

Belonging Among Newcomer Youths

Intersecting Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion

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Belonging has been identified as an important resource for health and well-being in the lives of youths. Thus, it is an important concept for upstream health promotion and culturally safe and relevant nursing care. While many researchers acknowledge the importance of the social, cultural, and political context in the lives of newcomer youths, little research has examined the sociopolitical processes inherent in immigrant and refugee youths' experiences of belonging. By employing an intersectional and postcolonial perspective, this study explored newcomer youths' gendered, racialized, and class experiences of inclusion and exclusion that ultimately influenced their sense of belonging in their country of resettlement. Through an examination of online blogs in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and secondary analyses of transcribed interviews from a previous study conducted in Canada, experiences of belonging were revealed to be shaped by complex and multifaceted structures of oppression. Through individual and collective efforts of resistance and resiliency, newcomer youths worked to construct a sense of belonging in their daily lives. Despite these participants' demonstrated strengths, it is evident that more work is needed to support newcomer youths' sense of belonging and well-being throughout resettlement. Implications for nursing practice and research are discussed. **Key words:** *belonging, health, intersectional, newcomers, postcolonial, racism, resettlement, social exclusion, wellness, youth*

THROUGHOUT the process of resettlement, newcomers experience tremendous challenges and transitions. The process of migration to a new country significantly influences opportunities for health and wellness. *Newcomers*, individuals engaged in constructing a new home in a new land, face new and unfamiliar environments that can both threaten and facilitate their sense of well-being. Central to this process is a struggle for

a sense of belonging. Examining experiences of belonging thus provides nurses an opportunity to attend to essential processes of health and wellness critical to this population.

Experiences of belonging are a culmination of mediating influences of exclusion and inclusion on spatial, symbolic, and social relationships.¹ Boundaries of belonging, marked through processes of exclusion and inclusion, are often experienced as highly racialized, gendered, and economic realities.^{2,3} As people negotiating new social environments and as common targets for racial discrimination, newcomer youths experience unique difficulties in constructing a sense of belonging.⁴

Belonging is a valuable social resource for well-being,⁵ making it of great relevance to health promotion and nursing science. Belonging is also crucial to social capital because it can build a sense of connectedness as

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well as encourage participation within local communities.⁶ Among youths, belonging has also been linked to the strengthening of national cohesion, solidarity, and a commitment to a more socially just world.^{7,8} Research with youths has pointed to the strong influence of social relationships, local inequalities, material and political circumstances in shaping youths' pathways toward health.⁹ As *health* is a "resource for everyday living,"^{10(p1)} an analysis of forces of social inclusion and exclusion by which belonging can be understood¹ can contribute to vital insight into processes of wellness among this group and thus to a nursing practice that is of the utmost responsiveness and relevance. The aims of this research were to examine the sociopolitical context of belonging in the lives of newcomer youths and its impact on health and well-being, explore newcomer youths' agency and resistance in constructing a sense of belonging, and foster an increased awareness within nursing about changes needed to support newcomer youths in their transition to a new land.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Consistent with research within the critical paradigm, the researchers assumed that structural injustices shape everyday individuals' experience; consequently, an apolitical (ie, neutral) position is impossible.¹¹ Fitting with this worldview, the theoretical framework utilized was a synthesis of intersectional and postcolonial perspectives. As first noted by black feminist scholars, such as Kimberle Crenshaw¹² and Patricia Hill Collins,¹³ racism and other forms of oppression are experienced as invisible realities. That is, through a fusion or transformation of various social positions, oppression (and privilege) is ultimately experienced as a hybrid whole.

There is a pressing need to examine the relationship between the socioenvironmental, economic, racialized, and gendered circumstances in which individuals experience health.¹⁴ Crenshaw first coined *intersection-*

ality to capture intersecting sites or "cross-roads" of oppression.¹² Intersecting positions such as gender, "race," and class, in combination with limited knowledge of the dominant language and experiences of war, complicate social negotiations toward belonging among newcomer youths.¹⁴ Thus, in this research, an intersectional lens facilitated an analysis of multiple and transformative social positions that shaped the everyday experiences among newcomer youths. In essence, an intersectional view enables one to consider the limitations of understanding health within discrete social categories. Instead, an intersectional perspective interrogates common social groupings and considers individuals' fringe or liminal experiences, simultaneous and contradictory circumstances that influence health.^{11,15} Given our study's focus on processes of inclusion and exclusion that mediate experiences of health and belonging, this perspective was especially useful because it facilitated an understanding of the unique and complex sociopolitical sites of belonging encountered by newcomer youths.

A postcolonial perspective was used to critique "taken for granted truths" and consider the historical, cultural, and political legacies of colonialism that impart social boundaries of privilege and oppression.¹¹ Experiences of everyday racism are known to be widespread and have a negative influence on the health and sense of belonging among newcomer youths.¹¹ As systemic racism and discrimination may lead to decreased access, participation, and equity among newcomer youths,¹⁶ it is likely a barrier to achieving a sense of belonging. Considerable attention was paid to the processes of normalization and mainstream rhetoric that conceal experiences of racial discrimination.

STUDY DESIGN

The study design was a discourse analysis of 25 purposively selected written online texts (blogs and electronic forums), and preexisting transcripts. The latter were from

a previously conducted study focusing on uprooting, displacement, and health of youths.¹⁷ Discourse analysis was used as a strategy to connect systemic, cultural, relational, and individual insights into a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Recognizing all communications as social acts inseparable from social structures enables examination of the influence of political forces on participants' individual accounts.¹⁸ This is fitting with a postcolonial orientation toward research because postcolonial discourse analysis attends to both the micropolitics and the macrodynamics of power.¹¹

While the context and the writer provide key insights into the meaning of the data, the focus or the unit of analysis is the written text itself.¹⁸ As the electronic data were available on public forums, it was expected that these data could be treated as public data. The Ethics Review Board confirmed that data were indeed public data and collecting data in this way posed no risks that would warrant a formal consent process. Privacy was not considered to be an issue because the majority of Web authors used nicknames and did not disclose any identifying information. In cases where unique identifiers (such as address, contact information) were explicitly shared on the forum, individuals were contacted and informed about the research and written e-mail consent was obtained. Individuals then were able to contact the researchers via e-mail if questions or concerns arose.

Transcribed interviews were derived from a critical narrative study that had been conducted in southwestern Ontario, Canada, with 7 girls whose ages ranged from 13 to 17 years.¹⁷ The primary study had investigated experiences of uprooting, sense of community, and health among newcomer, Aboriginal and homeless girls, and young women. Only the newcomer girls' transcripts were examined for this research. Previous informed consent was collected from all participants. These data provided key insights into the current research as experiences of belonging had surfaced in the interviews. By expanding the data set to include more individu-

als' accounts, we aimed to develop a deeper understanding of newcomer youths' experiences of belonging. This is also in keeping with Johnstone's recommendations for discourse analysis, where a smaller subset is first analyzed to have a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon before considering other data sets.¹⁸ Building upon the initial 7 transcripts, the researchers sought online textual dialogues that offered unique accounts or perspectives on belonging. To find the texts, Google searches and searches through common blog search engines (eg, Wordpress, Blogspot) with key words (eg, refugee, youth, immigrant, resettlement) were used to find these texts. While originally, only Canadian texts had been sought, the scope was widened to include texts from other English-speaking Western nations. These criteria reflected time, cost, and feasibility considerations. Furthermore, through an assessment of non-Canadian texts, we sought to enhance our understanding of these diverse contexts of resettlement. Viewing diverse social positions as having the potential to increase understanding, as opposed to a barrier, is in keeping with an intersectional and postcolonial research lens.^{11,15}

The final data set included texts from electronic forums in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. In the American youth forum, although ages are not specified, the community is for youths between the ages of 18 and 28 years. As previously noted, childhood is a social construction that enforces particular social norms,¹⁹ this makes it difficult to determine who qualifies under the category "youth." Self-identification within a social category, in this case, youth, has been viewed as an appropriate strategy, especially when such category may be used in an oppressive manner.²⁰ This reflected a more general approach to reject essentialized constructions of identity, and value the definitions and subjectivity of individuals' identity, which is in keeping with both intersectional and postcolonial perspectives.^{11,15}

In the Australian Internet community, ages ranged from 15 to 20 years, although 4

informants did not specify their age. One 24-year-old male blogger residing in Australia was also included in the analysis. Scholars have noted that young adults aged 16 to 25 years are often neglected in youth research because of their marginal positions in constructions of both childhood and adulthood.² In keeping with a postcolonial and intersectional aim, the unique position of these individuals was seen as important not only to understand youths' experiences of belonging, but also to value the expression of marginalized perspectives.^{11,20} None of the participants in the round-table discussion in the United Kingdom disclosed their ages on this forum. Nevertheless, they were included because they provided rich information that was used to supplement data from the other participants. Many Web authors also did not identify their gender(s). The selection process however was consistently guided by an attempt to consider multiple and various perspectives to construct credible research findings.²¹

All data were collected over a 4-month period. Using Johnstone's guidelines for discourse analysis, textual passages were analyzed for their relationship to the larger world, language, the authors, temporality, and purpose(s). Furthermore, the influence of discourse on these elements, and these elements on discourse, were viewed as structures of both conformity and resistance.¹⁸ Johnstone suggests that approaching the analysis from these different vantage points enables the researcher to ask different questions of the text important in understanding a particular phenomenon.¹⁸ Thus, each text was considered from each of these dimensions, raising questions such as What assumptions of the world are suggested through this description? How does the structure of language limit the authors' expression? What is intended through this account? Interrogating each individual text in this way and in relation to the context of belonging and newcomer agency allowed us to create a broad set of codes for each blog or forum post and transcript. Once all texts were preliminary analyzed, codes were considered across units of

analysis—often returning to the original texts to contextualize the issue. Over time, patterns emerged as codes were collapsed into larger categories and themes. Themes continued to be refined and collapsed in relation to emerging issues until the researchers felt that the findings reflected a thick and comprehensive outlook of the inquiry of interest. The primary author practiced reflexivity through engaging in reflective conversation with individuals with scholarly and personal experiences related to resettlement. Furthermore, by reflecting on her own social position—as a Mestiza, Latina, educated, middle-class, Guatemalan refugee—she attempted to enhance the analysis by interrogating her own privilege and oppression as well as her experiential sources of knowledge. These were important steps to ensure the meaningfulness and trustworthiness of findings.^{11,21}

While we understood that threats to authenticity existed due to the relative anonymity of blog authors, we felt confident that our analysis would contribute to an open-ended interpretation versus a fact finding project. That is, the texts were important not as a representation of the truth, but more so as an important representation of multiple truths by blog authors and interviewees.^{18,21} Newcomer youths' accounts of their experiences of belonging were viewed as sites of meaning making, reproduction, and reification in which the researchers were actively and subjectively engaged. Recognizing the power in the youths' expression and its potential to enhance the authenticity of the findings, written text has been kept in its original formatting.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the literature was conducted by using various databases. These included CINAHL, SCOPUS, Sociology Index, and Scholar's portal from 1998 to the present.

Resettlement, belonging, and health

Research with newcomer youths has documented many unique barriers and challenges

they experience throughout the resettlement process. For many, achieving a sense of normalcy is an important step toward feeling a sense of attachment and belonging.²² Because of unfamiliar and challenging contexts, this is often difficult to achieve.

For many newcomer youths, violent experiences of war or trauma, loss of family and social support networks, possible detention in refugee camps, and dangerous travels in arriving to a country of resettlement are potential challenges that can precipitate serious health concerns.^{4,23} Past experiences of war are often compounded by present experiences of racism and discrimination. In a study with 647 Southeastern Asian refugee youths in Canada, reports of racial discrimination were linked to symptoms of depression.²⁴ Similarly, Almqvist and Broberg's work with Iranian refugee children found that racial discrimination was a powerful moderator in participants' ability to adjust to their new land.²⁵ Consistent with other findings,^{23,26} it appears that experiences of past violence and present-day discrimination negatively affect newcomer youths' overall health and ability to cope with everyday challenges of resettlement.

Newcomer youths and their families also may experience economic disadvantages throughout resettlement that can adversely impact their mental and emotional health. Bieser, Hou, Hyman, and Tousignant's research with immigrant children aged 4 to 11 years found that participants and their families were twice as likely, compared with nonimmigrant families, to experience poverty after resettlement in Canada.²⁷ While they found that the newcomer youths generally suffered fewer mental health difficulties as a result of financial stressors than their nonnewcomer counterparts, poverty in combination with other familial difficulties had significant mental health outcomes.

Conceptualizing belonging

The literature indicates that *belonging* is a multidimensional phenomenon informed

by personal and/or environmental factors. As Dodman²⁸ notes, while belonging is tied to feelings of pride and attachment to one's local community, it is indivisible from larger social and environmental contexts. Belonging is shaped by interaction with a multitude of community boundaries that are spatial, symbolic, and social.¹ In this way, belonging and identity can be seen as mutually interactive phenomena that are both socially regulated and personally negotiated.

Research indicates that *belonging* is a highly contextualized, process-oriented concept that manifests differently at cascading levels of society. Walseth's²⁹ work with young female Muslim athletes yielded 3 different sources of belonging: social support, safe spaces, and expressive/identity confirmation. In contrast, survey research by Hagerty et al³⁰ with community college students operationalized belonging as characterized by 2 defining features: feeling valued by society and sharing commonalities with other members of a community. While these 2 conceptualizations differ significantly, both describe belonging as a relational experience dependent on feelings of connectedness, positive social relations, and complex performances of identity. Given Walseth's sample population, her articulation of belonging may be of particular relevance to newcomer youths.²⁹ While examining the different characteristics of belonging is important to understanding newcomer youths' experiences, we must also consider the context in which belonging is experienced.

Wridt notes that belonging is enacted at multiple levels of community, as it is performed on both (and through) the gendered political body, the housing unit, physical ability, competing norms and values, and larger societal expectations.³ Her historical ethnographic analysis with 3 data samples during 3 different time periods in the United States (1940s, 1970s, and 2000s) revealed complex and changing social processes of inclusion and exclusion often inscribed through racialized and gendered normative performances of space and "block" identities.

According to Wridt, enacting specific identities appears to foster a sense of togetherness among select groups of individuals while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of exclusion. Through community organizing, Wridt noted that block or neighbourhood identities diminished as a sense of belonging to the larger community was enhanced.³ Thus, belonging is a relational process enacted at multiple scales (ie, bodies, playgrounds, nation states). It is enacted and negotiated through simultaneous forces of inclusion and exclusion upon social (eg, friendships), symbolic (eg, dress style), and spatial boundaries (eg, neighborhoods). While highly shaped by specific contexts, it generally involves a sense of connectedness, positive interaction with social others, and a highly complex performance of identity.

Participation, safety, and public spheres

Research with newcomer youths has noted an important relationship between feelings of safety,¹⁷ participation,¹⁶ public spaces,³ and experiences of belonging. Opportunities to construct a sense of belonging are shaped, restricted, and mediated by intersecting social positions of privilege and oppression. Walseth's research with newcomer girls highlighted the importance of heterotopias—safe spaces in constructing a sense of belonging. In these spaces, normative expectations could be neglected and girls experienced a comfort to reveal their genuine selves. For many of the girls, safe spaces afforded by participation in sport were exceptions to daily norms of racialized and gendered social realities, although these discriminatory forces sometimes managed to manifest even in these safe havens.²⁹ Similar constructions of safe spaces have been found through the use of Internet forums³¹ and participation in community networks,³² although economic, educational,³³ and gendered realities³⁴ appear to both enable and inhibit youths' experiences of belonging through these mediums.

In her ethnographic research with Sikh immigrant youths aged 16 to 21 years, liv-

ing in the United States, Verma³⁵ noted that participants and their families experienced profound marginalization through discrimination, poverty, and alienation. Racist backlash, especially following the terrorist attacks of September 11, eroded the youths' sense of safety and belonging. Similarly, Spicer found that newcomer youths and their families' feelings of exclusion were linked to a heightened insecurity, fear for their safety, and social isolation in neighborhoods perceived as racially intolerant. These experiences had direct consequences on immigrant and refugee children because it limited their sense of agency, narrowed their social networks, and limited their opportunity to build friendships.³⁶ It has been widely noted that a lack of safety and a limited ability to engage in public life have a negative impact on youths' sense of connectedness to their local communities.³

Girls in particular appear to be marginalized from public spheres and consequent participation because of familial gendered norms and patriarchal societal values.^{37,38} Furthermore, Wridt notes that "terror talk" has limited youths' ability to engage in public spheres.³ Terror talk involves scandalized and repeated stories about atrocities committed against children that become so entrenched in the adult psyche that they serve to normalize violence against children and justify the social restriction of youths from public life. These embodied restrictions are complicated by everyday racist and gendered threats experienced by newcomer youths. Social markers of difference, such as religious dress, skin color and language difficulties, can make newcomer youths increasingly visible while maintaining their marginality in public spaces.² Many have noted the importance of not only engaging youths in public spheres of life, but also acknowledging the public roles (ie, as caregiver, or "breadwinner") that youths undertake that are generally not recognized^{16,39} and that inevitably shape their sense of belonging.

Understanding how individuals are constructed as alienated others—often through the signification of cultural symbols and how

racialized positions are made more complex by other experiences of privilege and oppression are central to a postcolonial and intersectional research approach.^{11,15} Thus, the aim of this investigation was to examine the political context of belonging (ie, intersectional, postcolonial) context of belonging, with particular attention to the agency and resistance of newcomer youths.

FINDINGS

The analysis revealed youths' encounters with boundaries of exclusion and inclusion that ultimately shaped their sense of belonging. While informants illustrated the demarcation of inclusion and exclusion in diverse ways, emerging themes revealed common sites of struggle in constructing a sense of belonging. In total, 6 themes were identified: (1) feelings of difference and unfamiliarity; (2) the role of the family; (3) life left behind/feelings of loss; (4) new opportunities and challenges; (5) navigating public and private spaces; and (6) deconstructing identity, enacting diversity. Through these everyday themes, belonging and its role in the health of newcomer youths was articulated in terms of (post)colonial and intersectional discourses.

Feelings of difference and unfamiliarity

Discrimination and varying social disadvantages often affected newcomer youths' sense of comfort and familiarity in their new social surroundings. A pressure to adjust and conform to mainstream social practices to be accepted accompanied new social settings. Faria from Canada stated "you're new here you can't—you kind of doesn't fit with them till you learn the language or start to do, like the stuff they do or dress like them. And that's like a huge problem." Lack of fluency in dominant languages and social norms often contributed to a sense of alienation. For some, who had come from more close-knit communities, distant neighbors exacerbated feelings of isolation.

Rui, an Australian newcomer youth wrote: "The houses are like the tombs in the cemetery. . . . quiet and lonely! I wished to see someone and greet them but the situation here is not the same as our home land. . ."

Dyck and McLaren's work²² with newcomer mothers and daughters revealed a similar desire to connect in neighborhoods that were felt to be cold and uncaring. As they noted, participants often reported a sense of alienation accompanied by a struggle to overcome internalized feelings of inferiority that reflected pervasive discriminatory social contexts. Through poetry, Mari of the United States captured this experience. In her words, "You sit and think to yourself how good their life is and just wish for a day when you could be like them: rich, smart and white."

For Mari and others, experiences of racialized marginalization were inseparable from experiences of poverty and inferiorized cultural identities. Verma's research³⁵ with Sikh Indian youths revealed that participants' sense of belonging was shaped by intersecting social disadvantages of poverty, religious, and racial discrimination. These accounts point to the hybridity of exclusions experienced by newcomer youths occupying multiple positions of constructed difference.

Gendered experiences of discrimination were commonly discussed among practicing Muslim girls. While one young girl discussed sexual exploitation of her female peers by male "players," most concerns centered around harassment, bullying, and social stigma because of their choice to wear the hijab. Dora from Australia stated:

. . . I am kind of timid and serious like most of u about my head scarf. People always harass me about it, but I always refuse to take notice wat they say 2 me and be strong about my beliefs. . .

Hopkins² and Dwyer,³⁷ both note that religious dress has become an oversignifier of difference and is often conflated with race. In addition, hate crimes and other forms of discrimination have increased since the events of September 11th.² Since newcomer girls are often viewed as symbols or bearers of culture^{37,38} they may be disproportionately

targeted. Furthermore, the hijab is a symbol of both religious and cultural difference, but also of an alternative to Western heteronormativity. Thus, racist and sexist discourses experienced by these newcomer girls may be a strategy to regulate both their ethnocultural or racial identity, and their bodies and sexuality. Jiwani's research³⁸ with Canadian newcomer girls found that through social processes of exoticization, surveillance, and containment, their everyday experiences were marginalized, thereby inhibiting their sense of belonging.

The most common concern expressed by newcomer youths related to experiences of racism. Whether at school, in the media, their neighborhoods, or other public areas, newcomer youths reported systemic and individual experiences of racialized marginalization. Lack of attention to language needs, rampant stereotypes, and accusations of being terrorists were common complaints. Many newcomer youths felt that the media unfairly targeted them and served to misrepresent and demonize their cultural communities. The influence of the media in triggering and maintaining social stigma against newcomer youths is well recognized.^{38,40}

Vanderbeck's⁴⁰ analysis of media depictions of racialized youths in British society illustrates the sophisticated role that the media plays in reinforcing youths' positions of marginality and stigma. Through the use of trigger words and images, superficial "common-sense" explanations are implied that maintain racialized, class, and ageist stereotypes about newcomer youths. Thus, "ghetto" and "youth" used uncritically to explain criminal behavior, for example, strengthen the construction of newcomer youths as dangerous.⁴⁰ As youths noted, pervasive discourses emphasizing difference and deviance were obstacles in achieving a sense of connectedness, belonging, and well-being.

The role of the family

As previously discussed, newcomers typically stressed the importance of their family in constructing a sense of home and belonging.

Mothers in particular were often viewed as important in supporting the youths through challenges and maintaining family togetherness. Informants also discussed changes in family structure because of changes in living conditions, shrinking of supportive family circles, and changes in family composition. This often involved adjusting to evolving family dynamics.

For many participants, a sense of familial connectedness often meant that many changes were experienced collectively. For sisters Faria and Nina, whose family emigrated from Saudi Arabia to Canada, improved social conditions for their father positively influenced family well-being. Faria explained:

...one of the reasons my dad moved here because like they're kind of racist over there, like and they made him lots of problems because he wasn't a citizen of that country. . .so like when we are here like there is no racism or anything and he feels like it's his home by now. So it's kind of better for my dad and my—you know, we—you can joke with him or do whatever and he's like a better person now. I think it's better for us here.

While most youths reported experiencing racism throughout resettlement, many shared Faria's conceptualization of well-being—as a familial experience. They described engaging in joint efforts not only to maintain family cohesiveness, but also to achieve socioeconomic goals and overcome a variety of family struggles. Similar collective processes have been found among newcomer communities in Toronto, Ontario.⁴¹

Life left behind/feelings of loss

Many newcomer youths shared memories of their life left behind, which triggered a sense of loss for familiar settings, routines, cultural traditions/values, and support networks that were no longer easily accessible. As Faria from Canada stated: "... like back home [Saudi Arabia] it's really social. But you know when you go like to the Mosque, . . . you know everyone. You just know everyone. But like here . . . our street is so quiet . . . they're not that social."

Vast changes in social contexts also led to a loss of social identities. For Nina, for example, moving to Canada involved shedding a more familiar sense of self as the “popular” or “noisy girl” for a more conservative sense of self because of language difficulties and her fears of scholastic failure. Other youths described feelings of loss with respect to professional recognition and financial dependence. Many of the participants noted that their families had been financially secure before migration; others chose not to disclose their parents’ employment status. Loss of professional identity among newcomer populations has been addressed in the literature but with a focus on adult experiences.⁴² For some informants, especially those with tentative legal status, their family’s situation required them to take on new responsibilities to assist the family socially and financially. This trend, whereby children are required to assume “adult” responsibilities, has been reported elsewhere in research with newcomer youths.³⁹ As noted by Sporton et al.,⁴ the western construction of childhood as a time of innocence and passivity does not accurately reflect this phase of life for immigrant and refugee youths, many of whom have endured war, trauma, multiple losses, as well as acute financial hardships.

For many of the youths, experiences of war, poverty, and unjust living conditions contributed to feelings of mourning and guilt, not only for the places they had left behind, but generally, for the state of humanity. The mourning of loved ones was described as an on-going and very lonely process. Ming states:

I lost someone so dear that can not be priced because it’s too dear 2 me and nothing compares t him. I lost my father who i rarely knew because he kept going and coming out of the country in order to feed us. I never got 2 be close to him and i never actually HUGGED him. and I now die to HUG my DAD . . . but it’s never going 2 come true because no one knows EXACTLY how i felt at that time and how i feel right now recalling these memories.

Many newcomers’ accounts reflect varied and intense feelings of loss that could evoke a profound sense of alienation or disconnectedness. The intense impact of trauma and mem-

ories of war with displaced youths has been noted elsewhere.^{22,23}

New opportunities and challenges

Resettlement typically brought new opportunities, creating a sense of enthusiasm and possibilities for participation and belonging among the youths. These opportunities however often brought with them an array of new challenges and obstacles to belonging. For example, several youths spoke about access to a good education, which was viewed as essential for financial stability and a successful future for themselves and their families. Language barriers and/or unfamiliarity with the educational system however created challenging contexts to meet these goals. Jen from the United States noted:

I was able to learn more in my classes in China than I can here. And now here, my classes are teaching me math that I’ve already learned. So I asked myself what should I do next? Review? Study it again? I don’t know. I’ve lost my way already.

Despite difficulties, newcomer youths generally expressed high hopes and high expectations of themselves to adjust and succeed. For some informants, resettlement also provided a welcome sense of autonomy and independence. Rui saw his life in Australia as a chance to be recognized for his abilities and achievements. Days after his arrival, after years in refugee camps, he wrote:

Now I have got a chance, but the chance is not like you are given a fish to eat . . . I myself have to build up the hook, find my own baits, and explore the best spot to do fishing . . . Cos’ the world I step on now is very wide, huge, adventurous, challenging and currently unfamiliar with my just hatched out paradigm . . .

Although promising a worthwhile reward, opportunities often increased self-reliance and an acute sense of responsibility, competition, and financial pressures. These challenges shaped newcomer youths’ possibilities for belonging.

Navigating private and public spaces

Youths often expressed difficulty in infiltrating the white majority public sphere or mainstream. A sense of orbiting society's periphery was often tied to rigid social norms that by definition demarcated them as outsiders. Thus, social symbols and practices embodied by newcomer youths often became sites of contestation in negotiating public and private boundaries, and ultimately, a sense of belonging.

For some youths, familial support was contained within private boundaries of home where life left behind could be reconstructed. Unfortunately, for many youths, this familial support was not accessible in public spaces, forcing youths to find support elsewhere. Informants expressed a need for safe spaces to show their authentic selves. They reported word-twisting of the media and a need for increased vigilance when interacting with journalists who often portrayed migrants in a negative light. Public visibility was thus often viewed as a disempowering condition, while privacy and secrecy could enable a certain amount of protection from social stigma and discrimination.

Oppressive conditions could transform newcomers from social actors in private domains to public objects of derision in mainstream society. Kae, an asylum seeker in the United Kingdom expressed wariness of being portrayed as the parasitic "free loader." She states:

Sometimes I make a mistake and buy more than the vouchers will pay for. While the cashier is recounting, I always feel like opening the earth beneath my feet and burying myself in it rather than having to see the look on her face or to hear the sighing of people in the queue... People in the queue always notice. I can tell by the expression on their faces. Some have this expression of pity or compassion, while others are just angry to see that I am one of those people who are supported by their hard work. I would love to support myself...

Although public spheres are often depicted as the quintessence of inclusiveness, they are

often founded on practices of marginalization and exclusion of the "Others."³⁴ Dependence on the government for basic necessities such as food and transportation, and state restrictions that barred participants and their families from employment, changed once personal/private practices into open and highly visible affairs that made informants vulnerable to scrutiny and surveillance. Bartlett⁴³ notes that youths are often "contained, regulated and treated as intruders."^(p4) Even when allowances are made for public spaces, an agenda of "positive outcomes" (ie, a pressure to conform to adult hegemonic values) is enforced, which "suggests a lesser right to the public domain."^(p4) Social restrictions and a sense of being on public display could trigger feelings of shame and low self-worth among youths, aware of discriminatory attitudes harbored against them.

In contrast, some informants identified the family home, or the private realm, as a place that restricted their freedom to be themselves and contributed to feelings of isolation. Particularly, youths reported an overwhelming amount of meddling and social surveying by community/family members. Lea from the United States writes:

... I'm just a 17 years old, few months ago one lady from the darkness of hell majestically came up to my dad and say to him 'do you know that your daughter is pregnant' and three days ago my friend told me that he had a rumour that my Dad caught me in a car having sex that's why am so skinny these days, coz I just can't handle the free life am leavingv... seriously am just fed up, why people just can't mind their own business?

Concern for one's reputation was a real fear for many of the female informants who felt burdened by pervasive rumors within their neighborhoods and communities. This scrutiny appeared to be socially endorsed by gendered norms within their cultural communities. Previous research has pointed to the gendered boundaries and social regulation of sexualized bodies that limit girls' ability to fully participate in public spheres.³ Constant monitoring of newcomer girls' sexual morality undermined their agency and obstructed

their chances to participate freely. Many of the female informants longed for a place free of gendered regulation—a place to be themselves. For some, public spaces like churches, libraries, and schools generally fared better in this regard.

Sometimes public visibility was a positive experience for newcomer youths or considered a risk worth taking despite its heightened vulnerability. Through activism, engagement in alternative media, and taking on leadership opportunities in their schools, many informants gained a new sense of space and agency that enabled them to uniquely express their opinions, beliefs, and raise awareness about injustices. Newcomer youths' accounts illustrate the multiple and intersecting domains of private and public negotiated in striving to achieve a sense of belonging. Through processes of containment, regulation, discrimination, and resistance, newcomer youths experienced inclusion within exclusion and exclusion within inclusion. These experiences point to the multilayered, complex, and contradictory experiences of belonging.

Deconstructing identity, enacting diversity

A commitment to a peaceful and pluralistic society was evident in many of the youths' accounts. Many expressed a strong belief in universal humanitarian values fostered through respect and knowledge of diverse peoples. Lea wrote: "every one needs fair treatment to have peace. In every religion there is a book that tells you the commandments and rules to follow . . . it's obvious there is a chapter that says be FAIR and JUST to one another." Consistent with Gustafson's description of transnationalism,⁴⁴ many of the newcomers viewed migration as a natural expression of a globalized world that was both positive and inevitable. This notion was often an important point of reference when encountering racial discrimination. As Ming noted, "Australia is a multicultural country no one can stop it from becoming more

and more diverse every day . . . not even John Howard [previous prime minister of Australia] himself."

For many youths, a flexible (ie, ambiguous) and diverse sense of community enabled a sense of belonging. In describing what made Canada feel like home, Ara stated:

... maybe because a lot of people from different countries and I don't feel like I'm in Canada most of the time, you know? Just because we speak English? No . . .

Like it just feels like a country where people come from different countries to live too, because it's safety, you know?

The youths emphasized the value of cultural exchange and discussed their participation in forums that appreciated and respected differences. Some reported however that organizational structures to support a genuinely diverse community were lacking.

As noted by Pacheco, a legacy of colonialism and racist discourses enable a monocultural "nationalist" identity.⁴⁵ This historical context works to legitimize white constructions of "Canadian," (or "Australian," etc) while problematizing racialized others as deviant individuals who are depicted as "failing to integrate." Consequently, participants' sense of belonging required alternative ways of conceptualizing identity. These identities were often ambiguous, flexible, and multiple. Dani, commenting on "American identity" noted that patriotic media "makes people 'really feel American'—though I'm still not entirely sure what it means to really feel like an American." In accepting ambiguity in the construction of identity, Dani, contested common-sense ideologies of nation and identity as monocultural and static. By challenging these exclusionary belief systems, many of the informants created opportunities to feel a deeper sense of belonging to their new place of residence.

Leyshon⁴⁶ writes that the everyday construction of identity—through relationships with people and places—allows for the construction of systems of knowledge. These ontologies are important sites for resistance and

community acceptance. For many, reconceptualizing identity was an important source of agency that enabled a deeper sense of belonging and kindred connectedness at multiple levels of society.

Participants also displayed nonconformity to their identity being essentialized or externally defined. Identity categories were often rebutted and critiqued for their reductionist standpoint that fragmented pieces of informants' sense of self. In response to surveys that required Muslim people to choose between their religious and national identities, Rae commented: "why would you want to pick between your religion and your nationality? And why is there even a survey that makes you pick between the two?"

By cultivating diverse, unique, and flexible identities as well as reflecting on the richness of their cultural heritage, many of the newcomer youths built a positive sense of themselves and their communities that allowed for an evolving sense of belonging.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING

Multiple and intersecting contexts were found to be important in shaping newcomer youths' sense of belonging. Experiences of racism and unfamiliarity, new challenges, and various profound losses were described as alienating processes that inhibited a sense of belonging for newcomer youths. Social regulation and stigmatized realities within constructions of private and public spheres, and complex positions of gender and economic disadvantages further restricted newcomer youths' efforts toward belonging. Despite these challenges, the newcomer youths in this study were active in resisting forces of marginalization, using creative and varied strategies to do so. Through new opportunities, speaking out in public spaces, harnessing familial/community supports, and constructing alternative worldviews in promoting diversity and community, these youths worked to build a sense of belonging for themselves and society at large.

While newcomer youths' agency is evident, it is clear that organizational, sociocultural, and political barriers must be overcome in order for newcomers to truly feel a part of, and be able to participate fully in, their new place of residence. There is a need to foster public and governmental accountability. This process must include not only an evaluation of the quality and accessibility of services, but also an evaluation of measures in place to promote safe and inviting environments for full participation. Institutional bodies must anticipate and provide necessary support for newcomers that have experienced traumatic and/or life-changing events in their former place of residence. These efforts must move beyond individualist psychopathologic frameworks. As outlined by the World Health Organization,⁴⁷ a commitment to mental health requires attention to the positive attributes within a community that can be compromised by sociopolitical conditions, not just a focus on illnesses among individuals. Omidvar and Richmond,⁴⁸ for example, suggest that antiracist and antidiscrimination curricula, and direct access to settlement services for youths within schools can help provide necessary support for newcomer youths. Nursing practice environments and curricula could benefit from a similar approach and valuing. Nurses can engage in initiatives that capitalize on the insight and energy of youths in influencing and partnering with local government/organizations to build safer communities. "Upstream" health promotion,⁴⁹ which seeks to foster wellness and prevention of illness among individuals and also targets the context in which health occurs may have the most potential in fostering a sense of belonging among newcomer youths. Ideally, youths should play a central role in the development and design of appropriate and meaningful programmatic initiatives. Using a client-centered model, nurses can work in partnership with newcomer youths to ensure that health care services and programs cultivate a culture of belonging.

It is clear that the transition to a new country for young newcomers is complex

and fraught with cultural, emotional, and political challenges and opportunities. An intersectional understanding of how newcomer youths construct a sense of belonging provides important insights into pathways toward wellness for this population. Furthermore, it provides nurses with important considerations in understanding the social con-

text and holistic health needs of newcomer youths. An appreciation for the social processes and resources inherent in belonging will enable nurses to work in partnership with their newcomer clients, health care teams, and social institutions to foster everyday therapeutic environments necessary for a globalizing world.

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