move throughout human history whether individual or in groups, forcefully or voluntarily in the quest for ameliorating living conditions for themselves and their families (Castelli, 2018; Castles, deHaas, & Miller, 2014; Nationalgeographic.com, 2020; UN.org, 2019). Migratory human movement may occur due to military conflicts, religious persecution, inadequate food and water supplies, dreadful climatic and environmental conditions, or in quest for better economic opportunities and different lifestyles. The latest evidence suggest that the first migrants originated from East Africa to Eurasia about 120,000 years ago (Bae et al., 2017), paving the way for today's interconnected and globalized world. Marsella & Ring (2003) argue that "the separation of the human species into its myriad ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and racial groups was – and remains – an outcome of migration" (p. 3).

Prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic abruptly halted all international migration across the globe, the World Migration Report 2020 provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded 272 international migrants globally in 2019, making up 3.5 percent of the entire world's population – a significant increase from 2.8 percent at the millennium change in 2000. The number of migrants is thus growing faster than the world population (DESA, 2019). When broken down by factors such as age and gender, the report showed that 52% and 48% of all international migrants were male and female, respectively. Almost two-thirds of the entire international migrants' community are considered labor migrants,

with 74 percent aged between 20-64 years, with children numbering 33 million. The United States is still the top destination country for 50.7 million international migrants, hailing mostly from India (17.5 million), followed by Mexico and China adding 11.8 million and 10.7 million, respectively (International Organization for Migration, 2020, p. 3). Overall, North America and Europe hosted more than half of all international migrants (141 million) in 2019, resulting from the so-called South-North Migration (SNM) which stands for migration between less developed or developing countries that are often referred to as the Global South to developed countries, the so-called Global North (Phelps, 2014).

Among the steadily growing number of international migrants are 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, of which 25.9 million are labeled as refugees – the highest level ever recorded, and of whom more than half are under the age of 18, with approximately 41.3 million being internally displaced people due to violence, conflict, and persecution, and with 3.5 million as asylum-seekers (UNHCR.org, 2020). More than half of the world's current refugee population originated from Syria (6.7 million), Afghanistan (2.7 million) and South Sudan (2.3 million), although the highest number of the 341,800 new asylum applications in 2018 was registered in Venezuela (UNHCR.org, 2020). An additional 3.9 million people worldwide were accounted for as stateless persons, with Bangladesh hosting the largest number with approximately 906,000, followed by the Ivory Coast with 692,000, and Myanmar with 620,000 (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

International migration is a highly polarized policy item on the political and social agendas across the globe amid staggering population numbers and its growing complexity, diversity and visible impact on continuous socio-cultural, economic structures and population change. Ritholtz (2017) thus contends that international migration has been increasingly

demonized and instrumentalized as a political weapon. By tapping into the existential fear in communities to fall behind by the accelerated pace of change and economic competition and rising uncertainty, democratic structures and inclusive civic engagement have been undermined, leaving communities divided with evidence of erosion of core values of democracy despite proven benefits of immigration. While the politicization and demonization of migration is just as old as the human movement itself, it is undeniably a fundamental feature of today's increasingly interconnected world with its global economic and trade processes, enabling a greater mobility of labor as well as goods, capital, and services (International Organization for Migration, 2020). In fact, despite only making up just 3.5 percent of the worlds' population, migrants contribute nearly 10 percent of global GDP (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016), which supports the notion that more effective integration, inclusion, and social cohesion of migrants and refugees could boost a country's economic growth in addition to social development, as well as significant cultural contributions in sports at local, national, and global levels.

Scholars and researchers across a wide variety of academic disciplines have investigated migration patterns, dynamics, and typologies for decades. Bailey (2004) advocated for the use of typologies in understanding migration because it serves fittingly as a critical foundational and guidance tool for empirical and theoretical studies. Merriam-Webster.com (2020) defines a typology as a "study of or analysis or classification based on types or categories" (para. 1). Migration applied to the phenomenon of human movement can be classified into several distinguishable types associated with push-and-pull factors (Riss, 2014). Building on Ravenstein's (1885) research, who posited the laws of migration, Petersen (1958) classified migration into five categories: primitive, impelled, forced, free and mass" (cited in Riss, 2014, p. 67), albeit terms that are nowadays outdated and considered derogatory.

Lee (1966) introduced the push-and-pull models that are still mostly accepted as a baseline for contemporary research, based on distinguishing factors such as geography, political borders, economic drivers, duration of relocation, and circumstances and motifs for leaving. More specifically, the following three broad migration patterns have been identified as follows (National Geographic Society, 2005):

1) Intercontinental migration refers to moving between continents,
2) Intracontinental refers to relocating between countries within the same continent,
3) Interregional refers to migrating within countries, including the significant movement of people from rural to urban areas in search of economic opportunities.

Migration can be further classified into internal and external categories, referring to individuals and families that either move to a new home within or outside of a state, country, or continent. The latter is more commonly known as international migration or immigration. Within these categories, migration may be voluntary or forced, temporary or permanent. Voluntary migration is mostly driven by the hope for better economic and living conditions, comprised of well-educated, highly skilled, and motivated individuals who specifically set out to advance their livelihoods and career prospects as financial experts, professional athletes, IT specialists, health professionals, and researchers (Favell, 2008). Forced migration, on the other hand, refers to "population transfer" (National Geographic Society, 2005, p. 1) that involves large groups of people who have been forced out of a region by a government, usually based on ethnicity or religion during war or other political and military conflicts, or have been enslaved as prisoners and slaves (Britannica.com, 2020). Among them refugees, exiled or asylum seekers that are both internally and internationally displaced (Castles, 2003).

Extant literature on migration and immigrants primarily studied the major drivers and factors to differentiate the flow of people and identify patterns, dynamics, and ultimately construct a typology of migration (e.g., Castelli, 2018; Castles & Miller, 2009; King, 2012, Lee, 1966; Ravenstein, 1885; Riss, 2014). Building on Ravenstein's Laws of Migration (1885) and Lee's (1966) push-and-pull theory, the dominant notion in migration scholarship during the 20th century was that a combination of economic, environmental, social, and political factors pushed individuals and families to abandon their homelands in favor of their chosen new host country (Castelli, 2018).

Theoretical perspectives used in migration research

Over the past two decades, a paradigm shift among migration scholars occurred (e.g., deHaas, 2011; Skeldon, 1990), propelled by the consideration that the push-and-pull models are too simplistic amid the constantly evolving and more complex and faceted globalized and interconnected world. Castles & Miller (2009) highlighted three broad theoretical perspectives that have been primarily adopted to examine patterns, motifs, mechanism, and consequences of human mobility: First, the neoclassical theory of migration (Harris & Todaro, 1970) posits those economic considerations are the major driver for migrants' individual decisions to relocate to regions with presumably higher wages. Thus, it is a valuable framework for studies investigating structural factors' impact on human mobility and its potential to cause inequalities in salaries and spatiality (Muyonga et al., 2020). Second, the historical structural approach guided by the world systems theory (Fawcett & Arnold, 1987; Wallerstein, 1974) that emerged in response to the criticism that neoclassical theory models overlooked the bigger picture and its macro factors, such as the political, cultural, and economic exchange of countries and individuals, undergirded by notion of the world as a capitalist system that was established by colonialism.

Third, the migration systems theory (Mabogunje, 1970) that emphasizes the role of social networks (Massey, 1990). Along with this, Arango (2004), Hollifield (2008), and Castelli (2018) advocated to expand the push-and-pull models to add "retain" and "repel" as meso-level elements that encompasses social, family, and cultural structures. Most recently, the "pull-push plus" theory has been proposed as a new approach to conceptualize the determining drivers for migration (Van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2017). Evidently, theorizing, and conceptualizing migration is highly complex, as captured eloquently by deHaas (2004), staying "there is no central body of conceptual frameworks or theories on migration that can guide and be informed by empirical work" (p. 6).

Similarly, with the rise in human trafficking and children's migration, it has proven difficult to sustain analytical clear distinctions of the different types of migrations, notably forced and voluntary migration. Cohen (1996), King (2002), and O'Reilly (2013) independently issued calls for the deconstruction and abandonment of such typologies, referring to them as "migration binaries, dichotomies or dyads" (King, 2012, p. 8). Problematic is for instance how such categorizations can overlap and blur, as illustrated in the unclear divide between forced and voluntary immigration regarding "economic" migrants versus refugees (deHaas, 2014). Specifically, Sales (2007) pointed out how such a theoretical distinction "neglects the fact that conflicts can produce economic devastation which forces people to leave who do not satisfy the 1951 UN Convention on refugees which stipulates a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, or political beliefs" (p. 47). Echoing this sentiment, Barjaba and King (2005) introduced the term "economic refugees" to describe the emigration wave from Albania in 1990 after the economic and political collapse of the former communist country. Likewise, the duration of migration may quickly change from temporary to permanent settlement, as observed

by guest workers in Germany and Switzerland (Castles et al., 1984). As an explanation for the overlapping and therefore redundant typologies, O'Reilly (2013) cited the constantly changing dynamics and nature of migration that "continually changes shape, form, direction, and content to such an extent that it is no longer possible to provide encompassing typologies of migrants, flows, destinations, or outcomes" (p. x). Whether voluntary or forced, migration is an integral and essential part of our human experience that has profoundly shaped and re-shaped societies around the globe, transforming them into heterogeneous, diverse, and complex communities. Despite the constant proliferation of new types of migration and international mobility, most of the extant literature on migration, however, settle on three core categories of actors of migration. These are temporary labor migrants, settler-migrants, and refugees (King, 2012).

Theoretical perspectives on research focused on forced migrants. In extant literature on refugees and sport, a deficit-based paradigm theoretical approach is predominantly used, with the status of being a refugee solely associated with negative attributes such as trauma, poor health, social exclusion, and deprivation perpetuating stereotypical views of forced migration (Spaaij & Oxford, 2018). Evers (2010) questioned the effectiveness of sport-based intervention programs for refugees, "stating that to fix [refugee-background] young people is a misplaced agenda" (p. 61). Instead, Evers (2010) urged fellow scholars and practitioners to approach the research from the lens of a student rather than a teacher or scholar. In other words, instead of attempting to understand what the young individuals with refugee background need to learn and know, researchers and practitioners may need to learn from the young people's life experiences and their survival skills acquired on their resettlement journeys. Equally concerning in the current body of literature is the commonly used one-dimensional approach to understand an individual's situation according to his or her refugee status, which utterly dismisses the fact that

refugees and migrants are a highly diverse group of individuals with different journeys and experiences that are affected by identifiers such as age, ability, socioeconomic status, religion, gender, race, and sexuality (Bakewell, 2008, Spaaij et al., 2019). Adopting an intersectional approach in future studies is recommended to "avoid the trap of unreflexively ascribing particular problems or experiences exclusively to a person's identity as a refugee" (Spaaij et al., 2019, p. 13).

International migration has more than doubled since the 1980s (Castles & Miller, 2009). Academic research on migration, with the focus on refugee and forced displacement has grown considerably across disciplines over the last 60 years (Black, 2001; Spaaij et al., 2019). However, most of the existing scholarship primarily examined issues, experiences, and impacts connected to political and policy development. The role of sport and physical exercise within the resettlement process of refugees and migrants has historically received little to zero attention (Spaaij et al., 2019). For instance, this stark contrast is well-illustrated in Neumann's (2016) study on the settlement of refugees in Australia (1940-2016) that only includes 10 of the 1,451 listed publications addressing sport and physical exercise. With sport labor migration being a swiftly growing research area in the field of sport management and sociology since the 1980s (Agergaard, 2018; Carter, 2011; Maguire, 2013), and the growing acceptance of sport and physical exercise as a practical tool for development and peace, the initial absence of sports-focused migration literature is problematic. Since 2017, nonetheless, sport and physical exercise as a means to promote the social inclusion and integration of refugees has progressively captured the attention of the academic community, largely ignited by mounting consensus among policy makers and practitioners worldwide to invest substantially into sports programs and interventions designed to help refugees and asylum seekers' resettlement (Spaaij & Oxford, 2018).

According to Spaaij et al. (2019), the majority of the research on the relationship between sport, physical exercise, and refugees was published within the last five years, with a steep increase in the volume of published studies from 2017 to 2019. Although Australia's refugee population is comparatively low (2018: 56,933 -45th overall, 50th per capita and 88th relative to GDP), the bulk of previous studies on sport, refugees, and forced migration were conducted in Australia, followed by European-based scholars, most notably Germany, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Scandinavian countries such as Finland, Denmark, Norway (Refugeecouncil.org.au, 2020; Spaaij et al., 2019). More recently, studies originating from Turkey as the worlds' leading host country for refugees (3.68 million in 2018) has been on the rise (e.g., Atali, 2018; Koca, 2021).

Similarly, researchers in the United States and Canada have recently begun to pay closer attention to the nexus between sport, refugees, and forced migration.

Most of the existing body of literature on the relationship between sport, physical exercise, and immigrants, delved into the refugees and forced migrants' participation and experiences with organized team sports, most notably European football (soccer), basketball, cricket, and volleyball (Spaaij et al., 2019). By comparison, informal sport, leisure formats and recreational physical activities such as pickup basketball, cycling, swimming, or jogging are still largely untouched, while community-driven sport events (e.g., tournaments and festivals) and specific exercise and sport intervention programs have been attracted more attention from scholars (e.g., Knappe et al., 2019; Rosso & McGrath, 2016; Spaaij & Schaillée, 2020).

Practiced in many societies across the globe, sport is widely recognized as a socializing, unifying agent, and effective tool to promote peace and development of communities and individuals (Beutler, 2008; Coakley, 2015; Sage & Eitzen, 2016). Nelson Mandela, the first

black South African president, anti-apartheid activist, and Nobel peace prize winner, powerfully demonstrated the unifying and transformative power of sports when he leveraged the patriotic euphoria of the 1995 Rugby World to end the apartheid system in 1994 and win South African's first multiracial elections, adopting "rugby as an instrument of reconciliation" (Carlin, 2008, p. 111) and setting in motion the process of healing and reunification of South Africa, a nation that had been racially divided from 1948 to 1991 (Dunn, 2009; Keim, 2003).

Following Mandela's powerful example and the UN's strong lead in establishing sport as a practical tool for development and peace, policymakers and practitioners worldwide have increasingly embraced the notion of sport as a powerful vehicle for positive social change (Beutler, 2008; Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). As such, global governing bodies and agencies have sought to use and promote sport to address socio-cultural and economic issues that face diverse populace. Global North countries, such as Canada, Germany, UK, and Australia have modified government legislations and public policies to cultivate sport programs and initiatives underpinned by the belief in sports' socio-cultural, and economic benefits (Australian Sports Commission, 2006; Bloom et al., 2005).

Some of the overarching findings in previous studies suggest that socio-cultural identifiers, personal constraints, and structural barriers play a significant role in facilitating or hindering access to sport and physical exercise, and how it is implicated in forced migrants' resettlement in host countries (e.g., Baker-Lewton et al., 2016; Hancock et al., 2009; Mohammadi, 2019; Olliff, 2008; Spaaij, 2013). Such trends illustrate the evolving role of sport in the various societies across the world.

Statement of the Problem

Human migration (voluntary and forced) is one of the most distinctive human characteristics (Adler & Gielen, 2003; McNeill, 1984). Due to environmental disasters, political upheavals, religious persecution, civil unrest, and military conflict, forced migration has increased sharply over the years, including 25.9 million refugees of a total of 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR.org, 2020). The bulk of them often end up in the Global North, necessitating host countries to develop cultural and social adjustment programs to facilitate a smooth transitioning into their new home communities. With global refugee and immigration policies becoming more inconsistent, inefficient, and inadequate (Glaser, 2016), sport has stepped in to fill this leadership vacuum. Widely accepted and used as an instrument of social and cultural change, sport has emerged as a viable solution and practical tool for the successful inclusion and integration of forced migrants in host countries. Consequently, a myriad of sport programs exclusively designed to help the resettlement process of forced migrants has been launched across the globe. However, there are legitimate concerns about the effectiveness of such sports-based social inclusion programs. Previous research of sport programs that are catered to help refugees integrate into their new host communities mainly originated in Australia and European countries, notably Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Few studies focusing on refugees have been published in North America, virtually zero have specifically examined refugees' resettlement to the U.S. society and culture, let alone their involvement in physical exercise and sports. It is therefore of critical importance and the opportune time to examine how refugees' involvement in sport and physical exercise may help them to cope with challenges of adjustment and living in the United States, given research studies that document problems that refugees face in host countries.

The intent of this study was therefore to explore the meaning of sport and physical exercise and its varying role in the lives of forced migrants the United States, emphasizing women's experiences, and to discover ways to empower forced migrant women, as well as raise awareness for the unique demands and challenges those women with forced migrant background face in their adopted home countries.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the meaning and role of sport for forced migrant women in the United States.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

(1) What meanings do forced migrant women draw from participating in sports-based integration programs located in the United States?

(2) What benefits do forced migrant women draw from participating in sports-based integration programs located in the United States?

(3) What role does sport play in the lives of forced migrant women in their host country (United States) and in their countries of origin), especially in context of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences from engagement in sports activities?

(4) What challenges do forced migrant women face from participation in sports-based integration programs in the United States?

Significance of the Study. The significance of this study lies in its aim to fill the gap of the extant knowledge on sports-based social-inclusion programs in the United States. Specifically, the aim of this study was to identify barriers and constraints that impact sport

participation of forced migrant women in the United States, especially refugees and asylum seekers, helping specify reasons and antecedents that deter or influence psychosocial development and welfare of forced migrant women, using them to provide sport practitioners and program coordinators with practical recommendations to tailor more effectively existing or prospective sports-based initiatives and programs to the unique needs of forced migrant women, especially refugees and asylum seekers. Another significance of the study lies in the documentation of how participation in sports and physical exercise impact participants' lives in terms of inclusivity, health outlook, identity formation, and positive integrative experiences, affirming previous studies from Olliff's (2008) and most recently Luguetti et al. (2021). Further, the knowledge and insights gained from this study may help develop empowering strategies to overcome the identified barriers, and generate awareness, so that women and girls can equally accrue the benefits of sports participation. In a similar vein, it may expand researchers, educators, and practitioners' understanding of the diverse socio-cultural perspectives on sport and physical exercise, and particularly how it informs participation patterns and lived experiences of forced migrants in their new host communities. Lastly, the findings of this study have provided support for the development of a conceptual model that could be applied to cultural contexts irrespective of locality.

Definition of Terms and Context

To ensure the clarity of the discussed concepts and avoid any potential misinterpretation, the following section will present operational definitions for key terms and how they will be applied within the unique context of this dissertation study.

For the specific purpose of this dissertation study on forced migration in the realm of sports and physical exercise, the term *"forced migrant"* has been deemed to be most appropriate,

considering that it specifically refers to "a person subject to a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or development projects)" (International Organization for Migration, 2011, para. 1).

Human migration

To the same degree that human movements have sparked controversies and heated political debates throughout the decades and centuries largely due to its palpable impact and intertwined relationship with politics, economics, demographics, culture and religion, the definition of the term itself has been a wedge and contentious issue (Kok, 1999).

In 1975, Shaw offered the conventional definition of migration as the "relatively permanent movement of persons over a significant distance" (p. 1). Since then, there has been much of an academic debate about the classification and conceptualization of human migrations (Kok, 1999). The *IOM Glossary on Migration* (2nd edition), for instance, defines migration as a "process of moving, either across an international border, or within a state. Encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, compositions and causes; it includes refugees, displaced persons, uprooted people, and economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification" (Perruchoud, 2004, pp. 62-63). By contrast, Britannica.com (2020) describes human migration, as the "permanent change of residence by an individual or group, it excludes such movements as nomadism, migrant labor, commuting and tourism, all of which are transitory in nature (p. 1). Merriam-Webster Dictionary, conversely, adopts a more inclusionary approach, defining migration as a "movement from one country,

place, or locality to another" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020, para. 1). Hence, this dissertation study adopted a combination approach.

Migration and immigration are often interchangeably used, causing confusion and debate over the appropriateness of the terms. To decipher the slight distinctions, a closer look at the distinct differences between the actors of migration, namely migrants, refugees, asylum seeker, immigrant, and sport migrant. So, what is the difference between a migrant and a refugee?

Forced and Voluntary Migrants

Derived from the Latin word *migrāre,* which refers to moving from place to place, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) broadly defines a migrant as "any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or forced; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is" (International Organization for Migration, 2018; UN.org, 2020). Under this encompassing umbrella term, two subcategories may be identified:

1. Labour (or economic migrants) and family reunification
2. Forced migrants (asylum seekers and refugees)

Refugee

Article 1(A)(2) of the 1951 Geneva Convention universally defines a refugee as a person who has been forced to flee his or her country "as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside of his former habitual

residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. In the case of a person who has more than one nationality, the term 'the country of his nationality' shall mean each of the countries of which he is a national, and a person shall not be deemed to be lacking the protection of the country of his nationality if, without any valid reason based on well-founded fear, he has not availed himself of the protection of one of the countries of which he is a national" (UNHCR.org, 2020, para. 1).

Asylum Seeker

Unlike refugees who have already been granted protection," an asylum seeker is an individual who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In case of a negative decision, the person must leave the country and may be expelled, unless permission to stay is provided on humanitarian grounds" (International Organization for Migration, 2020, para. 1).

(Undocumented) Immigrant

As this study will be conducted in the United States, some of the study participants have been undocumented immigrants – a status that "refers to anyone residing in any given country without legal documentation. It includes people who entered the United States without inspection and proper permission from the government, and those who entered with a legal visa that is no longer valid" (Immigrantsrising.org, 2020, para. 1). Most recently, the current US administration under President Biden and Vice President Harris directed all immigration enforcement agencies to overhaul the terminology of all official documents to adopt a more inclusive and welcoming language.

To this end, the hostile terms “alien” will become “noncitizen or migrant,” “illegal” has been replaced with “undocumented” and “integration” rather than “assimilation” ought to be used when referring to the resettlement process of forced and voluntary migrants and immigrants (Durkee, 2021).

(Documented) Immigrant

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary offers the definition of “a person who comes to a country to take up permanent resident” (Merriam-webster.com, 2020, para. 1). The US Department of Homeland Security further commonly refers to lawful permanent residents as immigrants (Department of Homeland Security, 2021).

Sport

Recognizing sport as an all-encompassing and broad concept, the term refers to “all people, activities, businesses, and organizations involved in producing, facilitating, promoting, or organizing any activity, experience, or business enterprise focused on fitness, recreation, athletics, or leisure; sport products include goods, services, people, places, and ideas” (Pitts, 2017, cited in Pedersen & Thibault, 2019, p. 9). In more general terms, dictionary.com (2021) classifies sport as an “athletic activity requiring skill or physical prowess and often a competitive nature, as racing, baseball, tennis, bowling, wrestling, boxing, hunting, fishing, etc.” (para. 1). Both definitions apply to the specific context of this study.

Physical Exercise

Unlike physical activity that is often interchangeably used, physical exercise encompasses “planned, structured, and repetitive bodily movements that primarily aim to maintain or improve physical health” (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 2).

Assumptions Underpinning this Dissertation Study

The key assumption underpinning this research investigation is that women refugees and other forced migrant women belong to a population that tend to universally be discouraged to participate in sport for various reasons, likely tied to the persistent ideology of patriarchy, deeply embedded in religious and cultural structures of their countries of origin and destination. More specifically, as reported by the UN Women Europe and Central Asia, by October 2015, women asylum seekers hailed mostly from Middle Eastern countries, escaping military conflicts, religious persecution, or other forms of discrimination (Eca.unwomen.org, 2020). And yet, my assumptions could be totally wrong and a reflection of my own underlying Eurocentric views that need to be adequately addressed throughout the research project with the reflexivity process that requires researchers to be "rigorously self-aware" (Stacey, 1988, p. 26). Common strategies in qualitative research include memoing throughout the entire research process in addition to subjectivity statements that clearly show the researchers' goals and experiences, beliefs, values, and emotion that inform and influence the researcher's approach to the planned research (Maxwell, 2005).

Subjectivities

Being a cisgender white female European scholar and active recreational basketball player myself that has witnessed first-hand both overt and subtle sexism in basketball games, I suspect that the centuries long conditioning to patriarchy and gender norms has developed a deeply ingrained internalized oppression that could play a determining factor in women's reluctance toward sport participation, if not already discouraged or even prohibited based on a set of religious and cultural practices, and gender norms and values that reflect patriarchal and colonialist structures. In fact, sport has "proven to be one of the key institutional sites for the

study of the social construction of gender" (Dworkin & Messner, 2009, p. 120). Although originally created in the late 19th and early 20th century "by and for White middle-class men to preserve the hegemonic masculinity, organized sport as an institution has become a critical research site for feminist scholarship on gender (e.g., Hargreaves, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Ultimately, this study, therefore, aims to deconstruct dominant assumptions, beliefs, and practices of sport and physical exercise, particularly so-called men's sports, while demonstrating the positive value of physical exercise and sports for forced immigrant women in their resettlement journey (Dworkin & Messner, 2009). Furthermore, cisgender White European feminist scholars like myself conducting research within the female refugee population ought to bear in mind that "certainly the contents and tone of one's background will largely determine the direction and meaning of one's life and, therefore, the meaning and effect of one's performance in any given sphere of activity" (Gunn Allen, 1986, p. 32). As such, the primary source of data for this study were authentic voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of the study participants.

However, whether due to my White European background or general apprehension, I encountered difficulties in recruiting study participants with a forced migrant background because of mistrust regarding the intention and aim of this study, as well as lack of perceived benefit from it. The latter was directly expressed by one of the biggest soccer-based inclusion programs in the United States.

By contrast, the previously expressed concern over internalized resentment and reluctance toward sports' participation from study participants due to the possible pre-conceived notion that women refugees largely hail from predominately Muslim societies in the Middle East that are still often overtly shaped by patriarchy albeit in different forms.

Other common practical, methodological, and ethical challenges and concerns for engaging refugees and forced migrants as study participants included the lack of communication due to language and cultural barriers or low literacy levels (Halabi, 2005), and traumatic experiences encountered throughout their migration and resettlement journeys (Gabriel et al., 2017; Hopkins, 2008; Hugman et al., 2011; Hynes, 2003; Johnson et al., 2009).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The goal of this literature review was multifold. At the beginning of the chapter, a historical overview of human migration as an international experience will be presented, including a critical and comprehensive assessment of the extant knowledge with an emphasis on forced migrants, major drivers and motifs for migration, and prevalent theoretical perspectives adopted in the current body of forced migration and sport scholarship. Following this, the next section will outline the emergence of sports-based programs for forced migrants and explore research that examined the role of sport and physical exercise in the resettlement process. As such, the inclusionary or exclusionary nature of the primarily European model of voluntary sports clubs will be discussed. Subsequently, specific theoretical perspectives and methodologies adopted in previous studies on refugees and sport will be detailed. Among them are acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) and belonging theory (Mecheril, 2003) that were informed by an intersectional feminist lens guided by gender relations theory (Connell, 2002). The chapter will conclude with an identification of gaps in the extant literature which will inform the research design and theoretical framework for this dissertation study, as well as briefly summarize key points of the literature review. Figure 1 below illustrates the major areas covered in the literature review.

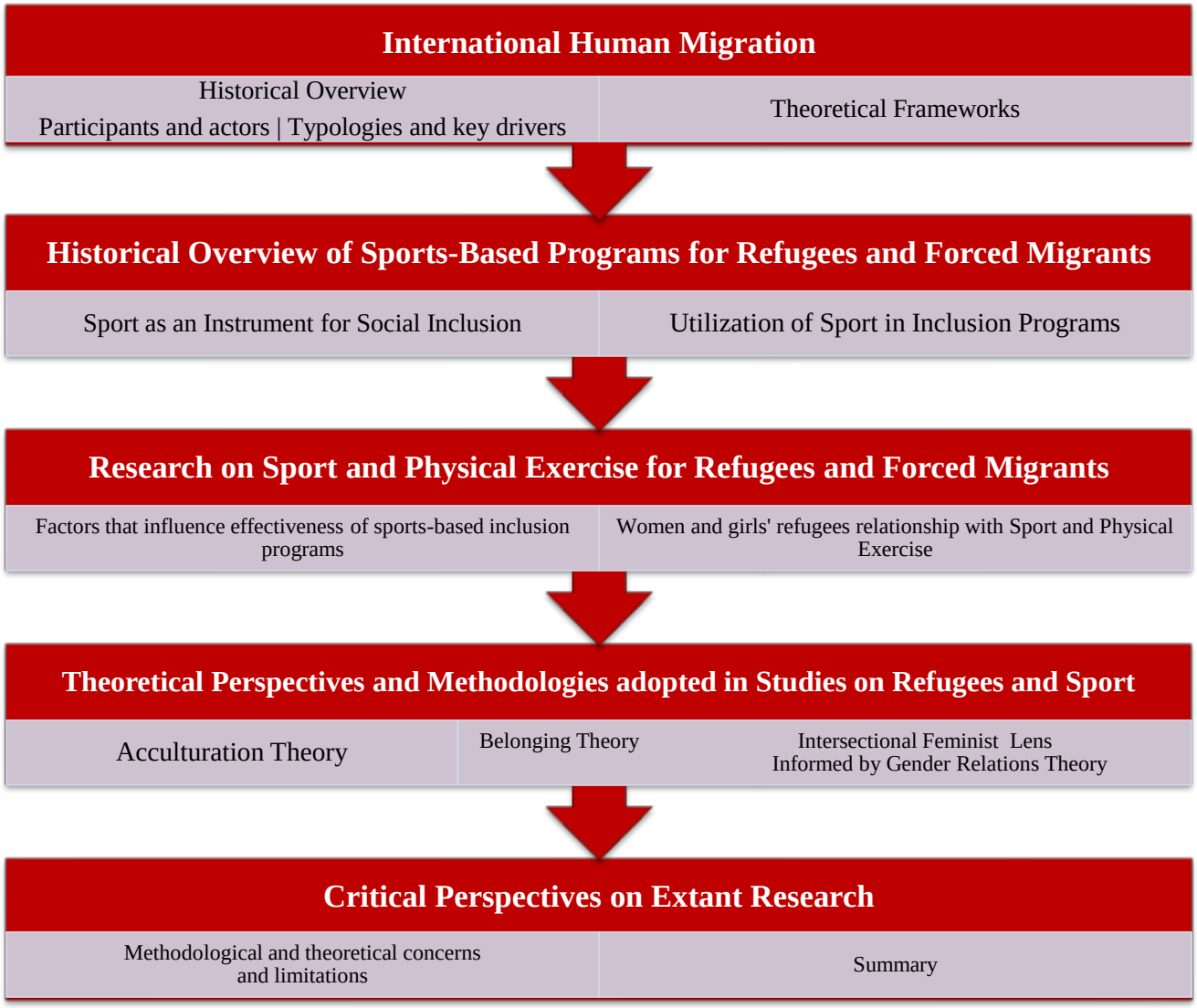


Figure 1: Chapter Outline

International Human migration

Human movement is not only as old as mankind (Castelli, 2018) but indeed inherent to human nature, and is one of the most distinctive human characteristics (Adler & Gielen, 2003). McNeill (1984) asserted that

> no dominant species had ever spread so far so fast before. Our ancestors broke through climatic and geographical barriers with comparative ease because the invention of clothes and housing allowed them to sustain a tropical microclimate next to their almost hairless skins, no matter what conditions prevailed in the environment at large (p. 1).

And yet, international migration has become one of the most divisive and polarizing topics on both policy-making level and in the general public (Gheasi & Nijkamp, 2017). This trend is largely attributed to the steadily increasing trend in numbers that often serve as baseline for discussions and heightened concerns alike regarding the implications of global socio-cultural and economic trends and political and technological changes for an individual and its community as a whole – as associated with international human migration. Accordingly, the current estimated number of 272 million migrants (International Organization for Migration, 2019) may appear large, but only represents 3.5% of the entire global population. Compared to 2010, however, this number reflects a gradual growth of 1.8% (49% increase since 2000) where 150 million international migrants were accounted for, with Europe and Asia hosting 61% of the total global international migrant population in 2019 (82 million and 84 million, respectively), followed by North America hosting 22% (59 million international migrants), Africa at 10%, Latin America and the Caribbean at 4%, and Oceania at 3% (International Organization for Migration, 2019). Most importantly, however, it is a manifestation of the evolution of international human migration.

Since the first migrant pioneers left East Africa, humans have been constantly on the move. Larrison and Raadschelders (2020) therefore proclaimed migration to be "a key issue for the governments in the 21st century" and an "integral part of everyday life for migrants and non-migrants alike" (p. 37). However, migration occurs on different levels and in a myriad of forms. Deeply entangled with globalization and its growth, along with perceived impacts on the socio-political environment and global economy, migration has turned into a global phenomenon that affects all walk of lives (Ertekin & Dural, 2013). There are two major classifications of human movements, the forced (forced) and voluntary migration.

Although constantly evolving and diversifying, the primary motifs for migration have always remained unchanged, undergirded by the undying hope and quest for a better life for an individual and their family and friends.

An historical overview of international human migration

Early homo sapiens moved out of Africa to settle across Australia, Asia, and Europe by 40,000 BC (Diamond, 1999). Migrations to Siberia occurred 20,000 years ago, before the Americas became a central destination by about 10,000 years ago. Hawaii and New Zealand were the remaining uninhabited lands in the world that were occupied by human beings during the last migratory waves of ancient times in AD 100 and 1000 (Diamond, 1999; National Geographic, 2020). While perhaps some lands were indeed uninhabited by the arrival of migrants, it is imperative to point out that migration has a profound and irreversible impact on both the newcomers and hosts affected by this interactive process. What might have been progress for the settlers, might have been the death sentence or a new socio-cultural order for the hosts. As such, migratory waves of eastern and northern European tribes (e.g., Vandals, Goths, Huns) caused the fall of early civilizations and rise of others, such as the Roman Empire and the

Ottoman Turks, or the Celtic people, Anglo-Saxons, and Jutes that defined the history and culture of Ireland and the United Kingdom (Marsella & Ring, 2003). Evidently, human migration has played a pivotal role in shaping the world map for the good, bad, and the ugly.

Therefore, it should not be overlooked the dark sides of human migration, such as invasion, conquest, colonization, and slavery. Over the course of 400 years, from the late 16th through the 20th century, more than 60 million European migrants devastated and permanently altered the lives and cultures of indigenous nations in the Americas, Australia, Oceania, Asia, and Africa (Britannica.com, 2020). The aftermath of the brutal and inhumane practice of enslavement of sub-Saharan and West Africans continues to rear his ugly head in the form of systematic racism and social justice inequality throughout the world disguised in different forms and shapes (Marsella & Ring, 2003). Throughout the era of industrialization, rapid technological inventions in transportation and long-distance communication, such as the steamboat (1807), the railroad (1830), motorcars (1886), the telegraph (1830s) and radio (1894), led to internal mass migration from the rural to urban areas, better known as the "Gilded age" of urbanization. Previously distant and isolated communities of immigrants and farmers were brought together, and colonial settlement and mass migration was at its peak and encouraged, as it contributed to the expansion of the United States. In fact, all you needed as a document was a steamship ticket, according to Bundy (2016). By the late 19th and early 20th century, however, a seismic shift occurred in the understanding and perception of migrants and immigrants. Gradually, the United States and other countries sought to regulate the process of immigration, eventually imposing restrictive immigration policies, border controls, quotas, and literacy tests to make it a selective phenomenon (Bundy, 2016).

The contemporary form of international human migration was born out of what has often been characterized as more differentiated, "accelerated, globalised, femininised, diversified and become increasingly politicised" (Castles & Miller, 2009, pp. 10-12). Larrison and Raadschelders (2020) more specifically determine the beginning of the modern migration era to be sometime after the end of the World War II and before the oil crisis of 1973 (Keeley, 2009; Koser, 2007). By contrast, Massey (1999) contends that modern international human migration began already in the 1500s and continued into the 21st century, taking place in four phases, turning global in the 1950s, and concluded in the 1960s. This stands in stark contrast to the documented influx of European migrants in various countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America throughout the 1830s to 1950s (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020). Thus, a fifth period at the turn of the 21st century has been proposed by Segal, Elliott, and Mayadas (2010). Despite migrants' indisputable vital contributions to the economies of their host countries, the simultaneously increasing economic interdependencies between countries worldwide enlarged the rift between rich and poor, causing developed countries to further tighten immigration policies that emphasized exclusion and enforcement. As a direct result, politicians and media gradually moved to demonize immigrants and refugees, showcasing them as a plague at the expense of society as a whole (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020).

The so-called "Age of Migration" (Castles & Miller, 2009) may thus be just as much described as the "age of forced immobility" (Carling, 2002). In fact, King (2012) has cast strong doubt on the widely perceived notion in previous literature that the phenomenon of the accelerated migration is a direct outcome of the globalization, stating "it is one of the ironies of globalisation that whilst goods, capital, knowledge, entrepreneurship, and the media are free to flow across borders, labour, the other crucial factor of production, is not.

In fact, on the whole, people are less free to migrate now that they were a hundred years ago" (p. 6). The reality is indeed quite the contrary. People are more restricted than ever in their mobility, and the ability to migrate is more of a privilege than a basic human right (King, 2012). "Fine if you are white, from a wealthy country in Europe, North America or elsewhere in the developed world, or if you have money to invest or valuable skills to deploy. But if you are from a poor country in Africa, Latin America, or parts of Asia: forget it" (King, 2012, pp. 5-6). Carling (2002) posits the label "age of forced immobility" as an alternative way to describe the current state of international migration, with King (2012) suggesting that "access to mobility – to possibilities to travel, migrate, circulate and return – will become a more fundamental differentiating factor within societies in the future" (p. 26). Crawley (2018) corroborates this assessment, calling migration a "highly visible reflection of global inequalities whether in terms of wages, labour market opportunities, or lifestyles" (p. 3). As a direct outcome from this unequal access along with the rise of anti-immigration sentiments, closed borders, restricted visa rules, and exclusionary policies towards migrants globally, so-called "undocumented" or "irregular" immigrants, often vilified as "illegal immigrants" are a new classification type of migrants (King, 2012, p. 7).

To level the playing field in migration, institutional and political barriers need to be removed which can be done by implementing a set of more inclusive migration policies covering various areas including the labor market, integration, humanitarian/asylum, family, co-ethnic, and irregular migration. However, despite the profound effects of migration within the socio-cultural, economic, and political framework of a society, academic research on the implementation and administration of migration policies on multiple levels of government has been scant (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020).

For instance, on a global governance level, a plethora of United Nations (UN) agencies have taken on this issue of international migration, most notably the already often cited United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Other international and humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross and globally operating financial institutions (e.g., World Bank) stepped up their efforts to address concerns pertaining to migration. As a direct result, the term "global governance" emerged that was for instance well-illustrated in the form of international cooperative campaigns, such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) in 2006 and the UN High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development in 2007. Eventually in 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, acknowledging the importance of addressing current migration concerns while establishing a comprehensive framework on how to ensure human rights of migrants and particularly refugees in an equitable and shared manner across borders and UN member states ((Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020). Betts (2011), nonetheless, cautions to view international migration governance as a "one size fits all" approach. Rather, the different types of migration require different approaches of governance and responses from varying institutions at the bilateral, regional, interregional, and multilateral levels. For instance, there is basic multilateral framework in place regarding refugees, international travel, and labor migration, whereas costs and benefits associated with high skilled labor migration are divided among sending, receiving states, and the migrant (Betts, 2011).

Participants and actors of international human migration. Whether temporary or permanent, work or study – forced or voluntary, there is no such thing as a typical "migrant" (Beutin et al., 2016, p. 7). Nevertheless, Berry (1997) divided migrants in the following two

categories: immigrants and sojourners that are differentiated by three factors: “voluntariness, mobility, and permanence” (p. 8). Although their specific reasons and motifs for their migration journey may differ, it essentially is a matter of voluntary or forced (involuntary) relocation, which is reflected in the varying levels of difficulty experienced in the process of adaption and acculturation (Berry, 1997). Encompassing refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants, the latter is often (yet not limited to the mostly forced nature of migration) ignited by traumatic experiences due to war, military conflict, religious persecution, and characterized by the permanent or temporary loss or separation from family and beloved ones, hazardous migratory journey to a country of asylum, horrendous conditions in refugee camps, and the uncertain future in the hosting countries (Binder & Tosic, 2005; Burrmann et al., 2018, Ha & Lyras, 2013, Hartley et al., 2017). As further posited by Burrmann et al. (2018), such experiences may be detrimental for the emotional well-being of refugees and hence cause a lack of interest in physical exercise.

This presumed correlation has been substantiated by previous literature. For instance, Caperchione et al. (2009) and O’Driscoll et al. (2014) found that everyday issues, such as employment, income, inaccessibility to housing, medical services, and housing likely seem to be more of a priority for refugees after resettlement than their involvement in physical exercise. Even more so, research has shown that forced migrants were more physical active in their home country than in their new host community – a trend that may linked to “escape-related post-traumatic stress” (Burrmann et al., 2018, p. 21). And yet, the nexus between refugees, sport, and physical exercise is still understudied (e.g., Spaaij et al., 2019) and therefore at the center of this dissertation study.

Whether voluntary or forced, migration is an integral and essential part of our human experience that has profoundly shaped and re-shaped societies around the globe, transforming them into heterogeneous, diverse, and complex communities. Yet, as Beutin et al. (2016) emphasize, it is paramount to regard migrants as a heterogenous and diverse group of individuals with a unique set of expectations and opportunities. Failing to see migrants as unique individuals is what renders migration efforts fruitless, as it may require different policy responses. Refugees fleeing military conflicts and religious persecution, health concerns, economy collapses, and natural disasters or famine are for example are not always clearly identifiable as voluntary or forced migrants, which exposes the deficiencies of categorizing the different types of migration. Larrison and Raadschelders (2020) itemized the leading sending and receiving countries of international migrants, after first establishing the fact that "international migrants come from every nation in the world" (p. 38). With respect to forced migrants, Syria (6.3 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), and South Sudan (2.4 million) are the top sending countries. To ensure clarity and consistency throughout the research process, the terms forced migrant women and refugees were adopted as the preferred choice of language for this paper.

Typologies and key drivers of international human migration. According to the National Geographic Society (2005), migration occurs on different levels, distinguished by factors such as geography, political borders, economic drivers, duration of relocation, and circumstances and motifs for leaving. Similarly, previous literature primarily focused on the reasons and motifs for people to move from one state to another, from one country to another, or from one continent to another (e.g., Arango, 2004; Castles & Miller, 2009; King, 2012; Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020; McNeill & Adams, 1978). For instance, African migration is a perfect example of intra-continental human movement - contrary to popular belief and the dominant

media narrative of the global migrant crisis that has captured political debates within the European Union and beyond since the mid-1990s. A study from Flahaux and de Haas (2016) found that 75 percent of African migrants resided in another African country in 2000, whereas 16 percent lived in Europe, five percent in America, four percent in Oceania, and 0.3 percent in Asia.

Regardless of the different types of travelers, all participants of migration share similar reasons for their decision to leave their homeland, most notably, the desire to ameliorate living conditions for themselves and their loved ones after escaping a hazard situation. Such structural forces have been understood as the major drivers of migration, and their interplay and relationship are considered as the foundation for the "push and pull" theory models (e.g., Ravenstein, 1885; Lee, 1966), which have dominated migration scholarship during the 20th century. Underpinned by the neoclassical economics paradigm that works on a macro and micro level only (Massey et al., 1999), the dominant notion was that a combination of economic, environmental, social, and political factors drove individuals and families to abandon their homelands in favor of their chosen new host country (Castelli, 2018).

More specifically, previous research identified that poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, political and religious suppression, and natural disasters to be among the most common push factors (WMR 2018). Pull-factors, on the other hand, are most often constituted in the search for personal advancement, most notably economic, educational, and professional opportunities, improving family life, and the search for political and/or religious freedom (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020). In response to the evolving and more complex and faceted globalized and interconnected world, Arango (2004), Hollifield (2008), and Castelli (2018) advocated for the expansion of the push-and-pull models to add "retain" and "repel" as meso-

level elements that encompasses social, family, and cultural structures. Most recently, the "pull-push plus" theory has been proposed as a new approach to conceptualize the determining drivers for migration (Van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2018). Building on the existing push-pull models, this analytical framework operates on the premise that "activated factors" for migration are "predisposing, proximate, precipitating and mediating drivers" (p. 931). Plainly, the determinants and drivers of migration are just as complex and nuanced as the nature of migration and the impact of globalization, and research is still somewhat scarce. Not to mention the fact that geographical, political, and socio-cultural components may differ in terms of weight and influence for individuals, even within countries and continents. Accordingly, the notion of an expanded push-pull model that demonstrates the interplay of the drivers on micro-, macro-, and meso-levels is excellent for it takes into consideration elements that are only partial under the individual's control and can therefore act as an obstacle or facilitator (e.g., cost of moving and social network), appearing as a reasonable approach (Castelli, 2018).

For future research, the conceptual framework below provided by Government Office for Science in the United Kingdom (2011) could be adopted. Upon the understanding that conditions for migrations may interact or overlap in different ways, the framework groups the wide range of migration drivers into the following five categories: 1) social, 2) political, 3) economic, 4) environmental, and 5) demographics, presented below in Figure 2, which illustrates the complexity of the migration drivers.

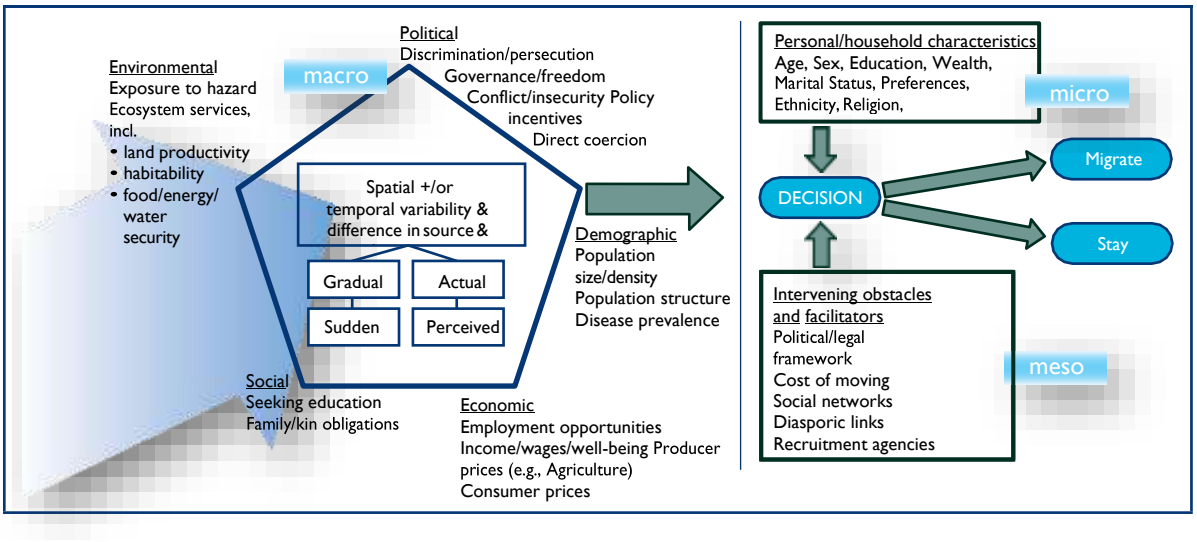


Figure 2: Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change. (2011). *Final Project Report*. The Government Office for Science, London.

As demonstrated above, human movement is driven by a complex interplay of macro-, meso-, and micro-factors, such as socioeconomic conditions and political, ecological, environmental, and social/demographic factors (Castelli, 2018; Wood, 1994; King, 2012). The presentation however fails to mention the varying nature and types of migration, particularly the forced displacement of refugees and asylum seekers internally and globally – a trend that has been on the rise, according to Wood (1994).

Gendered components in migration drivers in international human migration. With women and girls making up almost 50% of the refugee and forced migrant population, it is surprising yet somewhat expected that most of the extant literature on the broad and interdisciplinary field of migration largely overlooks the gendered patterns of the identified largely economically driven push/pull factors of migration that subsequently causes different migration experiences for women in all types of international human migration (Sociology Lens, 2017). The relationship between gender and migration has increasingly become a hot topic in the social sciences and humanities since the 1980s, addressing the gendered components of the

migratory movement of both male and female migrants (Sociology Lens, 2017). Scholars like Nawyn (2010) have pointed out the lack of knowledge about individuals' reasons for migration and ways to improve their social statuses in their respective host communities from a feminist theoretical perspective. Nawyn (2010) thus encourages fellow scholars to consider future research that examines gender not as an "individual-level binary category ascribed at birth," but rather as "a system of power relations that permeates every aspect of the migration experience" (p. 760). As a dynamic concept that shapes experiences of migration on an individual and structural level, gender analysis and gender relations theory (Connell, 2002) have emerged as the most dominant theoretical frameworks in the burgeoning gender and migration scholarship (Nawyn, 2010). Drawing heavily upon these theoretical lenses, recent gender and migration literature has showcased how gender relations are impacted and shifted in the settlement and migration journeys of individuals. To illustrate this further, Nawyn (2010) provides specific examples of industries (e.g., domestic care work, light manufacturing and service) that predominately hire forced migrant women, while lacking access to certain social networks and educational opportunities in their countries of origin and in the host country, which may significantly put them at a disadvantage when it comes to competing with other male candidates for limited immigration visas and the overall costs and benefits of migration (Nawyn, 2010). Not to mention the fact that cultural norms in their countries of origins may often yield more influence and act as a hinder for women refugees and forced migrants in their quest for employment than their human capital characteristics (Heering et al., 2004; Read, 2004).

Theoretical framing of international human migration research. Challenges of forced migration is a growing concern for governments and policymakers. The latest UNHCR annual global trends report just recorded the highest total ever of forced displaced individuals, now

making up one percent of the entire human population. Since 2010, the number of forced displaced individuals worldwide has almost doubled, increasing from 41 million to an unprecedented 79.5 million individuals fleeing their homes, of whom 45.7 million are internally displaced, 26.0 million are refugees, and 4.2 million are asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2020). While the primary reasons for forced migration seem to be clearly understood as a direct outcome of a state or country's failure to serve and protect its citizens that has become more prevalent since the end of the Cold War due to failing democracies, collapsing economies, technological advances, and the increasingly globalized and interconnected world (Betts & Collier, 2017; Falk, 1999), there seems to be a dearth in academic research on how to approach forced migration through a theoretical lens.

Such theories provide a foundation and guidance to understand human migration, hence research scholars use them to inform and give direction to their studies. However, theories that take into consideration the unique challenges that forced migrants face are limited. According to Wood (1994), the apparent lack of a comprehensive refugee theory is due to the complexity of forced migrations that often occur following a string of multifaceted decision-making phases and a multitude of causal factors. Alternatively, as Wood (1994) notes, "the extent of forced migration is underestimated, however, because the conventional definition of refugees as victims of coercive government policies or war who cross an international boundary fails to account for the many others uprooted by communal ethnic conflict, life-threatening environmental and economic conditions, and mandatory repatriations" (p. 607). The few attempts to theorize forced migration in the extant literature, however, include Kunz's (1973) proposed two-type *Kinetic Model of Refugee Theory* of "pushed" refugee migration, encompassing so-called "anticipatory flows" of refugees, individually or in small groups, that leave their unlivable conditions before

being forced out, whereas so-called “acute flows” refers to large numbers of refugees escaping imminent life-threatening danger. Shortcomings with this approach is however that so-called anticipatory refugees can be easily mistaken as voluntary, economic migrants (Kunz, 1981). Because of this evidently murkiness of defining voluntary or forced migrants, and a lack of a widely accepted theory that can serve as a “panacea for understanding the causes of migration” (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020), examining global governance structures and migration policies are even more significant, as they are intricately linked to international relations and foreign and immigration policies (Aras & Mencutek, 2015). With its direct impact on international migration trends and innate domestic and humanitarian aspects, it is surprising to find that the nexus between foreign policy, immigration and asylum policy has rarely been a focus of previous empirical research. Lahav & Lavenex (2013), therefore, call migration a rather novel subfield in the academic discipline of international relations. Even though linked to several different policy sectors, such as development, human rights, security, and trade, international migration has always been rather incorporated within the subfields of ethnicity and nationalism, with debates mostly revolving around interdisciplinarity and epistemic diversity (Lahav & Lavenex, 2013). Despite its apparent complexity that renders it difficult to create an accurate analysis of all migration types and policies, both migration scholars, policy makers, and governments have come to the consensus to distinguish international human migration between highly skilled migration, low-skilled migration, irregular migration, and forced migration (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020). Amid the continuous global refugee crisis, the latter has increasingly become the major concern of policy makers in developed and industrialized countries. In an effort to find a healthy balance between the growing hostile anti-migrant sentiment in the public opinion and national interests of economic growth and global

competitiveness depending on migrant labor, many governments have steadily restricted their refugee and asylum policies. The most striking example is found in the United States, formerly known as the country, that welcomed more refugees than the rest of the world combined. In 2019, however, the U.S. only allowed 30,000 refugees into the country. Still, the majority of refugees (85%) lives in countries that are classified as developing, such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Pakistan (Larrison & Raadschelders, 2020). As public opinion affects migration policies and implementation in all receiving countries in a similar manner, governments have increasingly begun to seek solutions on how to successfully integrate refugees and forced migrants in their country and within their population. One answer has been found in sports-based social inclusion and integration programs for refugees and forced migrants. The following section will provide a historical overview of the emergence of sports and physical exercise as a practical tool for a successful resettlement process.

Sports-based Inclusion Programs for Forced Migrants

What do have human migration, sport, and physical exercise in common? Both practices involve movement and are inevitably linked to the shared and universal human experience. As old as ancient history, physical exercise evolved over the centuries from collective societal activities such as rituals, warfare and military training, and social entertainment into organized team and individual sports and games (Crowther, 2007). Whether voluntary or forced in nature, humans have always been on the move, transcending their homelands' borders in the quest of settling temporarily or permanently in a new community with better living, social, and economic conditions. Put differently, migration is the "history's oldest and most effective anti-poverty measure, a natural human response to challenges and a facilitator of greater opportunities" (Swing, 2016, para. 1).

And yet, academic research on the strong ties and interrelationship between the two deeply intricately human movements involving political, economic, social, and cultural factors is still in its early development and rather scant, concentrated by geographic location, gender, and type of sport. As such, previous studies primarily offer insights into the perceptions and broad experiences of male and youth refugees with sports-based social inclusion programs and voluntary sports clubs located in the European and Australian context (e.g., Burrmann et al., 2018; Nowy et al., 2020; Spaaij et al., 2019).

Still notably absent from the extant literature, however, are the voices and perspectives of women and girls' refugees and forced migrants regarding the role of sport and physical exercise in their journey to immerse and integrate in their respective host communities (Luguetti et al., 2021). Concurrently with the persistent global migrant crisis roughly since the 1990s, it is not surprising that most of the current body of literature on sports-based social inclusion programs and initiatives for refugees' successful resettlement has been recently published.

Since Nelson Mandela's powerful demonstration of sports' ability to serve as a unifier and bridge-builder between racially divided people and nations during the 1990 Rugby World Cup, sport and physical exercise has increasingly become the beacon of hope for the international community faced with never-ending wars and conflicts, poverty, diseases, and other challenges that stifle human development and causes a rift in universal peace (Beutler, 2008). Perceived as an innovative instrument that speaks an universal and international language and may therefore be able to overcome cultural differences and foster tolerant and inclusive communities, a plethora of government agencies led by the United Nations (UN) have increasingly embraced sport settings as "motors of integration" (European Commission, 2007, German Federal Government, 2007; Rittner & Breuer, 2004) that can serve as an important

platform to advance human rights, social and economic process, sustainable development, and cross-cultural understanding. In fact, the UN recognized sport as a fundamental right in 1959 as part of their "Declaration of the Rights of the Child," before announcing sport and physical education as a "fundamental right for all" in the 1978 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Charter of Physical Education and Sport. However, it was not until 2001 that the UN formally bestowed upon sport its substantial role as a practical mechanism that can be used on individual, community, national, and global levels, to promote development and peace as well as gender equality, universal education, environmental sustainability, and combating fatal diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Beutler, 2008).

In 2002, the Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP), launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, partnered with an Inter-Agency Task Force to identify best practices that promote efficient and consistent use of sport-based initiatives at the individual, community, national and global levels (Beutler, 2008). The goal was to garner active support from the respective governments and sport organizations for sports' vital role in achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were adopted with the resolution 55/2 on September 8, 2000 (United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force Report, 2003). Upon signing the declaration, the then 189 UN member states joined the fight "against poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women" (WHO.int, 2018, para. 1).

Although the UNOSDP was surprisingly closed in 2017 for the sake of establishing a direct partnership between the UN and the International Olympic Committee (UN.org, 2017), the UN still appears to stand firm and unchanged on its belief in sport's vital role for social progress, as reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) below:

> Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives (UN.org, 2020, para. 1).

Likewise, the United Nations (UN) treat sports as a "natural partnership" for its system (UN.org, 2020, para. 1), officially recognizing and raising awareness of its "vast reach, unparalleled popularity and foundation of positive values" (UN.org, 2020) in 2013 when the UN General Assembly declared April 6 as the *International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSDP).* A decade earlier, the UN General Assembly had adopted the resolution 58/5, entitled *"Sport as a Means to Promote Education, Health, Development and Peace*" (2003) to acknowledge the emerging global acceptance of sport as a significant contributor to development and peace, followed by its proclamation of 2005 as the *International Year of Sport and Physical Education (IYSPE 2005)* that entailed an action call for governments, international governing sports bodies and sport-related organizations to actively support the notion of sport and physical education as a means to promote the MDGs goals, namely education, health, development, and peace (Beutler, 2008).

Following UN's lead and an encouraging assessment from UN's Inter-Agency Task Force that published a report in 2003 that detailed specific examples of existing well-designed sport-based initiatives that were not only practical and cost-effective but also deemed effective in promoting development and peace (Beutler, 2008), many European governments have taken steps to leverage the power of sports to address broader public policy objectives. For instance, United Kingdom designed sport programs to tackle issues such as social exclusion, obesity, and health, and to strengthen civil society, diminish anti-social behavior and youth crime, and foster active citizenship and the rebuilding of communities (Tacon & Hanson, 2011).

These are a few examples that showcase sports' path to its increasingly accepted role as a major element of public policy that requires attention from policymakers across the world (Evens et al., 2013). This growing trend is according to Bergsgard et al. (2007) due to sports' power "malleability as a resource to help deliver non-sport government objectives; and third, its multi-dimensional character" (p. 3).

Sport as an instrument for social inclusion. In addition to public policy issues, many policymakers and governments within and outside the UN have turned to sports-based programs and initiatives as a practical tool to effectively tackle domestic and foreign policy challenges (Beutler, 2008). Amid the continuous global migrant crisis since 2015 that became the biggest global displacement since World War II (UNHCR.org, 2016), the social inclusion and successful resettlement of refugees and migrants has become one of the most pressing items on the legislation agenda of host communities and polling surveys, reflecting the growing anti-migrant sentiment in the public opinion (Blinder, 2012; Robila, 2018; Stone, 2018). In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Commission for Integration and Cohesion (2007) determined the need for the overhaul of local and national government policies to ensure a more welcoming and integrative response (Stone, 2018). Sport as the pathway to social integration was then proposed by the Department of Communities and Local Government (2009), but had been already written into the Policy Action Group 10's plan for sport and the arts, stating that:

> Participation in the arts and sport has a beneficial social impact. Arts and sport are inclusive and can contribute to neighbourhood renewal. They can build confidence and encourage strong community groups. However, these benefits are frequently overlooked both by some providers of arts and sports facilities and programmes and by those involved in area regeneration programmes (DCMS, 1999, p. 5).

In addition, the "dispersal and/or inclusion of asylum seekers/refugees per se has increased as a policy priority in recent years for different levels of government in the UK" (Amara et al., 2005; p. 3; Ndofor-Tah et al., 2003; Zetter et al., 2003). Filippo Grandi, the current United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, issued a strong appeal to the international community to not only provide adequate shelter conditions, but also to help "find better ways of peacefully integrating refugees into our host communities that could ease tensions between refugees and host communities" (UNHCR, 2016, p. 3).

While funding and infrastructural challenges pose the most visible challenges for the respective host countries, starting over in a new country and culture is never an easy undertaking, especially when it involves leaving your home behind to start life over for the sake of escaping from political persecution or other endeavors. As addressed in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2019), many migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees arrive in poor physical and mental conditions in their respective new communities. Often traumatized and emotionally exhausted by the escaped military conflicts, violence, and their difficult if not hazardous path to freedom, the new beginning in the cultural context is already overshadowed from the onset (Johnson & Thompson, 2008).

Adding to the equation the unique difficulties of fitting into a new culture or country such as lacking understanding, language skills and communication problems, financial and potential visa status insecurity, detention in refugee camps or prohibition to work separation as well from family members (e.g., Brabant & Raynault, 2012; Laban et al., 2004), the potential outcomes are a feeling of disconnection at its best, and social marginalization if not isolation and loneliness in the worst-case scenario. Experiencing such sentiments can be detrimental to one's physical and mental well-being, ultimately leading the affected individuals down a dark path of resentment

toward oneself and the host communities reflected in proneness to embracing radical and hateful ideologies and discrimination, crime, and violence (Ginzel, 2018). In fact, Schick et al. (2016) have found a strong correlation between the level of exposure to traumatic experiences and adverse effects on integration. Additionally, Berry et al. (2006) linked a lack of acceptance and equal participation in the host culture to separation or segregation. As such, despite migration's integral role in human history whether involuntarily as a source of survival, or voluntary for adaptation or growth (e.g., Castles & Miller, 1993; Diamond, 1999; Kraut, 1994; Marsella & Ring, 2003), the arrival of new migrants and refugees is often met with resistance and hostility by local residents, well-reflected in the resurging trends of xenophobia and right-wing /populist parties across the globe, most notably in European countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Germany, or the land of opportunities and immigration, the United States.

Thus, there is a growing and urgent need for governments and grassroot organizations to find effective and innovative strategies to not only curb the increasing resentments and hostility toward economically disadvantaged and socially excluded groups such as migrants and refugees, but also to promote and foster an environment of social inclusion and cohesion for all citizens which will subsequently strengthen and develop their communities into peaceful and empowering entities.

The emergence of sports-based inclusion programs. Spearheaded by international governing agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), sport activities in refugee camps across the world have emerged since 1998 thanks to partnerships with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), *Right To Play*, and the international volleyball, basketball, and badminton federations.

Prior to this, sport and physical education programs designed to achieve developmental goals tended to be rather ad hoc, informal, and isolated in nature (Beutler, 2008).

Beyond the governing directive, however, there have been an increasing number of initiatives from private and non-profit sport, and human rights organizations to develop programs that aim to support social inclusion and integration of refugees and migrants. Across the European Union and beyond, various professional football clubs and other sport organizations have moved towards creating opportunities for refugees to interact with residents of their new host communities (Ginzel, 2018). Among others, *project HOPE* is a sports-based inclusion program in Cologne, Germany that was initiated by RheinFlake, a German aid organization, during the peak of the refugee crisis in 2017. Based on a cooperation with a tier one professional football club, youth refugees between 15 and 19 years old are offered the opportunity to play in the official league system of the German Football Association (DFB) leagues, which allows for cultural exchange with other local residents while playing other German teams on a weekly basis. The project is supported by FIFA's Football for Hope initiative and aims to create "social togetherness in society" (FIFA.com, 2020, para. 1). In a similar manner, subsidized or government-assisted programs for refugees such as *Welcoming through Sports* (Council of Europe Portal, 2020; DOSB, 2017) sought to connect refugees with recreational sport and leisure activities to foster social interactions with local members of voluntary sport clubs (VSCs) in Germany (Waardenburg et al., 2018). Other programs financed by the German Federal Government include *Orientation through Sport (OtS)* carried out by the German Youth sports (dsj) at the German preliminary refugee reception centre in Hamburg, Neugraben-Fischbek (DOSB, 2017), the *Sport for and with Refugees (SfwR)* operated by the Technical University of Chemnitz, and the *Refugee Work of Sport Clubs (RWoSC)* carried out by the Humboldt

University of Berlin (Burrmann et al., 2018). The OtS initiative largely aimed at providing financial support for the establishment of sport offers for young, unaccompanied refugees. Sport federations and sport clubs across Germany adopted a wide variety of athletic activities and sport offerings catered toward the promotion of social inclusion of refugees and migrants. The other two programs are research-based, intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing sport-related refugee programs in specific cities in Germany, particularly looking at the potential, deficits, and best practices of sport offers in local voluntary sport clubs (Burrmann et al., 2018). These are just a few examples of how the European Union (EU), North America, and Australia have substantially invested in sports-based initiatives that are solely designed to engage refugees and asylum seekers in sport and physical exercise for social inclusion purposes (Spaaij et al., 2019).

More specifically, between 2008 and 2018, the European Commission provided a total of three million Euros to subsidize 54 projects that desired to support social inclusion and well-being of refugees in EU member states (European Commission, 2018, cited in Spaaij et al., 2019). Furthermore, EU's Erasmus+ program financially backed the following two international sport-based projects: Activity, Sport and Play for the *Inclusion of Refugees in Europe (ASPIRE)* and *Integration of Refugees through Sport (IRTS)* "that combined research and practice for the sake of enhancing sport organizations' capacity to deliver suitable participation opportunities for migrants and refugees" (Spaaij et al., 2019, p. 2). Other initiatives include the *Sport Inclusion Network (SPIN)* and its successor, the *European Sport Inclusion Network (ESPIN),* which have been co-funded by EU's educational flagship program. Their shared purpose is to promote the civic participation of forced migrants through sport volunteering. Albeit often smaller-scaled, other projects in the US, Canada, and Australia have been launched with similar objectives

(Spaaij et al., 2019; BBC.com, 2020). For the World Refugee Day on June 20, 2020, the UNHCR teamed up with *Goal Click* to create the year-long global football storytelling and photo project *Goal Click Refugees.* By giving a platform to the unfiltered stories and intimate photos taken by more than 25 male and female refugee participants with a disposable analogue camera of football-based programs worldwide, including refugee camps in Jordan, Kenya, South Sudan, and from football fields in London, Germany, and Sydney, the aim was to raise awareness for the rising levels of forced migration and combat stigmas surrounding refugees and asylum seekers (BBC.com, 2020). "This series aims to challenge existing stereotypes and give an intimate look into refugees' football lives, in a way that no one from outside these communities could do. Now, more than ever, the voices of the marginalised need to be heard" (UNHCR.org, 2020, para. 2).

Observed trends in existing sports-based inclusion programs. Previous studies (e.g., Nowy at al., 2020; Seibert et al., 2018; Stone, 2018; Stura, 2019) have determined that European football is the most popular organized sport used to facilitate and promote the social inclusion of forced migrants, mainly refugees and asylum seekers. Particularly male migrants appear to respond positively to football-based inclusion programs (Seiberth et al., 2018). Correspondingly, the majority of existing sports-based inclusion programs for refugees and other migrants is embedded in the structure of football-based voluntary sport clubs or initiatives. Recognizing football's appeal and ability to serve as an integrative platform, the German federal government, for instance, largely subsidize integrative projects of football clubs (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2016). In the United States, most of the distinguished integration programs for refugees and asylum seekers use soccer as a vehicle for positive change. Examples include the non-profit organization *Soccer Without Borders*, *Fugees Academy,* and *RIFA (Rooklyn*

International Football Association). Similarly, the new UNHCR's *Goal Click Refugees* campaign that was launched ahead of World Refugee Day (June 20) and Refugee Week (June 15-21) strongly reflects "football's unique role in refugees' lives" (UNHCR.org, para. 1). Nowy et al.'s (2020) study further indicates that football clubs are generally expressing more willingness and interest in integrating refugees into their teams. This correlates with Breuer and Feiler's (2017) study that found generally a higher number of migrants represented in football clubs than any other sports-based inclusion program. Such trends are well-reflected throughout the extant literature, with the bulk of previous research studies (e.g., Dukic et al., 2017; Nathan et al., 2013; Spaaij et al., 2019) exploring organized team sports, most notably European and Australian football, basketball, and volleyball. With respect to the sport format and setting of the programs, numerous publications (e.g., Burrmann et al., 2018; Nowy et al., 2020; Waardenburg et al., 2018) particularly examined voluntary sports clubs' structures and school-based competitions, whereas a smaller percentage inquired into informal sport and recreational activities , among them are fitness and badminton or individual sports such as swimming and running (Jeanes et al., 2019; Spaaij et al., 2019).

Although informal sport formats such as pickup basketball have recently gained more appreciation and prominence as rich cultural sites that ensues not only plenty of physical health but also mental benefits that can both preserve or challenge existing social practices (e.g., Burdsey et al., 2013; Jeanes et al., 2019; Sonkeng & Cheypator-Thomson, 2020; Thangaraj, 2010), there's still a huge gap in the knowledge production and literature regarding refugee and forced migrants' participation in informal sport and physical exercise (Spaaij et al., 2019). For instance, Burdsey (2007) assert that sporting practices have been an integral feature in global migration processes, as it provides the space to construct, live, mediate, consume, contest, and

challenge the notion of diaspora. Hence, this dissertation attempted to fill the gap by using the concept of belonging and gender relations theory to explore the perceived role of sports in the adjustment to the new socio-cultural contexts of the respective host communities of forced migrant women, especially women refugees.

Research on Sports and Physical Exercise for Forced Migrants

Most of the current body of literature on the nexus between sport, physical exercise, and forced migration primarily revolves around the following three major themes: 1) health promotion, 2) integration and social inclusion, and 3) barriers and facilitators to participation in sport and physical activity (e.g., Blanchard, 2018; Hartley et al., 2017; Mohammadi, 2019; Ley et al. 2017; Ley & Rato Barrio, 2019; Seibert et al., 2018; Spaaij et al., 2019; Waardenburg et al., 2018). This evident emphasis may be inherited to the rather deficit-based approach in the extant research on forced migrants, specifically refugees (Spaaij et al., 2019). To this end, Burrmann et al. (2018) and Castles (2003) refer to "refugees as a sub-group with the community of migrants that are demarcated by specific characteristics" (Burrmann et al., 2018, p. 20) due to the traumatic experiences that are associated with forced migration. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that most of the previous studies have been published in Australia, Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands – all countries/continents that are considered developed and part of the Global North (Spaaij et al., 2019). Nonetheless, Waardenburg et al. (2018) and other scholars argue that participation in organized sport may not only help refugees to cope with the everyday challenges of building a new life in a new country or community, but also provide them with an easy access to socialize and meet with others, leading to the development of a network of social contacts that ultimately increases the sense of belonginess and connectivity with the host country as well as intercultural understanding, in addition to the physical health benefits of establishing a plan to

consistently participate in structured sport activities (Olliff, 2008; Nathan et al., 2013; Bunde-Birouste, 2013). Stone (2018) echoed this assessment, stating that physical activity may serve as a "distraction, a way of avoiding the endless tedium of empty days with little to do as asylum seekers are prevented from (legally) taking an integral role in the local and national economy (p. 179). All in all, findings in previous literature imply that especially young refugees and forced migrants assign to sport a substantial meaning in their everyday lives, as it provides a setting where individuals can engage with each other socially, emotionally, and physically in a natural manner, ultimately allowing for identity formation and the sense of accomplishment and belonging (Burrmann et al., 2017; Walseth, 2006; Spaaij, 2015). Notably, research studies from Germany (Mutz, 2012) and Switzerland (Makarova & Herzog, 2014) indicate that migrants who identified themselves as members of voluntary sport clubs felt more integrated and part of inter-ethnic friendship networks than non-members, attributing their interactions and stronger sense of belonging with the native residents to their participation in sports activities. In the same way, the likelihood for migrants to seek a membership in a voluntary sports club in the first place is higher depending on the level of integration and identification with the host country (Burrmann et al., 2012). To this end, more studies should redirect their attention on identification aspects, as it appears to be one of the major foundations required for migrants to feel comfortable enough to join voluntary sport clubs in their host communities in the first place. Equally, developing a stronger sense of identification with the host community might be another positive outcome correlated with sport participation (Makarova & Herzog, 2014).

Voluntary sports clubs as sites of integration or exclusion. Pizzolati & Sterchele (2016) contend that participation in sports clubs, for instance, may diminish the potential for anti-social behavior. This assumption builds on the premise of voluntary sports clubs as a site of

social interaction and safe space that provides equal opportunities and racial equality for everyone (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013). Several scholars, therefore, have noted ample physical and social-psychological benefits that refugees would accrue from participation in organized sports. These include increased confidence and resilience skills, and an overall improved well-being and health due to satisfied emotional needs (Anderson et al., 2019; Pizzolati & Sterchele, 2016; Spaaij, 2015; Waardenburg et al., 2018). Undergirded by this belief in sport's healing power, the UNHCR as the leading UN Refugee Agency, has been one of the earliest and most vocal, visible proponents, and advocates for sport as a "positive catalyst for empowering refugees, helping to strengthen social cohesion and forge closer ties with host communities" (UNHCR.org, 2020, para. 2). Put differently by Dominique Hyde, Global head of External Relations at UNHCR: "For young men and women uprooted by war or persecution, sport is much more than a leisure activity. It's an opportunity to be included and protected – a change to heal, develop and grow" (UNHCR.org, 2020, para. 2). Maram, a 14-year girl refugee from Zaatari camp in Jordan, illustrates well the meaning of football to her, stating that: "Some people in the camp believe that football is only for boys, and girls shouldn't do it. But when I play football it raises my spirits and it reinforces my self-confidence" (UNHCR.org, 2020, para. 3). Related effects have been reported from participants in physical activity interventions, with Hartley et al. (2017) concluding that engaging in such community group-based activities provided an important coping mechanism and a chance to re-gain control, daily structure, and a routine. Correspondingly, the Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework (2019) officially endorsed leisure and recreational activities as a method and indicator of integration, as it provides a helpful tool for refugees and forced migrants to "learn more about the culture of a country or local area, and can provide opportunities to establish social connections, practice

language skills and improve overall individual health and wellbeing" (Ndofor-Tah et al., 2019, p. 38). For more than a decade, leading scholars in forced migration sport research, such as Spaaij (2012, 2015), Olliff (2008) and Nathan et al. (2013) have substantiated this notion of sport and physical exercise activities as an empowering and uplifting environment in which trusting relationships with other participants, teammates, coaches, and administrators can be built, information, culture, and knowledge can be exchanged in a genuine and non-judgmental manner. Particularly the involvement in a team sport setting has been found to be a natural facilitator of acculturation, social integration and inclusion, fostering a sense of belonging and community while providing the opportunity for individuals with refugees to connect with local residents in their new host communities or with individuals that may share similar experiences or cultural backgrounds (Baker-Lewton et al., 2017; Burrmann et al., 2017; Fader, 2018; Nathan et al., 2013; Whitley et al., 2016; Seiberth et al., 2018; Spaaij, 2015; Stone, 2018). Equally found as supportive environment are co-ethnic diaspora community sporting events (Spaaij & Broerse, 2019). Conversely, Hurly (2019), and Hertting and Karelfors (2013) emphasize the need to consider sport as a cultural site with different cultural meanings attached to sport, which is constituted in the varying outcomes of sport participation, ultimately suggesting that there is no "one size-fits-all" approach to developing effective sports-based social integration programs for newly arrived forced migrants (Spaaij et al., 2019).

Additionally, scientific research on the true essence of sports' ability to serve as a change agent and unifier remains anecdotal and scant. In fact, there is growing evidence against the concept of sport for integration, with scholars exposing proneness to "cultivating limited social capital among refugees, providing transient feelings of belonging, or, in some instances, leading to a heightened sense of social exclusion" (Dowling, 2019, p. 3; Waardenburg et al., 2018;

Spaaij, 2012, 2015). Dukic et al. (2017) further warn against fully embracing the notion of sports as the perfect platform to facilitate social integration of refugees and forced migrants successfully, citing the lack of evidence for the unifying power of sports and its effectiveness to promote social integration, and the evident conflict between policy and practice (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013; Jeanes et al., 2015).

In fact, multiple research studies have found evidence corroborating that voluntary sport clubs, for instance, are not immune to racial, gender, or religious and ethnic discrimination, and exclusive behavior (Bradbury, 2013; Hylton, 2010; Spaaij et al., 2019). Such negative experiences can significantly affect refugees' emotional well-being and may reinforce group boundaries at best, ultimately discouraging and hindering successful integration into the new host communities (Spaaij, 2012). Even more problematic, previous literature suggest that refugees and forced migrants often face barriers and constraints that prevent them from even taking advantage of the offered sport and physical exercise opportunities in the first place. This particularly applies for organized team and club sport. Spaaij (2013) and Baker-Lewton et al. (2016) have identified that barriers operate at four levels: structural, sociocultural, interpersonal, and personal. Specifically, Hartley et al. (2017) regard the structural barriers such as inadequate and inequitable policies, lack of communication and financial resources, as well as access to transportation and supporting organizations as the biggest hurdles to overcome.

In a similar vein, Burrmann et al. (2018) showcased how organizational culture, especially human resources in sport clubs can act as gatekeepers to access and participation. Spaaij et al. (2012, 2013, 2019) on the other hand argue that the potential to be exposed to potential discrimination of any form is the deal-breaker that operates on all of the identified levels of constraints. Other case studies situated in the Australian sport context (Abur, 2018;

Baker-Lewton et al., 2017) affirm the detailed occurrences of exclusion, everyday racism, and discrimination recounted by both Somali and South Sudanese Australians. Ironically enough, social networks developed in sport clubs may even produce more decision than integration and inclusion, as observed in both ethnically heterogeneous and homogeneous sports clubs (Jannssens & Verweel, 2016). Findings from Robinson et al. (2019)'s in their community-based participatory action research project with/for Syrian Youth refugees further concluded that "physical and social obstacles and barriers are unique to the examined sites and time" (p. 11).

Forced migrant women's relationship with sport and physical exercise. Although comparably small in numbers, there exists a body of literature on sport, physical exercise, and forced migration with a particular focus on women refugees who perceived additional barriers for participation in sports-based integration programs (Spaaij et al., 2019). Specifically, the consensus among various scholars is that socio-cultural norms and expectations within the countries of origin and their respective ethnocultural communities are the greatest hinder for women refugees to participate in sport and physical exercise in their respective host countries (Guerin et al., 2003; Mohammadi, 2019; Palmer, 2009; Pizzolati & Sterchele, 2016). Such tendencies are well-illustrated in Spaaij (2013) study, in which female respondents overwhelmingly acknowledged that they did not feel free or allowed to take part in sport and physical exercise opportunities. Yet, other research studies in Germany and Norway have yielded encouraging results upon female Muslim refugees' participation in sport. As such, participants in a study from Kleindienst-Cachay (2007) praised the sport setting as the primary reason for interactions with German peers that reportedly enriched their social life significantly.

Conversely, however, other research findings refute these positive claims, citing the visible underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in voluntary sports clubs. This is particularly

palpable in the German context, where roughly 60% of male migrants are found to be part of club-organized sport activities as compared to 30% of female migrants. While gender differences in sport participation are seemingly less pronounced among the native German youth, previous research clearly shows a general higher level of sedentariness among migrant girls (e.g., HBSC Study Group Germany, 2011; Higgins & Dale, 2013; Makarova & Herzog, 2014; Pfister, 2011), with Muslim girls particularly absent from sports clubs and daily practice of sport (Burrmann & Mutz, 2016). Cultural norms and religious beliefs may present additional influencers upon sport and recreation participation (Robinson & Randall, 2016; Stanec et al., 2016). For instance, evidence suggests some female newcomer youth who are Muslim face a greater number of hurdles than do their male peers with respect to sport and recreation participation (Robinson & Randall, 2016; Stanec et al. 2016).

Evidently, therefore, sport's potential to serve as the practical tool for the social inclusion and integration of forced migrants is neither clear-cut nor universal. To design efficient and successful sport-based inclusion programs, a context-dependent and highly experienced, sensitive approach is paramount (McDonald et al., 2019; Michelini et al., 2018). Alternatively, Stone (2018) warned to not underestimate the mere value of sport in the context of forced migration in its ability to serve as a lighthouse that may help refugees and forced migrants navigate through the rough waters associated with the dramatic personal change they experience while adjusting to a new life in their respective host communities. By providing rays of hope and a sense of belonging and guidance, sport-based programs or voluntary sport clubs may equip refugees and forced migrants with the necessary confidence, mental and emotional strength, and comfort levels that can be carried over to other key societal realms, such as education, employment, and housing (Stone, 2018).

Factors that influence effectiveness of sports-based integration programs. An online survey from Nowy et al. (2020) found that only 28% of the approximately 6,000 German voluntary sports clubs reported some form of engagement in the process of integrating refugees by the end of 2015, of which only 14%, however, alleged to have done any concrete measures. As suggested by the study findings, the engagement of voluntary sports clubs or the lack thereof is indicative of a lack of HR capacity versus financial capacity. In other words, to successfully provide an inclusive and integrative environment, the time of core volunteers are more needed than money (Nowy et al., 2020). The number of bureaucratic structures such as law and policies may also play into the engagement levels of a voluntary sports clubs in Germany.

Overall, however, the current body of literature suggests that forced migrants prefer integrative initiatives and efforts handled through existing grassroots and voluntary club sport systems, as commonplace in European sport systems and in Australia. As such, Block and Gibbs (2017) study on the Australian context reassured the approach to facilitate integration and inclusion programs through already existing voluntary club sports as the most ideal solution, although short-term and explicitly designed sports-based programs for refugees were equally perceived as beneficial. Refugees in the Netherlands expressed similar preferences, with participants clearly stating the desire to "make an early start on the long process of integration into Dutch society by joining sport clubs" (Waardenburg et al., 2018, p. 15).

Consistently, research studies across a wide variety of countries overwhelmingly revealed the defunding and denouncement of so-called "migrant sports clubs," as they seem to rather promote segregation than integration (Krouwel et al., 2016; Mueller et al., 2008). Spaaij (2012), for instance, notes that ethno-specific sports clubs are often shunned in Australia, despite its

potential to preserve the cultural heritage of the refugee members by aiming to create a collective identity within the new community as an adaption strategy.

By contrast, participation in multi-ethnic sport clubs may be equally difficult in terms of its ability to foster an integrative environment and a sense of belonging due to its tendency to incorporate a rhetoric of sameness consciously or subconsciously imposed by the dominant group (Spaaij, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006). In order to find a sense of belonging in such sport spaces, the individuals essentially have to assimilate rather than integrate themselves by renouncing their cultural identity for adopting the language, culture, values and behavior of the dominant group, ergo the accepted socio-cultural norms of their host community (Berry, 1992; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Thus, as Burrmann et al. (2018) accentuate, heterogeneous voluntary sport clubs may only be effective motors of integration of refugees and forced migrants, if they actually give access and undertake the concrete measures and policy changes required to provide an inclusionary, integrative, and supportive environment. To accomplish this, sport administrators and managers ought to review their methods of communication (e.g., language, media messaging, fees/costs, and entry stages) and recruitments that are usually catered toward the interests and comfort levels of native speakers and residents. However, as Robinson et al. (2019) point out, refugees and forced migrants often experience language barriers, may not have access to the internet and social media platforms, let alone afford registration fees and/or equipment costs, or may not have the athletic skills and sport knowledge to feel comfortable enough to participate in the offered sport activities. Consequently, while the physical environment and space matters, Robinson et al. (2019) urge to take a closer look at the "social(ized) environment [that] might reveal that having a space, alone, does not necessarily translate into one" (p. 11).

On a policy level, furthermore, Dowling (2019) found that voluntary clubs in Norway had no formal local policy in place that specifically addressed the integration for refugees through sport initiatives. Beyond this, Breuer et al. (2017) advise voluntary sport clubs to review and revise their current traditional recruiting and bonding strategies so that they can reach refugees and forced migrants as well. Burrmann et al. (2018) provide specific recommendations on how to adjust recruiting strategies, including active promotion campaigns at sites where refugees frequent (e.g., refugee camps, recaption centers), collaborations with refugee and humanitarian agencies (e.g., Red Cross) as well as other sport clubs, social workers, and municipal workers and policymakers.

Other factors such as institutional logics, encompassing different distinctive club types (Breuer & Wicker, 2011) and organizational capacity need to be also contemplated (Nowy et al., 2020), given the heterogenous nature of voluntary sport clubs. Suzuki (2017) thus recommends performing the analysis of the effectiveness of sports-based integration efforts for refugees and forced migrants at the meso-level, hence organizational level. Accordingly, Nowy et al. (2020) contend that the institutional logic of voluntary sports clubs or other sports-based social inclusion programs for refugees and forced migrants "have to normatively align with the values promulgated in the policy" (p. 26). Contrariwise, Michelini et al. (2018) and Seiberth et al. (2018) strongly rebuke this approach, given that institutional logics are based on long-standing traditions, well-established patterns, and membership structures that are often rather exclusive to new members and difficult to overhaul. This observation is shared by Waardenburg (2016) who not only attributes these patterns to inertia, but also identifies it as one of the most distinctive features of voluntary sport clubs, while further pointing to the fact that voluntary sports clubs hardly ever get involved in the development of sport policy.

And yet, integrative efforts toward refugees have been proven to be successful marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) tools that may help a sports club or organization to set itself apart from the rest of the competitive field, while advancing its reputation and acceptance in the local community, and likely in its competition for public funds (Seibert et al., 2018). Perhaps that could be a motivation to take a critical and close look into existing organizational structures with the intent to make them more inclusive and integrative toward refugees and forced migrants. Burrmann et al. (2018) proposed the following three conditions and factors for successfully setting up sport activities that are designed to promote the social inclusion of refugees and migrants: "a corresponding sensitivity and qualifications of VSC-members to constructively deal with diversity, respective specifications of goals and criteria for success to foster the openness of sport clubs, and the representation of migrants in VSC positions and posts to promote integration" (p. 20). Granted, as Burrmann et al. (2018) point out, many currently existing sports-based inclusion projects for refugees and forced migrants in Germany have been rushed and developed under intense time pressure to provide immediate help and first solutions at the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015.

Recent studies in other European countries such as the Netherlands (Waardenburg, 2016), Norway (Bergsgard, 2016), and Sweden (Stenling & Fahlen, 2016), however, strongly suggest the inherently competitive nature of voluntary sports clubs as a major hindrance to successfully providing social integration programs for refugees and forced migrants (Dowling, 2019). Rather, sports-related rivalries between homogeneous ethnic majority and ethnic minority sport teams, for example, foster conflict and disintegration while potentially producing a stronger bond and sense of belonging within the teams (Burrmann et al., 2017). Robinson et al. (2019) therefore suggest practitioners to cultivate a warm and inclusive environment that is focused on learning

rather than winning, in which skill development is intended to boost confidence and enhance feelings of competence and security. To accomplish this, programs designed to promote the integration of refugees and forced migrants need to prioritize personal improvement as opposed to social comparison (Robinson et al., 2019).

Additional layers of consideration are needed for successfully drawing and welcoming women refugees into sports-based inclusion programs. Findings from various studies indicate that community development approaches built on group interests, cultural norms, and strengths are the best practices to reach women refugees and grant access to the integrative services (Guerin et al., 2003; Hashimoto-Govindasamy & Rose, 2011; Spaaij, 2015). Illustrative examples are provided by Spaaij (2015) who highlighted some of the young Somali Australian women's efforts to challenge the gender boundary by creating space of their own outside of such mono-ethnic sport clubs where they are often subject to misogynist comments, gossip, and hostility. Supported by local community organizations, casual women-only football and basketball programs were created that led to the launch of the two-day annual Australian Somali Football Championships tournament in 2011 for young women from Somali and Islamic backgrounds.

Besides gender, other factors such as age, social class, country of origin, race, nationality, and duration in a new country may play a significant role in the effectiveness of a voluntary sports club or sports-based inclusion program for refugees and forced migrants. Spaaij et al. (2019) addressed the lack of recognizing the heterogeneity of the forced migrants' population in the extant literature. In a 2013 study, for instance, Spaaij discovered that second-generation Somali Australians, particularly young males, expressed stronger desire and commitment to invest time in sport participation as opposed to their parents and the first-generation group,

whose main concerns were surviving and establishing themselves in their respective new host communities. Logically, their major priorities were employment, family, housing, and other physiological needs.

With respect to other factors such as the potential to be exposed to racism, Ravaglia (2018) provided solutions on how to challenge and eradicate any form of racial discriminations. Creating large banners stating," Refugees Welcome" and fostering an inclusive club culture and symbols are some of the mentioned strategies that could help to improve the effectiveness of sports-based inclusion programs operated through voluntary sport clubs. Eventually, however, as Burrmann et al. (2018) conclude, it all boils down to the people factor. The extent to which the individuals involved in the operation of sports-based inclusion programs and/or voluntary sport clubs succeed in creating a positive and helpful experience to refugees and forced migrants is the determining factor in its success or failure. Agreeing with this assessment, Seibert et al. (2013) further detail the necessary qualifications for individuals that are involved in such sports-based integration programs, pointing out that "individuals who are particularly sensitive to the needs of refugees and qualified to deal with the topic of integration" are needed (p. 187). Echoing his views, Burrmann et al. (2018) applaud these characteristics but recommend taking it a step further by stating that appointing individuals with a refugee background themselves to create more relatedness on top of integration policies that promote inclusion within the voluntary sports clubs is necessary.

Based on some of the presented findings, the extant body of literature generally rejects the system of voluntary sport clubs (VSCs), as the best setting for sports-based integration programs and initiatives for refugees and forced migrants (Dowling, 2019; Jeanes et al., 2015; Spaaij, 2015; Waardenburg et al., 2018). Findings from Dowling's (2019) study on Norway's

VSCs even labels their sport for integration efforts "as an ideological project of assimilation, rather than a multiculturalist or two-way process of integration" (p. 12).

Hence, sports-based inclusion programs and initiatives organized by non-profit organizations that are ideally operated by refugees offering a variety of physical activities and sports within a local community might be more effective in creating social integration for forced migrants (Dowling, 2019).

Theoretical Perspectives adopted in Sport Forced Migration Research

This section will briefly present and discuss the most common theoretical perspectives and methodologies used in previous studies on refugees, sport, and physical exercise. The theoretical frameworks guiding voluntary human migration research encompass (social) and (migration) network theory, migration systems theory, world systems theory, transnationalism, cross-cultural adaptation theory, and neoclassical theory.

Social networks theory. Migration decisions are often strongly dependent on the depth of interpersonal ties between prospective and current migrants in the origin and destination countries. These often include kinship, extended family, friendship, or shared community origin (Massey et al., 1993). The deeper the migrant networks the more likely is the opportunity to move to another country due to lowered costs and risks of movement. Hence, as Massey et al. (1999) suggest, social networks are social capital, essentially serving as gatekeepers by either providing or hindering access to employment in foreign countries. Every successful migration expands the network, gradually developing a social structure and chain that creates a more affordable and secure pathway for a subsequent migration for friends, relatives, and other acquaintances. Accordingly, the dynamic social or migration networks theory is undergirded by the notion that international human migration can be both individually or collectively driven but

understands the act of migration as a systematic and "self-sustaining diffusion process" (Massey et al., 1993, p. 450) that becomes less economically driven, as suggested by the more traditional migration theories but rather representative of the sending community or society. Social network theory is therefore well-established in migration research, as it aims to understand how the first migrants of a region or country facilitate the arrival of subsequent migrants by passing on their acquired knowledge about the new community and aiding with finding accommodation and employment (Van Meeteren & Pereira, 2013). Although many previous migration studies have used this theory to dissect the role of social networks in the flow of labor migration, its effectiveness is questionable when it comes to explaining specific types of human movement, such as forced migration, particularly refugees and asylum seekers (Collyer, 2005). It further lacks to acknowledge the role of migration policies and that migrant networks are often gendered (Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Zell & Skop, 2011).

World systems theory. Along with dependency theory, and dual and segmented labor markets models, Wallerstein's (1974) theory understands the phenomenon of international migration as a direct outcome of the macro-structural forces that have been forged throughout human history, hence emphasizing the inherently economic and exploitative nature of international migration and its direct reflection of the economic power of global capitalism (Morawska, 2012; King, 2012). Articulated by Wallerstein as a sophisticated historical analysis of the development and expansion of the global capitalist system, this lens fundamentally lacks to acknowledge the agency of the migrants themselves, rendering them to "little more than passive pawns in the play of great powers and world processes presided over by the logic of capital accumulation" (Arango, 2004, p. 27). It basically understands immigration as a direct outcome of capitalist economic relations and globalization that is "driven by a desire for higher

profits and greater wealth, owners and managers of capitalist firms enter poor countries on the periphery of the world economy in search of land, raw materials, labor, and new consumer markets" (Massey et al., 1993, p. 445).

Transnationalism. By contrast, transnationalism theory focuses on the everyday lived realities and experiences of the migrants themselves and their agency (Butler, 2015, Carter, 2014). Giulianotti and Robertson (2012) define transnationalism as "processes through which individuals and groups are interwoven and interconnected across diverse geopolitical terrains" (p. 217). It provides a deeper understanding of policies related to social, economic and political processes through the migrants' lenses, offers valuable insights into the role of migration policies in nation-states as related to institutions of the receiving civil society, and lays bare hardships that affect migrants' lived experiences ("Global Society Theory," 2017). Transnationalism theory has been adopted to migration studies that particularly focused on individiuals' cross-border activities and the sense of belonging that develops upon the economic, political, and social exchange that occurs in the process (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). Rooted in post-structural and post-colonial thinking and considerations, transnationalism ultimately aims to shift back the focus in the migration research to the actual individuals and their agency involved in the process of migration (Schiller et al., 1995). For instance, migrants create cross-border networks that can substantially facilitate employments and mobility methods (e.g., recruitment and referral) of subsequent migrants and curb transnational power relations, such as race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity (McCormack & Walseth, 2013).

Cross-cultural adaptation theory. Although every resettlement journey is unique in its individual circumstances, there are shared adaptation features that are examined through this theoretical lens. The term refers to the complex and dynamic journey individuals embark on

when crossing borders to settle down in a new culture and unfamiliar environment that requires them to establish and foster a stable, healthy, and reciprocal relationship with the host environment (Kim, 2001). Central to a successful adaptation process is therefore interaction effectiveness and psychological adaptation that includes an individuals' willingness to be open, positive, and receptive in the often rather severely unreceptive host environment that often comes with a culture shock. However, a core tenet of the theory highlights the benefits of a successful adaptation in the host society, particularly a gradual identity transformation that in exchange instills more space for openness, empathy, and acceptance of differences in other people (Kim, 2001). As such, migration scholars have increasingly incorporated cross-cultural adaptation theory into their research to not only understand better the individual experiences of migrants, but also to identify factors that hinder or facilitate the successful integration of migrants and quality of relations between members from different cultural groups (Ward et al., 2001).

Neoclassical theory. Originally developed to explain labor migration in the process of economic development (e.g., Harris & Todaro, 1970), this theory is probably the oldest and best-known theory of international migration and remains the dominant paradigm in migration studies where people decide to invest in migration based on the expected rate of return in the destination country being greater than the costs incurred trough migrating (Chiswick, 2000). Additionally, in the economics of labor migration theory, it is argued that migration decisions are made by families, households or even communities rather than isolated individuals (Taylor, 1987). Migration theories have also revolved around development and networks (Castles, 2009).

Noticeably, most of these theories, with neoclassical theory remaining the dominant paradigm in migration studies, are underpinned by economic and structural considerations and motivations for the displacement. But with growing interdisciplinary interest in migration

research, theoretical lenses focused on individual and collective elements of the change process have proliferated, revealing the complex nature of migration and its large-scale socio-cultural and political impact on the participants and actors (Castles, 2009; Castañeda, 2017). Placing international migration into the concept of larger development processes and collective household-coping mechanisms, the new economics of labor migration theory, for instance, assumes that migration decisions are always made by collectives, such as families, households, or communities rather than by an isolated individual (Taylor, 1987), which explains why most of the dominant theories in voluntary migration research centers around networks, systems, and development (Bale & Maguire, 1994; Castles, 2009). Murrugarra et al. (2011), moreover, suggest that migration can serve as a shock response to natural disasters or economic instability. Conversely, some researchers have used social network theory that examines social capital to make the case for migration as a self-fulfilling act, while other scholars applied transnationalism theory to explore the impact of migration on identity formation. Migration systems theory is another popular lens in migration research, as it particularly useful in the analyzes of structures that influence migration paths (Castles et al., 2013; Glick Schiller, 2013).

While there is yet to be agreed upon a comprehensive refugee theory (Wood, 1994), some of the most prevailing theoretical approaches in forced migration research with a focus on sports-based intervention programs include social capital theory, critical social theory, belonging theory, acculturation theory, as well as social ecological framework (Robinson et al., 2019), post-colonial feminism, integration theory (Ager & Strang, 2008), community development, and systems theory (Luhmann, 2017). The vast variety of theoretical approaches in forced migration research and sport reflects the generally dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of the field of research and policy, with boundaries and terminologies remaining fluid and overlapping (Spaaij

et al., 2019). Furthermore, Spaaij et al. (2019) draw attention to the fact that both policymakers and researchers seem to solely understand sport as a means to an end, reflected in recurring describers, such as "sport for inclusion" or "sport as medicine." Most of the adopted theories and concepts that undergird the extant literature reflects this notion. Examination of extant literature and theories on refugees and sport, the following three theoretical lenses were deemed most suitable for this dissertation study: the concept of belonging (Mecheril 2003, Yuval-Davis, 2011), acculturation theory and accompanying conceptual framework (Berry 1992, 1997; Ha & Lyras, 2013, and gender relations theory (Connell, 2002). The following section will briefly define the theoretical perspectives and its core assumptions and concepts that were deemed most appropriate for the purpose of this research investigation.

Acculturation Theory. A theoretical concept used to understand an individual's change while living with a cultural group (Berry, 1992; 1997), the term acculturation initially referred to "the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultural backgrounds come into prolonged, continuous, first-hand contact with each other" (Redfield et al., 1936, p. 146). Since then, the concept has evolved and shifted from a widely recognized group-level to an individual level phenomenon that is often termed as "psychological acculturation" (Graves, 1967). This includes "changes in an individual whose cultural group is collectively experiencing acculturation" (Berry (1992, p. 70), emphasizing the view that most of changes occur in the non-dominant, migrating group happening throughout the resettlement process into new dominant (society of settlement) group. At the group level, there are six levels of changes (physical, biological, political, economic, cultural, and social) that occur when individuals move to another culture.

Individuals cope all differently with such drastic shifts in their life, hence numerous psychological changes in behavior occur at an individual level during this first-hand contact. These may encompass values, attitudes, beliefs, and motives. Berry (1992) refers to them *behavioural shifts*, as existing identities, lifestyle preferences, and attitudes may be altered and/or replaced with new ones. Such drastic transitions rarely occur smoothly, thus social, physical, and psychological problems are common at the individual level during the process of acculturation. Berry (1992) named this phenomenon *acculturative stress*. The concept of acculturative stress is based on the assumption that the adaption process has been difficult for an individual, reflected in health issues of the individual, identity confusion and problems in the daily interactions and activities with family, work, and school (Berry, 1992). As adjustments are not the only strategy of adaption, Berry's (1992) fourfold model consists of the following four acculturation strategies: 1) Assimilation, 2) Integration, 3) Separation, and 4) Marginalization. While assimilation refers to an acculturation strategy that requires individuals to relinquish their cultural identity to fit into the larger society of the dominant group and avoid conflict but increase harmony with the environment (Berry, 1992), integration is a strategy that persons living in multi-ethnic societies mostly desire this strategy. This second acculturation strategy allows some maintenance of the cultural integrity of the group, while seeking to become an integral part a larger societal framework through some adjustments. The positive outcome is a multicultural and heterogeneous society in which distinguishable ethnic groups can cooperate and co-existing peacefully.

The segregation or separation part of the model refers to the lack of interest in participating in sports-based integration programs or voluntary sports clubs could imply that individuals have chosen this third acculturation strategy. Berry (1992) characterizes this option

as a lack of substantial relations with the larger community, coupled with a strong desire to preserve the ethnic identity along with its traditions and rituals. What's important here, as Berry (1992) points out, is that this form may either be called segregation or separation, depending on who imposes these circumstances. If the dominant group aims to keep "people in their place" (p. 72), then it would be referred to as segregation, whereas if the non-dominant group makes the decision, then it would be to maintain their traditions and identity, and pursue the development of an independent existence, making it a separatist movement (Berry, 1992). Lastly, marginalization is least preferable acculturation strategy, and it is mainly attributed to feelings of alienation and loss of identity that are elements of the concept of acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987). Although difficult to define precisely, Berry (1992) uses this term to describe groups that lose cultural and psychological touch with both their original culture and the larger society they live in due to exclusion or withdrawal.

Berry's (1997) conceptual framework of acculturation (Mengistu & Manolova, 2019; Riedel et al., 2011) was particularly helpful for this dissertation study, as the participants' responses pertaining to their participation in sport and physical exercise reflected their individual's decision to choose one of the four options. At the same time, as Berry (1997) points out, its main purpose is to show the key variables that should be attended to when carrying out studies of psychological acculturation. Failing to recognize the cultural and psychological characteristics that individuals bring to the acculturation process or merely referring to the study participants by categories (e.g., immigrant, minorities, migrant) will result in an incomplete and surface-level study of acculturation. It is therefore imperative to examine the two societal contexts: that of origin and that of settlement. Beyond this, political, economic, and demographic

conditions faced by individuals in their countries of origin need to be fully comprehended as a basis for understanding the reasoning and motifs of the acculturating individuals (Berry, 1997).

Gender relations theory. Patriarchy and gendered systems of power are universal and deeply embedded in global capitalism and migration structures. Accordingly, women may escape one patriarchal system to then come across another one that may put different barriers in place but may provide new economic and educational opportunities. Yet, the absence of a gender analysis in mainstream migration research is visible, considering that most published research focuses on elucidating the economic well-being of migrants and its benefits to the economy of their respective host communities. What is missing here but deeply embedded in this feminist conceptualization of gender is the notion of power and social inequality. Hence, gender relations theory appears vital to the intent of this proposed dissertation study with its particular focus on the experience of forced immigrant women.

Gender relations theory particularly attempts to understand how gender relations shift throughout the process of settlement and migration. According to Connell (2002), there are four dimensions of gender relations: 1) power, 2) production, 3) emotional, and 4) symbolic relations. All these four dimensions interact and intersect with one another in social institutions "that shape how people's individual gender performance is constructed" (Nawyn, 2010, p. 751). Similar to intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), gender relations theory enables individual agents to challenge gendered structures without overlooking the encountered constraints and barriers to this agency. Drawing largely upon structuralism, this theory still includes some elements of culture and discourse, which informed the applied intersectional feminist lens of this study.

Belonging theory. In broad terms, Wood and White (2001) conceptualizes belonging to be some form of emotional attachment that makes individuals feel connected to other people,

locations, or lifestyles. Often, belonging is interchangeably used with the personal, intimate emotional expression or sense of "being at home" in a particular place, group, or community (Anthias, 2006; Antonsich, 2010). Halse (2018) understands "belonging" as a noun (belonginess) and a verb (to belong), depending on its context. It can either refer to "possess or own something" or "that one belongs to and is a member of a particular social group, solidarity, collectivity or organization" (p. 3). Similarly, the concept of belonging is fluid in a globally interconnected, yet increasingly divided world by racial, religious, ethnic, cultural, gender socially constructed differences. Correspondingly, social interactions, identities, and solidarities vary and may have different meanings and expressions for each individual and how they feel connected to specific social groups, communities, and places (Halse, 2018).

Ultimately, belonginess is a basic human need and therefore intrinsic and central to the constitution of an individual's everyday life experience. A sense of belonging generated through connectedness is therefore always relational, and an active social process of becoming as opposed to a state of being, which refers to the quality of the present experience and overall physical condition of a person (Antonsich, 2010). The interactions of individuals with other people, societal institutions in specific socio-cultural contexts are intersections between the self and the social, and what determines how individual "define and configure what it means to belong (and not belong)" (Wright, 2015, p. 393). Accordingly, belonging is intricately intertwined with experiences, identity, and emotional attachments of individuals, which are often the deciding components of a successfully perceived integration into a collective or community (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The concept of belonging thus steers researchers to raise critical questions concerning belonging and its political significance, garnering attention across multiple disciplines, among them, migration studies, gender studies, political science, and sociology (Youkhana, 2015).

Similarly, looking through the lens of the belonging theory could help to better understand the nexus between one's own sensibilities and politics. Put differently, belonging is where social boundaries can be shifted and crossed or preserved and created (Spaaij, 2015). With the latter the central component of the belonging process, the sense or experience of belonging is characterized as dynamic and situational, multi-faceted and complex, while constantly evolving and changing throughout time (Krzyanowski & Wodak, 2007). Such confines can be of social, historical, psychological nature, shaping profoundly the human experiences of individuals due to the relationships between genders, between race and ethnicities, and between religions, and sexual orientations (Anzaldúa, 2012) throughout centuries. The outcome is a binary society with oppressors on the left and the oppressed groups on the right, based on socially constructed differences. The latter group denied from the human basic need of belonging are constantly required to seek ways to break down invisible dichotomies and glass ceilings by developing new, hybrid spaces or cultures, as Anzaldúa (2012) called it the "una cultura mestiza." Thus, based on previous studies (Burrmann et al., 2017; Mecheril, 2003; Thangaraj, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2011), belonging is a beneficial concept to understand to successful integration despite Crowley's (1999) accurate indication of a lack of universal and specific definition. For example, Thangaraj (2010) explored the "cultural practices of belonging" in the informal site of pickup basketball in metropolitan Atlanta (p. ii) for this dissertation study. Burrmann et al. (2017), on the other hand, adopted the concept of belonging to examine the intricate relationship between sport and the feelings of belongings in the experience of young migrants' adjustment to the German socio-

cultural context experienced in voluntary sports clubs. Using the definition from Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013, p. 7) who characterizes belonging as an "emotionally charged, every dynamic social location – that is: a position in social structure, experienced through identification, embeddedness, connectedness and attachments," Burrmann et al. (2017) drew particular attention to the three pillars of the belonging theory (membership, efficacy, affiliation), as articulated by Mecheril (2003) to explore the socialization process of youth migrants in Germany facilitated through sports.

Especially amid the steadily increasing transnational migration and mobility, reflected in the largest influx of forced migrants and refugees in history, and the growing hostility and resentment they encounter worldwide upon arrival in their respective host communities, this concept of belonging is more important than ever. Accordingly, this theoretical perspective would be an excellent guide to this proposed dissertation study, as it is a viable instrument to dissect a person's demeanor in an ever-changing and evolving society. Upon this shared assumption, Mecheril (2013) offers three core pillars on which belonging builds upon, which are membership, efficacy, and affiliation.

Membership refers to one's participation or affiliation into a social context, such as a nation-state, an organization, or sport club, whether it involves formal or informal inclusion. Memberships typically grant access to a variety of resources, while providing a form of symbolic level or status (Burrmann et al., 2017). In the context of migration, formal memberships can be restricted to certain types of migrants, such as asylum seekers. By contrast, in sports clubs, formal memberships are accessible and optional, yet often more complex decisions are required when it comes to migrants due to potential individual and personal constraints and concerns that may vary depending on the socio-cultural context (Seiberth et al., 2013). At the sports clubs'

level, for instance, if migrants feel unwelcomed or obligated to change their cultural identity to fit into the local club culture, they may consider the option to join another club that is more inclusive. Efficacy, according to Mecheril (2003), the second pillar of the concept of belonging, is used to build on the significance of making efforts and the ability to efficiently act and participate within a certain social context, and if missing, then a sense of belonging will unlikely develop. In the realm of sport and physical exercise, individuals need a certain degree of athletic skills and knowledge for active and effective participation. In the context of affiliation, Mecheril (2003) specified that affective bonds formed in social contexts are paramount for the development of a sense of belonging. With respect to sports, long-term memberships in a sport club, for instance, can ultimately lead to biographical linkages that make individuals feel more familiar, embedded, and emotionally attached.

The concept of belonging guided this dissertation study, as its components are dynamic and constantly shifting, representing subjective reflections and considerations that are always subject to change (Riegel & Geisen, 2007). Not to mention the fact that individuals' sense of belonging is not only the outcome of their own affinities and affections, but a mirror into how they feel recognized and respected within the social context they live in. For refugees and forced migrants, particularly, their status of belonging is often compromised when "categorically viewed as 'others or strangers" (Burrmann et al., 2017, p. 191).

Research on Belonging Theory in the Context of Forced migrants and Sport and Physical Exercise. Spaaij's (2015) study on Somali Australians' participation in community sports clubs in Australia shows how belonging is articulated and negotiated at a plurality of scales (Antonsich, 2010; Wood & Waite, 2011). The results indicate that belonging is a "gendered process" (Spaaij, 2015, p. 309). While the study participants noticed a shift in clan and tribal

boundaries within the Somali Australian community, which correlated with their sporting encounters, allowing for new forms of belonging, other social boundaries such as gender seem to have been maintained if not reinforced. Despite the significant strides made toward gender equality in sports on all levels (Anderson, 2009), gender remains a key social boundary in widely perceived male-dominated sports–football and basketball–particularly prevalent in uncontrolled and informal sporting spaces. This is evident in community sport clubs or playgrounds, which are ideal spaces for men to preserve male supremacy underpinned by the structuring principle of gender, permeating everyday interactions in sporting spaces. Based on this, Spaaij (2015) argues that rule-bound sport provides particularly refugee men the perfect arena to connect with others and prove and reclaim their masculinity through physical performances. This is further reflected in the findings of Spaaij (2015) study which discovered that female respondents attributed their disinterest in organized competitive sport to persistent hegemonic notions of femininity within the Somali Australian community, although recognizing community sport clubs as a place where belonging can be produced on multiple levels. In addition, male club members expressed their disdain to women participating in football, calling it “unfeminine” (Spaaij, 2015, p. 310). Burrmann et al. (2017) further conducted a qualitative research study to dissect the complex and multilayered relationship between sports and the sense of belonging. Earlier studies from Walseth (2006) and Yuval-Davis (2006) have provided insights into the different forms and levels of belonging as well as politics that are produced when engaging with sports. These include boundary discourses and practices that create the “us” from “them” narrative yet manifest itself differently depending on the different contexts.

Methodological Techniques in Sport Forced Migration Scholarship

With the majority of the previous research studies qualitative in nature, case studies are the most common research design employing mostly ethnographic data collection procedures such as semi-structured and informal interviews and participant observations, focus groups, and document analysis (Burrmann et al., 2017; Dowling, 2019; Spaaij, 2015; Spaaij et al., 2019; Waardenburg et al., 2019). Other less traditional research methods, such as participatory action research (Robinson et al., 2019), autoethnography (e.g., Denzin, 2013), reflective journaling, photo elicitation and film analysis, are emergent, but played a minimal role in the extant literature. Such visual and performative approaches, however, could be very valuable in gathering meaningful and rich insights from study participants and inform policy developments (Waardenburg et al., 2019). Self-report questionnaires were typically used in some of the few quantitative research studies (Spaaij et al., 2019).

Critical Perspectives on Extant Sport Forced Migration Scholarship

Apart from the belonging theory (Spaaij, 2015), all these above-mentioned theories have in common that they "privilege cognitive perceptions over refugees' and forced migrants' emotional and bodily experiences of sport and physical activity" (Spaaij et al., 2019, p. 13). What is largely missing however in previous literature is the knowledge of sensory and embodied emotional experiences of forced migrants when participating in sports and/or physical exercise, which is vital to gain a better understanding of the meaning of sport and physical exercise in the everyday lives of refugees and forced migrants. The dissertation study filled this gap in the extant literature.

Not covered by the scope of this dissertation study but identified as another overlooked area of study in the extant literature on sport for integration of forced migrants and refugees, is

the role and meaning of sport activities offered to refugees in reception centers that are "spaces of liminality" and where "refugees can live and are being looked after by the government (Waardenburg et al., 2019, p. 939). Considering the unique context of a reception center that is "at the boundary of two dominant spaces, which is not fully part of either" (Dale & Burrell, 2008, p. 238) similar to borderlands and customs areas, with its temporality and its omnipresent uncertainty and boredom (Agier, 2016; Waardenburg et al., 2019), providing sport activities to refugees in this space could be even more meaningful and beneficial to their mental and physical well-being, as well as sense of belonging and community with other refugees.

And yet, conversely, much of the previous research on sport and forced migration has explored the role of voluntary sports clubs and specifically designed sports-based integration and social inclusion programs for forced migrants in host communities (Burrmann et al., 2017; Dowling, 2019; Nowy et al., 2020; Spaaij, 2015). Overall, the mental health and well-being of migrants and immigrants seems to be a large blind spot in the otherwise abundant migration scholarship. As Hendricks and Bartram (2019) note, the "study of migration generally lacks a clear vision regarding what kind of metric could be used to evaluate" (p. 280) the happiness of migrants as an outcome indicator to determine successful migration and integration efforts as well as consequences for the migrants itself and the sending and receiving societies. Zuccotti et al. (2017) echoed their assessment, pointing out that some of the yet largely unanswered questions regarding the well-being of migrants is to what extent and under what conditions are migrants indeed living a better life because of their migration. Six years prior, the authors of the World Migration Report (International Organization of Migration, 2013) had expressed similar concerns, leading them to urge for more research "into the factors that contribute to subjective well-being" (p. 38), hence shifting the focus on the lived experiences of migrants to ultimately

provide better support to them and policy makers. Most of the previous research surrounding forced migration and sport and physical exercise is centered around identifying barriers and using a deficit-based approach. While this may be grounded in the desire to create awareness and to develop strategies that can overcome some constraints, adopting deficit-based models are inherently controversial, as it may perpetuate a negative connotation of multiculturalism by implying that ethnic and cultural differences are potential barriers to participation (Donnelly & Nakamura, 2006). At the same time, it could also reveal Eurocentric and implicit assimilationist tendencies. Especially when it is combined with specific recommendations on how forced and voluntary and migrants could be incorporated into the mainstream, rendering them invisible and deprived of their cultural identity just to fit into the larger society (Berry, 1992). This is particularly problematic given that most of the previous literature published were conducted in European countries, most notably Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands. Australian scholars such as Spaaij et al. (2019) and O'Driscoll (2016) have been leading the efforts to address these ethical and methodological issues for decades, calling for the decolonization of research. O'Driscoll (2016), specifically, appealed to fellow scholars and researchers to be more considerate of how Western practices and mainstream perceptions may undergird theoretical lenses on research that examines non-Western population groups, like his case study on the Karen community in Melbourne, Australia (Spaaij et al., 2019).

Equally problematic is the overarching lack of critical considerations regarding the concept of integration throughout the current body of literature. Specifically, Bakewell (2008) criticizes the scholars' gullibility when it comes to terminologies and boundaries imposed by policy versus analytical (research) categories. By doing so, his concern is that academics become a propaganda instrument, as they merely verify and reinforce the assumptions given by actors of

migrations, most notably policymakers and governments. This discrepancy is clearly exhibited in Northcote & Casimiro's (2009) study of a sports program for Muslim refugee youth in Australia. The findings revealed the program participants' preference to focus on ad hoc sports events and self-organized sport participation, which stands in stark contrast to the government discourse and corresponding resettlement policy that aims to promote the participation in structured, organized sport (Spaaij et al., 2019).

It is therefore imperative for researchers to critically reflect on policy categories and other primary and secondary data sources to ensure trustworthiness and validity of the findings as well as remain independent from any external influences that may be driven by state and regulator discourse. However, sports-based inclusion program coordinators and practitioners cannot easily escape the social control and reproduction of regulatory discourses. For instance, Broerse's (2019) study of a sports-based settlement program for refugees and other migrants in Australia further laid bare the conflict between policy and research categories. As Broerse (2019) recounts, "while clients were talked about in respectful and empowering terms in meetings or informal discussions, policy documents […] and consent/evaluation forms reinforce migrant categorization" (p. 245). By looking at study participants as refugees and foreigners, they are instantly degraded to a policy issue and objectified, ultimately taking away their humanity all over again. Along with this, a deficit-based approach has been mostly observed in the previous literature, which is a major problem, as it lumps all refugees and forced migrants into one big homogenous group of individuals that are solely associated with negative attributes and stereotypes, such as trauma, health issues, legal uncertainty, and social isolation (Spaaij & Oxford, 2018). Such a deficit-based theoretical lens can become particularly difficult when it causes a visible alteration of the findings, as noticed in the study from Stura (2019), who referred

to the experiences of refugees as major traumas that he linked to the substantial cultural differences of their countries of origin that that could make it more difficult to acculturate in the host countries. Yet, Stura's (2019) study participants never explicitly mentioned any of their experiences in a negative manner.

Granted, unfortunately, forced migrants and refugees do encounter dramatic experiences on their resettlement journey. However, looking at them as victims is shortsighted, as it ignores the great amount of agency, strength, capability, and normalcy, which is something that is rarely ever associated with refugees and forced migrants (Bakewell, 2008). Hence, instead of reproducing stereotypes with a deficit-based approach, a strength-based theoretical lens was applied to this dissertation study to adequately recognize "forced migrants' strengths, capabilities, knowledge, and resources" (Spaaij et al., 2019, p. 13).

Methodological and theoretical concerns and limitations. In line with the issue of policy versus research categorization, terminologies and labels used to refer to actors and participants of forced migration are discriminatory, causing a feeling of being "othered" if not stigmatized. Legally disconcerting about the usage of terms, such as "forced migrants," "migrants," "asylum seekers," "refugees," and "refugees," "illegal immigrants," and "war and torture survivors" is that those terms are often conflated, which may render invisible certain important differences in terms of legal and labor rights as well as status of asylum seekers versus official refugee status that could however have a major influence on the study participants' participation pattern in sport and physical exercise (Amara et al., 2004; Stone, 2018).

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, the women experience in the large field of migration is still understudied, hence the lack of incorporating gender into theories of international migration. More specifically, although most migrants and refugees move to another

country to seek better living conditions that include improved economic opportunities, men's economic approach might not always be applicable to women (Kana'iaupuni, 2000). Consequently, popular economically driven theories of migration such as the neo-classical economic and Marxist political economic theories have been challenged by feminist scholars, rebuking the notion that migrants are "purely rational actors embedded in social contexts devoid of gendered power relations" (Nawyn, 2010, p. 752).

A persistent debate surrounding refugee and forced migration studies has been of the ethical concerns and the safeguarding of the study participants due to their already unique vulnerable status (e.g., Block et al., 2012; Mackenzie et al., 2007). And yet, one of the things that Spaaij et al. (2019) flag as a major concern and limitation in extant research is the lack of discussion on the ethical challenges and consideration in forced migration research. It is usually just limited to a brief statement, mentioning the approval of the institutional review board and how informed consent forms have been obtained. Exceptions include Ley et al. (2017) who explicitly stated that participants were given the option to withdraw from the research project at any given time without any repercussions. The latter is particularly important, as forced migrants, such as refugees and asylum seekers often live in a constant state of fear due to the vulnerable legal residence status that may be revoked at any given time due to the lack of rights, resulting in detention, deportation, and potential separation from family members and loved ones.

Mitigation strategies such as co-creation (Robinson et al., 2019), field roles (Mohammadi, 2019; Spaaij, 2013), and the concepts of reflexivity and researcher positionality (Abur, 2018; Dukic et al., 2017; Fader, 2018) were discussed in a few studies. Among them was Doidge (2018) who critically reflected on the relationship between politics and ethics of research

and activity in this discipline, observing that conducting research in this field is emotionally challenging comparable to labor and requires a huge amount of critical engagement as well as constant awareness toward the power dynamics between the researchers and the vulnerable subject groups.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter provides collective findings from previous studies that clearly indicate the need for more research on sports' often perceived potential to serve as social change agent, unifier, and especially significant for this dissertation study, as an integrative tool for refugees and forced migrants' social inclusion. More specifically, this chapter presented a historical overview of global migration, including its key players, dynamics, and drivers to then discuss in more detail the nexus between sport and migration, and how the latter has rapidly emerged as a widely accepted practical tool for the successful integration and social inclusion of refugees and forced migrants. Along with this, some of the previous literature pertaining to key factors that influence the effectiveness of already existing sports-based integration programs for refugees and asylum seekers were evaluated. On this basis, some of the gaps and limitations in the previous literature were identified that largely informed the research questions and theoretical perspectives that guided this dissertation study. For example, an abundance of research has been published on the dynamics, drivers, and motifs for international human migration. While these previous studies provide valuable insight into the socio-cultural phenomenon that has been an integral part of the human history, it provides only limited knowledge and understanding of forced migrants' experiences on their adjustment to their respective host communities. Especially women's and girls' perspectives are scant, despite sporting spaces with its double-edged sword of being a change agent and "male preserve" (Matthews & Channon, 2019, p. 2) being

increasingly leveraged as a pathway to a successful social inclusion and integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Hence, this dissertation study aimed to fill this void. The chapter concluded with a brief overview of the prevalent theoretical frameworks in the previous migration research to then transition into the selected theoretical perspectives for this study, namely the concept of belonging, acculturation theory, and gender relations theory.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

Before the COVID-19 global pandemic ravaged the world and essentially brought immigration to an abrupt halt, international human migration has been on an accelerated path, growing on a faster rate than the world's population – totaling 272 million worldwide (UN.org, 2019). And yet, while international immigrants only make up 3.5 percent of the entire global population, the timeless phenomenon has increasingly turned into one of the most divisive and debated policy issues around the world. Politicians, lawmakers, activists, social workers, and academic scholars alike have chimed in with the discourse.

Often missing from these ongoing conversations, however, is the female perspective, and the focus on the women's experience that is significantly different from those of men and boys due to additional individual and structural barriers as well as vulnerabilities (Beste, 2015; The Forced Migration Research Network, 2017). Albeit making up at least 50% of the total number of forced migrants, who fulfil vital roles in their families and communities, the plight of women and girls are often still unrecognized, their voices silenced, and their social capital and capacities underutilized. On top of the shared structural and individual challenges all forced migrants face (e.g., language barriers), women refugees encounter gendered roadblocks hindering access to employment, infrastructure, and resources, such as social networks to facilitate childcare (Beste, 2015; Khan & Laurie, 2017; Tuliao et al., 2017).

Despite often equipped with the highest educational degrees and qualifications, they are not allowed to practice their professions as teachers, doctors, and nurses in their respective host countries. Instead, they are often obligated to take on the role of caregivers and head of the household, accepting gendered, low-paying, low-skilled jobs with little to no professional advancement, ultimately leading to a long-term skill depletion (Beste, 2015; Sienkiewicz et al. 2013; Yakushko, 2010). Conversely, the employment rate for male refugees was at 62% in 2011 compared to 42% for their female counterparts (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). For all these reasons, it is imperative to take a closer look at the unique resettlement experiences of forced migrant women to ultimately identify opportunities and develop strategies that help facilitate their social and economic inclusion into their respective host communities. Granting access to training and talent development, employment advice, and language courses may be one way (Beste, 2015; Yakushko et al., 2008). Another pathway might be sport participation, which allows individuals to fully participate in the community and society they live in, which is according to Tuliao et al. (2017) "part of claiming a rightful place in the host countries" (p. 42).

After restating the purpose and research questions of this study, the following chapter will first introduce the theoretical frameworks that guided this qualitative research investigation, then provide more detailed insight into each component of the selected multi-case study research design, including the data collection methods and recruitment procedures as well as the data analysis techniques to ensure the credibility, transferability and trustworthiness of the results.

Purpose statement and research questions. The primary purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the meaning and role of sport and physical exercise for forced migrant women in the United States, especially refugees and asylum seekers.

Ultimately, by identifying sports' meanings, the objective of this study was to identify barriers and constraints that impact forced migrant women's sport and exercise participation to help specify reasons and antecedents that deter or influence psychosocial development and welfare of forced migrant women to ultimately equip sport practitioners and program coordinators with practical recommendations to tailor more effectively existing or prospective sport-based initiatives and programs to the successful resettlement of forced migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers.

***Research Questions*.** The following research questions guided this study:

(1) What meanings do forced migrant women draw from participating in sports-based integration programs located in the United States?

(2) What benefits do forced migrant women draw from participating in sports-based integration programs located in the United States?

(3) What role does sport play in the lives of forced migrant women in their host country (United States) and in their countries of origin), especially in context of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences from engagement in sports activities?

(4) What challenges do forced migrant women face from participation in sports-based integration programs in the United States?

Theoretical Perspectives

Concept of Belonging

Widely accepted as one of the most fundamental human emotional needs, the inherent desire to belong to a certain social group, whether it is a family, circle of friends, a religion, or community and country, can be the determining yet subjective factor in how human beings experience and understand their realities and surrounding environment.

Accordingly, questions of belonging with respect to social inclusion and integration efforts of governments are central in debates about globalization and international human migration, occurring on local, regional, national, and global levels (Carolissen, 2012). Characterized as multilayered and multiscale (Antonsich, 2010), Yuval-Davis (2011) introduced a theoretical framework that distinguishes belonging between two different types: psychological and political, with the latter incorporating social and economic belonging. Considering that subjective experiences of belonging are profoundly shaped by political belonging, this appears to be a false dichotomy. Yet, in conjunction with Mecheril's (2003) approach to belonging theory and its three core tenets of membership, efficacy, and affiliation, Yuval-Davis (2011) proposed analytical framework with its three analytical, interrelated facets will serve as the guiding theoretical framework for this study. These are social locations, such as age groups, race and ethnicity, gender, and class that group people into socio-economic demographics and classifications, ultimately creating division and a sense of belonging at the same time. As Carolissen (2012) points out, such social locations are dynamic, evolving, and intersectional in nature. The second and third facets comprise constructions of individual and collective identities, emotional attachments to various collectives, and the values and symbols that people use to consciously or subconsciously assess their own and others' belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Still considered a novel and underdeveloped theory in migration research, the concept of belonging or the need to belong originated from the field of social psychology, and was first articulated by Baumeister & Leary (1995), who highlighted the strong effects of belongingness generated through social attachments to and interactions with other people within the context of long-lasting relationships on emotional and cognitive processes, ultimately serving as a powerful, fundamental motivation for human behavior.

Subsequently, Mecheril (2003) defined "belonging as a social practice that establishes social order by classifying people into groups" (p. 119) or so-called social locations (Yuval-Davis, 2011), as opposed to an individual feeling. Theoretically presumed to be equal and inclusive groups, their existence is conditioned to the acceptance by others. In fact, the lack thereof may lead to the undesirable concept of "precarious belonging" (Mecheril, 2003, p. 28). By contrast, the desirable sense of belonging is according to Mecheril (2003) built on the three core pillars: membership, social bonds (affiliation), and recognition (efficacy). This is well-illustrated in how people often explain their sense of belonging to a social context by describing how "they recognize themselves and are recognized by others as symbolic members" of this context (Mecheril, 2003, p. 28). As such, belongingness is regarded as key ingredient to develop group identity (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Applied to the particular case of immigrants and migrants, their levels of belongingness to the respective host country or community are a strong indicator whether they feel welcomed, accepted, and "at home" (Schimmele & Wu, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006). For migrants and immigrants, especially, the notion of "home" is according to Antonsich (2010) a "symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security and emotional attachment" (p. 650) that gets assigned a stronger significance due to the unique challenges of having to adapt to different customs and social norms that might leave one feel out of place and uncertain regarding his or her identity (Lee et al., 2010). Echoing this, Ward (2013) expands on this notion and suggests that a person's sense of belonging might be a valuable measuring tool in studies involving diverse immigrant groups, as it transcends ethnicity and culture and its associated attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Through the lens of belonging theory, this study was able to better interpret how the participants' experiences with sports in their lives may have helped them to establish a sense of belonging through the membership to a particular sports-based inclusion program, in which they have developed social interactions and bonds with residents that often leads to a sense of positive recognition and value or efficacy.

Acculturation Theory / Conceptual Framework

With the sense of belonging identified as multifaceted in the migrant experience, and thus a mediator between acculturation orientations and adjustment (Schachner et al., 2019), acculturation theory and the associated conceptual framework (Berry 1992; 1997) further informed the concept of belonging as guiding theoretical framework to adequately address the ongoing cultural and psychological changes that migrating to another country or community yields. This process is called acculturation, which is the result of prolonged interaction between distinctive cultures, causing significant changes in values, belief systems, attitudinal and behavioral shifts in the migrating individuals that can lead to four possible acculturation responses that contain different implications for the well-being of the newcomers (Berry, 1997, 2003; 2005; Sonn, 2002). As detailed in the previous chapter, these are integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Perhaps due to its well-balanced approach to actively engage with the host community while preserving strong ties to the original cultural heritage and identity, integration has been proven to be the most prevalent form among immigrants settling in Western countries, further corroborated in studies that linked higher levels of well-being, self-esteem, life satisfaction levels and social competence to integration (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013).

Using the lens of acculturation theory and particularly the associated conceptual framework from Berry (1997) greatly benefitted the study's value and ability to reach a deeper understanding of the examined phenomenon, as its guidance ensured the proper recognition of the cultural and psychological characteristics the individuals bring to the acculturation process. Figure 3 below illustrates Berry's framework for immigrant's acculturation that showcases the links between cultural context, individual behavioral development, and the long-term psychological consequences of the process of acculturation, while considering the influences of social and personal variables that reside in the society of origin, and in the society of resettlement.

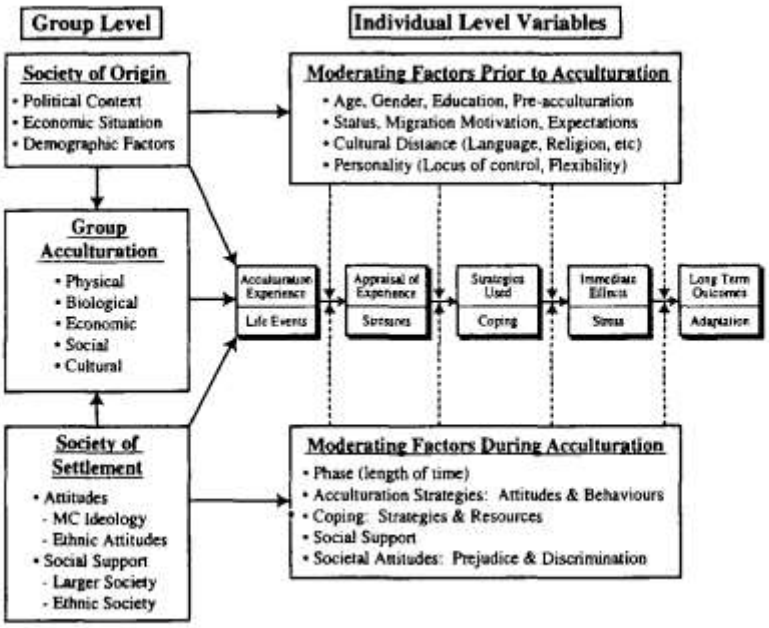


Figure 3: Berry's framework for immigrant's acculturation

To accomplish this, interview and survey questions sought to examine sports' role and meaning for the participants in its two societal contexts: that of origin and that of settlement. Along with this, the researcher was committed to refer to the study participants by pseudonyms rather than by merely referring to them by categories, such as immigrant, minority, or migrant

(Berry, 1997). For the outcome of this study, acculturation theory and its framework were exceptionally invaluable, as the participants' responses pertaining their sport and physical exercise participation and satisfaction patterns equally provided tremendous insights into their acculturation responses. Additionally, the focus of this study laid on the diverse women's experience, an intersectional feminist lens was adopted, informed by Gender Relations Theory (Connell, 2002).

Intersectional Feminist Lens informed by Gender Relations Theory

Contrary to popular belief, migration is a gender topic. Stunningly, despite the constantly increasing number of women and girls among the total number of forced migrants (approximately three-quarters of individuals migrating to the United States each year are women and their children), migration researchers have barely touched gender-specific aspects of the migration context since the 1960s. The lack of feminist perspectives in previous research on international migration may be partial explained by the overarching focus of researchers to understand the dynamics, patterns, and drivers for international migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). By doing so, they often failed to ask specific questions that sought to learn about the individuals who embark on migration journey and its potentially gender-specific varying conditions and experiences. For example, women and girls are more likely to become victims of human trafficking than their male counterparts. Hence, posing specific questions that adequately address gender-sensitive inquires in a seemingly gender-neutral process of international migration and resettlement may not only result in differential outcomes for male and female participants of this particular study and their meaning-making of sport, but also provide a meaningful and empowering platform for the study participants. For all these reasons, an intersectional feminist lens informed by gender relations theory (Connell, 2002) was adopted to

support this study as an additional theoretical framework, as their core assumptions expose the power dynamics of interlocked social constructions and binary systems, such as race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). As such, Connell's theory of gender relations operates under the premise that four dimensions of the social institutions of power, production, emotional, and symbolic relations interact with one another to shape and construct people's individual gender performance (Nawyn, 2010). Applied to the specific context of forced migration, this theoretical perspective has been often drawn upon to understand how gender relations shift throughout the resettlement process. Largely informed by structuralism, the value of gender relations theory lies in its ability to recognize both the power of individual agents to transform gender structures, without undermining any of the encountered barriers and restraints in the uphill battle for equality (Nawyn, 2010). Accordingly, gender relations theory regards gender as a social construction that can be dynamic and fluid, despite its reliant on social institutions and structures that create social expectations and gendered performances and practices (Nawyn, 2010). Recognizing gender power relations as fluid that can change amid different macro-structures and external factors (i.e., global labor markets or different political regimes and socio-cultural contexts) was paramount for the accurate interpretation of the experiences and perspectives of the study participants with sport and physical exercise in their respective host communities. Through Crenshaw's intersectional feminist lens, furthermore, the researcher remained vigilant of the intersecting social and political identities (e.g., gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, class, ability, physical appearance, height) and its revealed impact on the participants' unique perspectives on and experiences with sport and physical exercise in their adjustment to their respective host communities and cultures within the United States. This decision is further influenced by the somber analysis of Dworkin and Messner (2009) who

highlighted the lack of research on the position of men and women toward sport and physical exercise as active participants, consumers of the associated products and symbols "informed by feminist theories of the intersections of race, class, and gender" (p. 128).

Corroborating Berge & Ingerman (2017) who have demonstrated the added value of combining multiple theoretical lenses in qualitative research, belonging and acculturation theories supplemented with an intersectional feminist lens informed by gender relations theory provided a strong theoretical foundation for this study. It significantly influenced the way data were collected, questions were asked, and findings were presented and interpreted, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the examined phenomenon by molding or changing the initial interpretation informed by the primary lens (Puar, 2012).

Rationale for Using Qualitative Research Methodology

"How do you measure happiness and human being's emotions?" (St. Pierre, 2018, personal communication). Pose this question to a psychologist or other scholar in natural sciences, and they are likely quick to list several quantitative methods, such as multiple-item scales asking people about their level of happiness (Holder, 2019). These measuring approaches, however, lack the ability to uncover the deeper reasons for the well-being or contentment of an individual, which elusive nature is due to the perceptions of individuals forged by their unique lived experiences in any given moment and situation (Stake, 2010). Conversely, the latter is the ultimate strength and value of qualitative research that seeks to decipher the "how" and "why" a social or cultural phenomenon exists to build more understanding of the "messy and unpredictable" (St. Pierre, 2018, personal communication) world and its inhabitants. Therefore, human beings cannot be treated like objects and numbers – which is one of the distinctive characteristics of quantitative research. Based on the paradigm of positivism (Kuhn, 1962),

quantitative research studies mostly investigate the "what" by objectively and empirically obtaining evidence for a hypothesis or causal model (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Because the primary purpose of this dissertation study was to explore the meaning and role of sports for forced migrant women, a qualitative research approach was therefore deemed to be most appropriate. Spradley (1979) eloquently said:

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 34).

From "memory data" (St. Pierre, 2018, personal communication) to meanings, observations, memos to the self, interviews, photographs, recordings and other artifacts (Berg & Lune, 2012; Creswell, 1998) – qualitative research is a powerful tool to make sense of society and its sociocultural and historical trends, dynamics, and patterns.

Upon the belief that meaning is a social construction that varies depending on each individual's lived experiences, cultural and societal place in the world (Merriam & Grenier, 2019), qualitative researchers recognize its flux, dynamic and diverse nature that requires multiple perspectives and approaches as opposed to the positivist view of quantitative research that traditionally treats the world as a static, measurable, one-size-fits all phenomenon.

It was not until the late 18th and beginning of 19th century, however, when a so-called paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) was initiated that disrupted the understanding of science and put a halt to the "pursuit of knowledge" as it was known by then. Deeply influenced by the works and new discourses that emerged as an outcome of the Enlightenment – an intellectual and philosophical movement in Europe that undermined the existing aristocratic and religious structures – a new understanding about human experience developed along with an emphasis on

science, paving the way for the beginnings and growth of the academic fields of sociology, philosophy, and anthropology. Spearheaded by major leaders of the Enlightenment Age such as the philosophers Immanuel Kant, Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who shared the belief that human beings cannot be studied detached from their lived experiences that are largely informed by their cultural and social settings. By recognizing human life as a reflection of an individual's activities and reflections as well as the complexity of interpersonal relationships, they set in motion the birth of sociology as an academic discipline in the 19th century and qualitative inquiry (Eisner, 1998; Kockelmans, 1967; Solomon & Higgins, 1997).

Interestingly, the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is widely accepted as the "father of sociology" after he first used the term in 1838 to refer to the scientific study of society and its patterns of social relationships, social interaction, and culture as well as society as its whole. However, at the same time, it was also Comte who merged rationalism and empiricism to develop a new opposite paradigm called positivism, following his believe that all societies develop and progress through religious, metaphysical, and scientific stages (Walia, 2015).

Despite early attempts to reject positivism by some qualitative researchers in the early 1900s, it took more than 160 years before qualitative research gained recognition as a legitimate inquiry process in the academy, partial sparked by the civil rights and women's liberation movements in the 1960 and 1970s, and the emergence of several journals with a qualitative focus. With the increasingly social justice awareness and attention on issues surrounding identity, such as race, class, gender, and discourse communities in the mid-1980s, the need and demand for qualitative methods among scholars and policymakers soared, and writing became more reflexive.

Today, qualitative approaches are integral and well-established across many academic disciplines, focusing particularly on the human aspects of social sciences and applied fields of practice, such as helping professions and clinical psychology. Beyond this, qualitative research is now a preferred method for less academic contexts as well, including market research, business, and organizational science and management (Merriam, 2002).

Because of its broad, in-depth nature, there have been plenty of attempts from different angles and academic perspectives to define this systematic scientific inquiry process from leading qualitative researchers. In such a crowded field of scholars, the combined definitions of Merriam (2009) and Creswell (1998) stand out, encapsulating it as follows: “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). By adding a methodological focus, Creswell (1998) expanded the definition to "qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic pictures, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducted the study in natural setting” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

In essence, qualitative research is an umbrella term for a wide variety of theoretical methods and approaches, essentially, a “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalist approach to its subject matter” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Equipped with a myriad of data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, observations, and document analysis along with unique insights and perspectives from participant-observers and study participants, qualitative researchers aim to seek in-depth knowledge of social, political, cultural, and historical phenomena within its context-specific and natural setting. All these

methods share a common feature, which is emphasized in Strauss & Corbin's (1990) broad definition of qualitative research. Specifically, the proverbial "founding fathers" of grounded theory, refer to as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). With asking the "why" rather than trying to count numbers and occurrences while located in the world of the research subjects, it allows scholars to gain valuable insights into the lived experiences and motivations of human beings, transforming them into "meaning-making agents in their everyday lives" (nursing.utah.edu, 2019, para. 1). Especially the ability to constantly adapt and evolve as well as its focus on the participant's perspectives and authentic voices is what makes qualitative research methodologies so valuable to the purpose of my proposed dissertation research. Not to mention the fact that understanding perspectives and unique lived experiences are too dynamic, complex, elusive, and subjective to be investigated with quantitative research instruments or descriptive designs.

Suitably, qualitative research methods will be adopted to examine the socio-cultural phenomenon of interest, notably factors and experiences that affect forced immigrant women's satisfaction levels and sport participation patterns, shaping their perspectives on the role and meaning of sports and physical exercise in their resettlement process.

Recognizing the complex and potentially emotionally laden nature of this study, a combination of qualitative methodologies informed the research questions and development of the research design that will be discussed in-depth subsequently. These include a multiple case design (Burrmann et al., 2017; Stake, 2005; Yin, 1994) to not only acknowledge the diversity of the refugee and forced migrant population, but also how the varying living conditions may be reflected in their meaning-making of sports' role in their lives. Supplemented by an interpretive

analytical lens, the lived experiences of forced migrant women, especially refugees were examined with the aim to offer insights into how each of them makes sense of the phenomenon of interest, given their unique resettlement journey and socio-cultural contexts and backgrounds that may either enable or restrict individual behaviors and decisions, hence profoundly influence perspectives and attitudes (Burrmann et al., 2017).

Research Design

Selecting the appropriate research method is one of the most critical steps in the research process, as it needs to consider the suitable theoretical perspective that informs the research questions, and the maturity of the phenomenon (Merriam & Kim, 2012). Even more so, a research design is often underpinned by implicit epistemological assumptions and beliefs regarding knowledge and validity claims (Creswell, 2007). The concept of reflexivity (Malterud, 2001) that requires the researcher to continuously reflect on his or her thoughts, beliefs, and actions is therefore particularly significant in the decision-making of the research plan, as it could significantly impact the outcome of the research findings. Upon these considerations, the above-mentioned research questions seeking to understand the meaning and understanding of sport's role as an integrative tool from the perspective of the participants were informed by a combination of the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks, and a multiple case study design was deemed as most appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Multiple Case Study

First introduced by Fidel (1984), case study research designs are in-depth analytical tools that are now considered as one of the five common methodological traditions within the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 1998). Rooted and largely used in the social sciences, especially in sociology, the concept of case study research is a familiar practice in law and

business and has contributed to a myriad of literature that is referred to as classics in each of their disciplines across the academic world (Flyvbjerg, 2011). It has been proven to be a valuable research tool in practice-oriented fields, such as education, management, public administration, social work (Starman, 2013).

Case Study research defined. Despite its longstanding use and popularity, however, the nature and classification of case studies are still a central matter of debate among qualitative researchers and theorists (e.g., Baxter & Jack, 2008; George & Bennet, 2005; Simons, 2009). As such, Gerring (2004) notes that case studies have been misunderstood as a type and method of qualitative research. Not surprisingly, therefore, there a myriad of researchers (Creswell, 2013; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Simons, 2009; Sturman, 1997) that attempted to offer a definition of a case study. Creswell (2013) ultimately combined all prior attempts into one all-encompassing definition, referring to a case study as "a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as a product of the inquiry…in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (i.e., case; a context, a setting) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes" (p. 97).

Regardless of singular or multiple case studies, Thomas (2011) further classifies the various types of case studies by time dimensions, notably dividing in "retrospective case studies" that refer to data collection from past phenomena with the aim to understand its historical context and integrity, "snapshot studies" that examine a current phenomenon, event, or a particular period of time, and "diachronic studies" that are typical comparable to longitudinal studies (p. 517). By contrast, Stake (1995) distinguishes three forms of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental,

and collective. While the intrinsic case study refers to a unique situation/subject at the center of attention that may have limited generalizability and transferability, the term instrumental rather focuses on a particular situation or phenomenon, and the describer collective indicates that there are multiple cases under scrutiny (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

***Benefits of a multiple case study approach*.** Sport is generally recognized as a rich research site for socio-cultural practices and relations that may both sustain and perpetuate stereotypical views and social stratifications that preserve or challenge the status quo (Carrington, 2010). Not existing in a vacuum, sporting cultures provide valuable insights into social phenomena within the sport industry and the larger society (Thangaraj, 2015). Accordingly, individuals engaging in sport may be regarded as a "cultural-sharing group" member of a "bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 97). In the case of this study, multiple-bounded systems are more applicable to acknowledge the diversity of the forced migrant women population, and their unique experiences and perspectives based on their varying cultural backgrounds. The multiple-case study design was therefore beneficial, as it compares the various cases, relationships, and individuals for new insights on existing theories and findings, essentially debunking and diminishing the impact of preconceived notions (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, as Yin (1994) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) contend, multiple-case study approaches generally generate more data richness, depth, and variability of inquiry, while expanding opportunities for generalizations and potential theory development. To do so effectively, however, Stake (2006) recommends analyzing four to 10 specific cases as opposed to two to three cases to gather sufficient synergies and interactions to draw qualitative conclusions.

The value and strength of this in-depth, multi-faceted case study research tool is therefore to explore complex issues in their real-life settings. It basically uses an ethnographic lens of

trying to understand a specific culture, borrows its typical data collection methods such as participant-observation and interviews, and then applies it to a narrow case. The outcome is a powerful in-depth analysis and illustration of a social and cultural phenomenon that may be indicative of bigger picture implications. As such, using a collective multiple-case study proved effective to understand explanatory questions of "how," "what," and "why" to essentially develop and implement strategies that may be first tested in the confined space of the narrow case before it may be introduced to other larger scale scenarios such as the other social institutions (Yin, 2003).

For the specific case of forced migrant women' experiences and perspectives of sports' role in their resettlement process, employing a multiple-case study approach offered additional insights into the potential internal and external barriers to participation that were helpful in tailoring as closely as possible potential solutions and strategies to overcome such constraints. At the same time, the more insights gathered, the better can be refuted or confirmed generalizations and assumptions surrounding women's participation in sport and beyond – to hopefully move the needle forward.

Limitations and challenges of a case study approach. Although the value of the case study approach is well recognized and has a long tradition across all academic fields but most notably in psychology, medicine, clinical practice and research, law and policy, and political science (Creswell, 2007; Crowe et al. 2011), there is always a flipside to the coin, and with all research designs, the case study approach is not flawless but has its weaknesses and limitations. For instance, one of the major challenges of this research design clearly lies in determining the specific type of the case study, as initially a single-instrumental case study was considered for this study, building on the notion from Creswell (2007) that "the study of more than one dilutes

the overall analysis; the more cases an individual studies, the less the depth in any single case" (p. 76). On the other hand, examining and presenting multiple selected cases may provide vital details about forced migrant women' meaning-making of the role of sport in their resettlement to the respective host communities that may be overlooked in a single-case study approach. What's more important, by presenting more than one case, particular attention can be drawn to aspects that reflect the multifaceted relationship between sport and the sense of belonging, such as membership, efficacy, and affiliation (Mecheril, 2003). The latter was examined through the theoretical lenses of belonging and acculturation, the underpinnings of this study, as discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

It is thus imperative to identify cases that vary from each other in meaningful ways that shed light on the significant differences of individual experiences and perspectives on sport and society due to the varying upbringings, backgrounds and its associated daily routines and socio-cultural and religious norms. Hence, as Burrmann et al. (2017) point out, social contexts in which individuals are embedded are factors that profoundly shape individuals' behaviors and decisions, acting often as hindrance rather than facilitator.

Limitations of the multiple-case study design further include its time-consuming and costly nature (Yin, 2003) and need for caution when selecting the cases to ensure the richness of data and ability to predict similar or contrasting results across cases consistent with a theory or deviating from a theory (Yin, 2003). Other common points of criticism on case studies are way too familiar to qualitative researchers, especially the persistent complaint about the lack of scientific rigor. In a similar vein, case study findings are often questioned and considered invalid and worthless due to its narrow nature, making it supposedly less generalizable and transferable to other settings (Crowe et al., 2011). Nonetheless, there are multiple ways to effectively address

these concerns. Among them is the use of purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) or theoretical sampling, respondent validation or member-checking (Crowe et al., 2011) as well as data triangulation, and highly detailed transparency of the research process in the final representation of the findings (Stake, 1995).

Based on this assessment, a multiple-case study served as methodological approach to the data collection. Following this method of inquiry, forced migrant women were questioned in qualitative surveys and follow-up semi-structured virtual interviews and focus group sessions regarding their experiences with and perspectives on sports' role and meaning in their quest to become an inclusive member of their respective new host communities in the United States.

Research Setting

Using an interpretive qualitative research approach, data collection was completed in several phases amid the ongoing global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In the first phase, a qualitative research survey (Appendix A) was virtually disseminated to members of collaborative non-profit sport organizations and several other sites scattered around the United States, including the option to schedule a follow-up in-depth semi-structured virtual interview or attend a focus group session.

Upon completion of this survey within approximately two months, the second phase involved 30-90 minutes of in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, and two 90 minute-focus group sessions of eight participants, respectively, who had either signaled interest in sharing their experiences and perspectives on a deeper level in their survey responses or separately. As detailed above, the process involved email correspondence with the interested program members or individuals, containing specific information about the study purpose and objective, and formal invitation to participate in this study and the preferred method of the

interview setting, along with the enclosed Informed Consent form (Appendix B and C). The selected data collection methods were deemed as most appropriate and beneficial to the nature of the study, considering its ability to gather authentic (Bernhard, 1994), rich and detailed data from members of the observed population and culture (Tiainen and Koivunen, 2006), and to ensure the safety and privacy of all participants due to the ongoing public health crisis.

Research Participants

The target population for the study was forced migrant women, who were at least 18 years old and above, and have resided in the United States for more than a year. Informed by the interpretive multiple case study research design, 20 participants were recruited for in-depth semi-structured interviews and/or focus group sessions through a qualitative research survey and a variety of other communication channels. These included cold emails and calls to various refugee agencies and non-profit sport organizations catered toward migrants, as well as referrals from local high school athletic directors, high school girls' soccer head coach, and other educators. All interviews were held virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic.

Sampling and recruitment procedures

Purposeful sampling was employed to capture the diversity within the target population (Barbour, 2001). Widely accepted as one of the most common sampling methods in qualitative research (Palys, 2008), this technique was first introduced by Patton as "purposive sampling" (Patton, 1980) and later changed to purposeful sampling to reflect its aim "as a specifically qualitative approach to case selection" (Patton, 2002, p. 265). As its power and logic lies in its ability to identify and select "information-rich cases to study cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (Patton, 2002, p. 265), particularly useful when resources and circumstances (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic and vulnerable

target population) may be limited, this technique aligned perfectly with the goal of this study to achieve the depth of understanding by deconstructing existing dynamics, processes, and phenomena in certain populations and groups (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Eligible participants were female refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented, and documented immigrants, who are at least 18 years old and above, who currently reside in the United States. For the sake of clarity, all participants had to be conversational in the following languages: English, French, or German. Further criteria for selection included a personal experience with sport and physical exercise, and a stable and convenient access to web-based technology and video conferencing tools (e.g., Zoom).

After the approval of the dissertation committee and the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), study participants were primarily recruited through the dissemination of a qualitative research survey to the various non-profit organizations and refugee agencies scattered across the United States, as well as local high school girls' soccer coaches in the surrounding metropolitan area. The survey included the option to schedule a virtually hold in-depth semi-structured interview and/or attend a focus group session of approximately ten participants. Once the participants signaled interest by checking the appropriate box in the survey and providing their contact information, the researchers reached out with an email containing specific details of the study purpose, the level of their involvement, and the enclosed Informed Consent form.

Data Collection Procedures

In-depth semi-structured interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews was the primary source of data and proved to be the best method to give participants the platform and voice to express their experiences and perspectives in a comfortable and conversational manner, while allowing for a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon. According to Esterberg (2002), for instance, the value of semi-structured in-depth interviews lies in its less rigidity than structured interviews, allowing for a topic to be explored "more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words" (p. 87). All interviews were held virtual to ensure the safety and health of both participants and researcher.

In compliance with case study guidelines and requirements for the length of interviews, all interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes, consisting of 10 open-ended questions that focused on the experiences with sport and physical exercise of the participants in their countries of origin and host communities. No interview was conducted without the written or verbal informed consent of the participants.

The spoken languages were English, Arabic, and Dari. The program organizers of the Women's Empowerment Group and Women's Swim Group in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States provided translators for the focus group session and the individuals interviews, respectively. Nevertheless, as Patton (1990) notes, intercultural interactions are always subject to misunderstanding, yet "cross-cultural interviewing is intriguing, challenging, rewarding, and not a little precarious" (p. 338). To avoid any unclarity of the information, regular member-checks were integral part of the research process (Devault, 2018).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed manually by the researcher. An interview guide (Appendix D) with 10 pre-set questions was developed and meticulously used throughout all interviews. The pre-set questions covered the participants' personal experiences with sport and physical exercise in their host community and in their country of origin. As such, prompts were given pertaining to their personal and professional habits and goals influenced by their sport involvement, their participation patterns, and attitudes, as well as satisfaction levels and

emotive sentiments toward sport's role in their transition to the United States, including challenges and benefits derived from their participation in sports-based inclusion programs or independently performed sport and physical exercise activities. The format of in-depth semi-structured interviews was chosen because of its conversational style, in which the participants can feel safe and comfortable to share their stories and truths (Heyl, 2001). The aforementioned theoretical lenses allowed the researcher to interpret these shared experiences and meanings subsequently.

Focus group sessions. As the primary intend of this study was to understand forced migrant women's perspectives on sport and physical exercise in their adjustment to their respective host communities and cultures within the United States, focus group sessions were conducted with members of two different sports-based programs in the United States. A major strength of this data collection method is its ability to focus on people's opinions and thought processes rather than their actual behavior (Esterberg, 2002). Another advantage of such small-group interview sessions, as further pointed out by Esterberg (2002), is that they allow for the collection of a fairly large amount of data in a relatively short period of time…Overall they can be less time-consuming (and thus cheaper) than individual interviews" (p. 109). Because of the lost time due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, focus group sessions became a very relevant and valuable research method. Especially, as Esterberg (2002) emphasizes, when the focus groups include "so-called transient populations, such as migrant farmworkers or refugees (p. 109). Not to mention that "some feminist researchers argue that focus groups are especially helpful in reducing the imbalances of power between the researcher and those being researched" (Montell, 1999).

By enabling women to speak with others who have had similar experiences, focus groups help empower women" (Esterberg, 2002, p. 109). Along with this, the consistent practice of memoing as part of the reflexivity concept, and the creation of empowering and safe spaces were applied to further strengthen the value and meaningfulness of this work.

Memoing

Guided by the interpretive qualitative research approach, the study participants were regarded as the sole authors of their stories rather than research subjects or merely categories (Berry, 1997; Wang, 2017). By doing so, an empowering safe space was created that was further enforced through continuous reflexivity memoing of the researcher throughout the entire research process (Birks & Mills, 2011; Urquhart, 2013). To this end, both participants and researchers served as instruments (Patton, 1990). Memos were used to capture any research-related concerns or biased thoughts before, during, and after each session. These were triggered by reflections on the quality of the process, while listening to participants, transcribing the interviews, and coding. Furthermore, memos served as regular reminders to keep the researcher's thoughts separate from any theoretical reasoning to avoid imposing any thoughts on the theory that might emerge from the inductive reasoning of the data (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Data Analysis

Inductive Reasoning

An inductive, bottom-up grounded theory approach was employed to conduct this interpretive multi-case study research. Specifically, the constant comparative method was adopted to analyze participants' verbatim transcripts from the individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout the three-phase coding process, the data was deciphered and coded that included identifying key words from the

interview guide and the verbatim participants' transcripts. Next, as part of the axial coding phase, emerging categories were subsequently identified and inductively transformed into broader categories, then themes and sub-themes (Creswell, 2007). Coding the transcripts is a critical component of the data analysis. It essentially involves multiple readings to find trends, patterns in the data, ultimately dividing the given information into meaningful and manageable units of data. The purpose of coding is twofold. First, it helps the researcher understand the perspectives of the participants, while detecting relationships, emerging trends, and phenomena throughout the data analysis (Urquhart, 2013). Second, coding may help to prevent the researcher from overemphasizing on a particular aspect, hence ensuring a thorough and unbiased analysis of the entire data set (Charmaz, 2006; Stake, 2010).

Data Management

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is ensured through the four concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the recognition of experiences that are believable (Thomas & Magilv, 2011), which is related to accuracy in the representation of the data (Creswell, 2007) and to dependability in gathering consistent data, as reflected in the findings (Merriam, 2002). Confirmability is accomplished through individual review of transcripts to determine uniformity in participants' experiences. The concept of transferability refers to the degree to which the research findings can be reflected in other contexts based on documented similarities, which requires the research to describe findings as rich and thick terms as possible (Glesne, 2006).

Member Checks. To enhance trustworthiness of the findings, the validation technique of member checking was integrated into the data analysis process. It allowed the study participants to review the interview transcripts for accuracy of their provided insights and recounts of their personal experiences, as well as reflect on the researchers' conclusions and interpretations (Devault, 2018).

Triangulation of Data. Triangulation of data is critical to the establishment of trustworthiness, which aims to enhance the validity, credibility, and rigor of research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By applying and combining multiple research methods in the same study, conclusions that may reflect biases or limitations of a specific source or method can be avoided (Flick, 2007). Cohen and Manion's (1986) definition seem to be most accurate, referring to the method as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint " (p. 254). Deniz (2006) further distinguishes triangulation between four basic types: 1) Data triangulation (involving time, space, and individuals), 2) investigator triangulation (involving multiple researchers in one study), 3) theory triangulation (involving using more than one theoretical framework in the interpretation of the phenomenon, and 4) methodological triangulation (involving more than one data collection procedure, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents).

For this specific study and the complex nature of its phenomena of interest, the latter was applied, as surveys, interviews, and focus groups were used to gather the data.

Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Ethical Considerations

As mentioned above, before any interviews were scheduled, everyone who expressed interest in participating in this study received an email outlining the specific purpose and goal of this study along with an attached Informed Consent form as PDF file that had to be downloaded,

carefully reviewed, and read, before it had to be signed, dated, and sent back to the researcher who retained the copy in the study records. If verbally given, the researcher read aloud the entire document before recording the loud and clearly stated consent statement and storing them away in a secured folder on the researcher's notebook.

The consent document meticulously describes every step and detail of the research investigation, including the purpose of the study, the anticipated time required for the participants' involvement. Most importantly, however, it reaffirms the potential participants of the voluntary nature of his or her participation, and the opportunity to withdraw from the research process at any given time or refuse to answer any questions that might cause any discomfort, the potential risks and benefits associated with the study participation, in addition to confidentiality and compensation information. Once the participants signed and returned the form by email, the next steps involved the scheduling of the interview at his or her convenience and availability. However, neither the consent process nor the data collection procedures began before the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) officially approved the research investigation. As previously mentioned, all interviews were transcribed manually and verbatim to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness. Throughout the entire process, the interviewees were repeatedly reminded that their participation was voluntary and would not harm them psychologically. Beyond this, participants will be provided with a digital copy of the results after completion of the study.

Another critical component of ethical concerns is data confidentiality. As vowed in the Informed Consent form, all information obtained have been treated strictly confidentially. All identifiable materials and information have been removed, each participant was given a pseudonym, which has been used within all transcripts and reports. The digitally recorded

interviews are kept in a password-protected folder on the researcher's notebook. Similarly, all transcripts have been completed manually by the researcher to safeguard the identity of the participants. The research data was only shared with the participants themselves and will be destroyed as soon as the analysis is completed.

Ethical concerns for virtual focus groups. Another legitimate subject of scrutiny is the question of safeguarding the participants' confidentiality and rights when conducting focus groups in a virtual video conferencing format. Esterberg (2002), specifically, raises some serious ethical concerns when it comes to focus groups as a research method in general, arguing that 'unlike in individual interviews, the researcher is not the only one who needs to respect confidentiality. In the case of group interviews, all the other group participants need to maintain confidentiality as well" (p. 111). Berg (2001) thus introduced the idea of a confidentiality statement that has be signed by all participants prior to the scheduled focus group session, ultimately ensuring that no information will be revealed outside of the group. However, this begs the question how to present the data then in a manner that is meaningful and yet in adherence to the promised confidentiality.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a glimpse into the intended research design, data collection methods, and theoretical perspectives that will guide this dissertation investigation. The approach to combine the concept of belonging with acculturation theory and adopt a supplementary intersectional feminist lens informed by gender relations theory allowed for a deeper understanding of the three key elements that are at the heart of this qualitative research study: resettlement, women, and sports' unifying and inclusive power. Merging these theories prompted a more critical look at the intersectional nature of forced migration and sports' role as an

integrative tool, well-reflected in the research questions that were addressed in this study. At the same time, it significantly helped to develop a conceptual model from the data that can be applied to the creation of future sports-based inclusion programs for forced migrant women.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to understand meanings that U.S. based forced women migrants assign to the role that sport and physical exercise play in their lives, (b) to identify barriers and constraints that impact their sport participation, and (c) highlighting challenges that they faced in their current places of residence, and in their countries of origin. An intersectional feminist lens informed by gender relations theory and the concept of belonging and acculturation theory guided this dissertation study. All findings presented in this chapter directly address the main research questions, resulting from inductively analyzed data that was collected through several research methods. Specifically, 36 participants responded to the open-ended questions of a qualitative research survey on Qualtrics, with 20 other women participating in 30-90 minutes one-on-one virtual video or phone in-depth semi-structured interviews, and two virtual focus group sessions that were held on Zoom and lasted 90 minutes, respectively.

For the data analyses, constant comparative method was adopted (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), with the coding process being completed in three phases that encompassed the act of transcription along with open coding of key words from the interview guide and from participants' transcripts. Organization of emerging patterns and connections into broader categories followed. Broad categories, themes and sub-themes were developed (Appendix E). Trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was met through triangulation of data and reflexivity memos which were added to the coding process to eliminate any underlying predispositions or subjectivities since "all coding is a judgement call" (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004, pp. 482-3) and to help establish theoretical connections

among codes (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Participants and program sites were given pseudonyms to ensure all identities are protected and kept confidential.

The inductive analyses yielded four major themes: (1) enhanced quality of life, (2) social inclusion through sports, (3) self-respect and life skills through sports, and (4) generational differences, judgements, and lack of resources. Each of the themes and its sub-themes are discussed and elaborated through a culturally sensitive, inclusive, and intersectional feminist lens, which recognizes the historical and cultural context surrounding an issue. It highlights the voices of the study participants that have experienced overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression to understand the depths of the encountered inequalities in the context of sport participation.

The participants involved forced migrant women, mostly former or current refugees, aged between 18 and 67 years old, hailing from countries in the Middle East, in Southeast Asia, in Africa, Central and South America, and Europe, now living in various parts of the United States for more than a year. In fact, the demographics of the study participants provide an accurate snapshot of the current migrant and refugee population in the United States, with refugees from Myanmar (former Burma) making up the largest ethnic group (177,700), Iraq (144,400), and Somalia (104,100). (Krogstad, 2019). More specifically, migrants from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) with Iraq being the top country of origin (19%) largely settled in California (20%), Michigan (10%), New York (9%), Texas and New Jersey (approx. 6% each), according to the 2018 data from the Migration Policy Institute. More than 75% of so-called MENA immigrants reportedly speak either Arabic or Near East Arabic dialect. The remaining 11 percent called English their first language, whereas speakers of French and Armenian accounted for about three percent, respectively (Migrationpolicy.org, 2018).

Although Islam is the predominately practiced religion in Iraq (95%), 40% of Iraqi refugees identify as Christians. In 2008, 62% of Iraqis that settled in the United States were registered as Christians (CDC.gov, 2020). What is less clear is their ethnic and racial affiliations, which has been a subject of heated discussions and debates among scholars and practitioners alike (Hanish, 2008). According to the Assyrian International News Agency (2003), however, Chaldeans make up the largest group of the entire Iraqi refugee community in the United States, followed by Assyrians, Syriacs, and Armenians. All of these ethnic groups share Christianity as their religion and Semite as race, which is shared with Iraqi Arabs and Jews as well.

By contrast, the second largest participant group hailed from Southeast Asia, specifically Myanmar, former Burma. All of them identified as part of the Karen community, an ethnolinguistic group of Sino-Tibetan language-speaking people that fled from former Burma due to religious and ethnic persecution. Most of their members settled in Minnesota, particularly in St. Paul and Maplewood. In 2017, more than 17,000 Karen lived there, and in other states, such as California, Texas, New York, and Indiana. 90-95% of all Karen refugees in the United States practice Christianity (Iimn.org., 2021). Few of the independent sport participants originated from countries in West Africa (Nigeria), Central America (Honduras, Peru), and Europe (UK) with their largest populations concentrated in Texas, New York, California, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Virginia (Anderson, 2017). Similarly, most of the refugees and forced migrants from these regions identify Christian, but are diverse in their racial and ethnic affiliations, including Black and Yoruba, Hispanic, Mestizo, and Asian.

Figure 4 below provides a profile of the participants' cultural and migrant group affiliations throughout the United States.

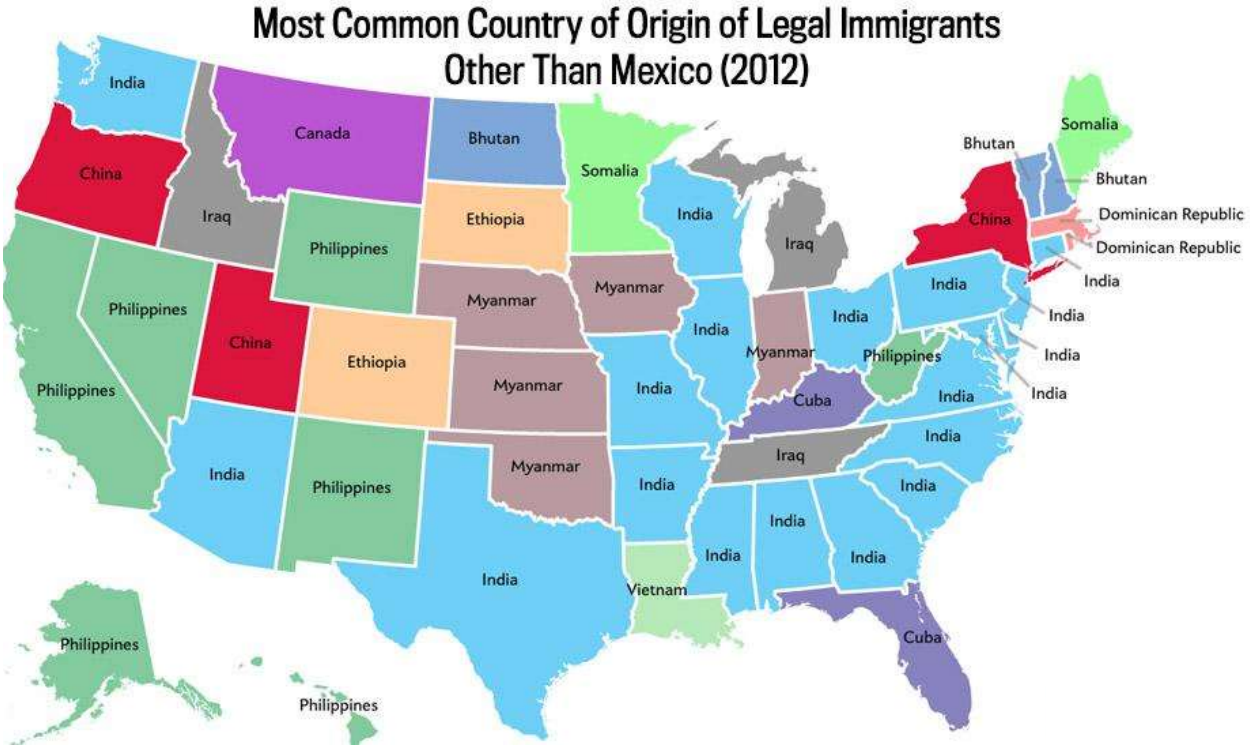


Figure 4: Adapted from Blatt (2014) with data from the US Department of Homeland Security

Most of the participants (23) were part of two sports-based inclusion programs catered toward the integration of refugees, whereas the remaining 13 individual women were either part of a Women's Empowerment Group or independent sport participants involved in various types of sport and exercise in local gyms, outdoor parks and trails, or educational institutions. For the purpose of this multiple case study design (Yin, 2003), therefore, the participants represent four separate case studies. As such, the sub-themes are reflective of the varying cultural backgrounds and perspectives from the survey (13), interview (20), and focus group participants (16) and their respective program and sport affiliations, which gives an authentic voice and meaning to the participants' experiences and perceptions, as intended by the belonging and acculturation theories. For this reason, the following thematic presentation of the findings will largely contain direct quotes and statements, allowing for authenticity and unbiasedness.

The findings of the study are organized based on overarching themes and its sub-themes. The first segment reflects participants' meanings about sport's role in their lives and cross-cultural adjustments made in their new adopted home in the United States. In the next section, some of the participants' specific experiences associated with their involvement in sport and physical exercise are presented. Subsequently, the benefits and impact of sports participation on the participants' personal lives with a particular emphasis on their integrative efforts in their respective hosting communities of the United States will be discussed in more detail. Conversely, the final part of this chapter will address some of the challenges the participants faced when attempting to get involved with sport and physical exercise. A summary of the findings will conclude the chapter and transition into the final part of this dissertation focusing on theoretical and practical implications that will encompass specific recommendations and a conceptual model to augment transferability and understanding of forced migrants applicable to all socio-cultural contexts.

Tables 1-4 below illustrate the most relevant demographic characteristics of all study participants. The list is not exhaustive, as some of the research participants chose not to disclose information, such as their age, educational background, occupation, or marital status. Table 5 provides an overview of the key findings categorized in themes and subthemes.

Table 1. Disclosed demographics from Qualtrics Survey participants

Pseudo-Initials	Age	Country of Origin	Duration in the United States	Type of Sports/Exercise	Educational Level	Occupation	Marital Status
AZ	38	Iraq	4 years	Swimming	Bachelor's Degree	Sales Associate	Married
AS	59	Iraq	3 years	Swimming	Elementary School	Student	Married
HS	36	Iraq	3 years and 10 months	NA	High school	NA	Married
YA	32	Syria	4 years	Swimming	College	Teacher	Married
BC	38	Iraq	6 years	Swimming	GED	Unemployed	Married
DE	22	Mexico	8 years	Soccer	High school	Worker at MCF	Single
BM	33	India	8 years	Basketball	Bachelor's Degree	Restaurant Manager	Not identified
FR	25	Peru	14 years	Swimming	Bachelor's Degree	Software Engineer	Single
TT	29	Mexico	25 years	Soccer	Some college	Receptionist	Divorced
LG	32	Haiti	26 years	Running	MBA	Operations Manager	Single
DA	34	UK	10 years	Running/Yoga	Bachelor's Degree	Freelance writer	Married
NA	20	Honduras	12 years	Swimming/Soccer	Associate degree	Student	Single
OK	55	Nigeria	29 years	Group exercise classes	College degree in nursing	Psychiatrist nurse	Divorced

Table 2. Participant demographics from in-depth semi-structured interviews

Pseudo-Initials	Age	Country of Origin	Duration in the US	Type of Sports/Exercise	Educational Level	Occupation	Marital Status
AZ	28	Afghanistan	2 years	Walking	NA	NA	Married
SA	21	Afghanistan	4 years	Cycling, Running	NA	NA	Married
HS		Afghanistan	4 ½ years	Walking	NA	Housewife	Married
AR	27	Afghanistan	6 years	Walking	College	NA	Married
AS	30	Afghanistan	2 years	Walking	NA	Housewife	Married
AK	67	Afghanistan	37 years	Walking, Swimming	Bachelor's Degree	Interfaith Ministries	Married
BZ		Afghanistan	NA	Walking	NA	NA	Married
AF		Afghanistan	4 years	Running	NA	NA	
AH	40s	Iraq	2 years	Swimming, Yoga	NA	Housewife	Widow
HA	50s	Iraq	5 years	Swimming	NA	Housewife	Widow
AD	30s	Syria	4 years	Kickboxing	NA	Working	Married
DA	34	UK	10 years	Running	Bachelor's Degree	Freelance Writer	Married
OK	55	Nigeria	29 years	Group exercise	B.A. in Nursing	Psychiatrist nurse	Divorced
LG	32	Haiti	26 years	Running, Yoga	MBA	Operations Manager	Single
YN	20	Honduras	12 years	Soccer	Bachelor's Degree	Student	NA
AN	20s	Nepal	About 10 years	Karate	Bachelor's Degree	Student	NA
BM	31	India	8 years	Basketball	Bachelor's Degree	Restaurant Manager	NA
WS	18	Thailand	About 13 years	Soccer	Bachelor's Degree	Student	NA
AM	32	Afghanistan	3 /12 years	Fitness	NA	Housewife	Married
AL	22	Afghanistan	18 months	Walking	NA	Housewife	Married

Table 3. Demographics of focus group (Nerak Football)

Pseudo-Initials	Age	Country of Origin	Duration in the US	Educational Level	Occupation
UM	20s	Thailand	Approx. 11 years	High school	Student
UA	22	Thailand	18 years	High school	Student
YL	23	Thailand	19 years	High school	Student
YT	23	Thailand	14 years	High school	Student
UA	20	Thailand	9 years	High school	Student
AW	21	Thailand	14 years	High school	Student
EW	22	Thailand	14 years	High school	Student
RT	21	Burma	10 years	High school	Student

Table 4. Demographics of focus group (Women's Swim Group)

Pseudo-Initials	Age	Country of Origin	Duration in the US	Educational Level	Occupation	Marital Status
AD		Syria	4 years	NA	Translator	Married
BZ		Iraq	4 years	NA	NA	Married
LN		Iraq	NA	NA	NA	Married
RS		Iraq	4 years	NA	NA	Married
ZB		Iraq	NA	NA	NA	Married
MR		Iraq	NA	NA	NA	Married
NI		Iraq	2 years	NA	NA	Married
AT		Iraq	NA	NA	NA	Married

Table 5. Overview of the overarching themes, its subthemes, and best examples

Theme	Sub-Themes	Best Examples
1) Enhanced quality of life	a) Freedom and empowerment to exercise and be yourself – *"A woman, a human"* (Women's Swim Group)	"I was feeling like I had my freedom when participating in the swimming project, you know. Because women in my country, she has not freedom. She can't go to the gym, can't go to learn the swimming or anything else. So, here, I'm so happy, because I find those friends, those volunteers, they make me another person, they give me my freedom. I like the life here, I like myself in opposite when I was in my country, I was very sad" (Participant AF).
	b) Exercise as a stress reliever and natural health-boosting energy shot – *"I feel like flying"* (Women's Empowerment Group)	"When I'm riding my bike, I feel like I'm just away from everything. I feel like flying. I love to go to the main road, because I want to keep on going and going and going. It's like I want to get away from every day's work. So, I'm so happy when I'm on my bicycle. I feel so free" (Participant BZ).
	c) A cocktail of emotions: Pride and joy versus disapproval (Nerak Football)	"…My mom wasn't very supportive but throughout the years, I saw her change a little bit, because she did go watch me play a few times. But I think, as time goes on, she could really see that … I really love this sport, like I have passion for it. I do like to share my victories with my parents, and before she would just shrug it off, and every time I would come back and would be yeah, we actually did good, we won. But now I can see it in her face that she is actually proud. She doesn't want to show it, but I can see her smirk" (Participant EW).
	d) Sport as a source of pride, purpose, autonomy, and positivity – *"Air I breathe"* – (Independent sports participants)	"You can literally breathe" (Participant DA). "Exercise is like the air I breathe. I love that, I don't think I would have been able to endure a lot of things even dreamt by many to maintain being healthy if I was not working out" (Participant OK).

2) Social inclusion through sport	a) Access to new perspectives, skills, and pursuits (Women's Swim Group)	"When you come from the war, you will feel like you don't like this life, you don't like anything, you're just feeling down, and putting down a X on anything. But when she started the program and people were coming, everyone started to see people, get out of their house, drink coffee or eat something with other people. And after that, people started to change their mind. They started to think about their selves, how they can study, how they can join a project like swimming class, or anything else she did for them. I love this, because it was very great and changing our lives" (Participant AD).
	b) Building bridges and achieving good health (Women's Empowerment Group)	"I have a bit of a high cholesterol [sic]. Because of that, I am doing this, and I have to do this. If I don't go for walks, I feel kind of depressed, but not in a bad way, just not at ease. Plus, when I do this, I feel more relaxed, muscles and all this. I do not have pain or anything. I just feel really good. So I feel like I have to go for a walk. And even mentally, I feel down if I don't go for a walk" (Participant AR).
	c) Development of belonging and connectiveness (Nerak Football)	"It feels like a sense of belonging and like I could be myself around the girls…and it felt like a family, and the girls are like the closest friends that I have now, and so, it's just, was another home than my actual home, you know" (Participant RT).
	d) Experiencing new cultures, new opportunities, and new communities (Independent sports participants)	"It definitely helps with assimilating to the US culture, because you're meeting people of all kind of walks of life, it allows you to see different kind of American culture, what kind of people like or people don't like… You see a whole lot of things. You know more about America when you go to the gym or if you're working out. It's the easiest way to blend with the community" (Participant OK).
3) Self-respect and Life skills through Sport	a) Making the impossible possible: Creating hope for a better future (Women's Swim Group)	"I wanted to add to what the other women said how about they used to feel. They feel refreshed, they feel relaxed, they feel that it[s] actually to themselves, they can overcome any hardship with persistence. We can achieve, of what they thought and believed that was impossible. I also realized that anyone can learn new things, whether they were difficult or they were achievable" (Participant BZ). "Because if you're just staying home and not going to the YMCA, then I feel like I will never feel happy or excited, or interested in doing the [job] application or having to start work here or going to volunteer. Or maybe if I hadn't gone to the morning coffee and meet these nice people, maybe my mind would keep bring ideas from the Middle East that people here are dangerous, they hate us, they don't like us, I will [sic] maybe just staying home until now and never doing anything like learning English, or work, or helping the people, or part of this community. So, I started from the exercise, from the sport, and now I'm here now. See, how this is changing. I'm now so proud of myself. When I look back when I first came here, I learned so many things, I am a very strong woman, I did a lot of things" (Participant AD).

	b)	Sports provides a safe space and learning community (Women's Empowerment Group)	"While we walk, we always talk about prizes of things that we want to buy, or where we can find a good deal, and then we all go in one car after the walk to do shopping, when one found out, and then everyone wants to go there too. We all have kids, so we always look for deals" (Participant AF).
	c)	Sports promotes development of confidence and character (Nerak Football)	"Because it keeps me focused, and it's just like really it teaches me things like earning my spot, you know, through pure efforts, and like respect for competitors and you know. And then, I feel like, respect is the one thing that I really, you know, like respect for everyone, like especially authority. In soccer, players like respect the coaches and the game. Sometimes, like you know, refs make bad calls and stuff, but you know, it just comes with your character, you know. Like when you play the game you like show the best version of yourself" (Participant YT).
	d)	Gaining a voice through sports (Independent sports participants)	"I was very talkative when I was young. But when I got here, I stopped talking and I started getting shy, and my confidence went like really low. But then after I joined the karate, my confidence started to gain back. Like we always have competitions around the state and if there was one, we would go and participate. And that helped me a lot, because that was in front of every people we had to perform. So helped me gain my confidence" (Participant AN).
4) Generational differences, judgements, and Lack of Resources	a)	Overcoming fear of the unknown and lack of skills (Women's Swim Group)	"However, two things that were challenging to me, were like how to start, how to jump in water, like how to approach water. Like there was this wall, and we all were stuck to the wall, afraid of trying to come closer to the water. But the trainer was encouraging us and trying to tell us that we need to try and encouraging us. And we were surprised how shallow the water was when we got into the pool. That is how scared we were. And the other thing was the deeper water, like that was a real challenge, like swimming in this deep water" (Participant BZ).
	b)	Confronting gender role expectations: *"It's the Women's job"* (Women's Empowerment Group)	"I mean, I don't know what to say. Sometimes the husband has two jobs or so, so taking care of the kids is usually the women's job. Other priorities are more important for migrant women, such as survival and taking care of the kids" (Participant AK).
	c)	Addressing generational differences (Nerak Football)	"I wanna die with a lot of memories. It's like a cliché thing, but it's like the generation today, but to our parents it's like why, why. Because it's like a luxury we can enjoy, but to them it's just a waste of time" (Participant RT).
	d)	Dealing with judgements, stereotypes, and lack of resources (Independent sport participants)	"Like when I was a kid, like I couldn't, even I was in sports, there were things that were difficult to do like when we had to pay fees or buy uniforms, stuff like that. Which is why I said now it wouldn't be a problem for me, but I think about, when we had all those fees to pay, there were times we were close at not being able to go or like you know things like that. So, it's like affordability, access, and maintenance" (Participant LG).

Theme I: Enhanced Quality of Life

The major theme in this section encapsulates the overarching trends pertaining to the first research question of this dissertation study, which explores the different meanings and feelings that forced migrant women draw from participating in sports and exercise, particularly in sports-based integration programs located in the United States. Sport can capture a full range of emotions: excitement, passion, joy, disappointment, and touches on the depths of our emotions, inspires yet challenges us and lets us believe in the impossible. More importantly, sport engages our mind, our body and soul. Transcending across the diverse cultural values, norms, and lived experiences of the study participants, the prevailing consensus among all women was the enhanced quality of life (QOL) associated with participation in sports and/or physical exercise.

For instance, a 20-year-old survey participant from Honduras shared how sport helped her to navigate the new life in the United States, stating:

> The sport means new opportunities for everything. I came to the states with barely knowing how to swim. I had no idea what college was. There was so much unknown for me. The sport taught me so many things, even if I started my sophomore year of high school. I made so many new friendships (Participant NA).

As illustrated above, the generic term *quality of life* may encompass varied meanings and determinants (e.g., new opportunities), based on the subjective perceptions of their life, informed by the context of the culture and value system in which they live, and in relation to individual goals, expectations, standards, and concerns. Put differently, it is the degree to which an individual feels mentally, socially, physically, and economically healthy, reflected in their ability to participate in or enjoy life events, including sports and exercise, recreation, and leisure time, which leads to social belonging.

Quality of Life (QoL) is a critical component to person's welfare and has become a key objective of contemporary health care for participants. Holistically, one's quality of life may

constitute social, emotional, and physical well-being of an individual or could encompass one's ability to lead a fulfilling life. While individuals may perceive quality of life differently, participation in sports, organized or unorganized, recreational, or competitive, make up the best ways to promote quality of life. The findings of this study elucidated in the form of four subthemes: (a) Freedom and empowerment through exercise and selfhood – *"A woman, a human,"* (b) Exercise as a stress reliever and natural health-boosting energy shot – *"I Feel like flying,"* c) A cocktail of emotions: Pride and joy versus disapproval, and (d) Sport as a source of pride, purpose, autonomy, and positivity – *"Air I breathe"*. Each of the subthemes is representative of the viewpoints, perceptions, and experiences of members of a case study group, based on program affiliation and type of sport. The first subtheme/case study centers on the experiences and perspectives of women refugees who were actively involved in a weekly swim program that a women's empowerment unit of a refugee agency offered in conjunction with a local gym, located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. Subsequently, the second subtheme/case study serves as the metaphoric bullhorn to amplify the voices and perspectives of women that were part of an Empowerment Group organized by a refugee agency located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. In the third theme/case study, the thoughts, and feelings of regular members of a football-based inclusion program based in a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States. The final and fourth subtheme/case study continuously exhibits the perspectives and experiences of 20 survey and interview participants who were actively involved in sports or exercise independently from a particular sports-based inclusion program scattered across the United States.

1a) Freedom and empowerment through exercise and selfhood, *"a woman, a human"* (Women's Swim Group). Prior to the Covid-19 global outbreak, the women's empowerment unit

of a refugee agency located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States offered a weekly swim program to women refugees from Middle Eastern countries. In conjunction with a local gym, about 18 adult women, between the ages of 20 to 60 years old, were given swim lessons once a week by certified coaches and volunteers that provided a shuttle service to and from the location and childcare. The nine interviewed participants of this case study shared similar cultural, ethnic, and religious norms, as they all grew up with Islam as their predominant religion. Depending on the nature and specific locality of their hometown, whether urban or rural, opportunities to learn or participate in swimming as a sport or activity was either discouraged or limited available in their country of origin. For most of the participants, the weekly swim program allowed them to venture into a completely unknown territory, triggering the full spectrum of emotions, including fear and pride to have come overcome this new challenge that is comparable to the initial feelings associated with their involuntary relocation to their host community in the United States. By the same token, all participants overwhelmingly equated the ability to participate in a swim course with true liberation from imposed gender expectations stemming from their cultural and religious origins. Feelings such as freedom to exercise, empowerment, and the authenticity of being a woman came to the study participants' minds when prompted about their meanings drawn from participating in the swim course – factors that significantly contribute to the enhanced quality of life.

These sentiments are expressed from a participant who is a widow and mother of four adult kids, as follows:

> I was feeling like I had my freedom when participating in the swimming project, you know. Because women in my country, she has not freedom. She can't go to the gym, can't go to learn the swimming or anything else. So, here, I'm so happy, because I find those friends, those volunteers, they make me another person, they give me my freedom. I like the life here, I like myself in opposite when I was in my country, I was very sad (Participant AF).

Adding to this, the participant elaborated on the specific time when she experienced these detailed feelings, stating: "I'm being happy when I'm in the water. And I find good friends, talk to them right there, go to shopping together. New friends. I'm very happy. Here, you have your whole freedom" (Participant AF).

Echoing her sentiment, fellow participant AH, who came to the United States around five years ago and just applied for citizenship, further expands on the specific aspect of freedom and liberation as a woman and refugee that had to flee from a war that is the central in her meaning-making of her participation in the swim course. She stated:

> When I […] started the swimming class, I felt a lot of emotions I can't explain how I felt. I felt joy, happiness, everything. I feel like crying why saying this, because I feel so happy and I feel like how the other ladies are feeling. I can understand what they are feeling when they started the swimming. And I think a lot about the swimming and how it's like swimming is easy and how you are like a fish inside the water, and I feel like a lot of great things. I forget everything in my mind, but I'm thinking how I can enjoy this water. You know, because when the people came from the war, they just feeling scared, sad, feeling everything is different, especially here. So, when you go into the water, you feel like you're free, you're like this is the time for yourself. You will never think about anything else. Especially, from the Arabic community to the American community, it is very different, a big difference, but that makes me feel I am a human, I'm a woman, I'm a great person here (Participant AH).

What's even more important about this participant's recollection is the fact that she had to first overcome her fear of water and the impossible, which was a shared initial sentiment and common occurrence among the ladies.

However, the expressed support from the other women and witnessing other participants to overcome their fear and adversity had an empowering effect on her, as she recalls:

> I never never never thought I could swim before. But when I first heard about the swimming course and the ladies wanted to participate in the swimming. I felt really scared, but I asked myself can I do that, I think no I can't, because it's scary to be inside the water. Like especially with my age, and I never felt like starting this experience. After this, I felt I was brave for going (regardless), but when I started the course the first time, I felt I couldn't do it, but some other ladies told me that I can do it. They told me that I would be very scared, it's scary to be in the water. And after that, I just came in the water, I felt very happy, comfortable, like free. When I saw the other ladies going inside the water, everyone feels great, feel free. It's a very great experience. I never thought it's going to happen to [see] me in the water (Participant AH).

The importance of her statement cannot be understated, as passionately pointed out by her fellow participant AD, who has been living in the metropolitan city of the Southern United States since 2016. During the focus group, she conveyed a powerful message on behalf of other Women's swim group participants that were unable to attend the 90-minute long Zoom video meeting. She stated:

> And the other thing is that participation in this activity helped them to realize that women can do things, and they are able to achieve things. It made them change the way they think, and made their husbands change the way they think. Like they understood that these things are allowed here, and it is the women's right to try and participate in swimming and wear swimming suits (Participant AD).

Correspondingly, several participants of the focus group recounted experiencing positive, empowering, and liberating feelings upon wearing bathing suits, as powerfully described by a participant, who reportedly would eagerly await the day when the class would occur:

> Like we've been waiting for Monday all week, and it was even better on weekends. Because it was when we had this class. The feeling that I used to have in the moment I get in the water or the moment I wear the bathing suit, was freedom. So, I feel free of all these commitments, thinking of kids, house shores, or other life issues, and I would live the moment, and enjoy this time of swimming. The only time I ever felt this way was during the swimming class (Participant NI).

By participant NI's definition, the term *freedom* encompasses the ability to be her authentic self, have autonomy over her life and what's she choosing to do and wear, in addition to

"me time" and a break from obligations pertaining to her family and children that are part of persistent traditional gender expectations and roles in the society. This notion of *freedom* as the meaning and role of sport and exercise was one of the most impactful and central perception among all participants of this study. Among them was participant AK from the Women's Empowerment group. Like some of the other swim group participants, she associated a strong sense of freedom and empowerment with exercising. She elucidates:

> It is just freedom; you can do whatever you want to do. And fresh air. And just to be able to walk. Thank God, you will be able to walk. To have your health, that is the most important thing. That you are able to get out of the house without a problem.

1b) Exercise as a stress reliever and natural health-boosting energy shot– "*I Feel like flying*" (Women's Empowerment Group). As creating safe spaces has been proven to be an effective strategy to provide physical and emotional protection and room to express themselves freely to vulnerable populations such as refugee women and girls, the refugee agency located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States, currently hosts a second Women's Empowerment group that is catered toward adult women hailing from another Middle Eastern country. Before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down public life, the participants, volunteers, and organizers would meet once a week in the premises of the partnering local gym to discuss and demonstrate ways and strategies for leading healthy and active lives. This was through having workshops with guest speakers and a myriad of opportunities to engage in exercise, learn and speak English, cooking sessions, or obtaining licenses for driving and catering services, as for instance the translator of the group did. In the near future, the goal is to extend the swim lessons to this group as well, in addition to other exercise opportunities that are currently in discussion.

The participants attributed their growing interest in and relationship with sport and exercise to the acquired knowledge and appreciation that was disseminated in the Women's

Empowerment group. Regardless of the chosen form of exercise, ranging from running, walking to cycling, and yoga, all participants connected feelings of positivity and better overall health-related quality of life to the meaning of playing a sport and/or engaging in physical exercise in their host communities. For instance, a participant who is an avid jogger that would usually go for hour-long runs over lunch break with four ladies that she met in the Women's Empowerment group, regards her daily exercise dose as a stress reliever and natural health-boosting energy shot. She stated: " I feel less stressed, I feel very good, I feel more energized. I'm talking, I'm running every day. I'm happy" (Participant AF).

Since participant AF's arrival in the United States more than four years ago, she has started to teach her kids the value and importance of exercise and sport, ultimately breaking generational patterns as a direct outcome from her positive experience with sport and exercise participation in the host country. Conversely, back in her home country, as she further explained, she never exercised and would just stay at home, taking care of the children and the household.

For participant AK, engaging in regular exercise means a significant enhanced quality of life due to improved sleep quality, alertness and focus, hence better productivity, and task performance. She said:

> About the walking, as I said before, I feel good and I sleep better at night when I walked before, honestly. It just makes it easier for me to finish my work and whatever. Very nice, I mean this feeling you get, because you get oxygen, you get something that makes the body feel good, and then I'm just having a very good night's sleep when I walk (Participant AK).

Today, participant AK engages in intense power walking at least three times a week. When the now 67-year-old translator and current president of a Homeowner's Association first came to the United States 36 years ago to escape political persecution and marry the man of hart against all the odds, she would walk every day in the evening. Then work and other obligations took over,

as she settled into her new life in her host community in the large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. Missing a workout would trigger negative feelings of guilt and obligation that led her to reevaluate her exercise regime. Ensuing this, participant AK regained her appreciation and positive perception of engaging in sport and physical exercise, as she recalled:

> My body is not like a limply and all this. When I don't walk for a few days, I don't do nothing, you know sometimes you feel like doing nothing. You feel like the whole day like that. But when you walk, and I can tell you this, the blood circulation and everything, it affects good in your body, that's for sure (Participant AK).

These perceptions were largely shared among all participants regardless of their program and sports affiliation, transcending culturally and other socially constructed differences and boundaries. As such, a participant that was forced to leave her home country in Europe over health concerns to resettle in the United States, expressed how her running habit cured a severe case of insomnia that she had developed after she had her first child. She detailed it as follows:

> I was recommended to run, when I suffered from this deep insomnia after I had my first child. But I was like I'm not sure if I am going to be able to, because I can't sleep. My body and brain are broken. But they were like no, you got to run. And it did help. It really did. Because after you run, you feel very tired, you do feel energized, but it also makes you feel tired. A good hour of your night, and you sleep better. So, all the doctors said that studies are showing people that aren't getting any sleep, they can still do sports, since there's still a lot of adrenaline that can push you to do some sport, especially running. That will help you regulate your heartbeat. Because I had so much adrenaline from lack of sleep, keeping me awake (Participant DA).

Along with better sleep, sharper focus, and enhanced productivity comes more energy – the major physical ingredients for a good quality of life. Accordingly, several participants expressed how engaging in any form of exercise has an energizing impact on them, a natural remedy, that enabled them to thrive in their professional and personal endeavors. Participant BZ captured best these expressed feelings and meanings of sport and exercise, as she stated:

> Everyone feels like me. If I do exercise for [sic] the morning, I will do [sic] fitter than the other days, I will feel very good, my mind, my body, because the other days, when I wake late, I'll be tired like I miss something. When I exercise, I can eat totally [sic], I can do my homework in our house (Participant BZ).

Besides her hour-long daily walks with other women that she met at the Women's Empowerment group in the nearby parks, participant BZ complements her exercise regime with almost daily biking trips next to the main road adjacent to her apartment complex located in the large metropolitan city in the Southern United States. Clearly displaying genuine joy in her voice and on her face, she recounted her feelings that she experienced while being on her bike:

> When I'm riding my bike, I feel like I'm just away from everything. I feel like flying. I love to go to the main road, because I want to keep on going and going and going. It's like I want to get away from every day's work. So, I'm so happy when I'm on my bicycle. I feel so free (Participant BZ).

Interestingly enough, participant BZ was the first person to sign up for the extension of the swim program opportunity to this Women's Empowerment group that was strongly encouraged by her husband, as she emphasized. However, the COVID-19 outbreak put all plans on hold. One day, she hopes, that "everything will fall into place" (Participant BZ).

1c) A cocktail of emotions: Pride and joy versus disapproval (Nerak Football). Presumably widely unknown to the general public, the biggest and still rapidly growing refugee population in the United States hails from Southeast Asia. Referred to as the Karen community or Karen people, most of their members fled from Myanmar (former Burma) or from refugee camps in Thailand to the United States (Winn, 2017). Because of the ongoing military conflict and political, religious, ethnic persecution by the government in this region, the minority group that largely identifies as Baptist Christians, has exponentially grown in the United States since the 2000s, with Saint Paul in Minnesota serving as the center and preferred new home for the approx. 177,700 Burma refugees, of which the majority are of ethnic Karen, Chin, Karenni, Kachin, and

Rakhin, living in the United States (Krogstad, 2019). With family and community central elements of the Karen culture, participation in sport has drawn such feelings among the participants of this study that were affiliated with the football-based integration program based in a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States.

The objective of this organization is twofold: to provide educational and professional opportunities to underserved communities and to promote gender equity and generate awareness for the rich Karen culture in the world through the community's passion for the sport of soccer. All players are women refugees from Myanmar and Thailand, since the association's ultimate goal is to empower women and girls to play sports and to develop the next generation of female role models that younger girls can look up to and identify with, which will have a long-term generational impact.

The study participants thus indicated that the soccer field became simultaneously a thriving community and safe space where friendships and connections formed, life and athletic skills honed that enabled the players to obtain full-ride college scholarships or seek out other professional avenues that ultimately enhanced their quality of life. Resultantly, the focus group uniformly reported positive feelings of pride, joy, and excitement slightly overshadowed by lack of support from their parents and the community – a direct consequence of decades-long displacement and constant fight for survival paired with lingering traditional gender roles and norms that were constituted through colonization. This was particularly well-illustrated by participant EW's response, who came to the United States when she was nine years old. She recounted her initial feelings when she first started playing with this association:

> I said I felt excitement, because, I think before that year, nobody has ever seen, like they never seen a girl play and participate in a men's tournament. They could see that some girls have real talent, and they were actually like rooting and supporting us. And it just felt like they were like for the first time, wow girls can play too (Participant EW).

Mirroring EW's feelings of excitement and pride, participant YL chimed in, adding that she equally draws feelings of joy and pride upon playing soccer with his team, as she detailed:

> So, when I play soccer, physically I feel very good. Like I'm in university now, and so I don't get to see a lot of them, and summer is over, so I don't really get to see the girls often anymore. So, when I do get the chance to meet up and create opportunity to play with each other, I get the sense of, I don't know, a sense of joy and it's healthy for our bodies and minds as well. And I love seeing this competition within the group, and just in general seeing Karen women athletes you know like being represented, it's a proud feeling. If that makes sense (Participant YL).

Agreeing with the previous speakers, participant UA regards her passion for soccer and active participation in this organization as a platform to showcase the value of sports and break stereotypical views of women in sports to invoke positive social change within the Karen community and beyond. She posited that:

> I also want to add that a lot of Asian parents are still behind the traditions and of their kids to become a doctor or lawyer… they don't really look past the fact that sport can be a way to become successful too. But they always look that if you are a doctor or if you're a lawyer, we will be very proud of you. But I think that … our team can be a way to you know open up how Asian parents can look at that, how we can be in sports and we can be very successful with passion. And we don't have to be a doctor or lawyer to become successful (Participant UA).

Although the participants expressed a high degree of understanding and appreciation for their parents, citing reasons such as survival (Participant RT) and work (Participant AW), they acknowledged negative feelings of sadness, frustration, and disappointment caused by the lack of support they receive from their families and community. Not mincing her words, participant AW, for instance, recalled her sentiments when she first started playing volleyball shortly after her resettlement to the United States 13 years ago. She said:

> I just wanna add in…so like about [the] Karen family not supporting the kids when it comes to sport. Like for example, I was playing volleyball for like high school in my senior year. And you would be seeing all the American kids their parents come to like cheer them on, and you know it feels a little disappointing sometime. You know, you understand your parents have work and stuff. But sometimes it feels disappointing that our parents can't be there for us. You know you want them to be, but you feel like a little down, but yeah just that's my point (Participants AW).

Expanding on this, participant RT compellingly shared her perspective on the lack of parental support:

> I feel like for my family, I feel like, it's always about survival. That's how my dad grew up. It's about surviving each day. So, it's like to them working, it's what's gonna lead us to having us a better life than our parents grew up. And how my dad grew up. Because he's always working. And I don't think he wants that for his kids. So that's why he doesn't want us to waste our time by playing soccer, by playing sports. And top of that, he doesn't want us to get injured. He doesn't want us to having get in our way of success, and to define in their way, is like to have a good job. But to us, it's more like I don't want to die with a lot of money. I wanna die with a lot of memories. It's like a cliché thing, but it's like the generation today, but to our parents it's like why, why. Because it's like a luxury we can enjoy, but to them it's just a waste of time (Participant RT).

Except for her brother who came to her senior night in high school, RT's family never been to her games, since she first started playing at the age of 11, after a tumultuous resettlement journey that took her first to Thailand, then Taiwan, before arriving in the Unites States. Having witnessed firsthand her dad's commitment and dedication to his family throughout, she does not hold his absence at her soccer games against him.

> But I understand why he wasn't there, because he was working and all this, and he's tired at the end of the day, so I understood and it's okay, and as long as I know that he's supportive in some other ways, and so like I kinda substitute that into like I guess, even though I don't get support in soccer, I get support somewhere else (Participant RT).

Conversely, RT expressed strong feelings of frustrations regarding the persistent gender inequity and bias within the Karen community and in society, which she hopes to shed light on through her presence as a role model for the next generation. She remarked:

> I guess, it's a feeling of frustration and but not surprised, because it's always been where the boys get all the priorities. And they always get what they want. Each time I would come back with an injury, my dad would be like yeah what did I tell you like this is not a girl's sport, this is not a sport that you should be playing (Participant RT).

Changing these deeply rooted perceptions that have been instilled in generations over generations is difficult, but not impossible. A powerful testimony of the power of exposure and representation is participant EW mom's struggle with her passion for soccer that eventually turned into deep pride, illuminating. She shared the following thoughts:

> Well, what makes me excited is that, I think, one of the things it does have to do with my mom. So, I'm the only person in my family that plays sports. Even my brother doesn't play any sports. Back then, again, my mom wasn't very supportive but throughout the years, I saw her change a little bit, because she did go watch me play a few times. But I think, as time goes on, she could really see that … I really love this sport, like I have passion for it… I do like to share my victories with my parents, and before she would just shrug it off, and every time I would come back and would be yeah we actually did good, we won. But now I can see it in her face that she is actually proud. She doesn't want to show it, but I can see her smirk (Participant EW).

1d) Sport as a source of pride, purpose, autonomy, and positivity – "*Air I breathe.*" (Independent sports participants). Unlike the previously presented case studies within the subthemes, this group consists of a diverse range of independent participants that consistently engage in sport and/or in physical exercise without any affiliation to a specific sports-based program catered toward forced migrants to help facilitate with social integration and inclusion in their new hosting communities. Despite the immense diversity of the group on all levels, including scattered locations throughout the United States (major cities on the East Coast, Southeast and Southwest) and engagement in different types of sports and exercises (e.g., jogging, group fitness classes, soccer, basketball, karate), and distinct forced migration journeys (e.g., war and conflict, political, and religious persecution, economic circumstances, health concerns, and gender discrimination), all study participants unanimously draw feelings of gratitude and positivity from

participating in their respective sport and exercise. Common attributed meanings included pride, purpose, autonomy, and overall happiness – all key contributors to enhanced quality of life. Pertaining to the sense of pride was powerfully illustrated by participant DA who forcibly relocated from Europe to the United States for health and economic reasons when she was in her mid-20s. Due to her severe mental and physical health issues, she was prohibited to participate in any sport activity in her home country, limiting her quality of life. Upon her resettlement to the United States, her conditions dramatically improved to the extent that she did not need supportive medical devices any longer. As she recalled, "Since you moved away, and you're away from that kind of environment, you can literally breathe" (Participant DA). With the help and encouragement of her American friend, she shortly after embarked on a fitness journey that led her to become an avid runner and outspoken sports enthusiast and advocate. This was particularly informed by the feelings she draws from her weekly runs. She recaptured these emotions as follows:

> I love the fact that yes, it is really hard to get motivated to start. But once you finish, you feel so good afterwards. You always feel such a sense of pride and accomplishment. Yes, I did it! I definitely feel more capable and competent to really strive for goals, running a 5K or 10K, beating personal record… And it clearly helps to clear your mind, especially during those very tumultuous times with the pandemic and elections, you know. Especially as an immigrant, there are so many different things, like visa issues, so many external factors that affect your daily life. And running is really a fantastic way to clear your mind and check in with your body. It is definitely a wonderful way to reconnect with your body and mind. And also, it really helps you with sleep (Participant DA).

The illustrated sense of pride is also at the center of participant AN's emotions regarding her regular participation in the sport of karate. Born and raised in Southeast Asia before resettling in the United States at the age of 11, she quickly felt drawn to karate and stuck to it.

Accordingly, the feelings and meanings that she draws from participating in her respective sport are deeply shaped by these contrasting experiences, as she revealed as follows:

> I came from a country where not a lot of women participate in sports, because like our society thinks women are not supposed to do that. Like if women play sports, they have this thoughts or mindset that women aren't supposed to do that kind of stuff but stay at home and cook and do the housework and all. But when I came here, and saw all the kids, everyone was so equal, you know, so I was like why don't I try, so I got into karate, and I started going, and my parents started to supported me through that (Participant AN).

Practicing karate substantially enhanced participant AN's quality of life, as it became a powerful source of pride, belonging, and purpose not only for herself but also for her immediate family. This is further illustrated in her response below regarding connected feelings and meanings of her sport participation:

> Everyone thinks I am doing so good and all because I'm in karate. My parents are proud, and all the people in our community that live with us, think it is really good that I'm doing this. There is only me and my sister and my family. And like people used to say that you only have girls in your family and they gonna get married one day. And you don't have a son, where you gonna go live, and work part-time. They used to say that to my parents, right. They had sons, like two or three. Their sons can get married and have families together and live with their sons' families. Like people used to say that to my parents, and they used to be sad about that they only had daughters. I took that with me and by doing karate, I started making my parents proud. Now, I do not feel excluded at all anymore. I feel like I am the pride of my family now, because of how I'm doing well with the karate (Participant AN).

Stated differently, sport often serves as a fulfilling purpose in life that can even be equated with the air we breathe, as participant OK eloquently put it:

> Exercise is like the air I breathe. I love that, I don't think I would have been able to endure a lot of things even dreamt by many to maintain being healthy if I was not working out (Participant OK).

Originally from West Africa, she lived most of her teenage years in Southeast Europe for educational and economic purposes before a bitter civil war broke out and she had to escape to the United States almost 20 years ago. Upon arriving in her new host community in a large metropolitan city on the East Coast in her early 20s, sport didn't even cross her mind at all, as she had to "figure out the streets where you live in" (Participant OK).

Eventually, she started walking for exercise, before she came across a gym right next door to where she lived. That was a pivotal moment and when exercise became her purpose in life, as she recalls:

> My quality of life changed. The gyms were mostly so far away. So, I was mostly walking or sometimes dance in the house. I wasn't like very big, but very thin, so it really didn't make a difference for me. I just danced in the park, but when I saw the gym, I was like this a good place to go do some workout (Participant OK).

Fast forward to 20 years later, OK considers exercise her purpose and reasons for existing, stating:

> To me, exercise is life. As long as I am able to do it, it means a lot to me, it means a way of life, it means a way of maintaining my health, being physically healthy, mentally healthy. It allows you to deal with stress differently. It means to look at things differently. You can easily solve a problem, because you have more mental endurance to find an easier way to take care of things when things get rough. Because you are so conditioning in your body that you be like okay let me find a way. Unlike somebody who doesn't work out can easily panic about things – for me no.

In addition to these above-described feelings and meanings drawn from participating in sport and exercise, participant LG pointed out feelings of autonomy and self-efficacy that she connected with her lifelong participation in numerous sports and fitness activities. As an example, she stated the following:

> I have more control over my life, more control over the trajectory over my life and my help as opposed to not being victim, but as someone that can think about their health and not someone that cannot think about their health because there are so many other things that needs their attention. It's like I consciously know this is not special but basically like not the norm. It's not the norm for people that look like me. And in the step further, if I had never come to this country, I would never have these luxuries as normal as it is for a lot of people. So, I thoroughly enjoy it being part of a fitness class or being able to work out whether by myself or with other people (Participant LG).

By the same token, however, LG reiterated similar feelings about sport's meaning in her life as a purpose and something to do. She specifically stated:

> I decided to just do sports, because one it gives me something to do outside of taking care of all these children in my house, and working sometimes, because I also worked. So, it was just something else to do (Participant LG).

Similarly, participant YN suggested that her involvement in soccer since middle school always felt having a special purpose in life. She conveyed it as follows:

> Well, participating in a sport just made me have something more like devote my time to. It is, you know, it is time consuming, but I like it. I was happy, and I saw it like I was doing something, other than just sitting around (Participant YN).

Coming from Central America, the now 20-year-old junior in a college in Southeast of the United States first started getting involved in cheerleading then swimming, basketball, and eventually soccer to be part of the community, as she recalls:

> I got involved with sports by watching other peers like in my grade participate in sports, talk about all the activities they had after school, and I wanted to experience that, and I wanted to be part of the group. I felt a little left out (Participant YN).

The more YN got involved in soccer, the more positive and uplifting feelings she drew from being part of this sport and team. In other words, the meaning and role of sport for her was happiness and joy – a prominent assessment among the participants of this study. To this end, she reflected on her feelings when she first started playing soccer, illustrating:

> Because, when I played soccer like my senior year, I'd be happy, all these emotions, because I knew you're playing for something more not just for fun, you know… Just a sense of togetherness, supporting each other, supporting our school, sort of sense of belonging (Participant YN).

Equally, participant BM regards sport's role and meaning in her life as a source of overall happiness and positivity. In fact, the native of India who had to move to the United States for economic reasons and to escape gender discrimination, credits sports as the major reason for her positive mindset: "Sport has helped me to develop this positive mindset…you need positivity in your life" (Participant BM).

Theme II: Social inclusion through sport

Particularly since Nelson Mandela's powerful display of sports' unifying power during the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the notion of sport as an integrative tool and vehicle for positive social change has garnered wide-ranging support and popularity across the disciplines and from scholars and practitioners alike. Sport creates a conducive setting to reinforce understanding and respect of cultural diversity that fosters the integration of migrants, making policymakers and government officials from UN member nations and other countries to push for social policies and sports-based programs that promote social cohesion and inclusion. The findings of this study provide more corroborating evidence to solidify this conviction.

Accordingly, the second broad theme focused on social inclusion through sport. The following subthemes that emerged as tied to research question two and the respective case study groups include: (a) access to new perspectives, skills, and pursuits, (b) building bridges and achieving good health, (c) development of belonging and connectiveness through sporting activity, and (d) experiencing of new cultures, new opportunities, and new communities.

2a) Access to new perspectives, skills, and pursuits (Women's Swim Group). The participants of the weekly swim program, a joint sports-based inclusion initiative provided by a refugee agency and a local gym located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States, collectively reported the key benefits and impact of their sport participation as a form of *access* on physical, mental, psychosocial, and emotional levels. Put differently, the term refers to the feel, the physical and non-physical environment, and the cultural context in which the sport participation occurs. Depending on the perceived level of access, a sense of inclusion and belonging in the respective host community may be generated, no matter the country of origin, age, race, sexual orientation, gender expression, religion, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Most importantly, however, as vividly described by the study participants, was the perceived access through sports to new thoughts, perspectives, and social activities, enabling them to not only escape but to also heal from traumatic experiences and encounters they made during their varied resettlement journeys. Participant AD, for instance, captured her sentiments as follows:

> When you come from the war, you will feel like you don't like this life, you don't like anything, you're just feeling down, and putting down a X on anything. But when she started the program and people were coming, everyone started to see people, get out of their house, drink coffee, or eat something with other people. And after that, people started to change their mind. They started to think about their selves, how they can study, how they can join a project like swimming class, or anything else she did for them. I love this because it was very great and changing our lives (Participant AD).

Wholeheartedly agreeing with her swim mate, participant HA provided more details on how the non-physical access (felt impact) through sport constitutes itself in her life, significantly improving her overall emotional well-being, sense of inclusiveness, and belonging to her host community. She thus noted:

> That makes me feel good and comfortable, instead of just staying home and doing nothing, and start thinking about Iraq and the people there and the people here. Just keeps me busy and makes me feel good about myself and continue to stay positive (Participant HA).

Shifting gears, participant HA further addressed the mental level of non-physical access through sport participation, such as the acquisition of new skills and the introduction to new social activities, pursuits, and events. To illustrate her thoughts, participant HA first shared her personal experience and how she overcame her fear of not being able to talk to anyone due to the language barrier, recounting that:

> When I come here, I was very afraid, I don't know the language, I don't know how to talk to anyone. But when I found friends and talk to them, I started to learn the language. (Participant HA).

Secondly, participant HA noticed an equally profound desire in the other swim group participants, expressing the following observation:

> They are old women, but they love to be alive, and they want to do something for their future. Even when they are 60 years or 70 years old, they think about their future. They want to study English; they want to do something for their future (Participant HA).

The accuracy of this observation is substantiated by her fellow participant RS, who attributed her newly gained self-confidence and educational goals to her participation in the swim group. She articulated her story as follows:

> So, I proved to him [husband] that I can do, and I can learn it, and that boasted my self-confidence, and made me believe if I can overcome my fears, and then anything can be possible. So that encouraged me to pursue my goals and I started also pursuing my education, and I believe in myself again, and that I can achieve and become what I used to be in my own country, a successful, working woman (Participant RS).

In addition to the reported non-physical aspects of access on emotional, mental, and psychosocial levels as the major benefit of sport participation, essentially paving the way for participant's social inclusion in their respective host communities, physical access was also frequently named as a benefit of sport participation. For example, when participant MR elaborated on her experience with the swim group, she emphasized on her significantly improved physical health as an added value to the psychosocial benefits ensued from learning a new skill, describing it as follows:

> Some of the benefits were physical. So, I used to have muscle spasm, and doing this swimming, I felt more flexibility and my muscles were relaxed, and that was incredible for me. Psychologically, you know, I would free my mind, and just focus on learning how to swim or just enjoying this experience of entering the water, and just this one thing that I would do on this specific day. Waiting on this day all week, so that is how I benefitted from it. (Participant MR).

2b) Building bridges and achieving good health (Women's Empowerment Group). Just like access to physical environments (e.g., sport spaces), social networks are critical components to establishing a sense of social inclusion and belonging in a community. Sport participation provides an ideal space for partnerships and friendships to be forged for life. Resultantly, most of the study participants affiliated with the Women's Empowerment Group hosted by a refugee agency located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States indicated an increased sense of social inclusion and belonging, particularly the development of social networks and improved overall good health, as the major benefits of their sport participation. Pertaining to the built-up of social connections, specifically, participant AK summarized this widely shared perception of the case study group when she made the following statement:

> Some friends after some time they get to know their neighbors, they make their own groups to go on for a walk. I don't know if they walk regularly or not, but they have their own group that's how they get to know each other. They all live in the same apartment complex. In a way, that's a good idea, because some of them they need to take care of each other's children when they go out shopping (Participant AK).

Sharing these perceptions with her fellow group member, participant SA further highlighted the unifying and social nature of exercising together, as she portrayed below:

> People would come in to talk about things was a great benefit, and also to meet new people from Afghanistan that I'm still in touch with. And then we had always people bring food and dishes and teach each other us how to do food. And the study group was really good for me to learn English (Participant SA).

Once these connections were built through sport, as participant AZ further emphasized, nothing could have kept the women socially separated, not even inclement weather. An avid female runner and mother of two, who's been in the United States for more than two years, the 28-year-old giddily recounted how they would simply move their park runs indoors:

> Nothing negative about running, but when school finishes early or it is too cold to run, it doesn't stop our social interactions, we just go visit each other at their houses (Participant AZ).

While the increased sense of connectedness facilitates better mental, social, and emotional health of the women refugees, the physical benefits of engaging in daily walks, runs, or other forms of group exercise led to overall better good health, as largely delineated by the members of the Women's Empowerment group. This is particularly well-exemplified by participant AR, who shared the following:

> I have a bit of a high cholesterol [sic]. Because of that, I am doing this, and I have to do this. If I don't go for walks, I feel kind of depressed, but not in a bad way, just not at ease. Plus, when I do this, I feel more relaxed, muscles and all this. I do not have pain or anything. I just feel really good. So, I feel like I have to go for a walk. And even mentally, I feel down if I don't go for a walk (Participant AR).

Some of the women further disclosed how exercising improved their body image, making them feel stronger and happier overall. As a mother of three and housewife, participant AS, for example, plainly stated that she is mainly engaging in sport and exercise to stay in physical shape: "I think, when I walk, everything is good. Like being [sic] fat, and also, we can relax our mind with the sport" (Participant AS).

2c) Development of belonging and connectiveness (Nerak Football). Despite vast differences in cultural background and sporting activity, the participants of the football-based inclusion program based in a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States equally determined the increased sense of belonging and connectiveness as the key benefit and impact of their sport participation. Numerous participants therefore relayed how they had built lifelong friendships through playing soccer upon enhanced confidence and resilience skills. By way of illustration, participant RT recapitulated her experience as part of the soccer team, stating that:

> It feels like a sense of belonging and like I could be myself around the girls…and it felt like a family, and the girls are like the closest friends that I have now, and so, it's just, was another home than my actual home, you know (Participant RT).

Carrying on, participant RT, who had to leave her home when she was nine years old, recounted how she got involved with the sport of soccer shortly after her family's resettlement to the United States, and how it has become her primary source of empowerment and support since then:

> It was basically, first, like when I got to Minnesota, they placed us in an apartment. In that apartment, I met a few girls that like to play, and they were starting a team, so they asked me to play...It feels really empowering to have other women [like I guess] they are all kinda in the same shoes, a lot of friends that I know have experienced the same thing, like not getting a lot of support from the family. I will always feel encouraged by other girls that kept pushing their dreams and I admire that (Participant RT).

Conversely, as participant RT alluded to, some of the challenges faced by forced migrant women that are actively involved in sport and physical exercise, are the often-lacking appreciation and understanding of its value within their family and community. In a similar vein, both her teammates YT and YL highlighted the emotional benefits of their involvement with the sport of soccer that reportedly facilitates their sense of belonging, connectiveness, and social inclusion through competing on the field, namely stating the following: "For me, it is like competition is the way for me to push myself and is like keep moving forward like every step. And I feel like, soccer is good for me, emotionally" (Participant YT). More importantly, as participant YL further elaborated, the connections quickly grew beyond the common goal of winning games and competition, transcending state borders, individual differences, and local communities to create an empowering community of its own. She remarked:

> "…I thought it was a very positive outlet, and a lot of the girls in the community I was able to make friends with everyone, and as the years went by, that community grew. Like first it was just soccer, but then it grew and it was about making friends and connections like with girls from other states" (Participant YL).

Fellow teammate EW concurred with this notion, as she related her amazement about the formed out-of-state friendships through the involvement with soccer, particularly drawing attention to its ability to transcend any socially constructed difference:

> …With people we never thought I would be friends with. I think the most amazing thing is that I get to see a lot of like talented girls, like actually really talented. Some girls better than guys… I made a lot of friendships through that. When I used to play Volleyball, I didn't make as deep connections as I did when I started playing soccer (Participant EW).

Calling sport a blessing, participant UA, particularly cherishes its ability to significantly ameliorate one's life in the United States through providing access to resources, a voice, and respect along with invaluable career and educational opportunities She expressed that:

> If we were back in [refugee] camp right now, we would not have none of this opportunity at all. It is blessing, because, if we would not have come here, and stay in the camp, we wouldn't have all the opportunities that we had, like education in sports, like I know some Karen girls that have now really good careers in sport right now. And they got scholarships to get to college and stuff. So, it is really a good opportunity to get a better life in America (Participant UA).

Resonating with her teammate UA's motion, participant VL imparted how she felt that soccer had taught her "hard work, dedication, and [like also] discipline. And it also leads, contributes to higher self-esteem" (Participant VL). Indeed, teammate and fellow participant UM credited soccer with bringing the best out of her, while musing that "the chemistry and connections just come natural together, you know what I am saying. Like I make bonds, we make bonds quickly, and it just like amazing, how by the end of the week, we were like so close to them, you know" (Participant UM).

2d) Experiencing new cultures, new opportunities, and new communities (Independent sports participants). Notwithstanding its diversity in types of sports and physical exercise as well as cultural backgrounds and host communities in the United States, this group of

independent sports participants largely corroborated the previous case study subsets of participants' accounts, fervently demonstrating how their sport engagement has opened pathways to social inclusion through enhanced terms of participation in society, notably through the exposure to new cultures, new opportunities, and new communities. Participant OK eloquently recapped the essence of the overarching inclination among the case study group members, offering the following thoughts:

> It definitely helps with assimilating to the US culture, because you're meeting people of all kind of walks of life, it allows you to see different kind of American culture, what kind of people like or people don't like… You see a whole lot of things. You know more about America when you go to the gym or if you're working out. It's the easiest way to blend with the community (Participant OK).

Good mental health and a positive outlook on life are directly correlated to feeling included and part of a community. To this end, participant OK further pointed out how sports participation is critical to mental health, hence another important benefit according to her:

> Mental health is a 100%. As we see, people who are physical fit, they seem to be more different than people who do not. The mental health is very important. My mental health, mentally, I'm very sharp, can do things easily, and I have rarely down moments, at all. If everybody would exercise, we had less individuals suffering from depression. If everybody works out, we have less individuals taking medications for depression or anxiety. This is sure a benefit of that (Participant OK).

Regarding the specific aspects of becoming part of new communities, participant OK argued that sport spaces such as fitness centers, specifically group exercise classes, often serve as hangout spots and therapy room where everyone can connect easily, asserting the following:

> Socially, you meet a lot of people. If you're into fitness, you gonna make friends. You gonna have individuals, you gonna have people to socialize with, to talk and laugh with. It's a place to meet people. I have met so many friends because of my physical activity. So being around people gives you so many ideas on what to do to help you. It can be like a therapy group. You just have to decide which therapy group you want to associate with. (Participant OK).

Especially participating in team sports, as participant DA argued, can generate a particular strong sense of inclusion. Accordingly, she cited it as the benefit "of joining any kind of sport is you know, especially like team sports, can really make you feel being part of a community, you know" (Participant DA).

Gaining the ability to master difficult situations through the acquisition of new skills and offered opportunities through sport stood out to participant LG as major benefits of her sport participation – all components that lead to social inclusion. Reflecting on her personal experience, she put her thoughts into the following words:

> Aside from being healthy, there's also like an opportunity to have control over situations that you normally wouldn't have control over like in regular day to day. But also, it helps you to learn skills that you might not necessarily be gaining in your household or school (Participant LG).

More specifically, participant LG suggested that participation in sport enables an individual to develop and establish life skills that may be critical for future careers and one's quest for integration and acceptance of a community. To illustrate this further, she stated:

> Skills that you can apply at work, or somewhere else to make you more successful, and not only assimilating but also in promoting yourself as well as taking on new challenges whether at work you are getting promoted in a state where you're a minority or speaking for yourself in meetings or being part of a team where there are different personalities and people that want to do different things. So, it helps you like to apply those skills to regular life. You might not be actively thinking about it, but I think it does (Participant LG).

Echoing her statement, participant YN added the layer of exposure to new cultures and opportunities as a benefit, expressing the following:

> You get to [like] participate in things that maybe your parents or your family didn't get to do, you know. A whole different situation, and you can represent your group, you know, your university and whatnot (Participant YN).

To this extent, participant LG revealed that she felt drawn to sports as a way to connect with others in the first place, explaining it as follows:

> I think, what drove me to sports, or doing sports, was, I think, to me was to play with American kids. Just to kinda like, you know, I'm kinda social, just to know kinda get to know people more (Participant LG).

According to participant YN, however, one of the biggest benefits of sport participation is its potential to produce career and educational opportunities, consistent with study participants from the other case study groups. Drawing from her personal experience, participant YN issued the following statement:

> But for me, there were benefits included like going to college on a scholarship. I never thought I would be getting a scholarship for soccer in college. Not a full ride, but more than 50% (Participant YN).

Conversely, other participants such as BM and WS, regarded the exposure to new playing techniques, skills, and cultures as the key benefit of their sport participation. Participant BM, for instance, listed the following components: "Improved playing techniques, get inspired from the other good players, and what they do and what we can do to match their levels. We practice, we ate differently in India. So, it benefitted me to communicate with people" (Participant BM).

Participant WS, on the other hand, zoned in on her improved confidence to engage in conversations with others, characterizing the field of soccer as a safe space where one can develop self-esteem and feel welcome. In her specific words:

> I didn't have the courage to talk to people or to anybody. I was like maybe no one likes me. But in soccer, I got more confidence, and was able to speak to others more. It is just, with school, you're just going to class, and I was just on my own, nobody was talking to me. In soccer, they were like approaching me, and that made me feel more welcome, like accepted (Participant WS).

As illustrated above through the diverse voices of forced migrant women, sport paved the way for them to explore and enter new non-physical and physical cultural and sport spaces in their respective host communities in the United States. By connecting and bonding with each

other through playing on the same team or experiencing the same sensation of learning a new skill (e.g., swimming), the women were able to gain social mobility (e.g., career and educational opportunities) and new skills on a mental and physical levels.

Theme III: Self-Respect and Life Skills through Sport

The third research question addressed in this dissertation study delved into the role of sport in the study participants' lives through learning about their most meaningful and rewarding experiences that resulted from involvement in sports and physical exercise. Across varying case study groups, sports served as a vehicle for social change and character development, revealing concepts of self-respect, survival strategies, and life skills. More specifically, the study participants regarded their respective sports settings as a school of life where they acquired essential survival and life skills that significantly ameliorated their sense of belonging and acceptance in their respective host communities. Succinctly put, the third broad theme, therefore, cast light on sport as a key to development of self-respect, survival, and life skills. with the following subthemes further elucidating the different levels of similarities and differences of the participants' perceptions on the role of sports in their resettlement journeys: (a) sport made the impossible possible, giving hope for a better future, (b) sport provides a safe space and learning community, (c) sport promotes development of confidence and character, and (d) sport creates opportunities to be heard – gaining a voice through sports.

3a) Making the impossible possible: Creating hope for a better future (Women's Swim Group). Participating in the weekly swim program served as the pillar of hope for most of the women refugees, making what was thought impossible possible**.** According to most participants, therefore, the role of sport lies in providing opportunities for positive change in their lives. By offering this sports-based program, the refugee agency and the partnering local gym

introduced the participants to various ways they could adjust successfully to the new culture and lifestyle of their hosting community in the United States. Hence, sport and physical exercise gave these women opportunities to develop hope for a better future, either through reliving of joyful past experiences or knowledge gained learning about new viewpoints. Other women relished the sports' role in their acquisition of new skills along with its empowering effect on their overall outlook on life and their new community. The plethora of reflections that the case study group members shared centered on the most meaningful and rewarding experiences resulting from their involvement in sports and physical exercise. Referring to her experience in the swim program as "amazing," participant ZB, for instance, chronicled how she would drive 54 minutes each way as a beginner driver to relive her childhood memories and articulated that:

> Although I was learning how to drive and you know at the same time I was learning how to swim; I was still 54 minutes from where I live to the swimming class. But because it was the time dedicated for myself, and I was thinking of it was me time, I didn't mind it. Also, I relived my experience when I was a kid, and you know, my family would go to swimming pools in my own country. But after that, when I got married and all that, I didn't do it anymore. This experience made me relive the old stuff that I used to do with my family (Participant ZB).

Relating to her future, participant LN recalled how she similarly started to develop optimism, excitement, and hope about the future inspired by conversations with other program participants that occurred before, during, and after the sporting and social activities. She chimed in:

> When it's started, it was every Tuesday and sometimes I was feeling very like sad and I can't imagine just to stay here, I just want to go back home, I want to see my family, I'm always saying that [sic]…And so I started seeing the people at the coffee morning. They ask questions like do you want to learn English? Or do you want to go outside for a walk to feel good? And they ask you what is your plan for the future. People here they think about the future, I thought to myself. But here you can have electricity, you can have a home, your kids can go to school for free, your kids can eat good meal in their school. Back home, you can't take your kids to the good school, and eat the food they are eating here. So that makes me want to make a plan for my future. So, my husband looked at me, and said that he had a happy wife (Participant LN).

Simply put, as participant LN reiterated," everything was good for me because it changed my life for the better" (Participant LN).

Speaking on behalf of her fellow swim mates, moreover, participant BZ passed on how the most rewarding experience for them was the gained strength and positive outlook on life in general by overcoming their fears and mastering a new athletic skill. She noted that:

> I wanted to add to what the other women said how about they used to feel. They feel refreshed, they feel relaxed, they feel that it actually to themselves [sic], they can overcome any hardship with persistence. We can achieve, of what they thought and believed that was impossible. I also realized that anyone can learn new things, whether they were difficult or they were achievable (Participant BZ).

On that note, participant RS determined that mastering the challenge of learning how to swim was the most meaningful and joyful part of her sport participation. She conveyed that:

> So, I had phobia from water, and I used to have nightmares about water. So, when I wanted to start this class, my husband was like umm I don't think you can do it. So, I challenged him, and I registered and joined this group, taking this class. One of the reporters, journalists, took pictures of me swimming, and I showed them to my husband, and he was like is that you (Participant RS).

In a similar manner, participant AD attributed her impeccable language skills, gainful employment, and successful integration to her new home in the United States to a regular exercise regimen and participation in the swim program. Upon evoking her emotions when in the water, depicting it as pure happiness and whole freedom ("I'm being happy when I'm in the water. And I find good friends, talk to them right there, go to shopping together"), participant AD then encapsulated the sports' role in her life by reflecting on some of her most rewarding experiences with sport. She stated below:

> Because if you're just staying home and not going to the YMCA, then I feel like I will never feel happy or excited, or interested in doing the [job] application or having to start work here or going to volunteer. Or maybe if I hadn't gone to the morning coffee and meet these nice people, maybe my mind would keep bring ideas from the Middle East that people here are dangerous, they hate us, they don't like us, I will [sic] maybe just staying home until now and never doing anything like learning English, or work, or helping the people, or part of this community. So, I started from the exercise, from the sport, and now I'm here now. See, how this is changing. I'm now so proud of myself. When I look back when I first came here, I learned so many things, I am a very strong woman, I did a lot of things (Participant AD).

The common denominator of the narrated testimonies from the women participants of this swim group is sports' ability to create hope and inspiration, as well as the desire to learn and grow.

3b) Sports provides a safe space and learning community (Women's Empowerment Group). Building on the previously established notion of sports' benefit as a bridge builder for social inclusion and belonging, the majority of the study participants affiliated with the Women's Empowerment Group hosted by a refugee agency located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States characterized the role of their involvement in sports and physical exercise as safe spaces and learning communities, unveiled by some of their shared most rewarding and meaningful experiences.

Notably so, participant AF placed put an emphasis on the learning element of her exercise involvement, stating that:

> While we walk, we always talk about prizes of things that we want to buy, or where we can find a good deal, and then we all go in one car after the walk to do shopping, when one found out, and then everyone wants to go there too. We all have kids, so we always look for deals (Participant AF).

Equivalent to this, participant HS highlighted educational components of the Women's Empowerment group as most rewarding to her, such as regular hosting of guest speakers. There were also events held that benefitted the women refugees, transforming it into a safe space and learning community.

> I learned there a lot of things. Sometimes we had speakers to talk about some issues, so I was taking advantage of that, and about the children how to grow them up [sic] and some issues about the kids and all these families, I learned a lot (Participant HS).

Whereas their fellow program member AZ treasured more sports' ability to create safe spaces in which she can be herself and heal her body, mind, and spirit. She put into words her most rewarding parts of exercising as follows:

> The best is that because of sport my body fully recovered. And I want to lose weight, and that helps a lot to control my weight…But of course, I always go with my friends, and we are talking, lots of stories, three or four rounds of running, then the rest of the time we walk and constantly talk. Before going to the park, we used to walk in our apartment complex and the kids were obviously with us because they cannot leave the kids at home alone, and the people living in the complex were kind of complaining that we were too loud, and their kids were loud and running around. I didn't blame them. But that's why we decided to go to the park. This way we have our own talks, and our children can run around freely (Participant AZ).

Participant AR further documented the sports' potential to serve as a safe space through revealing her most rewarding experience. For instance, while praising the program organizer's efforts to provide assistance with childcare through offering a day care area staffed by volunteers and allowing mothers to bring their children to the weekly activities and meetings, she also had the best time. She expressed that:

> I enjoy the best that the ladies are there, somebody was taking care of the kids, as there is a group that makes a little space for the kids, so I was free just to talk with friends and still know that my child is taken care of (Participant AR).

Adding to this testimony, participant AK shared an observation that she made in her role as translator for the entire group.

> That was a great joy for them to be there, to get out of them house, cooped up at home with the kids, the cooking, and the cleaning. This was just one time a week, they were coming all the time. They were happy, very happy to come. None of them said they said they were supposed to come. Because they only get out of the house probably mostly you know when the husband is coming; they are going all together shopping, feed the kids and all these things (Participant AK).

Given these valuable insights on sport's ability to create safe spaces and learning communities, the participants have provided a great rationale and testimony for sport's ability to create such critically important spaces in the quest for creating a more just and equal world.

3c) Sports promotes development of confidence and character (Nerak Football). As some of the participants alluded to in their previous reflections regarding the meanings and felt emotions drawn from their sport involvement, the focus group members of the football-based inclusion program based in a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States further specified how sports benefitted their quality of life, divulged through their most rewarding and meaningful experiences with playing soccer. For most of the participants of this case study, the role and value of sports goes beyond its well-known mental and physical health benefits. They collectively made a strong case for its ability to be a confidence and character builder, including learning the value of giving and earning respect. This is compellingly narrated by participant YT, as she said:

> Because it keeps me focused, and it is just like really it teaches me things like earning my spot, you know, through pure efforts, and like respect for competitors. And then, I feel like, the one thing that I really, you know, like respect for everyone, like especially authority. In soccer, players like respect the coaches and the game. Sometimes, like you know, refs make bad calls and stuff, but you know, it just comes with your character, you know. Like when you play the game you like show the best version of yourself. And I mean like it is just a way like for me to have a break time with other people. Just to play the game because it is fun, and you enjoy it (Participant YT).

To further strengthen her testimony, she reiterated that she felt "soccer like really build on my character, and just personal, like my characteristics, you know" (Participant YT). Likewise, participant YL credited her transformation into a confident and outspoken young woman to her involvement with soccer. She voiced it below:

> I came to the United States in 2001, when I was 3 years old. I didn't really play sports until high school. I was a really shy kid…and in our culture soccer is very important, so like my father and other brothers were around and playing sports, and so it kinda influenced me to play. Even though I started later like a lot of the girls, and so [sic] I thought it was a very positive outlet (Participant YL).

Building onto these considerations, participant UA zeroed in on sports' ability to build character and confidence through its unifying and educational nature, explicitly saying the following:

> So, for me, I like to learn a lot of new things, so as the soccer community, people can come together and learn new things, because you know there are a lot of young talented players out there that can teach the younger players or like new experienced players just to get more comfortable playing (Participant UA).

All of the above are powerfully encapsulated in their teammates' EW most treasured actions in her involvement with soccer, as she vividly recapitulated how soccer fundamentally changed her outlook on life to the better:

> So, but then, I don't know, as time goes on, she saw this is something that I actually take time out of my day to go do [soccer]. And I love doing. Even if I would go from school and just do my homework before I can even go to practice, like that's how important it was for me. So, she could see that I was both focused on school, like I was still working, and still focused on school, but then I still made time for the sport. So, I think she kinda understood it a little bit more (Participant EW).

3d) Gaining a voice through sports (Independent sports participants). Drawing upon the reportedly increased sense of belonging and acceptance from their various sport and physical exercise activities, the case study group of independent sports participants jointly agreed that their sport participation significantly promoted their agency and confidence to make their voice heard, live an unapologetically authentic life, and aim for personal and professional goals or ambitions that are difficult to attain. The latter was particularly well-articulated by participant TT, who formulated her most rewarding experience as follows:

> It means a lot more than just go out to play, it makes me feel more alive, more exciting about things and definitely gives you the opportunity to be someone in life (Participant TT).

Additionally, the survey participant who came to the United States in sevenths grade to join her school's soccer team shortly after, compared her experience with back home, accentuating on its empowering power when tapped into it effectively. She made the following assertion:

> I feel like at home they won't encourage you to be better since is hard to get a good level of a player. But in the US, they [sic] committed to your team, you have this opportunity to become someone and have way more support than at home you; gain real fans out here (Participant TT).

To elaborate further her viewpoint, participant TT wondered out loud why she felt more supported and hence emboldened to make her voice heard when playing soccer. Hence, the following comment:

> I guess when people around you or coaches or even people who you didn't speak to, they see you, when they noticed you and tell you how great you handle things or how good you were at the game. When people see you as a player (Participant TT).

Considering these factors, participant TT concluded her remarks by telling her most rewarding experience with playing soccer as follows:

> Sports definitely helped me to change the way I view the world, and playing soccer is my little time out from the real world. Time stops whenever I have a soccer ball and my cleats on. It shows you how to be discipline, committed, and makes you improve your lifestyle with a little bit more of joy and no stress. And having family gather together to watch you play, sounds amazing to me (Participant TT).

In the case of participant WS, her involvement in soccer literally gave her the confidence and voice to speak to others, as she relayed in more specific details below:

> When I play, I was so confident. You know, I wasn't like, too much sharing wasn't my comfort zone, I was actually able to speak out, like it's so much better. In school, I was by myself and not comfortable with anybody like that. But in soccer, I was able to talk to other teammates. It's really crazy. I didn't have the courage to talk to people or to anybody. I was like maybe no one likes me. But in soccer, I got more confidence, and was able to speak to others more (Participant WS).

While participant WS gained confidence and hence the ability to speak up for herself and connect with others through playing soccer, other participants underscored how they acquired the necessary language and life skills through their engagement in sport and physical exercise. This ultimately equipped them with the voice and self-esteem to live a more authentic life and pursue their educational, personal, and professional goals. Among them is participant OK. Citing her most rewarding experiences with sport back home and in various other communities she lived in before relocating to the United States, she painted a remarkable picture of sport's role as a survival and life skills coach that enables individual to gain a voice and tap into ones' strengths and selves. She phrased it below:

> In Yugoslavia, I had my friends, which allowed me to learn the language to speak fluently, allowed me to go to school of nursing. So that helped me a lot. So, I learned the language quicker than if I wasn't engaging with anybody. Sport helped me as I was able to meet a lot of friends (Participant OK).

Complementing participant OK's belief of sport's ability to equip one with a voice and agency regardless of the language spoken, participant BM likened sport's role in her life to a lighthouse that showed her how to be more open and curious about other people and cultures. In her concrete words:

> It brings all people together, it doesn't matter what language you speak, I should say the way of thinking is different, more open and helpful people, and etiquettes. They show etiquettes, manners. (Participant BM).

What's even more, sport can serve as a sanctuary, refuge, and therapy. That's the specific role sports took in participant AN's life. The avid practitioner of karate who came to the United States at the age of eleven after living in a refugee camp for many years recalled how karate literally gave her back the ability to speak. Below is her narrative:

> Karate helped me a lot, especially to my confidence. Like, because, I wasn't confident at all, within like myself, when I first came here. Like the environment was so different. Like in our country, everyone was so close, we used to go out and play and stuff. When we came here, we had to stay inside, and even if we went outside, we didn't know anyone. So, I was very talkative when I was young. But when I got here, I stopped talking and I started getting shy, and my confidence went like really low. But then after I joined the karate, my confidence started to gain back. Like we always have competitions around the state and if there was one, we would go and participate. And that helped me a lot, because that was in front of every people we had to perform. So [sic] helped me gain my confidence. (Participant AN).

Fast forward almost a decade later, participant AN is the one who is teaching the craft of karate to the next generation of young girls and women from her cultural community to pass along her knowledge and gained wisdom. Filled with pride, she gleefully mentioned the following:

> I just love, I don't know how to describe in a word, but I just love how it helped me throughout this year. I remember, like me being a white belt, white belt is like the lowest belt in karate. I remember, going back, seeing myself so sad, like my teacher would me do something in front of class. And now I'm seeing myself, I can lead the group now. So just like the improvement that I see within myself, like how he really gave me like a boost (Participant AN).

Reverberating this sentiment, participant LG praised sport's role in her life as a life coach that gave her a voice, the ability to take control of her life, and support others in the process. Accordingly, she said," it's taught me about teamwork, having a role to play while supporting others" (Participant LG).

Overall, the participants of this case study group uniformly showcased sport's power to serve as a school of life where survival and other life skills can be shaped in a playful manner, while enhancing ones mental, physical, and psychosocial health benefits. This is strikingly well put by participant OK:

> I love it, really, because it has enriched my life, it made me look good, mentally, and physically, and offers me a social life. And what else to do? Come back home and looking at the TV, or going to the restaurant, eat, and come back home. NO! What makes you push yourself, if you can push yourself go running, then you can push yourself to achieve any goal you want in life (Participant OK).

Through the collection of such rewarding and meaningful experiences with sport and physical exercise, the study participants provided valuable insights into sports' central role in their efforts to culturally adjust and immerse themselves into their host communities in the U.S.

Theme IV: Generational Differences, Judgements, and Lack of Resources

Historically, underrepresented populations such as women, faced and still face a variety of external and internal constraints and barriers to sport participation. These are rooted in persistent socio-culturally constructed and perpetuated gender roles, expectations, and norms. Sports-based inclusion programs and initiatives expected to promote the successful resettlement of forced migrants in new host communities often reveal a glaring absence of female participants. The fourth and final research question guiding this dissertation investigation therefore intended to identify challenges resulting from participation in sport and physical exercise. Ranging from encountered socially constructed stereotypes, differences in cultural expectations and practices, generational patterns, and internalized constraints, the participants of the four case study groups reported an abundance of hurdles they had to jump in order to continue their sport involvement or get involved in the first place. Hence, the fourth broad theme illuminates the impact of generational differences, judgements, lack of resources, and family obligations that the participants addressed in their testimonies. On that basis, the following subthemes associated with the four case study groups emerged: (a) overcoming fear of the unknown and lack of skills , (b) confronting gender role expectations: "*it's the Women's job,"* (c) addressing generational differences, and (d) dealing with judgement, stereotypes, and lack of resources.

4a) Overcoming fear of the unknown and lack of skills (Women's Swim Group). Prior to joining the weekly swim program offered jointly by a refugee agency and a local gym, most of the female participants grappled with self-doubts and anxiety partially prompted by external and internal voices and opinions, informed by varying cultural norms and expectations that they had grown up with in their home countries. Consequently, most of the women spoke of challenges they faced when they expressed interest in or were actively involved in sports and physical exercise activities. The biggest challenge was the fear of the unknown due to inexperience and lack of skills, best portrayed by participant BZ, who stated that:

> Two things that were challenging to me, were like how to start, how to jump in water, like how to approach water. Like there was this wall, and we all were stuck to the wall, afraid of trying to come closer to the water. But the trainer was encouraging us and trying to tell us that we need to try and encouraging us. And we were surprised how shallow the water was when we got into the pool. That's how scared we were. And the other thing was the deeper water, like that was a real challenge, like swimming in this deep water (Participant BZ).

Participant NI couldn't agree more, as she vividly remembered the first moment when she came face to face with the water, recalling that:

> One of the challenges was fear of [the] whole water experience, especially these times when the trainer would tell us to hold our breath under the water. That was one of the things that was a little bit hard. But with time and training, I overcame that (Participant NI).

Upon this statement, Participant DA mused aloud on the inner challenges she observed at herself and other swim mates. She contended that, "…and sometimes it's also the mind, sometimes they just don't want to" (Participant DA). Not to mention the initial language barriers that are growing pains and universally felt among all types of migrants, whether voluntary or forced. Nonetheless, as participant HA further pointed out, sports is a powerful weapon to overcome this fear and challenge as well, mentioning the following below:

> Of course, there were challenges. When I come here, I was very afraid, I don't know the language, I don't know how to talk to anyone. But when I found friends and talk to them, I started to learn the language (Participant HA).

Clearly, as part of their involvement with the swim program, the case study group members had to overcome problematic and thought-provoking situations that impacted their ways of life. While the female participants of the swim program primarily fought with inner fears and concerns, the case study group members of the Women's Empowerment Group had to cope with gender role expectations that are discussed in the next subtheme.

4b) Confronting gender role expectations: *"It's the Women's job"* (Women's Empowerment Group). Differences within cultural traditions, social norms, political, and organizational structures influence how individuals perceive the importance and value of participation in sports and physical exercise. In patriarchal societies, values and expectations for women and men have been deeply embedded within their particular historical, social, and cultural contexts throughout centuries, rendering traditional gender roles invisible to the plain eye and internalized by the participating citizens.

As the members of the Women's Empowerment Group hosted by a refugee agency located in a large metropolitan city in the Southern United States collectively explained, the husband is typically the head of the family as the primary breadwinner, whereas the woman is mostly responsible for taking care of the children and the household. The participants further elaborated on how women tend to be strongly discouraged if not often outright prohibited to take part in sport and exercise, pointing out that women athletes are perceived as unfeminine and unnatural. Inevitably, these perceptions and priorities are overwhelmingly reflected in their reported challenges resulting from their exercise participation. Participant AK summed it up as such:

> Sometimes the husband has two jobs or so, so taking care of the kids is usually the women's job. Other priorities are more important for migrant women, such as survival and taking care of the kids" (Participant AK).

Along with this, participant AK detailed more observations that she had made caused challenges to her fellow group members, expounding that:

> For one, in the beginning of course, it was their transportation. Because if the husband has a job and a car, and that's it, he goes to work. The wife stays at home with the child and all this. But if they are lucky and both of them get a job and have a car, then that's different. The group had three or four ladies that were still working, and they were coming to the meetings, and they were working too. But that was the days when they were off or working in the afternoon, something they could make up for an hour and half hour. That was easy for them. And the kids were in school at that time, because they had children at school-age. But some of them had no transportation and had small babies or children like six months old or younger than that, they would just bring them (Participant AK).

However, as participant DA pointed out, the good news is that sport itself can help to change the perspective, stating "people don't see the benefits of a sport immediately, but after they get involved, they can really see it does help with mental health and wellbeing" (Participant DA). But even then, the challenge remains to find time to stick with an exercise routine and squeeze in workouts into the day that is filled with taking care of the kids and the household. Let alone the concerns regarding access, transportation, and logistics. Participant AZ discussed this below:

> The problem is that my husband leaves at five in the morning for work. So, he cannot help with taking care of the kids, so I cannot go running on holidays or when school closes. So, it's not gonna happen, because he also works late until the evening (Participant AZ).

Participant AS experienced similar difficulties in her fitness journey, as she commented:

> But also, I may not have someone to take care of my kids, if the husband is working. So, I cannot just take my kids to all this, I cannot just pursue my interests. Especially nowadays, with the kids being at home and her husband going to school. So, the children are my responsibility. That might be one of the reasons. The kids cannot take care of themselves. I have to be here, because they are small… If somebody would take care of the kids, that would give me a peace of mind, and I would love to play basketball, as I always had the passion for it (Participant AS).

Addressing the above-mentioned obstacles by the women participants may be key to creating more effective sports-based inclusion programs tailed to the unique demands of forced women migrants. With respect to this, another important factor that needs to be considered as a major challenge resulting from sport and exercise participation is the impact of family patterns, involving traits, illnesses, behaviors, and beliefs that are passed down through numerous generations.

The following third subtheme centers on the case study group members who were affiliated with the football-based inclusion program based in a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States. They reported challenges that are grounded in generational differences, confronting them varyingly.

4c) Addressing generational differences (Nerak Football). Sustainable and enduring change in society requires an in-depth understanding of past patterns and traditions. The case study group members thus had to address challenges in the host community in light of their own cultural traditions. As such, the essence of the participants' reflections on the challenges they faced amid their affiliation with the football-based inclusion program based in a mid-sized city in the Midwestern United States concerns addressing generational conflicts and differences within their families. These include traditional values and beliefs that have been internalized by their parents and many generations that came before them. Combined with their hardships associated with building a sustainable life for their kids in a new country caused a disconnect between them and their children, profoundly manifested in their stark differences in assigning value and importance to sport and physical exercise, as well as giving emotional and mental support to their kids. The case study participants pondered their words when prompted about the challenges they faced resulting from their active involvement in soccer, recognizing the detrimental potential of family

traditions as internal barriers and gatekeepers to the next generation which may lead to missed opportunities as well as the reproduction of internalized feelings of inferiority resulting from decades-long conditioning to the patriarchal values, norms, and ideas that developed a deficit-mindset and negative belief about oneself. The participants' thoughts hinged on changing these cultural and family legacies by serving as strong and visible role models to the next generation of young girls and women striving to play sports such as soccer. Upon this, the participants expressed the hope to create new habits and traditions that value participation in sports and physical exercise as a transformative and powerful tool for career development, learning, and for inclusion of all, including women and girls.

For example, participant AT aims to pave the way for the next generation of female soccer players with them as supporting parents, breaking past patterns of their own childhood. She stated:

> I also want to add that a lot of Asian parents are still behind the traditions and of their kids to become a doctor or lawyer, and to make them very proud of their family, and they don't really look past that sports can be way to become successful in life too. But they always look that if you're a doctor or if you're a lawyer, we will be very proud of you. But I think that our […] team can be a way to you know open up how Asian parents can look at that, how we can be in sports and we can be very successful with passion. And we don't have to be a doctor or lawyer to become successful (Participant AT).

To ensure that her teammates' statement may not be perceived as an accusation and blame of her parents, participant RT felt inclined to provide her view on the shared lack of parents' approval of their soccer involvement. She complemented that:

> I just wanna add a little bit. I feel like for my family, I feel like, it's always about survival. That's how my dad grew up. It's about surviving each day. So, it's like to them working, it's what's gonna lead us to having us a better life than our parents grew up. And how my dad grew up. Because he's always working. And I don't think he wants that for his kids. So that's why he doesn't want us to waste our time by playing soccer, by playing sports. And top of that, he doesn't want us to get injured. He doesn't want us to having get in our way of success, and to define in their way, is like to have a good job. But to us, it's more like I don't want to die with a lot of money. I wanna die with a lot of memories. It's like a cliché thing, but it's like the generation today, but to our parents it's like why, why. Because it's like a luxury we can enjoy, but to them it's just a waste of time (Participant RT).

Equally expressing sympathy for her parents' disapproval of sports, participant YT described it as follows:

> And it's just, I mean my parents never came to, never watched me playing soccer. I mean like I understand from their standpoint, their perspective, like it's a waste of time for them. You know? Like why would I just go out and play soccer, when there are better things to do (Participant YT).

By contrast, participant AK admitted that she felt often discouraged and disappointed by her parents' lack of support for her sport activities, articulating the following:

> Like for example, I was playing volleyball for like high school in my senior year. And you would be seeing all the American kids their parents come to like cheer them on, and you know it feels a little disappointing sometime. You know, you understand your parents have work and stuff. But sometimes it feels disappointing that our parents can't be there for us. You know you want them to be, but you feel like a little down, but yeah just that's my point (Participant AK).

At the same time, however, participant AK understands their parents' reluctance and reasons, explaining it as follows:

> I feel like our parents don't value sport as much as they value work and stuff. They priorities is like going to work and like to financially support their families. So they view sport like something that is fun to do, but you know as a player you know you have to do a lot of work in, a lot of work and dedication. And that's something like our parents like kinda don't understand. And as much as like as good as you are compared to other people in like school, like you want your parents to see that, you know you want to show them like I'm like a little better than other players, but you don't see them there to cheer you on. So, it's kinda sad. But we're understand that they have work and you know they have to support us in some way (Participant AK).

Upon this awareness, participant AK is strongly committed to serve as a powerful role model to help initiate a generational change that desires to see the next generation of encouraged and empowered female soccer players , which is the ultimate goal of the football-based inclusion program. Which is according to the program organizer set in motion already, as he supplemented to his players' comments:

> I really wanna emphasize how important all of you are right now to the ones that are growing up. They all look up to you, each one of you as huge role model, and they wanna be like you and on the […] team at some point, because of you guys. That is such a powerful thing (Participant AK).

Building on his observation, participant EW contributed how her profound passion and dedication for soccer eventually led to a significant change in her mother's and sister's attitude toward her sport participation. She joyfully recounted that:

> I don't think they understand that you can have such things like a hobby or passion. They just think like if you have like, if you're doing something that's not gonna get you like far in life, then you shouldn't be doing it at all […] And then my sisters they got also more supportive of me also, and now they actually going to my games and stuff [...] They don't go out of state, but they try to go to games that they can go to. Now I can see when I travel out of state to go to tournaments, and I come back, I do like to share my victories with my parents, and before she would just shrug it off, and every time I would come back and would be yeah, we actually did good, we won. But now I can see it in her face that she is actually proud. She doesn't want to show it, but I can see her smirk (Participant EW).

As demonstrated by all case study participants, the major challenges resulting from their participation in soccer was fundamentally grounded in generational differences in priorities, values and awareness for the ample benefits ensued from participation in sport and physical exercise, particularly when it involves their daughters. Essentially, the provided insights provide an invaluable testament for the detrimental effect of lingering patriarchal norms and values that can be nurtured throughout a family line, building a generational legacy of internalized ideas that limits oneself and future generations to solely attempting to survive and fulfill societal expectations that preserve stereotypical views deeply embedded in Western and Eastern patriarchies alike.

The final case study group members, consisting of forced migrant women that independently exercise or play a sport, subsequently detailed their experiences with the direct consequences of such deeply rooted stereotypical, patriarchal views of women in the form of judgements, stereotypes, and lack of resources.

4d) Dealing with judgments, stereotypes, and lack of resources (Independent sport participants). Across the board, the participants of this case study group pinpointed judgements, stereotypes, and lack of resources, such as time, energy, and costs as key issues impacting their participation in sport and exercise, further indicating them as barriers to get involved in the first place. To this end, participant DA communicated her opinion in the following:

> Also, if you are a migrant woman with a family, that can be extremely tricky, because you don't have a lot of free time or energy. There are all these other responsibilities that have to be taken into account. So that can be very very challenging. I just feel like you have to have the resources. Sometimes, maybe, migrant women may feel like they don't have the resources, or the knowledge of resources of activities in sport available (Participant DA).

Beyond this, several participants referred to encountered judgements and stereotypes as the biggest challenges resulting from their participation in sport and physical exercise. Participant DA thus noted:

> I think, I mean, obviously, the challenges can be sometimes to be, in any sport, that you don't feel fit in, that you feel judged. Because of your size, because of your race, because maybe of what you wear, you know (Participant DA).

Direct outcomes of experiencing judgment informed by stereotypes is a sense of exclusion and the discouragement to partake in the desired activity, which is further illustrated below by participant YN's testimony:

> Well for me, I had to, even though I was good, I had to show them that I could do my job and there were all, like, my high school team, there were playing together since they were like four years old, so that's like 14 years of experience playing together. So, it was a little hard to fit in and all this (Participant YN).

With regard to judgment and stereotypes in sport and exercise spaces, participant BM tallied her experience playing basketball in the United States, and proffered the following recommendation:

> Yeah, I mean, for [sic] a challenge, they prefer their own people, they prefer that. But one thing I realized that you have to show your talent first, and then they will accept you. If I'm playing, I have to show my performance to make other ones appreciate it. Because some people, usually, especially with girls, they judge. Like oh, she's a girl. When they see all your techniques, they are like oh she got some moves (Participant BM).

Participant AN equally presumes that facing stereotypes and judgement are one of the biggest internal and external hindrances to women participating in sport and exercise. She reckoned that "I mean, I'm not saying that in society all stereotypes are gone. There are some still, which might stop some women from coming to karate" (Participant AN). In reference to this, participant LG chimed in a few examples of her experience with sports and exercise to expand on her fellow case study participant's suggestions, rehashing the following:

> I mean, challenges are, I suppose, how your culture view women in sports. And being able to balance this with other things. I think that's the challenge. I mean, not everybody can pay for a yoga class, but maybe you love spending money on a yoga class is not better for you in a long run. But the challenge is always like, I guess, how you pay for it, how you get access, how you get there, how you maintain it. Like when I was a kid, there were things that were difficult to do like when we had to pay fees or buy uniforms, stuff like that. So, it's like affordability, access, and maintenance (Participant LG).

To further strengthen her position, participant LG mulled over the roots of the encountered obstacles during her tenures with a variety of sports and physical exercise activities, concluding the following:

> It could be challenging. Because a lot of things seem like mandatory, besides like me going to the park or just jogging. Even jogging, when you decide to go jogging, you need jogging clothes. So, I think, sports just like other things, are ruled by capitalism and that's why a lot of people don't participate. You know, even in school, gym class, a public school, you have to pay for your workout clothes, your basic school t shirt and shorts. So, it's just like, a lot of things are mandatory when sports like breathing should be sort of free. But you always feel the pressure to have to look apart, you have to pay your dues if you're part of an organization like meetups or leagues and whatever. So, all these networking things cost money. And that's why you see a lot of faces of usually wealthy, white people. Because they have the money, they have the time, they have the resources to do so. But it's not that migrant communities don't want to do those things. I think that's the challenge (Participant LG).

Taking into consideration the varying yet similar testimonies from the case study members of the fourth sub theme, it is palpable that the lingering stereotypical gender views in the society remain a major hinder, internally and externally, for women and girls to participate in sport and exercise.

Summary of Findings

The above-presented findings of the study consolidated in four themes and four subthemes, respectively, clearly indicate the positive impact and social value of sport and physical exercise in the lives of the women refugees and migrants. More specifically, the participants largely contributed their enhanced quality of life, social inclusion, self-respect, and confidence to their consistent involvement in sport and physical exercise. Equipped with the newly acquired survival and life skills, their responses revealed how sport and physical exercise empowered them to address generational differences and cope with encountered judgement and stereotypes while seeking out resources to fulfill family obligations and future career and learning opportunities at the same. Simply put, the participants of the varying case study groups unanimously referred to sport and exercise as a key factor in their successful resettlement to their respective host communities in the United States. The women refugees and migrants gained benefits from participating in sport and physical exercise programs and activities and provided valuable insight into sports' potential to serve as an integrative and practical tool for the psychosocial, mental, and physical well-being of an individual and the collective. Precisely, despite the varying cultural backgrounds and levels and types of sport and exercise involvement, the overarching consensus from all participating forced migrant women was that their active lifestyles led to enhanced quality of life through an increased sense of freedom, belonging, and social inclusion due to the developed friendships within the sports-based inclusion programs or sports spaces that had an empowering

effect on them to be themselves and learn new skills that might have seem impossible to master for them at first. In addition, the women refugees and migrants talked about gained access to new perspectives and skills, improved health through sport, as well as how they built social bridges and connected with others to learn more about new cultures, opportunities, and the various communities in their host country of the United States. Sport and physical exercise taught the women refugees and migrants to believe in themselves, master the seemingly impossible and gain confidence, which gave them hope for a better future and a positive outlook on life.

When it comes to challenges, however, the women refugees and migrants had to overcome internal and external barriers. The biggest obstacles they encountered were disapproval within their closest circles, such as their own family and members of their cultural group, family obligations paired with internalized societal expectations, judgement stemming from stereotypes, and lacking resources.

Overall, it can be concluded that sport and exercise spaces served as safe spaces and learning communities for the forced migrant women where they reconnected with themselves, connected with others, and acquired the necessary skills to be active, integrated, and successful participants of their respective hosting communities. Interestingly enough, however, there were some notable age-related differences among the study participants' responses and across the varying case study groups. For instance, most of the older forced migrant women and refugees prioritized the physical benefits of their sport and physical exercise activities whereas the younger participants particularly cherished the emotional, psychosocial, and mental benefits and the educational and career opportunities associated with their sport and exercise participation. This is well-documented in the following statement from participant LN from the first case study group (Women's Swim Group), who is in her late 60s: "Plus, I consider myself older, and I have

hypertension. But exercise really helped me like relax and I would go back and feel very comfortable, relaxed. Even my blood pressure, it got better with exercise" (Participant LN). Conversely, participant EW from the third case study group (Nerak Football) demonstrated the glaring distinction in the way the younger generation may perceive and experience sports and exercise, stating that: "It is hard to talk about emotional stuff, like something you achieve and it's hard to talk to older people about those [emotional] stuff. So, it's like we just keeping it to ourselves and then just talk to our friends about it" (Participant EW). Similarly, the older women reported gender expectations, family obligations, and lacking resources as the major challenges in addition to overcoming their initial fear of participating in sport and physical exercise activities such as swimming. Related to this, participant AR from the second case study group (Women's Empowerment Group) expressed how much she would love to join a basketball group, however her "main problem is my kids and having to take care of them. That's my obstacle" (Participant AR). By contrast, the younger participants recounted how the experienced lack of support from their parents fueled their desire to serve as role models for the next generation of young girls that aim to compete in sports such as soccer or karate. As such, participant WS from the fourth case study group (Independent sports participants) recalled how she encouraged her sister to pursue volleyball in middle school, describing it as follows:

> So, I tell her that she really should. Like if you like, then you try out. There's no sport that you cannot do. Gives her more confidence in herself… Don't care if people talk about you, if you like, and you can do it, do it (Participant WS).

Nonetheless the age-related and socio-cultural differences, the overwhelming consensus among the study participants was the strong belief that their sport and physical exercise participation played a central role in their growing sense of belonging and connectiveness in their respective host communities in the United States.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Scholars conducting studies in varying environments worldwide showcase sport and physical exercise as key instruments in the promotion of social and cultural change in diverse societies. Accordingly, social institutions such as non-profit organizations, human right groups, or government agencies across the world (Global Sports Development.org, 2016) have launched a myriad of sports-based initiatives and programs catered toward the integration of migrants, especially refugees.

In Europe, the European Commission (European Commission, 2021), which is the executive branch of the European Union and responsible for proposing legislation and implementing the EU's policies, has actively promoted the use of sport as a driver of social inclusion. The Commission utilizes sport to address youth employment and the social inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in and through sport, especially forced migrant women and refugees and individuals with disabilities (European Commission, 2021).

Simultaneously, scholars continue to explore the role and effectiveness of sports-based programs and interventions designed as pathway to social inclusion and integration of forced migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers (Spaaij et al., 2019). These scholars, as articulated in most of previous literature, studied migrant or refugee communities in Europe and Australia focusing on sport offerings and program structures as well as male refugee youth and adults (Burrmann et al., 2018; Olliff, 2008; Spaaij, 2015; Stura, 2019). Nathan et al. (2013) and Spaaij (2015) exemplify a body of research that establish core strengths of sports-based inclusion

program offerings, specifying enhancement of well-being and development of a sense of belonging. Most recent studies have further identified the need for culturally responsive and community-driven program elements that are tailored to the specific strengths, capabilities, knowledge, and resources of the participants (Spaaij et al., 2019; Thorpe, 2020) as opposed to sports-based inclusion programs and initiatives that require them to assimilate by learning if not adopting core values of the program organizers' respective communities, whether intentional or unintentional (Baker-Lewton et al., 2017; Dukic et al., 2017).

Notably absent from the current discourse on the impact and effectiveness of such initiatives are the voices and experiences of female participants of sports-based inclusion programs in the United States, which, according to Luguetti et al. (2021) tend to demonstrate a manifestation of the deeply rooted issue of women refugees' historical and systematical marginalization in sport programs and interventions. In this regard, this dissertation study fills the gap in the extant literature in documenting meanings and the role of sport for forced migrant women and refugees in the United States, identifying barriers and constraints that impact their sport participation, and indicate challenges that the participants faced in current places of residence and countries of origin.

In this chapter, the findings of the dissertation study are discussed in the context of extant literature. Conclusions and implications follow with practical recommendations serving as closure. The major outcomes of this study substantiate and expand on previous research studies, specifically addressing the extent to which sports-based programs may generate social inclusion, lessens the gap in the existing literature on the women's experience, with some of the results providing insights and unique perspectives that might be a valuable contribution to the forced sport migration literature. The concept of belonging combined with acculturation theory and an intersectional feminist lens informed by gender relations theory underscore the understanding and

explanations of the research findings. Drawing from the interpretation of the study results, specific implications, limitations, practical recommendations for practitioners, and future research directions for scholars will be subsequently provided in this chapter, including the development of a conceptual model that aims to highlight the key antecedents and factors for implementing effective sports-based inclusion programs, applicable to others cultural contexts or populations.

In the bigger picture, the participants' perspectives on and experiences with sport and physical exercise strongly suggest that sports-based inclusion programs are effective tools to promote social inclusion and successful acculturation of forced migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers.

Undergirded by the notion of belongingness as a fundamental basic human need and motivation (Maslow, 1943; Yuval-Davis, 2004), the main outcome of this study aligns with previous acculturation and migration studies that determined the longing for a sense of belonging as the overarching "global theme" (Osman et al., 2020, p. 1), paramount to the successful integration and well-being of migrants in their host communities (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Karim & Tak Hue, 2020; Tovar & Simon, 2010). Amply proven in previous research (e.g., Brunette et al., 2011; Stone, 2018; Walseth, 2006), participation in sport and physical exercise has the unique ability to produce various forms of belonging, including the extent to which an individual feels valued, appreciated, and included as a full member of the respective social group or community. Accordingly, most of the study participants reported how they felt welcome, confident, and part of their chosen sport setting and host community.

These findings are congruent with previous literature on the concept of belonging, led by political theorist Yuval-Davis (2004), who has conducted numerous research studies on belonging and its interactions with politics and intersectionality, constituting that:

> [b]elonging is not just about membership, rights, and duties... Nor can it be reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need of people (2004, p. 215).

Conversely, however, Karim & Tak Hue (2020) caution to overestimate the role of the sense of belonging in the acculturation and resettlement process of migrants, based on the key findings of their phenomenology study of young Pakistani students' acculturation and sense of belonging in Hong Kong. More specifically, the scholars concluded that it may be shortsighted to gauge the success of adaption and integration by merely assessing the individual's sense of belonging. Instead, they postulated there are potentially other social implications affected by the sense of belonging (Karim & Tak Hue, 2020).

The main conclusions from this dissertation study validate this assumption, warranting a more in-depth interpretation of the major points that emerged from the interviews and survey responses. For clarity and consistency purposes, each topic will be subsequently discussed in more detail, distinctly divided into the following subheadings: (1) sports and exercise as spaces for women refugee empowerment, (2) sports and exercise as pathways to active citizenship, (3), Sports and exercise as schools of life, (4) sports and exercise as dismantling tools of patriarchy and cultural reproduction.

Sports and Exercise as Spaces for Women Refugee Empowerment

The participants in the four case study groups came from distinctive and unique socio-cultural backgrounds and had varying levels of involvement in sports-based inclusion programs or other physical exercise activities. These participants ascribed positive, liberating, and supportive meanings to their participation in sports-based inclusion programs, explicitly and implicitly drawing attention to sports and exercise settings as spaces of empowerment that enhanced their quality of life (QoL) due to increased self-confidence, self-acceptance, and sense of belonging.

This finding confirms and expands on existing literature pertaining to the life-enhancing and empowering impact of sport participation on vulnerable population, including forced migrants, women refugees, individuals with disabilities, and older adults (e.g., Amini et al., 2018; Chun et al., 2008; Lawson, 2005; Obadiora, 2016; Rejeski & Mihalko, 2001; Stura, 2019). Sutton et al. (2021) identified recognition and appreciation of diversity as key ingredients to achieving inclusion and a sense of belonging. Most recently, furthermore, a participatory-action research study from Luguetti et al. (2021) demonstrated how an activist and strength-based approach to sports-inclusion programs increased its empowering effect on the participating women with refugee-background, as they reported to have learned that "together we have power" and the "importance of speaking up to those in charge" (Luguetti et al., 2021, p. 14). Along with this, Meier (2005) emphasized the vital importance of incorporating female volunteers and program organizers, as they can serve as visible role models, language teachers, and close confidantes at the same time while increasing familiarity and relatedness. Such notion was shared by the participants of the study, who recurringly referred to the volunteers as their friends and the reason for their positive experience with sport and physical exercise. Establishing public spaces operated by and for women within and through sports and physical exercise provided practical and tangible benefits, while facilitating the empowerment of the program participants and gradually promoting their familiarization with the local community. The link between women and girls occupying and claiming public space and the gradual acceptance of their presence in the public eye is well-documented in extant literature and practitioners' guidelines (Sportanddev.org, 2021).

The growing interdisciplinary evidence for sports' ability to serve as a tool of empowerment paved the way for the emergent academic fields of Sport for Development (SFD), Sport for Social Change, and Quality of Life (QoL).

Whether as an outcome or source of enhanced quality of life, the described feelings of empowerment conjured through participation in sport and physical exercise by the participants of this study are consistent with previous research studies from Stura (2019) and (Otterbein, 2012) who found that sport programs provide participants the opportunity "to enjoy a better quality of life" (Stura, 2019, p. 137) and "enhance the quality of life and improve the psychosocial development of refugees, in particularly youth" (Otterbein, 2012, p. 2). This is further supported by the results of Obi's (2021) recent case study on Syrian refugees in Jordan that document the impact of living conditions in refugee camps on QOL, namely that "camp-based programs need to promote life skills to improve refugees' success once they move away from the camps, noting that these programs are particularly needed for female-headed refugee households living in campus" (Obi, 2021, p. 25).

Albeit the abundance of conducted research on quality of life (QOL) relating to older adult and refugee camps, and its growing role as a significant assessment instrument and concept in health and medicine, as well economy, migration, and politics (e.g., Elavsky et al., 2005; Rejeski & Mihalko, 2001; Wedgeworth et al., 2017), still more research is needed to address conceptual and methodological concerns (Haraldstad et al., 2019). As such, there are various approaches to assess QOL, and a uniformly definition of the concept is yet to be approved, although the World Health Organization (WHO) has provided the following classification: "An individual's perception of their position in the life in the context of the culture in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns" (WHO, 1995). Conversely, other attempts to define Quality of Life (QOL) refer to the individual's level of involvement, usefulness, and ability to enjoy in the respective community through several demographic factors, such as age, socioeconomic status, health (e.g., Haraldstad et al., 2019; Post, 2014).

Findings of this study clearly indicate that perceptions on quality of life are strongly informed by differences in cultural values, health, status, gender, and age, significantly impacting the meanings participants held about the role and meaning of sport and physical exercise in their life. Hence, data about the perceived importance of aspects of QOL could be useful in tailoring more effectively sports-based inclusion programs and initiatives catered towards the empowerment and quality of life of forced migrant women, especially refugees.

In addition to the established empowerment and QOL enhancement effects of sports-based inclusion programs and initiatives, it can be further observed that the reported increased levels of self-worth, or one's self-esteem, and self-acceptance may be connected to the participants' growing desire and confidence to belong and get involved in societal functions of their respective host communities in the United States. Research outcomes may be particularly critical to social inclusion and vice versa, enabling individuals to become full and active members of their respective host communities, particularly given the role sport plays in promoting positive self-identity formation empirically linked with perceived and actual belonging that can effectively combat feelings of exclusion and isolation (Cameron & Granger, 2016). This assumption is grounded in Harris & Orth (2020) research which determined "that the link between people's social relationships and their level of self-esteem is truly reciprocal in all develop-mental stages across the life span, reflecting a positive feedback loop between the constructs" (p. 1).

Through its unifying, collaborative, and transcending nature, sport and physical exercise settings are inherently thriving environments where individuals connect with others through working towards a common goal, such as winning games or learning a new skill. Adding to the equation an inclusive, cultural and gender sensitive, and empowering program culture, the product is a powerful tool to create pathways to social inclusion manifested in active citizenship.

Sports and Exercise as Pathways to Active Citizenship

Collectively throughout the case study groups, the young women offered resoundingly support of the sports-based approach to facilitate the social inclusion and integration of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide. Participants reported major benefits gained form involvement in sport-based programs, which include new perspectives, opportunities, and skills, as well as exposure to other cultures and communities, which confirmed previous academic and practitioner research on the effectiveness of sport for social inclusion and development projects (e.g., Block & Gibbs, 2017; Ginzel, 2018; Spaaij et al., 2019).

Most recently, however, Flensner et al. (2021) challenged this notion, arguing that the "role sport might play in promoting the integration of migrants is unclear and ambiguous" (p. 77). In fact, the interviewed stakeholders for this ethnographic study surveyed sport clubs in Sweden with a particular emphasis on integration of migrant children and youth decisively distinguished the concept of integration from the concept of inclusion, with the former being described as an out of reach concept because of its dependency on fundamental economic and social structures in society (Flensner et al., 2021).

Similarly, the responses from the participants of this study regarding the key benefits and impact of their sport and physical exercise participation implied that social inclusion rather than integration through and within sports is the pathway to active citizenship through increased societal participation and community engagement (Green, 2007; Flensner et al., 2021). In fact, full participation in economic, social, and political life is the core of the social inclusion agenda both in Australia and overseas, according to a research paper on "social inclusion and social citizenship towards a truly inclusive society" (Buckmaster & Thomas, 2009), accessible on the website of the Parliament of Australia.

This notion was well-reflected in the testimonies presented in this study. Particularly, the women participants' accounts on how their involvement in sport and physical exercise afforded them access to new, never thought possible educational, personal, and professional opportunities, validates the current body of literature on antecedents and factors for creating inclusion in sport (e.g., Kiuppis, 2016; Play by the Rules, 2021). Furthermore, the women participants' reports provided more substantial ground to the *Seven Pillar Inclusion* model that was developed and postulated in 2015 by Peter Downs, a former manager of the Australian Sports Commission's Disability Sport Unit, and founder of Play by the Rules, a non-profit government-supported initiative that aims to create safe, and inclusive sport and recreation programs at the community level, through collaborations with Sport Integrity Australia, Sport Australia, and Australian Human Rights Commission to name a few (Play by the Rules, 2021).

The premise of the broad framework is to provide guidelines for sport practitioners at all levels to promote and foster diverse, equitable, and inclusive sport programs (Inclusive Sport Design, 2021). Referring to commonalities that broadly influence inclusion as "habits" or "big picture" issues that must be adequately identified and addressed by sports clubs and organizations aiming to offer sports-based inclusion programs, the "helicopter view of inclusion" encompasses seven factors, namely access, attitude, choice, partnerships, community, policy, and opportunities, that can either facilitate or hinder achieving inclusion (Inclusive Sport Design, 2021, para. 1).

In line with previous research and the reports from participants of this current study, Downs (2016) caution, however, that implementation strategies of the framework have to be tailored effectively to the unique needs and demands of the respective target population, as "complexities of gender inequality are different to cultural disadvantage" (Downs, cited on Inclusive Sport Design, 2021, para. 1).

To accomplish this, the online platform sportandev.org (2021), for instance, urges sports programs to provide access to resources, structures, and leadership, meaning women should be offered key management positions and permanent seats on boards that make critical financial, structural, and personnel decisions.

The findings of this study add to the existing literature that indicated the need for more cultural and gender-sensitive sports-based inclusion and sport for development programs to position themselves as welcoming and accessible to women migrants and refugees than it is for their counterparts (Meier, 2005; Sportanddev.org, 2021). Only so sports and exercise can pave the way towards an active citizenship. Moreover, the participants highlighted how their active involvement in sport and physical exercise activities led to the development of new friendships and social networks, replacing the ones they had to leave behind in their home countries. Accordingly, some of the participants' answers revealed the desire to take on more of an active role in their respective communities, as explicitly demonstrated in the case of participant AK who served as a translator for the Women's Empowerment group and president of her Homeowner's Association. Such observations corroborate previous research that found evidence for the direct association between active involvement in sport and an active role in the community, making it a valuable tool for community building and active citizenship (Babacan, 2005; Coakley, 2011). As noted previously, this outcome may be strongly informed by the level of belonging and meaningfulness that is in turn highly influenced by the level of self-esteem and confidence as well as sense of appreciation and empowerment. Thus, as concisely recapped by Babacan (2005), sports and physical exercise programs have the ability to reverse some of the negative impact migration often has on both the individuals and the communities, including loss of social networks and resulting isolation, impact on belonging and identity, and social participation.

All these factors are fundamental for an active citizenship and community engagement. Providing pathways to ameliorate these aspects will lead to improved overall well-being and health of the participants, giving them an incentive to become more engaged with the community, hence active citizens, which are essential factors for a robust, well-functioning representative democracy (Babacan, 2005). It can be therefore argued that successful social inclusion of migrants and refugees are very much in the self-interest of the governments.

Sports and Exercise as Schools of Life

Empowered individuals are believed to be more engaged, self-motivated, and curious lifelong learners, as it builds autonomy, increases or restores confidence and self-worth, and instills the desire to explore and master new skills and gain knowledge that are related to their personal experiences (Andriotis, 2018; Lapan et al., 2002). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), three components, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, facilitate human desire to grow, with self-determination theory profoundly informing collective learning, hence epitomize important quality of learning in empowered learners. Corroborating this, several participants of this current study viewed their sport and exercise involvement as a safe space and learning community that generated sentiments of hope, confidence, and a strong voice, ultimately equipping the adult women with critical life and basic survival skills, including language proficiency, time management, leadership, resilience, and teamwork. While this link between sport participation and life skill development is well-documented in previous literature on able-bodied sport and inclusive environments (e.g., Block et al., 2014; Farello et al., 2019; Gould & Carson, 2008; Holt et al., 2009; Slee, 2011), there's been a growing call among scholars and practitioners alike to shift away from focusing on teaching survival towards thriving skills (Migrationpolicy.org, 2018), and adopting a strength-based rather than deficit-based approach, as the latter inevitably reproduces

stereotypical and stigmatic views of refugees and asylum seekers (Luguetti et al., 2021; Spaaij et al., 2019). Particularly the latter is palpable in Stura's (2019) study that depicted refugees as one-dimensional and troubled by the traumas they experienced throughout their resettlement journey and the challenges to adapt to the cultural differences of the receiving countries and societies, whereas the participants with refugee-background themselves never mentioned such perceptions.

By contrast, the strength-based practice assumes the pre-existence of valuable skills, knowledge, and resources that are worthwhile to explore and build upon to improve their situation (Saleebey, 2006). Rather than focusing on needs and problems that need to be tackled, the aim is to highlight aspects that could support the growth of individuals and communities, underpinned by the belief that people have agencies, aptitudes, and resources that empowers them from within (Spaaij et al., 2019; Thorpe, 2016). From this holistic perspective, the focus ought to be on individuals' personal strengths, agency, usefulness, and assets to the society that may be leveraged to overcome constraints and barriers forced migrant women, especially refugees, face in their new environment, and when seeking or being involved with sports and physical exercise (Wong, 2020). By way of illustration, a study participant who was involved with the Women's Empowerment Group used to work in foreign affairs in her home country, bringing along extensive knowledge about foreign protocols and policies in addition to exceptional language skills that enabled her to serve as a translator and assist the local refugee agency in their efforts to facilitate the successful resettlement of other forced migrant women and refugees. Although addressed in practitioners' concepts (e.g., SportandDev.org), sport and migration scholars have yet to examine the effects of handing over the program organization and leadership to senior forced migrants, tapping into their agency, self-efficacy, and strengths. In practical context, this approach has been adopted by existing sports-based inclusion programs, such as *tentaja* in Berlin, Germany (hangar.1.de, 2021).

Sports and Exercise as Dismantling Tools of Patriarchy and Cultural Reproduction

The main goals of the soccer-based inclusion program (Nerak Football) that fielded the third case study group of participants of this study are the infusion of generational change, preservation of cultural heritage, and promotion of gender equity. Particularly these young women's accounts provided a valuable glimpse into the continuous struggles of women and girls to participate in sport and physical exercise. Besides the potential disapproval from close family members due to differing values on gender norms and expectations, indicating generational conflicts, participants of other case study groups described incidents of encountered judgements, stereotyping, and other forms of discrimination that discouraged them from continuing or even beginning their fitness activities or following sport pursuits.

The lack of resources such as transportation, childcare, and financial means to pay membership dues or purchasing the "appropriate" workout clothes, represented another key barrier to regular participation in sport and physical exercise opportunities for participants, which is a negative outcome of capitalism. According to Hartley et al. (2017), these structural barriers are the biggest obstacles, which is further consistent with the body of literature on the socio-cultural, economic, and ecological constraints and barriers for women's participation in sport, especially for women hailing from patriarchal societies and historically underrepresented populations, and continuously perceived male-dominated sports such as basketball and soccer (e.g., Abbas, 2011; Agergaard, 2016; Hoden, 2010; Javed et al., 2020; Khan, 2012).

Particularly noteworthy is the often-detrimental parental impact on women's desire and interest in sport and exercise, yet curiously often overlooked in the extant research (Pacheco et al., 2012). For instance, Ogu (1999) noted how the responses and hopes from parents deeply influence their daughters' choices of sports.

In the Pakistani context, historically, parents would strongly discourage if not forbid their daughters from pursuing any form of sport and exercise (Javed et al., 2020). This is consistent with other previous research pertaining to similar cultural and religious contexts (e.g., Walseth, 2006, 2016; Kavasoglu & Alakurt, 2021) and with some of the participants' accounts of this current study, connoting patriarchal reproduction, which is doubly weighed on forced migrant women and refugees because of the often lack of available resources to mitigate this form of cultural reproduction.

Put differently, the participants implied that generational value conflicts were rooted in their upbringing in the U.S. culture as opposed to their parents who were culturally shaped by their home countries and deeply impacted by their resettlement journey and its associated challenges and often traumatic experiences with lasting consequences, such as decreased well-being and mental health issues, and one-dimensional outlooks on life deriving from a survival mindset (e.g., Kelly et al., 2016). Despite the expressed understanding, indebtedness, and appreciation for the parents sacrifice that brought them to the United States and allowed them to pursue their fitness and sport goals, the participants of this study offered valuable insights into a growing concern among migration and acculturation scholars regarding the widening gaps between first and second generations of migrants (e.g., Baghdasaryan et al., 2021, Birman & Morland, 2014; Citlak et al., 2008). As recently pointed out by Sanchez-Aragon et al. (2021), this disconnection between refugee parents and children are often caused by the elderly's desire to hold onto their culture of origin and their values, which are often embedded in patriarchal structures and norms.

Adding to this, empirical and anecdotal evidence indicate that the youth are generally able to adapt faster to a new cultural and religious context than their parents, causing acculturation gaps that set the stage for generational value conflicts and eroded family cohesion and traditions

(Birman & Morland, 2014). Strong female role models are needed to spearhead changes that address responsibly restrictive structures and generational conflicts, especially in traditionally male-dominated sports such as football (Ekholm et al., 2019). In fact, previous research studies (e.g., Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014; Pielichaty, 2019) have started to peel back the layers of the long-established conviction of football or soccer being the stronghold for the construction and preservation of hegemonic masculinity in sports (e.g., Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), making the argument for football as a space to dismantle patriarchal structures and gender role expectations due to its ability to engender a sense of belonging and togetherness, pride, confidence, identify formation – all established contributors to empowerment (Pielichaty, 2019). Referencing its global popularity, timeliness, and shared cultural phenomenon worldwide, Jones et al. (2021) contended that soccer is a conducive setting for creating safe spaces that protect participants from psychological or emotional harm, allowing them to escape from the daily burden and challenges associated with acculturation and resettlement (Dukic et al., 2017; Ha & Lyras, 203).

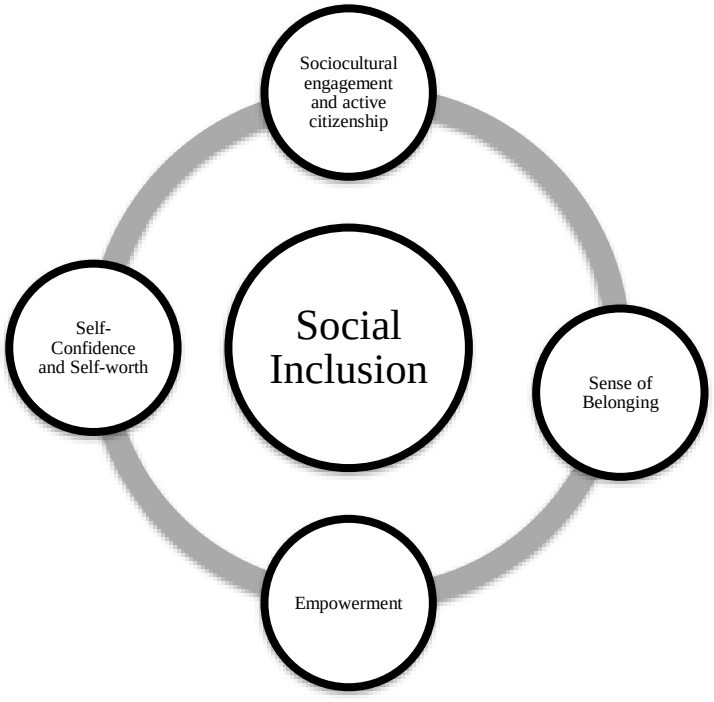
Conversely, however, identical to the shared perceptions from the participants of this current study, existing research on football-based programs from Caudwell (2011) and Pielichaty (2019) documented female participants' recurring experiences with harassment, discrimination, and marginalization, typically observed in organizations and programs that were run by men. Hence, Pielichaty (2019) concluded that participating in football for girls and women could be a symbolic way of challenging traditional gender norms and expectations imposed onto them by society, often constituted in the disapproval of parents and other family members to engage in sport and physical exercise.

Sports-based inclusion programs and interventions may thus take a central role in invoking and facilitating substantial social change centered on emancipation and gender equity hence

replacing the often-internalized lingering patriarchal norms that tend to be restrictive and discouraging for women and girls, as illustrated in the following statement: “That is the biggest problem. They are nowhere. They are at home” (the manager, west city midnight football, cited in Ekholm et al., 2019).

Consequently, the specific findings suggest that parents need to play a central in involving forced migrant women in sport and physical exercise through raising awareness of its benefits and changing societal perceptions. By raising awareness of this, current female participants of sports-based inclusion programs and interventions may take the lead in creating generational change as visible and strong role models.

In an effort to establish meaningful connections between the discussed findings that emerged from the subjective perceptions and experiences of the study participants, the conceptual-based relationship model (Figure 5) below has been created to further illustrate the causal relationship between each discussed factor, ultimately heightening awareness of how sport involvement can enhance culturally responsive social change.



F*igure 5:* Conceptual-based relationship model of identified factors that facilitate social inclusion through and within sports.

This framework illustrates how the four key themes of enhanced quality of life, social inclusion through sport, self-respect and life skills through sport, generational differences, judgements, and lack of resources interrelate with each other to create contexts that can facilitate successful resettlement and promote social inclusion of forced migrant women and refugees. Berry (1992, 1997) corroborates this research finding in that if tailored to the specific needs of the target migrant population, it will enhance the effectiveness of sports-based inclusion programs and interventions. Future research will be required to investigate further the links presented within this conceptual-based relationship framework.

Implications, Recommendations, and Limitations

Implications

Upon summarizing and discussing the main findings of this study, there are several theoretical implications and practical recommendations that sport practitioners and programmers might find helpful in tailoring more effectively existing and future sports-based inclusion programs and interventions towards the unique socio-cultural and psychosocial needs of forced migrant women and refugees.

Theoretical implications include the view that forced migrant women and refugees, sport practitioners, and scholars alike may be able to draw meaningful conclusions from the study findings that might not only be relevant for the realm of sport and exercise, but also applicable to other parts of the global society.

Another theoretical implication is the need for women in leadership positions to address the identified gender-specific constraints to sport and exercise participation by developing more culturally responsive and gender-accommodative programs while serving as relatable, socializing agents and visible role models.

Particularly women with forced migrant or refugee background would be helpful in leadership position to create more safe spaces and environments that foster appreciation, recognition, and respect, empowering all participants to reach their full potential and thrive successfully. It is important to reiterate that an intersectional feminist lens is always necessary to inclusively address and consider all antecedents and factors that could hinder or facilitate the participation to sports-based inclusion programs and interventions.

Practical recommendations

There are practical recommendations emanating from this study. Multiple approaches that emerged from the interviews with the participating forced migrant women and refugees of this study ought to be considered as practical recommendations and strategies.

First, public, private, or government-funded sports-based inclusion programs or inventions catered toward the successful resettlement of forced migrants should include free shuttle and transportation services, a kids' corner for childcare, and complementary exercise clothes – all to affordable pricing, preferably at no costs, so that the programs will be affordable, accessible, and attendance maintainable – to everyone. To accomplish this in a sustainable manner for the program organizers, the organizations must seek out partnerships with other liked-minded businesses and individuals.

A second key recommendation is that program offerings should be available multiple times during the day and week to make it as flexible and less time dependent as possible. This can occur through requiring program coordinators to get the participants involved with the leading and organizing of different elements and activities.

A third recommendation refers to the idea of developing a rotating member childcare service, which may be not only be beneficial to the women participants, but also to their kids who

will be exposed to other individuals with unique lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, helping facilitate the development of social networking and communication skills, interest and appreciation for other cultures, sports and exercise, and the creation of confidence and empowerment resulting from seeing their parents engage in sport and physical exercise activities.

The fourth recommendation is underpinned by the notion of empowerment and representation that can be accomplished through visible and strong role models that have a similar background, gender, or cultural and race identity. By program participants taking the roles of coaches, administrators, and leaders, they can actively influence policies and structures, ultimately helping to invoke generational and structural change through advocating and implementing gender-accommodative and culturally sensitive approaches.

A fifth recommendation concerns the type of sport and physical exercise that is chosen for the respective inclusion program or initiative. Team sports settings such as soccer and basketball have been proven to be effective, as they encourage social interaction and building connections through conversations before, during, and after the activity. By contrast, relaxation methods such as yoga or group fitness classes discourage talking by requiring everyone to remain silent and focused during the activity, which makes it more difficult to connect with other individuals.

The sixth recommendation is directed to helping professionals, such as counselors, psychologists, speech and trauma therapists, social workers, and anyone who wants to make a valuable contribution to transforming their communities to be more inclusive and equitable places through sports and physical exercise. According to several participants' testimonials, women refugees and forced migrants literally regained their voices and ability to interact with others through their participation in sport and exercise.

Thus, counseling, and psychiatric departments, as well as mental health professionals, could help forced migrants and refugees to seek out nearby sports-based inclusion programs when such services are warranted or needed.

The final and seventh recommendation taps into the strength of diversity, as the participants mentioned the need for generating more awareness of the programs to the broader host community so that more U. S. residents join the sessions, which could foster cross-cultural exchange and understanding between forced migrants and residents while providing the opportunity to practice and improve language skills. Accordingly, the conceptual model (Figure 6) below highlights the key factors that may facilitate the successful organization of sports-based programs for forced migrants, specifically women and girls from all cultural backgrounds.

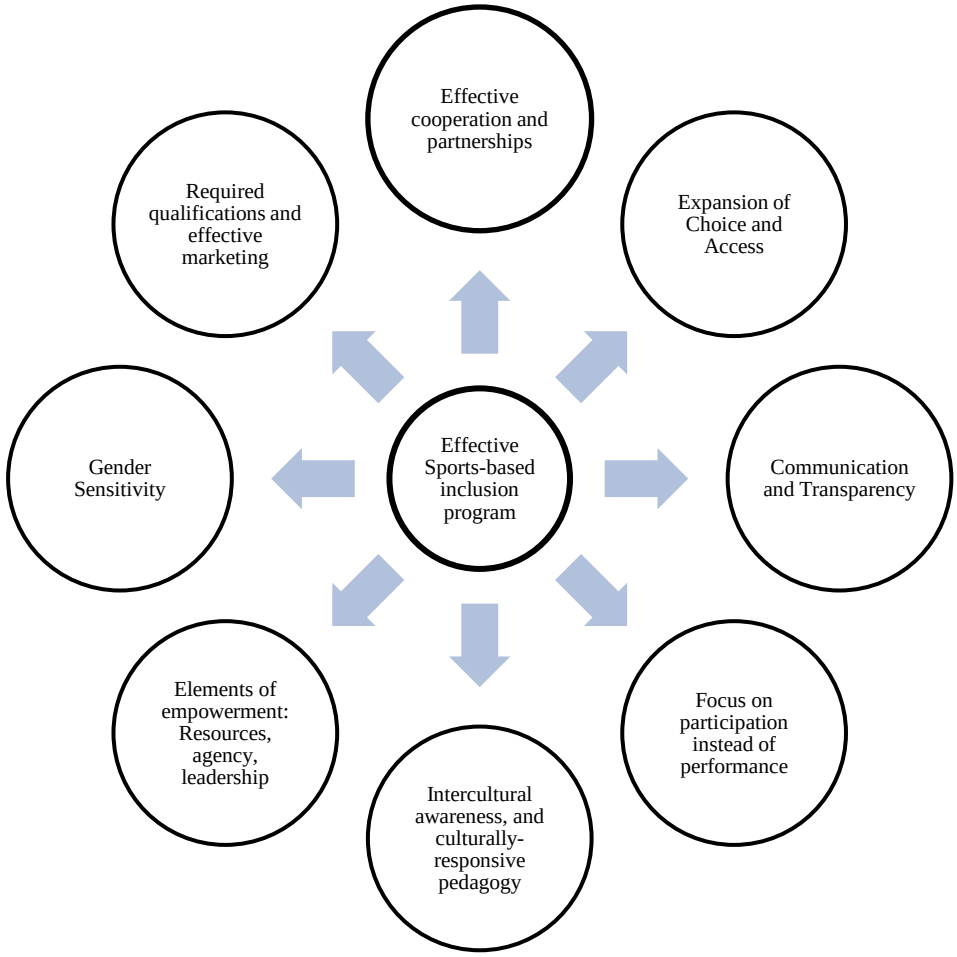


Figure 6: Adapted from Sport Inclusion Network (2019) and based on study participants' responses.

In summary, in order to develop effective sports-based inclusion programs, it is critically important for sport practitioners to promote gender equity across all populations. However, the key recipe to the success of sports-based inclusion programs and interventions is to always follow a personal and social development approach, meaning activities and program components have to be catered towards the specific needs and desires of the target groups.

Limitations of the study

Given the current circumstances stemming from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this study encountered difficulties that are inherent to the chosen vulnerable target group as well as to the interpretive multi-case study research design and data collection methods. More specifically, the number of participants (36) may be too small to draw general conclusions that could be expanded to the wider population. However, as Simons (2009) argues," the aim is particularization to present a rich portrayal of a single setting to inform practice, to establish the value of the case and/or add knowledge of a specific topic" (p. 24).

Furthermore, the decision to use a multi-case study design was largely informed by the notion that studying multiple cases of a similar phenomenon helps to identify commonalities and differences between the cases within each situation and across situations that creates a more convincing theory and findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003).

Another limitation might be the previously mentioned potential for the researcher's subjectivities that has been addressed with continuous memoing, which effectively turned it into a tool to enhance the interpretation of the data and strengthen the findings. Along with this, the researcher experienced difficulties with the recruitment of participants due to the status of being an "outsider" and "insider" at the same time. As a White European woman, I am often rendered "other," yet may be still perceived as "outsider," which may decrease the ability to gain trust and

access to rich data from participants (Irvine et al., 2008). Especially when it comes to recruiting study participants and interviewing women refugees and forced migrants, researchers have come across socio-cultural challenges, as described in Gunn Allen (1986) study on indigenous women. "Many Indian women are uncomfortable with feminism because they perceive it (correctly) as white-dominated. They (not so correctly) believe it is concerned with issues that have little bearing on their own lives, …and because they have been reared in an Anglophobic world that views white society with fear and hostility. But because of their fear…and bitterness…American Indian women often overlook the central areas of damage done to tribal tradition by white Christian and secular patriarchal dominance" (p. 22). Echoing this observation, Wolf (1996) concluded that "although foreign women may gain more license and flexibility to cross gender boundaries because of their foreign "otherness," they may indeed receive and feel more pressure than men to adhere to gender role behaviors" (p. 8). Besides, researcher need to be acutely aware of the underlying assumptions and biases when interpreting and analyzing the data because translation of words or sentences do not mean just equivalence in culture and language used, with perceptual and contextual differences counting as much as verbal (Gunn Allen, 1986, p. 23). Scholars need to be aware that understanding of diverse research participants requires having knowledge of their background. For instance, "indigenous Indians never think like whites and that any typeset version of traditional materials is distorting" (Gunn Allen, 1986, p. 31).

Future Research Directions and Conclusions

The findings of this study and its limitations indicate the need for future research. First, it is important to note that the entire research process was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately restricting the ability to connect and build rapport with the participants due to the lack of face-to-face interactions.

However, the video conferencing tool Zoom was to some extent an adequate replacement, allowing for the hosting of two focus group sessions in addition to in-depth semi-structured interviews with participants scattered across the nation. Although the data could have been richer if the researcher had been able to connect with the participants on a deeper face-to-face level, nonetheless, they provided invaluable insights and unique perspectives on the role of sport and physical exercise in their lives, as well as challenges they faced resulting from participating in the various sports and exercise types.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the women in this study provided overwhelmingly positive reviews of their sport and exercise experiences. Thus, these women's experiences may not be representative of other women's experiences in other sports-based inclusion and intervention programs. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted with caution. There are a variety of factors that may have contributed to the participants' enthusiastic responses. Several of the women indicated that their respective sport and exercise settings provided social and contextual supports that were not readily available to them in their host communities.

Therefore, these disparities may have influenced' the participants' perceptions of the benefits of their sport experiences. Not to mention the fact that most of the women never regularly participated in any sport or exercise activity in their home countries, hence it was often the women's first experience with the chosen sport or exercise. As such, the unique and novel nature of the particular sport settings may have played a significant role in the participants' answers. To address these limitations, future studies should be conducted with participants that may have had more experience in sport and exercise back home to understand the extent to which the present findings could be transferrable to understand other contexts.

Other avenues could include interviews with stakeholders and organizations that provide sports-based inclusion programs and interventions to understand better their motifs and drivers. This suggestion is particularly informed by unwillingness of many non-profit sport organizations and refugee agencies to participate in this study, citing the shortage of resources due to the ongoing global health crisis, or simply the lack of seeing the benefits for their program participants. In some cases, the organizations were initially extremely excited and eager to partner but then ceased all communication, implying concerns about potential exposure. Related to the pandemic, another future study should assess the impact of the closings and cancellations of sport programs on refugees and migrants. Additionally, the efficacy of strength-based and activist-approaches should become more of a focus of future research studies, and the proposed conceptual-based relationship and conceptual models should be investigated further as part of future research studies. Finally, more similar studies should be conducted on different types of sports and physical exercise to understand which of them are most beneficial to the needs of refugees, specifically forced migrant women.

In closing, the findings of this study provide further reason to believe in sports and physical exercise' power to serve as a practical tool for the social inclusion and integration of forced migrants, as it can transcend socially constructed differences, speaks a universal language that empowers and connects individuals to rise above any given challenge through invoking a sense of belonging and purpose. One of the main conclusions deriving from this study therefore is that it is imperative for sports programmers and organizers to adopt an equity, culturally responsive, inclusive, and intersectional mindset when designing efficient and successful sports-based inclusion programs and interventions. This study further reiterates the importance of empowerment, belonging, and representation through and within sports.

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APPENDIX A

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH SURVEY / QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Forced migrants in the United States: Experiences and perspectives on sport and physical exercise

Thank you for being interested in participating in the dissertation study on the meaning and role of sport and physical exercise for forced migrants. This research investigation is being conducted by Katja Sonkeng, a Ph.D. candidate, and Dr. Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson, Professor in Sport Management and Policy in the Department of Kinesiology at The University of Georgia.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and role of sport and physical exercise for forced migrants in the United States, with a particular focus on the women's experiences and perspectives. More specifically, the following survey aims to understand better how participation in sport and/or physical exercise may have facilitated or hindered the adjustment to your new host community in the United States.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to take part or stop at any time without penalty. You can skip any question you do not wish to answer. The information collected from the survey will be completely confidential and will not be linked to your identity. Data will only be shared with researchers working on the project. Completion of the survey will take approximately 30 minutes. Upon submitting your answers, you'll be invited for a 45-60 minutes follow up semi-structured in-depth interview or focus group session.

There may be psychological, social, legal, economic, or physical discomfort, stress or harm that will occur as a result of participation in this research study and triggered emotional responses from the questions. If you feel any discomfort, as the process of reflecting on past or current experiences may produce negative thoughts and emotions for you, you will be free to leave at any point in the research process. In addition, if you experience any negative thoughts or emotions as a result of participation in the survey and/or follow-up interviews and focus group sessions, please consult the Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS) of the University of Georgia. Due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19, CAPS is currently offering individual phone consultation services only. Clinicians are available during regular business hours (Monday - Friday, 8 am - 5 pm). Students seeking CAPS services should call (706) 542-2273. CAPS clinicians will be in touch with current CAPS clients to discuss additional options, including referral services. During business hours and after-hours, CAPS remains available for crisis services.s

Please proceed to the next page to answer the questions to the best of your ability!

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with our research study!

Survey questions:

1. Are you willing to participate in this survey?

- □ Yes, I agree to participate.
- □ I choose not to participate.
- □ I choose to participate but I might not be able to answer all questions.

Background and demographic information:

Gender:

Age:

Country of origin:

Racial and ethnic identity:

Duration and current residence in the United States:

Educational Level:

Occupation:

Family/Marital Status:

Relationship with sport and physical exercise in your home country:

1. How did you get involved with sports and/or physical exercise?
2. What types of sport activities and/or physical exercise did you engage in while living in your home country?
    a. With whom and how often do you usually participate in these sporting activities per week?
3. What did you enjoy the most about participating in these sporting activities?
4. What aspects of participation in these activities did you not like?

Relationship with sport and physical exercise in the host community:

5. How did you get involved with sports or physical exercise?
6. What types of sport activities and/or physical exercise do you participate in?
7. How often do you usually participate in these activities per week? And with whom?
8. What do you enjoy the most about participating in these sporting activities?
9. What are the aspects of participation in these activities that you dislike?

Overall thoughts on the meaning of sport and physical exercise:

10. What does sport or physical exercise mean to you?
11. How does sport participation and/or physical exercise influence your professional and personal life, and your relationships with others like friends, relatives, and coworkers and other professional contacts?
12. How would you describe your overall experience with sport and physical exercise?
13. Can you think of any particular experience or incident throughout your participation in sport and physical exercise where you felt a sense of belonging?
14. What factors and reasons do you think influence your participation habits in sport and physical exercise?
15. What are the benefits and challenges that you encountered from participating in sport and physical exercise or sports-based integration programs located in the United States?
16. What are the most meaningful and rewarding experiences from the involvement with sports and/or physical exercise?
17. Anything else that you would like to add?

Invitation for a follow-up virtual semi-structured in-depth interview and/or focus group session on Zoom:

Upon completion of this survey, would you like to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview or focus group session that will be either hold virtually or per request in-person but with social distancing rules enforced and complementary face masks?

- ☐ Yes, absolutely. Please contact me by email to set it up.
- ☐ No, I do not wish to participate in a follow-up interview or focus group session.
- ☐ Maybe, please provide more information by email.

Please provide your contact information here: _____

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL LETTER

Dear (name of participant):

My name is Katja Sonkeng, and I am doctoral student at the University of Georgia working on my dissertation through the Department of Kinesiology. My topic focuses on sports' potential to serve as integrative tool in the resettlement process of forced migrants.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and role of sport and physical exercise for forced migrants in the United States, with a particular focus on the women's experiences and perspectives. We are looking for female participants who have migrated to the United States forcibly and have been living here for longer than a year, and who are above 18 years old.

Your participation in this study will involve an interview, which will take about 30-90 minutes. We will appreciate very much if you would consider participating in this study. If you agree to participate in this study, I will provide you with an informed consent form detailing your rights as a participant in this study for completion and signature at the start of the interview.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email with dates and times you are available, and I will schedule accordingly an interview with you over Skype or Zoom at a time of your convenience for about 30 to 90 minutes.

We thank you in advance for your time and consideration. We hope to include your unique perspective and experiences in this research study.

Your perspective is invaluable toward our understanding of the potential of sports and physical exercise as an efficient tool to facilitate integration and social inclusion of forced migrants in the United States and elsewhere. We strongly believe that your life journey and relationship with sport and physical exercise will make a great contribution to the current literature and public discourse, while empowering other women and forced migrants in quest for adjusting to a new life in their respective host communities.

Should you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding the research study please contact:

The principal investigator: Dr. Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson | Tel: 706-542-4434 | Email: jchepyat@uga.edu

Co- principal investigator: Katja Sonkeng | Tel: 201-275-9876 | Email: ks90649@uga.edu

Thank you so much for your time and consideration!

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Forced migrants in the United States: Experiences and perspectives on sport and physical exercise

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson, Professor
Director, Cultural Studies in Physical Activity Lab,
Department of Kinesiology, University of Georgia
Email: jchepyat@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. This research study aims to examine the role and meaning of sport for forced immigrant in the United States, with a particular focus on the women's experiences and perspectives.

More specifically, the goal is to identify key factors affecting participation patterns and experiences, attitudes and satisfaction levels of women refugees to understand better the effectiveness of sport programs as a path to social inclusion and acceptance of refugees and migrants in their new host communities.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to …

- Participate in a one-on-one interview either by email or phone / Skype to share your past / current experience with participating in sport and/or physical exercise with particular focus on their perceptions, meanings, attitudes, participation patterns, and satisfaction levels.
- The interview is expected to last about 30-90 minutes.
- The interview will encourage an open discussion as you will be asked to elaborate on your experiences with sport and physical exercise in your new host community compared to sports' role in your home country.
- A series of 10 pre-determined questions will used to guide a semi-structured interview. Additional questions might arise as part of this more conversational interview style.
- The interview will be audio/video recorded and transcribed.
- Once the interviews are transcribed, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy before it will be analyzed.

Risks and discomforts

- There will be no psychological, social, legal, economic or physical discomfort, stress or harm that will occur as a result of participation in this research study. If you feel any discomfort, as the process of reflecting on past or current experiences may produce negative thoughts and emotions for you, you will be free to leave at any point of research.

- Additionally, I will provide you the opportunity to pause and replay the voice recorder at any time of the interview if requested or if the topic becomes particularly sensitive or you become uncomfortable.
- Also, you will be offered the opportunity to review and revise the transcript of your interview. Once transcriptions are completed, you will receive an email with the attached copy along the request to review the document within a period of seven days. If you do not respond, then it will be assumed that all interview transcriptions are accurate.

Benefits

- There are no direct material or monetary benefits for you as participant in this research study. However, the research may benefit you in the sense that it may empower and motivate you to engage further in sport and/or physical exercise.
- Similarly, by serving as a research participant, you may actively contribute inspiring, resourceful and insightful information which are essential to support academic findings that may help to increase public and general knowledge and promote awareness of the ample physical, mental, and social benefits of participating in sports and/or physical exercise.

Audio Recordings

The original files will be kept on a separate flash drive, and only me will have access to them. All of the audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcriptions are completed and confirmed by study participants.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

All interviews will be kept confidential and only conducted by the researchers, hence only we will know the actual names of the participants, unless otherwise agreed by all parties involved. In order to protect your identity, you will be given pseudonyms that will be used to reference your comments. In addition, any defining characteristic (organization, nationality, hometown) that can be linked to you will not be identified in the study. Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law. If you participate in the email by Skype or agree to have the transcript sent by email, please note that your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties.

Signed consent forms will be kept separate from transcripts in a secure location. Only the researchers will have access to information from interviews after transcriptions are completed.

Taking part is voluntary

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the research study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

Contact information

If you have any questions at any time about the research study and the procedures, or if you experience any discomfort as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researchers: Ms. Katja Sonkeng and Dr. Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson as follows:

Katja Sonkeng

331 Ramsey Student Center

330 River Rd, Athens, GA 30602

Phone: 201.275.9876

Email: ks90649@uga.edu

Skype: wkatja09

Dr. Jepkorir Rose Cheypator-Thomson

365 Ramsey Student Center

330 River Rd, Athens, GA 30602

Phone: 706.542.4434

Email: jchepyat@uga.edu

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

For questions or problems about your rights, please call or write:

Chairperson, Institutional Review Board | University of Georgia | Athens, Georgia 30602-7411

Telephone: (706)-542-3199 | E-Mail: IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VIRTUAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS

1. Tell me about yourself and how you got involved with sports in your new host communities.
2. What are some of your connected feelings and meanings of playing a sport and/or engaging in a physical exercise program in your new host communities?
3. What were the sport activities that you engaged in while living in your home country?
4. Who introduced you to this sports-based integration program?
5. What do you enjoy the most about participating in these sport activities?
6. What do you like least about the sport program that you participate in? And why?
7. How often do you participate in this sports-based program or exercise?
8. What do you think, in your personal experience, are the benefits and challenges of participating in these sport activities?
9. What would increase your interest / frequency in participating in this sport program?
10. In your eyes, what are other sport activities that you could think of that might be helpful in your resettlement and assimilation process?

APPENDIX E

CODEBOOK

Participants	**RQ1:** What meanings (feelings) do forced migrant women draw from participating in sports-based integration programs located in the United States?	**RQ2:** What benefits do forced migrant women draw from participating in sports-based integration programs located in the United States?	**RQ3: What role does sport play in the lives of forced migrant women in their host country (United States) and in their countries of origin, especially in context of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences from engagement in sports activities?**	**RQ4:** What challenges do forced migrant women face from participation in sports-based integration programs in the United States?
Arabic women in WEG (Women's Swim Group)	**Codes:** FREEDOM TO EXERCISE AND STEP IN THE POWER TO BE MYSELF, A WOMAN, A HUMAN, HAPPINESS, CHANGED MOOD, JOY, FORGET EVERYTHING, POSITIVE THOUGHTS, RELAXED, EMPOWERMENT, POSITIVE ENERGY, RELAXED MUSCLE AND MIND	**Codes:** ACCESS TO NEW SKILLS, PHYSICAL RELAXATION, NEW ACTIVITIES, PATIENCE, MEET PEOPLE, UNDERSTAND BODY BETTER, EMPOWEREMENT THROUGH LEARNING AND OVERCOMING FEARS	**Codes:** WHOLE FREEDOM, CREATES HOPE AND FUTURE PLANS, CHANGE, OVERCOME ANY HARDSHIP WITH PERSISTENCE, IMPOSSIBLE IS POSSIBLE	**Codes:** FEAR, ANXIETY FOR NEW EXPERIENCE, LACK OF SKILL, DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE, OVERCOME ADVERSITY
Afghanistan women in WEG: (Women's Empowerment Group)	**Codes:** STRESS RELEASE, ENERGY BOOST, BELONGING, JOY, FREE, HEALTH, INCREASED QUALITY OF LIFE, GOOD FEELING, LEARNING, LAUGHING, POSITIVE THOUGHTS, FEEL LIKE FLYING, GREAT JOY, POSITIVE OUTLOOK, FREEDOM FROM HOUSEWORK, ABILITY, SLEEP BETTER AND BE MORE FOCUSED	**Codes:** ACCESS TO ACTIVITY AND OTHER PERSPECTIVES AND PEOPLE, RELAXED MIND AND BODY, BETTER HEALTH AND SLEEP, NO PAIN, RELAX OUR MIND SPORT, GET OUT OF THE HOUSE, NEW SCENERY, TOGETHERNESS, COMMUNITY, BELONGING	**Codes:** SAFE SPACE TO SOCIALIZE WITH FRIENDS, MAINTAIN HEALTH AND BODY GOALS, LEARNING COMMUNITY, NETWORKING, EXCHANGING VALUES AND IDEAS, BUILDING TRUST WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS, NEIGHBOR'S WATCH, EXPOSURE AND SHATTERING STEREOTYPES	**Codes:** NOT READY PHYSICALLY, FAMILY OBLIGATIONS, GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS (WOMEN'S JOB) AND RESPONSIBILITIES, SURVIVAL
Karen football association:	**Codes:** CONNECTIONS, BONDS, BLESSING, QUALITY TIME, SENSE OF JOY, REPRESENTATION, PROUD FEELING, PRIORITY, CHARACTER BUILDER, SOURCE OF PRIDE AND SUCCESS FOR REFUGEE PARENTS	**Codes:** BLESSING, OPPORTUNITY, POSITIVE OUTLET, COMMUNITY, DEEP CONNECTIONS, PHYSICAL HEALTH, LIFE SKILLS, CHEMISTRY, FAMILY, HOME, BONDING THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCES, FRIENDSHIPS	**Codes:** FOCUS, HARD WORK PAYS OFF, RESPECT FOR OTHERS AND AUTHORITY, CHARACTER, CONFIDENCE BUILDER, LEARN NEW THINGS	**Codes:** PARENT DISAPPOVAL, WASTE OF TIME, INJURY, LUXURY, GENERATIONAL PATTERNS
Independent sport participants: (including survey responses)	**Codes:** SENSE OF COMMUNITY, BREATHE OF LIFE, EMPOWERMENT, SOURCE OF PRIDE, POSITIVITY, RELAXED, MORE CAPABLE, MENTAL ENDURANCE, MORE IN CONTROL OF LIFE (SELF-EFFICACY AND AUTONOMY, ESCAPE, SENSE OF PURPOSE, HAPPY PLACE, SOCIAL BELONGING, AND INCLUSION	**Codes:** MENTAL HEALTH, PLACE TO MEET PEOPLE, EXPOSURE TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE, SKILLS AND US CULTURE, BLEND WITH COMMUNITY, REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITY, SAFE SPACE	**Codes:** ENRICHED LIFE, GIVES VOICE, CONFIDENCE BUILDER, MAKES LEADERS, TEACH VALUE OF TEAMWORK	**Codes:** CULTURE VIEW, LACKING RESOURCES, KNOWLEDGE, ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, MAINTENANCE, JUDGEMENT, STEREOTYPES, FITTING IN