

Carnegie Mellon University  
Dietrich College Honors Thesis

**Understanding Economic Self-Sufficiency among Nepali Bhutanese Refugees  
in Pittsburgh**

Kayla Lee

Bachelor of Arts

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Advisor: Kenya C. Dworkin y Méndez

## **Abstract**

Pittsburgh is home to one of the largest Nepali Bhutanese refugee communities in the United States as a result of secondary migration (refugees who were resettled in other parts of the United States and voluntarily moved to Pittsburgh). Due to this community's growing presence, the local media often highlights the successful refugee stories that come from this community. These individuals are often portrayed as self-sufficient. Their success is based on a model of self-sufficiency that stems from the U.S. refugee resettlement program's definition of self-sufficiency, which focuses on achieving an end goal. From the perspective of Nepali Bhutanese refugees, there is no end goal to self-sufficiency. Architects of immigration and refugee policy have evaluated the effectiveness of the self-sufficiency model by measuring refugee household incomes. This measurement reflects the self-sufficiency model's emphasis on quick employment and less dependence on welfare. In addition, these measurements generalize refugee groups into a single category, which does not allow for the consideration of differences among refugee groups. This provides only a limited view of refugee self-sufficiency. Through ethnographic methods (Narrative Research and Grounded Theory), this research study aims to understand self-sufficiency among Nepali Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh. It begins by stepping away from the notion of "achieving" self-sufficiency and evaluating the concept beyond financial or material rewards. This study aims to create a more comprehensive understanding of self-sufficiency through the narratives of ten Nepali Bhutanese refugees.

Ten interviewees (3 females, 7 males) shared their experiences living in Pittsburgh and more specifically about what it was like for them to find employment, work in the United States and become self-sufficient. Analysis of the interviews suggest that understandings of

self-sufficiency vary among individuals. Interviewees discussed a number of shared themes including family income, English language learning, and work history. Key narratives highlight these three themes in ways that create an understanding of self-sufficiency that depict both shared and individual experiences. This study brings these narratives into the discussion of U.S. refugee self-sufficiency recognizing that self-sufficiency not only differs among different refugee groups, but also differs within these groups.

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## **Introduction**

Over the course of four years, I observed and participated in resettlement experience of a refugee family from Nepal. It was through my volunteer work with Carnegie Mellon University's student organization FORGE (Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment) that I engaged in the conversations on the significance of self-sufficiency with this family. FORGE works with a refugee resettlement agency in Pittsburgh, Jewish Family & Children's Services (JF&CS), to connect student volunteers with refugee families. Student volunteers take on a variety of roles depending on each family's needs and expectations; one family may view their student volunteers as English teachers and another may view their student volunteer as both an English teacher and a family friend. It is not surprising to hear of student volunteers who were invited to holiday celebrations and weddings hosted by their refugee family. What is true for most of our student volunteers in FORGE is that they build meaningful rapport with the refugees. Through FORGE, I was paired up with another student volunteer and we were introduced to a Nepali Bhutanese family of four in 2013. We took a bus to their home (about 30 minutes away) on Saturday afternoons for almost four years practicing conversations in English, helping the family read their mail, watching television, and sharing meals. My partner and I gave our family blank notebooks to write down any questions, thoughts, and words; anything they wanted to bring up during our visits. The father of the family took the notebook, smiled, pointed to it and said, "Emergency book!" This emergency book became part of a Saturday afternoon routine where the father would flip through the pages and share with us his questions and concerns from that week. It was a book filled with the various challenges that he faced during the first few years upon arrival in the United States. I saw the emergency book as

the father's scattered field notes of his questions and moments of confusion over the years. Most of the emergency book was questions and concerns related to work. Each Saturday, we asked him, "How is work?" His response was usually, "Okay." Then, he would pull out his emergency book. He often brought up instances when he was frustrated by the fact that he could not communicate with his supervisor. There was a time when he was upset because he could not take a day off for a Nepali holiday because he could not communicate this to his supervisor.

My motivation for this study began with the emergency book. I wanted to hear the narratives of other Nepali Bhutanese refugees on work; the notes and questions they would write down in their own emergency book. By addressing the questions and concerns he had written down in his emergency book, he became more self-sufficient. The father would not use this word, "self-sufficiency," but it was a word I thought of often when working with the family. This was likely a result of seeing it in federal documents on refugee resettlement and mission statements of resettlement agencies. Self-sufficiency was the ultimate goal of resettlement and a symbol of success.

The aim of this ethnographic study was to explore the ways in which Nepali Bhutanese refugees understood self-sufficiency. Like the father of the family that I came to know well over the years, I wondered how other individuals in the Nepali Bhutanese community understood self-sufficiency, especially since I expected concepts of self-sufficiency and success to be different from those of Western cultures. Since most adult refugees have had experiences with employment in the United States since the U.S. resettlement program stresses early employment, I decided to start my conversations with other individuals in the Nepali Bhutanese community on the topic of work.

## Background

### U.S. Refugee Resettlement

The United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention is the key legal document that consolidates previous international instruments relating to refugees. The document standardized a single definition of the term "refugee," which focuses on the protection of persons from political or other forms of persecution. According to the Convention, "a refugee is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to standardizing the definition of "refugee," the Convention also outlines the three durable solutions to respond to refugee crises mandated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). One of the solutions is refugee resettlement, where refugees are transferred from an asylum country (a country that provides protection and shelter) to another state that has agreed to take them and provide permanent settlement.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, the UNHCR submitted over 145,500 files for refugees considered for resettlement.<sup>3</sup> Submission by the UNHCR does not guarantee that resettlement will follow; only 1 percent of the world's refugees are resettled.<sup>4</sup> Refugees, themselves, cannot apply for resettlement; it is during standard registration interviews that the UNHCR takes note of vulnerable cases to be considered for resettlement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations General Assembly, *1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees* (Treaty Series, vol. 189, 1951), accessed March 17, 2017, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "Resettlement," UNHCR, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/resettlement.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



The United States is one of the countries that takes part in the UNHCR's resettlement program and has resettled over 3 million refugees since 1975.<sup>6</sup> Participation in the UNHCR's refugee resettlement program means that the United States is responsible for providing legal and physical protection to all admitted refugees. This includes ensuring civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights equal to that of United States citizens. The Refugee Act of 1980 is the U.S. legal document that describes the specific responsibilities of the United States in ensuring effective reception of refugees.

The Refugee Act of 1980 established the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in order to meet the needs of the refugees resettled in the United States. This office, which is housed within the Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for funding and administering Federal programs for refugees. The appointed Director of the ORR is expected to: (A) make available sufficient resources for employment training and placement in order to support the achievement of economic self-sufficiency among refugees as quickly as possible, (B) provide refugees with the opportunity to acquire sufficient English language training to enable them to become effectively resettled as quickly as possible, (C) insure that cash assistance is made available to refugees in such a manner as not to discourage their economic self-sufficiency and, (D) ensure that women have the same opportunities as men to participate in training and instruction.<sup>7</sup>

### **Challenges of U.S. Refugee Resettlement**

Various U.S. congressional reports over the years have recognized the shortcomings of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Refugee Act of 1980, *Public Law* 96-212, 96<sup>th</sup> Cong., (March 17, 1980), accessed July 6, 2016, <https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/refugee-act-1980/>.

refugee resettlement programs across the country. One of the main concerns comes from the increasingly diverse group of refugees in the United States, raising questions on whether or not reforms to the U.S. resettlement program are necessary. More specifically, the critiques have focused on the self-sufficiency model, which requires refugees to secure employment as soon as possible.<sup>8</sup> The current refugee resettlement system puts most of the strain of this model on the local communities (e.g., local resettlement agencies and nonprofit organizations), who are often unprepared because they are not provided information about the educational, health and other needs of incoming refugees.<sup>9</sup> These needs are identified after the refugees are resettled, which can hinder the community from effectively meeting the needs of their increasingly diverse refugee groups.

Changing demographics among refugees in the United States have brought attention to the consequences of the resettlement program's emphasis on quick employment. Experts have raised concerns on whether or not the refugee resettlement program fails to address the diversifying needs. The FY2011 budget justification for ORR discusses the specific challenges of the Burmese, Bhutanese and Burundian refugees:

The refugee program is struggling to meet the critical needs of the many incoming populations, such as the Burmese, Bhutanese and Burundians who have lived for decades in refugee camps, and have no work background, low levels of education, no English proficiency and very few skills that translate to the U.S. labor market. Newly arriving populations are more ethnically diverse and have an even greater need than past arrivals

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<sup>8</sup> Andorra Bruno, "U.S. Refugee Resettlement Assistance," Congressional Research Service, Washington: 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

for services to become self-sufficient. Many refugees are arriving with chronic untreated medical conditions, such as hypertension or diabetes, which must be treated and controlled before they can work. Refugees are often without a safety net or links to much needed services, and currently face multiple challenges as they try to navigate the system without the proper level of assistance.<sup>10</sup>

There are general challenges that all refugees face, including the challenge of living off of refugee cash assistance for up to eight months, or public cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Some experts have argued that eight months is not enough time to enable refugees to be self-sufficient. Service providers have also expressed concern that the assistance often does not cover rent and basic necessities.<sup>11</sup> There is also the challenge of finding quick employment for refugees, which often prevents refugees from finding good job matches, especially for highly educated refugees.<sup>12</sup> While service providers have recognized the general challenges of refugees, it is just as important that they recognize the specific needs of individual refugee groups. Local communities have become responsible in addressing the specific needs of their unique refugee communities, catering and molding their programming to fit the needs of their clients.

### **Lhotsampas: “People from the south”**

The Nepali Bhutanese refugees are known as Lhotsampas (also spelled Lhotshampas):

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, *Justifications of Estimates for Appropriations Committees FY2011* (Washington: 2011), accessed March 17, 2017, [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/olab/2011\\_all.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/olab/2011_all.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Bruno.

<sup>12</sup> Randy Capps and Kathleen Newland, 2015, *The Integration Outcomes of U.S. Refugees: Successes and Challenges*, Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/integration-outcomes-us-refugees-successes-and-challenges>.

Nepali-speaking Bhutanese whose ancestors settled in the southern part of Bhutan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>13</sup> While the Lhotsampas are collectively recognized as a single ethnic group, they are linguistically and ethnically diverse. When their ancestors settled in Bhutan, the Lhotsampas were recognized as one of the four main ethnic groups in the country. They actually have ancestral roots in both Nepal and Darjeeling (in India).<sup>14</sup> While the Lhotsampas are predominantly Hindu, there are also a few who practice Buddhism.<sup>15</sup>

In Bhutan, Lhotsampas translates to “people from the south” in the country’s official language.<sup>16</sup> They were borderland people who were discriminated against for being Hindus in a predominantly Buddhist country. In the 1980s, the Bhutanese regime introduced a homogenous and narrowly defined national identity; it was a cultural cleansing that the Bhutanese regime instigated when it sensed that people all over South Asia were petitioning to settle grievances against the regimes. The displacement of the Lhotsampas is one of the world’s least-known human rights abuses.<sup>17</sup>

The ancestors of the Lhotsampas were Nepali migrants who settled along the Bhutan-India border following the conflict in Nepal in the mid-1800s. They were granted permission to settle in this region because the borderland was malarial and uncultivated.<sup>18</sup> As descendants of peasant farmers, the Lhotsampas successfully cleared the land, established agrarian communities, and eventually contributed to the food industry in Bhutan.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rosalind Evans, “The Perils of Being a Borderland People: On the Lhotshampas of Bhutan,” *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 1 (2010): 25-42, accessed June 30, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09584930903561598>.

<sup>14</sup> Venkat Pulla, *The Lhotsampa People of Bhutan: Resilience and Survival*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), accessed April 11, 2017, <https://link-springer-com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/book/10.1057%2F9781137551429>.

<sup>15</sup> Evans.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Hutt, “Ethnic Nationalism, Refugees and Bhutan,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 9, no. 4 (1996): 398.

<sup>17</sup> Pulla, xi.

<sup>18</sup> Evans.

<sup>19</sup> Pulla, xi.

It was not until the 1980s that the Bhutanese government pushed for a national identity, one that reflected the dominant ethnic groups in Bhutan and excluded the culture and language of the Lhotsampas. It felt threatened by the violent ethnicity-driven movements in India.<sup>20</sup> The Bhutanese government adopted a “one nation, one people” agenda and attempted to create a “Greater Bhutan” by establishing a national dress and language that differed from the traditional dress and language of the Lhotsampas. In fact, it promulgated Dzongkha, the language that was spoken as the national language of Bhutan mainly by the elite.<sup>21</sup> In 1989, all children, students, local officials, and school staff in southern Bhutan had to attend Dzongkha classes.<sup>22</sup>

In response to the aggressive push for a national identity, the Lhotsampas protested and were suppressed by the Bhutanese government. As a result, approximately 100,000 Lhotsampas were stripped of their citizenship and evicted in the early 1990s.<sup>23</sup> In 1996, the UNHCR and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) set up seven refugee camps along Nepal’s eastern border. After failed attempts by the UNHCR to convince the Bhutanese government to admit the Lhotsampas back into Bhutan, it began helping them resettle to third countries.

Resettlement of the Nepali Bhutanese began in 2007 and is one of the UNHCR’s most successful resettlement programs. However, the UNHCR is still willing to work with the governments of both Bhutan and Nepal for the thousands of Nepali Bhutanese remaining in the refugee camps in Nepal.<sup>24</sup> This group is referred to as Nepali Bhutanese, as well as Lhotsampas,

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<sup>20</sup> Atyabrat Sinha, “The Battles for Gorkhaland,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2013, accessed March 14, 2017, [https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/the-battles-for-gorkhaland/?\\_r=0](https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/the-battles-for-gorkhaland/?_r=0).

<sup>21</sup> Birendra Giri, “Mourning the 15th Anniversary of Crisis: The Plight of Bhutanese Refugee Women and Children,” 350.

<sup>22</sup> Hutt, “Ethnic Nationalism, Refugees and Bhutan,” 404.

<sup>23</sup> Evans; Michael Hutt, *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Manny Muang, “No Way Home: Time Runs Out for Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal,” *Refworld*, last updated October 2016, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.refworld.org/country,,,NPL,,57fb77984,0.html>.

Nepali, and Bhutanese Nepali. The U.S. government, resettlement agencies, as well as international organizations, often use the term Bhutanese refugees to refer to this group.<sup>25</sup> These terms should not be used interchangeably, as these labels may have political connotations that can be misconstrued.<sup>26</sup> I have chosen to use the term Nepali Bhutanese as a shortened equivalent of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese.

### **Challenges of the Nepali Bhutanese Refugees: general and in Pittsburgh**

One of the most researched challenges, and a prevalent concern among Nepali Bhutanese refugees, is psychiatric vulnerability. Beginning within the refugee camps, researchers working in them claim that over half the camp population experiences lifetime disorders.<sup>27</sup> Between 2009 and 2012, refugee agencies noticed a high number of suicides among the Nepali Bhutanese refugees resettled in the United States. A recent study looked at both the prevalence of mental health conditions and significant factors for suicidal ideation, and found that depression was the most prevalent mental health condition. It found that the following were factors for suicidal ideation: not being a provider for the family, perceiving low social support, having symptoms of anxiety, and depression.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Deepesh Das Shrestha, "Resettlement of Bhutanese Refugees Surpasses 100,000 Mark," *UNHCR* (Kathmandu), November 19, 2015, accessed March 19, 2017, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2015/11/564dded46/resettlement-bhutanese-refugees-surpasses-100000-mark.html>; "Bhutanese Refugees Find Home in America," *White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders* (Washington), March 11, 2016, accessed March 19, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/03/11/bhutanese-refugees-find-home-america>.

<sup>26</sup> Jaime Spatrisano, "From Dark Days in Bhutan to the Land of the Midnight Sun: A Qualitative Cross-Cultural Analysis of Nepali Bhutanese Refugee Resilience," (Master's thesis, University of Alaska Anchorage, 2016), accessed January 1, 2017, <http://pitt.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1821315528?accountid=14709>.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Mills, "Prevalence of Mental Disorders and Torture among Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal: a Systemic Review and its Policy Implications," *Medicine, Conflicts and Survival* 24, no. 1 (2008): 5-15, DOI: 10.1080/13623690701775171.

<sup>28</sup> Trong Ao, Sharmila Shetty, Teresa Sivilli, Curtis Blanton, Heidi Ellis, Paul L. Geltman, Jennifer Cochran, Eboni Taylor, Emily W. Lankau & Barbara Lopes, "Suicidal Ideation and Mental Health of Bhutanese Refugees in the United States," *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health* 18 (2016): 828-835, accessed March 29, 2017, DOI: 10.1007/s10903-015-0325-7.

Nepali Bhutanese refugees who choose to resettle through third country resettlement face exacerbated forms of mental health problems due to the added stresses of migration. These stresses include migration stress, acculturative stress and traumatic stress, which correspond directly to unplanned movement, resettlement in an unfamiliar culture, and violence from disaster or due to willful human acts.<sup>29</sup> Pittsburgh health and social service providers say that refugee groups arrive “with a host of mental disorders including post-traumatic stress, and are outpacing manpower and funding to help people heal.”<sup>30</sup> Recognizing that Nepali Bhutanese refugees make up a large percentage of refugees in Pittsburgh, the Squirrel Hill Health Center opened up a second clinic closer to where many of the Nepali Bhutanese refugees live.<sup>31</sup> Mental health is a challenge shared among immigrants and refugee groups, and is not unique to Nepali Bhutanese refugees. However, the mental health of each group and individual is not only different, but different to varying degrees. For many adult Nepali Bhutanese refugees, they see mental health problems as their own fault.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars have also acknowledged that mental health problems create psychological and cognitive challenges in the refugees’ ESL classroom, stemming from their histories of trauma. Heather Bobrow Finn argues, in her study of ESL programs in New York City, that English instructors of adult refugees need to be knowledgeable of the ways in which psychological diagnoses influence second language learning and, subsequently, pedagogy.<sup>33</sup> ESL instructors

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<sup>29</sup> M.A. Adkins, B. Sample & D. Birman, *Mental Health and the Adult Refugee: The Role of the ESL Teacher* (Washington: National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, 1999): 3-4, <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=adkins+refugee&id=ED439625>.

<sup>30</sup> Diana Nelson Jones, “Riding Out the Storm Stress, Anxiety are Common among Allegheny County’s Newest Refugees,” *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, May 15, 2016, accessed March 29, 2017, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1789078920?accountid=9902>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Heather Bobrow Finn, “Overcoming Barriers: Adult Refugee Trauma Survivors in a Learning Community,” *TESOL Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2010): 586-596, accessed March 29, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27896747>.

working with adult refugees should view themselves as “cultural brokers” to aid in refugee resettlement, by addressing culturally-driven content related directly to topics such as healthcare and societal differences.<sup>34</sup>

The resettlement of Nepali Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh began in 2008. Since then, four local agencies, Jewish Family and Children’s Services (JF&CS), Northern Area Multi Service Center (NAMSC), Acculturation for Justice, Access, and Peace Outreach (AJAPO), and Catholic Charities, have directly resettled more than 1,900 Nepali Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh.<sup>35</sup> In addition, thousands more secondary migrants (refugees who were first directly resettled in a U.S. city other than Pittsburgh) have contributed to the growing Nepali Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh. U.S. Congressional reports see secondary migration as a challenge for communities because it may hinder their ability to keep track of migration patterns and prevent resources from being directed to the refugees.<sup>36</sup> However, secondary migration has produced many assets. Based on a community-conducted population survey, there are more than 5,000 Nepali Bhutanese refugees in Pittsburgh.<sup>37</sup> When I asked Nepali Bhutanese refugees why Pittsburgh was popular among their community members, they often told me that the hills of Pittsburgh reminded them of the landscape of southern Bhutan. Nepali Bhutanese refugees make up the largest refugee community in Pittsburgh: this is reflected through the various Nepali Bhutanese-owned grocery stores, health care clinics, and restaurants serving their communities in the South Hills neighborhoods of Carrick, Mount Oliver, Baldwin, Whitehall and Castle

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<sup>34</sup> Adkins, et al., 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> Demographics and Arrival Statistics, Pennsylvania Resettlement Program, accessed March 14, 2017, <http://www.refugeesinpa.org/aboutus/demoandarrivalstats/index.htm>.

<sup>36</sup> Bruno.

<sup>37</sup> About Us, Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP), accessed March 14, 2017, <https://www.bcap.us/about-us>.



Shannon. In the following quote from a resettlement professional, the community's presence is seen as a model of successful integration:

Overall, I think Bhutanese refugees are doing well ... Most of them are able to pay their rent, manage their lives. Kids are in school, parents are working. Health needs are taken care of. English is starting to come in. We see seven Nepali-owned grocery stores ... People have cars and homes. Kids are in post-secondary education. Those are all very good signs.<sup>38</sup>

Another significant part of this community's growth is the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP). Established in 2012, BCAP is a nonprofit organization whose mission is "to ensure high quality of life for all members of the Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh and to support their integration into American society through culturally-informed services and activities."<sup>39</sup> In 2013, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services published a report on the needs of immigrants and refugees in Allegheny County. In this report, BCAP was recognized as an organization that met the needs of the Nepali Bhutanese community other resettlement agencies might not be able to address. BCAP is:

an important source of community knowledge, taking advantage of traditional communication methods as well as social media. It holds community meetings in various neighborhoods in which there is a Bhutanese presence, to listen to members and share

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, 35.

<sup>39</sup> "About Us," BCAP.

important information about news and upcoming events. It also publishes community news bulletins that consolidate and distribute local news and information for the community. It then posts videos with the same news and information to YouTube for those with reading difficulties. It also maintains a web presence through a website and a Facebook page.<sup>40</sup>

I had the opportunity to talk with several of the employees at BCAP and it is clear that their priority is meeting as many of their community members' needs as possible. It has a small staff that is constantly thinking of ways to address the varying needs of the people in its community. Dhiraj, a staff member at BCAP, describes the nature of its working environment:

This job is more like a 24-hour job. Not just for me, for all the staff members and some of our board members, also. They engage [with] the community they work [with]. So, we're always running, running, running all the time. And we don't just stay here, but we have to go out and work with other agencies and other non-profits in the region ... It is very hectic. As we reach towards the end of the week, like, Saturday, we have more work in the field than in the office during the weekends. But also the weekends, sometimes, [there are] a lot of meetings, planning and things, because that's the only time that we can engage our youth, volunteers have to work, they have time to come out of their work during the weekends. So, we get busy during the weekends also. Only a few weekends

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<sup>40</sup> Abigail Horn, Andrew Smith, and Evelyn Whitehill, "Immigrants and Refugees in Allegheny County: Scan and Needs Assessment," *The Allegheny County Department of Human Services* 2013, accessed July 19, 2016, <http://www.slideshare.net/ACDHS/immigrants-and-refugees-in-allegheny-county-scan-and-needs-assessment>.

we have relax time, otherwise, it's always very tight.<sup>41</sup>

The weekends are when one of the staff members will take Nepali Bhutanese elders to ESL and civic classes. The weekends are when they can organize a community yoga session to bring the Nepali Bhutanese community together and encourage its members to be mindful of their well being.

The staff at BCAP also makes efforts to forge partnerships with local employers. This is also the responsibility of employment specialists at JF&CS, so BCAP makes an effort to share some of the responsibilities with the resettlement agencies:

[Employers] let us know that they have an opening. If we know for sure that we think [our community members] are qualified - academic qualifications and experience - they apply. They have a job through our network. Our recommendations, even they go with our reference - BCAP's reference. They have landed jobs, good jobs in the hospitals and in other nonprofits ... We help those employers and nonprofits connect with our people and they go ahead and they have found a job, good jobs.<sup>42</sup>

One of the points that Dhiraj highlighted in our conversation is the staff's ability to assess their community members' academic qualifications and experience. At the end of this excerpt, Dhiraj even added, "good jobs," demonstrating the importance of finding a job that meets the needs of their community members. This is not to say that entry-level jobs are not helpful. In

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

fact, Dhiraj and most of the other interviewees, see entry-level jobs as a necessary first step in the resettlement experience.

### **Adult ESL for Refugees in Pittsburgh**

BCAP provides ESL instruction, specifically neighborhood-based ESL instruction where ESL programming expands to other locations more convenient for refugee students. In its 2013-2014 annual report, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development evaluated BCAP's programming and found that neighborhood-based ESL instruction would address various challenges refugees face, especially the barriers of access to ESL:

It is difficult for many Bhutanese to participate in conventional ESL programs because of family responsibilities, work schedules, and transportation issues, particularly on the part of socially isolated, older adults. And it is their lack of English language skills that in part keeps them socially isolated. This neighborhood-based instruction is happening in several neighborhoods. But the goal is to offer expanded programming in at least 5 additional locations. ESL instruction is especially needed to prepare adults for naturalization classes and to make them more employable.<sup>43</sup>

The Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council (GPLC), a nonprofit organization that focuses on adult education and family literacy, plays an important role in the resettlement experiences of Pittsburgh's refugee communities. GPLC not only offers ESL classes, but also provides service coordination, assistance, and referral support to their immigrant and refugee students, as a

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<sup>43</sup> Annual Report 2013-2014, University of Pittsburgh, Office of Child Development, [https://www.oed.pitt.edu/Files/Publications/Annual%20Report/OCD\\_AnnualReport\\_2013-14.pdf](https://www.oed.pitt.edu/Files/Publications/Annual%20Report/OCD_AnnualReport_2013-14.pdf), 11.

partnering agency within Immigrant Services & Connections (ISAC).<sup>44</sup> Educators at GPLC cater their curriculum and programs to the diversifying needs of their students and families. For example, GPLC restructured its Foundations class when educators noticed that more of their incoming students were “low-literate learners with little or no educational background.”<sup>45</sup> The majority of their refugee students are Nepali Bhutanese, and most refugees who resettled as adults are low-literate learners. One of the significant changes that educators at GPLC made to their ESL classes for refugees was the way in which they chose topics; educators asked, “Where do our student encounter English?”<sup>46</sup> The list they came up with includes school (ESL classes plus their children’s schools), bus, shopping, social service agencies, doctor’s offices, work, apartment complexes (includes interaction with apartment management) and traveling in between these locations.<sup>47</sup>

GPLC is a leader in adult education and family literacy for many reasons, and one of its strengths is its ability to listen to and realize the changing needs of their students. For example, educators at GPLC noticed that an increasing number of their Nepali Bhutanese students were illiterate, so they redesigned the ESL curriculum to best meet their needs. GPLC educators used an assessment tool known as BEST Plus (Basic English Skills Test), an individually administered, face-to-face, oral interview, to assess the English language proficiency of adult refugees. When they assessed their Nepali Bhutanese students, GPLC educators found that students entering their Foundations level class scored very low, a level that makes it very

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<sup>44</sup> “Our Programs,” *GPLC*, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.gplc.org/our-programs.cfm>.

<sup>45</sup> Allegra Elson and Nancy Krygowski, “Low-level Learners: Prioritizing Teaching Topics,” in *Proceedings from the 7th annual LESLLA*, ed. Patsy Vinogradov and Martha Bigelow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Printing Services, 2011), 186.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

difficult for refugees to communicate with native English speakers.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to GPLC, volunteer coordinators at local agencies connect refugees to volunteers. For example, student volunteer groups at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh work closely with JF&CS to provide consistent student volunteers as in-home mentors. A student organization on both campuses, Facilitating Opportunities for Refugee Growth and Empowerment (FORGE), has volunteered with refugee communities for years, and has recently added a college prep mentoring program, to meet various needs of refugee youth. Educators from GPLC often lead workshops in teaching ESL with the FORGE volunteer students.

### **Refugee Economic Self-Sufficiency**

Refugee economic self-sufficiency is a topic that is researched more often from the policy level than from the perspective of refugees. For example, there are several reports evaluating the approaches used in the U.S. refugee resettlement program.<sup>49</sup> The policy perspective of refugee self-sufficiency has not changed since its origin, based on the approach to self-sufficiency applied to supporting Jewish refugees from the Holocaust. The United Service for New Americans (USNA) program provided employment to Jewish refugees in order to get them off relief as soon as possible.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>49</sup> Bruno; Peggy Halpern, "Refugee Economic Self-Sufficiency: An Exploratory Study of Approaches used in Office of Refugee Resettlement Programs," *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* 2008, accessed July 6, 2016, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/75561/report.pdf>; Miriam Potocky-Tripodi, "Refugee Economic Adaptation: Theory, Evidence, and Implications for Policy and Practice," *Journal of Social Service Research* 30, no. 1 (2013): 63-91, accessed July 18, 2016, [http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J079v30n01\\_04](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J079v30n01_04); Norman L. Zucker, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States: Policy and Problems," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467 (1983): 172-186, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1044936>.

<sup>50</sup> Beth Cohen, "From Agency Support to Self-Sufficiency," in *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

Scholars have evaluated integration outcomes of refugees across the United States, as well as observed economic self-sufficiency patterns among various refugee groups.<sup>51</sup> Most of these studies relied on qualitative methods (e.g. interviews, legal documents) to evaluate resettlement programs and the help they offered refugees in achieving economic self-sufficiency. One study by Mann Hyung Hur uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine various economic self-sufficiency achievement patterns among Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian and Hmong refugee groups in Colorado. One of Hur's key findings is that for all four refugee groups English proficiency upon arrival was one of the most commonly significant predictors related to economic self-sufficiency.<sup>52</sup> More importantly, Hur noted the differences that each of the four groups expressed in their self-sufficiency achievement patterns, as well as the different rates of achievement among these groups.<sup>53</sup> For example, education was a more significant factor for Vietnamese refugees when compared to the other refugee groups.<sup>54</sup> Recognizing the different outcomes and challenges that are specific to individual refugee groups, Hur and other scholars agree that there is room for more collaboration between the U.S. federal government and individual refugee communities.

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<sup>51</sup> Capps and Newland; Rowena Fong, Noel Bridget Busch, Marilyn Armour, Laurie Cook Heffron and Amy Channugam, "Pathways to Self-Sufficiency: Successful Entrepreneurship for Refugees," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 16, no. 1-2 (2007): 127-159, accessed February 22, 2017, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J051v16n01\\_05](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J051v16n01_05); Mann Hyung Hur, "Economic Self-Sufficiency: A Study of Southeast Asian Refugees in Colorado," (PhD thesis, University of Colorado at Denver, 1990), accessed July 20, 2016, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/303910904?accountid=9902>; Kris Kissman and Thanh Van Tran, "Life Satisfaction Among the Indochinese Refugees," *International Review of Modern Sociology* 19, no. 1 (1989): 27-35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41420941>; Domminick McParland, "Is Self-Sufficiency Really Sufficient? A Critical Analysis of Federal Refugee Resettlement Policy and Local Attendant English Language Training in Portland, Oregon," (Master's thesis, Portland State University, 2014), accessed January 22, 2017, [http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open\\_access\\_etds/1697/](http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/1697/); Miriam Potocky and Thomas McDonald, "Predictors of Economic Status of Southeast Asian Refugees: Implications for Service Improvement," *Social Work Research* 19, no. 4 (1995): 219-228, accessed July 6, 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Hur, iii.

<sup>53</sup> Hur, iv.

<sup>54</sup> Hur, iv.

Scholars have also criticized the U.S. refugee resettlement policies for emphasizing quick employment and suggested policy reforms. Domminick McParland, whose study examined the ways in which U.S. refugee resettlement policy construes the notion of self-sufficiency, and whether or not that constructed version of self-sufficiency is reinforced in local English language training, argued that the language used in these policy documents lacked mention of refugee agency and also served to limit it.<sup>55</sup> By agency, McParland is referring to the individual's efficacy in choosing his or her own vocational pursuits.<sup>56</sup> Jaime Spatrisano, who analyzed refugee resilience, suggested that service providers could improve their services by keeping in mind that the Nepali Bhutanese family is seen as the unit of well-being; the Nepali Bhutanese "appear to be interconnected with family members through overlap in their conceptualizations of the self."<sup>57</sup>

### **Economic Self-Sufficiency among Nepali Bhutanese Refugees**

There has been research specifically on the Nepali Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh. In a 2008 Master's thesis, Daniel Hatfield examined the effects of U.S. refugee policy on the Nepali Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh, and concluded that English language learning needs were not being addressed due to the U.S. refugee program's roots in foreign policy, its focus on self-sufficiency through employment, and the manner in which political power shapes policy.<sup>58</sup> In 2013, Andrew J. Smith also interviewed Nepali Bhutanese refugees, as well as service providers, to evaluate the resettlement experience through an integration framework and found that the U.S. refugee resettlement program diminished its efforts by encouraging

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<sup>55</sup> McParland, 67.

<sup>56</sup> McParland, 64.

<sup>57</sup> Spatrisano, 91.

<sup>58</sup> Hatfield, 104.



self-sufficiency and discouraging public dependence.<sup>59</sup> Through this framework, Smith also argues that economic self-sufficiency was a central factor in Nepali Bhutanese refugee integration.<sup>60</sup>

Both Hatfield and Smith offer a foundational overview of the resettlement program's effects on the Nepali Bhutanese refugee community in Pittsburgh. They also acknowledge the fact that discussions of self-sufficiency go beyond the federal policy's definition, which emphasizes quick employment. This means taking into account social and cultural self-sufficiencies.

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 9.

## Methodology

My attempt to understand how ten individuals from the Nepali Bhutanese community perceive self-sufficiency was guided by ethnographic methods. I conducted semi-structured interviews that were guided by open-ended questions I had prepared for all the interviewees. The questions were based on the framework of Narrative Research. The procedures for Narrative Research consist focusing on how one or two individuals tell their stories and experiences.<sup>61</sup> For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus on themes that the ten interviewees collectively included in their personal narratives. The main type of information collected were the audio recordings of the interviews as well as the transcriptions of these interviews on a Word document. Instead of taking notes during the interviews, I took notes for myself (e.g. body language) immediately after each of the interviews in order to reduce distractions.

The refugee narratives collected for this study are distinct from refugee success stories. I make this distinction because Western media commonly represent and construct refugees in terms of their successes. Liisa Malkki, an anthropologist who has worked with Hutu refugees, argued that within widely accepted refugee success stories portray refugees not as specific persons, but as pure victims. Malkki referred to this as “dehistoricizing universalism” in that it created a context where refugees were not seen as historical actors and instead, as mute victims.<sup>62</sup> The collection of narratives in this study take into account that each individual is the actor in their own story. My analysis of the personal narratives was guided by Grounded Theory, an approach that emphasizes analyzing “grounded” data from interviewees’ experiences, which

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<sup>61</sup>John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 55.

<sup>62</sup>Liisa H. Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 378, accessed April 16, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/pitt.idm.oclc.org/stable/656300>.

required inductive reasoning to formulate a theory about how the interviewees understood self-sufficiency.<sup>63</sup> While these individuals are refugees and identify with an ethnic group, each is his or her own actor in the narratives. These narratives demonstrate continually shifting individual identities in relation to the communities within which they belong.

The topic of refugee self-sufficiency among Nepali Bhutanese refugees cannot be discussed without recognizing the notion of “self.” The Nepali Bhutanese culture values collectivism (as opposed to individualistic North American culture), which means that individual is understood in relation to a group. However, this does not mean that Nepali Bhutanese individuality does not exist. Mattison Mines demonstrated in his research on individuality in South India that Tamils recognize individuality and that it “lies at the very crux of a Tamil’s sense of self, as well as his or her sense of others.”<sup>64</sup> Mines also added that individuality should also be recognized. The kind of individuality that Mines describes was similar to that of the Nepali Bhutanese refugees. Keeping this in mind, this study considered the coexistence of *self*-sufficiency and *community*-sufficiency.

Prior to the start of this research, I had already spent three years as a volunteer to a Nepali Bhutanese family. I was also an intern at Jewish Family Service (JFS) of Seattle for two summers and a summer volunteer at Jewish Family & Children’s Services of Pittsburgh. As a result of my experiences and my continuing involvement with the student organization, CMU FORGE, I was aware of what it meant to work with refugees. There are questions volunteers should not ask, there are responsibilities that volunteers should not take (e.g. caseworker), there are boundaries to what can and cannot be posted on social media. Working with refugees is a

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<sup>63</sup> Creswell, 83.

<sup>64</sup> Mattison Mines, “Introduction: Individuality in South India,” In *Public Faces, Private Voices: Community and Individuality in South India*, First ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 2.

responsibility that must be taken seriously.

Making the shift from a volunteer and family friend to that of a researcher was not an easy task. Applying for IRB approval for this study put another layer of responsibility on my part as a representative of our campus. As volunteer with CMU FORGE, I was familiar with the campus expectations. However, limitations on where I could conduct interviews as well as using a procedure and asking for consent from each of the interviews was challenging. I was used to knocking on my family's door, which they often left unlocked around the time they expected me to come. I was used to having conversations with staff members at BCAP about the incredible programming and events they hosted over the years. I will never forget the confused email exchange that occurred when I asked for a letter of authorization to use the meeting space of BCAP; it was definitely a learning experience for the both of us.

By the end of this study, I still do not feel completely comfortable identifying as a researcher. The relationships that I built over the years, some of which are included in this study, would not change. During the recording of our interviews was when I shifted temporarily to the role of a researcher, but as soon as I turned the voice recorder off, I was a volunteer and friend who watched television with them in their living room.

During the time of the interviews was crucial for me because I was using semi-structured interviews to collect data. My advisor and I created a questionnaire for me to guide my interviews. Most of them were open-ended questions and allowed for interviewees to take the lead. The questions were based on the framework of Narrative Research. The procedures for Narrative Research consist of "focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data

through the collection of their stories, [and] reporting individual experiences.”<sup>65</sup> Narrative Research is often based on a chronology of life experiences. For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus on themes that the ten interviewees collectively included in their personal narratives. The main type of information collected were the audio recordings of the interviews as well as the transcriptions of the interviews on a document. Instead of taking notes during the interviews, I wrote notes for myself (e.g. body language) immediately after each of the interviews in order to reduce distractions.

## **Procedure**

Once interviewees were contacted and agreed on a time to meet (usually Saturdays), I met with them at the BCAP office. I read through the consent form and asked them if they had questions. If they chose to continue, I asked them to sign two copies (one was kept in a secure file and the other was for the interviewees). I used a voice recorder to record the interviews and later transcribed them. Interviews typically lasted from 30 to 60 minutes.

The names of the interviewees have been changed for anonymity. All names mentioned by the interviewees have been changed. In the transcriptions, few modifications were made (e.g. in brackets) to clarify for syntax and context for understanding.

## **Interviewees**

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews from November 2016 through March 2017. Most interviews were conducted in a meeting room in BCAP, located outside of downtown Pittsburgh in the neighborhood of Brentwood.

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<sup>65</sup> Creswell, 54.

Seven men and three women were interviewed: Initially, I hoped that I would have a balanced participant pool in terms of sex, but finding women who could come to the BCAP office was a challenge. Interviewees' ages ranged from 18-55 years: the average age for men was 42.43; for women it was 31. Eight out of the ten interviewees were married. One hundred percent of the interviewees were Nepali Bhutanese refugees and all but one of them was employed at the time of their interviews.

In terms of the number of years living in the United States, interviewees arrived between the years 2008 and 2013. Fifty percent of the interviewees arrived in 2008 and 2009. When it came to highest education level of attained, one interviewee had a Bachelor's degree and three had Master's degrees (Master's obtained in the United States).<sup>66</sup>

**Table 1. Interviewee Characteristics: Age, Years in U.S., Marital Status**

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Age</b>	Average: 38.57 Range: 25-50	Average: 29.33 Range: 18-40
<b>Years in U.S. (years since arrival)</b>	Average: 7.29 Range: 4-9	Average: 5.67 Range: 4-9
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married: 6 Single: 1	Married: 2 Single: 1

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<sup>66</sup> Appendix E: Interviews Descriptions

**Table 2. Factors contributing to self-sufficiency**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Number of Mentions (n=10)</b>
English language	7
U.S. college degree	5
Work history/experience	5
Entry-level job	5
Paying bills	4
Nepali Bhutanese Community (support)	4
Personal/Individualized Responsibility	4
Transition from agricultural economy	3
Networking	3
Food security	3
References	3
Saving money	3
Homeowner	3
Resettlement agency	3
Family support	2
Health	2
Car ownership	2
Not all jobs require fluency in English	1
Raise (wages)	1
Working more than one job	1
Taking risks	1
Food stamps & cash assistance	1

**Table 3. Other Emerging Themes**

Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gendered perspectives of work</li><li>• Gender roles</li><li>• Shifting expectations from self-sufficiency to family-sufficiency</li><li>• Community networks</li><li>• Personhood within the entry-level job</li><li>• Personal Responsibility among a community</li></ul>

## **Analysis**

### **Family Income**

None of the interviewees referenced specific wages or salary goals when I asked what they considered to be a decent job. This differs from the U.S. government's approach to measuring the achievement of self-sufficiency by looking at the quantitative value of household incomes. Instead, they discussed the importance of contributing to the family income. Diwash, a business owner in his 30s, referred to the Nepali Bhutanese family as a "joint-family" in order to explain this cultural expectation:

Our culture is more of a joint-family, you know. People depends on one another, you know ... If Mom and Dad can both work, they can add another 1500 or 200, or whatever they make, to the income of the family to support it in a more efficient way. That's what drives me and my family. That's what it pulls.<sup>67</sup>

The importance of family income is connected to the idea of understanding family as a

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.



unit. Compared to American individualistic culture, Nepali Bhutanese culture is collectivistic in that it recognizes the individual as a contributor to a family and community. One can clearly see the collectivistic image of Nepali Bhutanese in an anecdote by Diwash in which he took it upon himself to be a liaison between his community members and potential employers in Pittsburgh:

I was talking with [my friend] to see if he can find anybody and there's a guy we talked to and he said he wanted to call him, hey there's an opening if you want to go and apply. It looks [like] a pretty good place to work. Five of us went [and] applied there. I would say he is the one who referred me and find that place for us. Later on, it was just the beginning when we went there; I took almost 30 some people from my community only. All five took almost 30, which there was total of 200 some employees. And it was good, good paying job, you know? Starting rate for 11 some and warehouse, you know, they will give you all the training and they will make 14, 15 bucks an hour.<sup>68</sup>

As soon as he built a rapport with an employer in Pittsburgh, Diwash immediately brought other Nepali Bhutanese community members with him to work. He saw an opportunity to find jobs for his community and took it. He is very proud of having made this connection. For Diwash, self-sufficiency does not stop with himself and his family. He sees the importance of being a contributing community member when he is able.

Contributing to a family income signified an investment in the future of the family as opposed to the individual. Saving money meant investing in the family unit rather than for

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.

oneself. Arpita, a female social service provider, said she was happy because she could save money and send it to her parents when they still lived in the refugee camps.

Other interviewees mentioned various indicators of economic self-sufficiency, such as being able to pay the family bills, purchasing a house to share with extended family members, buying a car, and saving up for future emergencies. However, none of them talked specifically about quantity.

**Table 4. Principal Challenges Faced: Family Income**

Principal Challenges	Number of Mentions (n=10)*
Paying the bills	5
Ability to Save	4
Supporting their children financially	4
Working women expected to also manage domestic affairs	2
Relying on welfare	1

\*Total number of interviewees who discussed work histories, n=10

### **Family Income and Gender Roles**

Family income is inextricably intertwined with gender roles within the context of Nepali Bhutanese culture. Satya, a female high school student, talked about female contribution to the family income in Nepali Bhutanese culture:

It's more about the culture too. I want to carry it with me so I want to stay with my parents until I get married and work and pay for like household thing and be with them.

[My dad] knows that.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Satya, January 21, 2017.

The decision to live with her parents until she gets married comes from traditional expectations for Nepali Bhutanese women. Once a woman is married, she manages domestic affairs, such as taking care of the children. Until Satya is married, she will be working and helping her parents pay their bills. Satya was aware of cultural expectations that were related to gender:

I think it's different for me than other[s], because [my family] think that my education is more important for me. I'm the only girl in the household and they always cheer me up. They're like, "You don't have to work now. You can just focus on your education." So, it's really different for me. That's why my mom and dad, they [would] love me to [have a] job, but they also want me to help [at] home. The most important thing is the really wanted help, so I have to manage my time. So, if I get a job, I might not be able to manage my time for financial thing[s], for my home and my school and my job.<sup>70</sup>

Nepali Bhutanese culture was based on historically patriarchal structures where the men spent their days working on the farm and the women were responsible for taking care of the children and household. The Nepali Bhutanese refugees maintained these expectations of gender roles in the camps. In some instances, men would leave the camp to work as laborers, while women stayed in the camps and took care of the children. In the United States, the expectations of gender roles shifted due to economic necessity. Dhiraj noted that when his wife started

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Satya, January 21, 2017.

working, the family as a whole became more self-sufficient:

I have gone through different stages, even after I arrived in the United States. My first job did not give me good, I would say, a good source of income. I was the only person working. My wife was not working and maybe a year later, I moved to another job. My wife was moving into the same job and we became more self-sufficient.<sup>71</sup>

Although he did not elaborate on why this change occurred, his main point here is that having more than one adult in the family contributing to family income made their family “more self-sufficient.” At the same time, working women were expected to take care of the children and manage domestic affairs.<sup>72</sup>

Diwash shared with me a story when his wife helped him in his business:

I’m married. He’s my wife’s brother (points to his brother-in-law working in the store). We have our uncle, but he decided to not carry on with us because he had back problem[s] and sometimes, we do have to [do the] lifting, loading, unloading and stuff. And it’s so convenient to have family than to have somebody you don’t know. I cannot open today? Yes! No problem. I’m taking [the day] off today. No problem! You can make yourself feel so much [more] comfortable. Even [a] few hours of relief. Sometimes, my wife will come in and stay and I’ll get off [my] shift for a moment, but then you can do your job rather than closing the store and [...] leave your sign open [which] makes a

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, 57.

difference.<sup>73</sup>

For Diwash, one of the benefits of running a family-owned business is the flexible nature of the work environment. The fact that Diwash can call his brother-in-law or wife to help him run the business for even a few hours in the day “makes a difference.” What is significant in this excerpt is the distinction between what his brother-in-law did and what his wife did to help out with the business. He did not specify what his wife did, but it did not sound like she played a major role in the business.

### **Autonomy and Family Income**

Diwash was happy with his business because it allowed him to control his work hours and work environment (including his staff of family). He stressed that his satisfaction in his current job was not only about having an income to pay the bills, but also the fact that he was not working under anyone else:

If you are able to navigate your life, you know, if you can stand on your own foot and don't have to work for anybody else and try to be your own [...] not have problems speaking, talking, speaking out [...] have a stable job, income able to pay bills, rents and stuff ... how you feel, how you act, how you maintain, it's your own.<sup>74</sup>

Diwash's sense of self in the context of contributing to his family's income was not uncommon among refugee entrepreneurs. It is important to recognize that there is an

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.

individualistic element to understanding the responsibility one has in ensuring the economic well-being of one's family. Dhiraj used the word "passion" to express the individual's responsibility to make more money or to have a better income:

How passionate you are to rise and get better salary. If you are not very passionate to make more income, a better income, to be self-sufficient, then you make think my level of English is okay. I don't have to improve. My job is fine ... Then, there is no chance that you can rise or you can improve so that you get better jobs, better salary or wages.<sup>75</sup>

While contributing to a family income was viewed as a collective act, individuals were held accountable for their personal goals in getting "better jobs, better salary or wages."

### **Earning and Saving**

Arpita mentioned that she saved money to send to her parents when they were still in Nepal. Other interviewees discussed the importance of savings, or more specifically the family's savings:

You are able to pay the bills and you have some savings left over for your emergencies, right? And that's how I define self-sufficiency. Able to buy good food, good clothing, to pay all your bills and also have some savings to meet your future emergencies. That's how I look at self-sufficiency.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

The idea of saving was not an investment for the individual, but rather the family. Arpita referred to a time when she picked up another job in addition to her first job in Pittsburgh. By working two jobs, Arpita was able to buy a car, pay her bills and save money to send to her parents, who were still in a refugee camp at the time:

It was a good job, but they didn't pay nice, like, the pay was very low. Anyway, [it was] like ten dollars per hour, but I got two jobs – I managed to do two jobs, one at the hotel. They scheduled me in the morning time and [during] the daytime I used to work at BNY Mellon. And then, I had a car and I was not having problems paying all [my] bills and all [my] rent and I could make a little saving. And that saving I could send to my parents who were living in Nepal in camp.<sup>77</sup>

I chose to focus on this topic of family income because the interviews shifted away from the narrow focus of the individual in *self*-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency in the context of family income would be more accurately labeled as family-sufficiency. The act of earning, saving, and contributing to the family income was a collective effort.

### **Work Histories**

Upon arrival in the United States, interviewees worked at commercial laundry services, janitorial work, food packaging, hotel cleaning services, restaurants, and retail. All but one left their first jobs within a few months (one left as early as three months). The ones who left their first jobs were unsatisfied with several aspects of the job, including low wages, poor working

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Arpita, November 19, 2016.

conditions, challenges related to public transportation, and limited mobility. There were a select few who arrived with college degrees and were frustrated because they felt overqualified working in entry-level jobs.



**Table 5. Principal Challenges Faced: Work Histories**

<b>Principal Challenges</b>	<b>Number of Mentions (n=10)*</b>
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	
Language barrier among employees	5
Miscommunication with supervisor	3
Miscommunication with clients/customers	3
Not being able to call in sick	2
<b>WORKING CONDITIONS</b>	
Insufficient wages	6
Too many hours	5
Physically demanding work	4
Unable to save money	3
Lack of network/connections	3
Lack of motivation to work hard	3
Unfamiliarity with area of employment	2
Inadequate knowledge of the rules/laws	2
Working under a supervisor	1
Taking care of one's health	1

\*Total number of interviewees who discussed work histories, n=10.

The definition of a “good” work history varies from one person to the next. Employment coordinators do not prioritize building a “good” work history for their clients. However, they looked down on “jumping from one job to the next.”<sup>78</sup> I observed an employment workshop where the employment coordinator discussed work attire, personal hygiene, appropriate behavior

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<sup>78</sup> Personal observation of employment workshop, July 2016.

(e.g. sitting up in an interview) and the importance of being on time. Throughout the presentation, the employment coordinator provided good and bad examples of his clients. He shared one story of a woman who was fired from her hotel cleaning job for taking a can of soda while cleaning a hotel room. The woman assumed that the guests had checked out of their hotel room and left the can of soda to be thrown out. Her employer treated the act as a theft and fired her. Most of the anecdotes shared by the employment coordinator during this workshop were examples of what not to do.

Refugees are also introduced to the topic of employment in cultural orientation sessions. JF&CS leads cultural orientations once a week at the Department of Human Services, which typically last two to three hours. At JF&CS, refugees meet with their employment specialists (another name for employment coordinators) after one month of arrival. The cultural orientation session on employment covers ways to find jobs (e.g. JF&CS employment team, internet, family, friends, neighbors, newspapers, “help wanted” signs), resumes, expectations at interviews, employee rights (e.g. safety, minimum wage), responsibilities (e.g. being on time), benefits of a first job, and a sample image of a paycheck. It is a lot of information for refugees to process, especially for those who have not yet started working. The cultural orientation session on employment and the employment workshop led by the employment specialist went over the same topics. The main difference, was that the employment specialist provided examples of the kinds of jobs that they would likely have.

It is important to be clear with refugees about the kinds of the jobs they are able to get as refugees within six months of arrival. In the employment workshop, the examples of refugee clients’ jobs included hotel cleaning services, food packaging, retail, and commercial laundry.

The presentation was tailored for refugees who would likely work in these industries. Most refugees were not completely satisfied with their first job, but accepted them because they would at least provide them with a source of income and be eligible for financial aid. The interviewees described their first jobs as “tough,” “backbreaking,” “not a good source of income,” something that they “had to do” and something that they had to “handle.” Resettlement agencies are aware of the challenges that refugees face when they begin their first jobs and support them in any way they can (e.g. making sure they know their rights). Caseworkers are also well-aware of the frustrations some of the more educated refugees may feel when their degrees cannot be transferred. What employment specialists and caseworkers can do is encourage refugees to keep them updated on any challenges they experience at work and at home, especially in the first few months. Then, they respond to the concerns as best they can.

I asked the employed interviewees to tell me about their current occupations and I usually followed up with the question of whether or not they planned on changing their occupation in the future. Overall, interviewees did not express negative feelings toward their current employment. Some interviewees described their jobs using one word, such as “good” and “okay.” There were also interviewees who told me they were “very happy” and “it’s going well.” While interviewees expressed satisfaction by describing working conditions as “good” and saying that the job “pays okay,” they also compared their current job to their previous jobs in the United States to explain why they were “very happy” or saw that work was “going well.” This often led to the topic of work history.

Sadar was “very happy” with his current job as a director at an organization that provides home services for the elderly. In order to help me to understand the reason why he was “very

happy,” he began his story with his first job at a meat processing company in Scranton, Pennsylvania in 2009:

Personally speaking, I’m very happy, you know? In the beginning, I was three months, around, I work in a meat processing company and was a cleaner which was a really, really tough job, you know? (laughs) After that, I start working as a case manager, service coordinator. Right now, I’m a director ... so I have to supervise the five offices, so it’s good. And also, I know lot of people in the community, so it’s nice wherever I go, you know. I feel like, I’m home, you know?<sup>79</sup>

By comparing his current job as a director to his first job at a meat processing company, Sadar could talk about how he became “very happy.” He described his first job as “really tough.” This was likely due to the physical labor that was required of him, but what is also important to know about Sadar is that he arrived in Scranton with a Bachelor’s degree in English literature. Since degrees do not always transfer and Sadar had to find a job quickly, he was limited to the kind of employment he had. Like many others who arrive with university degrees, it can frustrating to feel overqualified working in an entry-level job.

Satisfaction with his current job in Pittsburgh came from his ability to serve his community and Sadar emphasized this by comparing the nature of working in a meat processing company to that of a social service provider. His current job as a service provider gave Sadar satisfaction in the opportunity to work with a “lot of people in the community, so it’s nice ...” His

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Sadar, January 25, 2017.

use of the word “home” also indicated that he had reached a goal or felt that he had achieved something.

Sadar saw his work history as an accumulation of skills and connections he made over the years. With a Bachelor’s degree in English literature and work experience in social work, he had an impressive work history. He acknowledged his work history as a tool for upward mobility when he said:

Once I entered into the resettlement agency job, after that, job was not a big challenge for me, you know. I feel like wherever I go, I have a job, because I have my experience, you know, I have my, what to say, connection.<sup>80</sup>

To my surprise, he also added that he would like to “invest [his] time in other fields” in the next five years. I assumed when he said he felt at home with his current job, he would stick with it. I asked him what he meant by “other fields.” He wanted to go into business in hopes of early retirement, adding that he did not have enough time for his family with his current job, because managing five offices required long hours and a decent amount of travel.

Sadar viewed his work history as a tool that allowed him to leave his entry-level job and pursue other opportunities. Becoming self-sufficient for Sadar meant acquiring experiences and connections that make him “very happy,” but more importantly, he could talk about the future, a plan to to “invest” in a financially secure life for him and his family.

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Sadar, January 25, 2017.

Like Sadar, most of the employed interviewees talked about their first job, also more commonly identified as the entry-level job. This was the fourth most common topic in the interviews as it was a part of their work history that they saw as something they had to do in the first few months of resettlement. The entry-level job was the job that was “tough” and “backbreaking.” It was also the job that, as refugees, the interviewees felt that they had to take. In Sadar’s words: “You have to start somewhere. So, I started from entry-level, I got other jobs.”

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The word “entry-level” was significant because it not only categorized the kind of job that refugees were able to obtain within the first few months of resettlement, but also because of what it meant for each individual, in the way in which they saw their possibilities for economic mobility. In the previous section on English language, I discussed the way in which Arpita, expressed her increased level of confidence when she said, “I can fight now, you know.” Within that same excerpt, she had the following to say about entry-level jobs:

I got a chance to experience, you know, like, how we work in America. The first job is always the entry-level job. That was fine, and I worked there for maybe six, seven months. From there I could manage house bills, rent, and other food stuff and so many things. And that makes me little strong. I thought like I can fight now, you know, I can exist now.<sup>82</sup>

I noticed the way she talked about her first entry-level job during the first few months of

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Sadar, January 25, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Arpita, November 19, 2016.

resettlement in Pittsburgh, because (1) she used the word, “always,” (2) she said, “That was fine.” She used the word “always” to indicate that she did not expect anything else to be her first job in the United States. Following this statement, Arpita quickly added: “That was fine [...]” When Arpita said this, I interpreted it as her way of telling me that it may not have been the best place to work, but it was manageable since she saw that it was paying her bills. In addition to the financial stability that her first job provided her, she mentioned that the job provided her an existence. One way to look at this tangibly is that it became part of her work history, something that U.S. work culture values. Arguably more important for Arpita was that she gained knowledge to better navigate in the new context of U.S. working culture.

Arpita did not complain about her first job, but rather provided a benefit of her entry-level job. She was introduced to work in the United States; it gave her knowledge and confidence.

I noticed that the experience of acquiring some kind of knowledge while working in an entry-level position was a way for interviewees to explain that their first job was not all bad. Goman, an accountant, talked about the kind of knowledge he gained while working as a janitor:

In the beginning in 2009, I was in the school in Virginia. I was working as a floor deck. Mopping around, waxing, scrubbing, and all, I have knowledge of that too. I had to do that job that was the first job I got. That was the best job anyone could ever have there, who came there first, the newcomers.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Goman, February 25, 2017.

The skills or “knowledge” that Goman saw as part of his work history are mopping, waxing, scrubbing. The word “knowledge” carries a positive connotation; typically, it is something we aspire to gain. While Arpita and Goman saw the benefit of working in entry-level jobs by acknowledging that they gained “knowledge,” whether it was the skill in janitorial work or familiarity with work in the United States, it was a contrast to their shared understanding of the entry-level job as something they had to do.

For many of the interviewees, their experience working in their first job was about making the most of it at the time, because there was little under their control. Satya, who was a high school student and has never had a job, talked about how she saw people “handling” their entry-level jobs based upon her observations of her parents:

I have seen people give up after [...] they get a job [...] [they] wait for a job and get reject[ed] again, and again, and finally, have a job and earn money. They don’t want to do that. They want quick money, so they - I don’t want to say give up - but [they] try to handle it as much as they can but they eventually give up ...<sup>84</sup>

Satya noticed that her family wanted “quick” money, which does not necessarily signify *lots* of money. What Satya is referring to here is the fear of uncertainty that comes with unemployment while searching for a new job. Just as Arpita mentioned that her first job at least provided a steady source of income, Satya’s use of the words, “quick money,” pointed to financial stability as a priority. In this context, “handle” was similar to endure. My guess as to

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Satya, January 21, 2017.



why Satya used the word, “handle” would be that she heard it being used in the phrase: “I can’t handle it.”

Dhiraj talked about this and how he watched refugees find better opportunities as a result of having the ability to effectively communicate in English at work:

Even in entry-level, labor jobs, those physical labor. If you go there and see, people who can communicate in English say some English words. They quickly rise and become a favorite of the supervisors ... Then, the rest of the people who cannot even understand a single word in English. You just have to stuck in the same job for a number of years.<sup>85</sup>

Dhiraj viewed the entry-level jobs as a position to that one eventually left, but in order to do so, English and good communication with employers were needed to “rise” within or out of these jobs. The entry-level job was something they “had to do,” had to “handle,” and some were “fed up” with entry-level jobs.<sup>86</sup> According to Dhiraj, there was the fear of being “stuck.” In the next section, I bring up the question of what one would consider a “good” work history, because one of the interviewees, Pathik, had a different view of his entry-level job.

Pathik’s view differed from that of the rest of the interviewees because he saw value in maintaining his first entry-level job, because it demonstrated that he could keep one job and do it well. Pathik has worked at a linen and textile rental service for almost four years. Despite the difficult working conditions, he took pride in having built rapport with his supervisor. He also took pride in being able to train new workers, demonstrating that he has a skillset that adds to his

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Sadar, January 25, 2017.

“good history” as well as to his sense of personhood: In Pathik’s case, his first entry-level job has become the one most important part of his job history. When I asked him how long he had worked at his current job, he said:

Not quit. Very long time working. My history, good history, long time working, good history – job history. More money, plus, plus, plus, plus [raises his right hand higher, and higher after he says “plus”].<sup>87</sup>

Pathik viewed himself as successful because he did not quit for four years and considered his work history “good.” Unlike Arpita and some of the other interviewees, he did not use the word, “entry- level,” and this indicated a difference in the way in which he viewed his first job. Pathick saw potential economic mobility within the same workplace and this was observed in the way in which he communicated using body language. When Pathik said, “More money, plus, plus, plus,” and raised his right hand higher, and higher after each “plus,” he alluded to the possibility of a raise for committed and loyal employees. In other conversations, he mentioned that his relationship with his supervisor has also improved and solidified over the years.

For Pathik, familiarity with the workplace and the ability to teach new employees how to use the machines is a visible way to measure his own progress. Not having to leave a job is considered success. This was a different kind of satisfaction from the other interviewees who believed that entry-level jobs were always temporary and something that they had to do. Pathik may have also felt that he had to take it when his employment specialist helped him apply for it,

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Pathik, December 3, 2016.

but over the years, his satisfaction grew because it paid the bills, he had a job, and he was training new employees.

### **English Language**

Refugees in Pittsburgh have several options when it comes to learning English. They can enroll into ESL classes free of charge through the GPLC free of charge, they can attend English classes at the public library, and Nepali Bhutanese refugees can go to English classes provided by BCAP on the weekends. Another option is requesting an in-home volunteer to teach English informally, a service provided by most resettlement agencies.. While this option does not guarantee that a trained professional in ESL will be teaching them English, it is a way for refugees to practice having conversations in English during times that work best for them.<sup>88</sup>

**Table 6. Principal Challenges Faced: English Language**

<b>Principal Challenges</b>	<b>Number of Mentions (n=10)*</b>
Speaking with an accent	6
Limited opportunities to use English at work	4
Slang	3
Illiterate in own language	1
ESL classes conflict with family responsibilities	1
ESL classes conflict with work	1

\*Total number of interviewees who discussed work histories, n=10

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<sup>88</sup> JF&CS works with students at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh to find in-home volunteers to visit refugee families on the weekends.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was that work schedules conflicted with classes. One interviewee acknowledged the fact that there were accessible English classes in the community, but said that these ESL classes “might not be enough, because ... they have their own schedules ... [they take care of] their children.”<sup>89</sup> He went on to suggest “home-based education” as an answer. He explained:

Yeah, I was fortunate to have a volunteer worker for me and my family ... they’re husband and wife and they are reporters and they came at least once a week. We spent time together, we ate food together, and culture. They took us outside, they taught us new words and stuff. Me and my whole family, we were lucky enough to share the culture, we share the first Thanksgiving and stuff.<sup>90</sup>

Not all of the interviewees had an in-home volunteer come and have conversations with them in English. Those who had that experience were thankful because the volunteers worked around the family’s schedules. In addition, the family receives individualized attention.

In addition to limited access to public transportation and conflicting work schedules, employed interviewees brought up the challenges of learning English in the context of work and in life. A business owner who often communicated with customers (many of them are native English speakers) talked about slang and said that when he did not understand “native slang words,” he felt a kind of “dilemma in [him]self.”<sup>91</sup> Another interviewee said that her first two

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Diwash, January 21, 2017.

months were a struggle because of the “language barrier,” and explained that “It was so tough to communicate with [the Americans].”<sup>92</sup>

While I did not have difficulty understanding the interviewees, all of them brought up their accents as a prominent concern. One interviewee who arrived with a level of English higher than that of most members of his community said he and his friends: “had to struggle a lot ... even though we came from a background where our English was the medium of instruction at school back in Bhutan, even the refugee camps, but we are not very familiar with the way that Americans speak.”<sup>93</sup>

### **Confidence as an English Language Learner**

Not one of my interviewees expressed high confidence in the English language. All of them communicated with me without an interpreter, but were concerned about their accent and more specifically, about sounding like a “new immigrant.” The concerns with acting and sounding like a “new immigrant” were addressed by all of the interviewees. Sadar, who was a Service Coordinator for six years at one of Pittsburgh’s resettlement agencies, used an idiom to explain the challenges of being perceived as a refugee:

When you work like duck, quack like duck, you are a duck (laughs), so when you sound like something you look like, you know, new immigrant, and you speak like, you know, speak with a thick accent, you know, they don’t, you know...<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Arpita, November 19, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Sadar, January 25, 2017.

Within this excerpt, Sadar touched on the challenges that come with being an English language learner when he said: “When you work like duck, quack like duck, you are a duck.” This idiom helped Sadar communicate his understanding of what it meant to be an English language learner. He elaborated on this by indicating that there were challenges to being a “new immigrant,” one who might “speak with a thick accent.”<sup>95</sup>

### **Being an English Language Learner**

The ways in which the interviewees brought up the topic of English in the interviews would be best described as what it meant for them to be English language learners. I do not think that terms “English proficiency” or simply “English language” are accurate enough for this part of the analysis. The interviewees’ understanding of self-sufficiency goes beyond just reaching a point at which they are labeled “proficient,” which is also a word that is not clearly defined in U.S. refugee resettlement program documents.

When Sadar said: “When you sound like something you look like, you know, new immigrant ...,” he touched upon a challenge that brought up the topic of identity, one that had to do with the stereotypes of immigrants who speak English with an accent and speak “broken English.” Another example of employers’ expectations of immigrant and refugee employees is that they speak very little English. Pathik, an employee at a linen and textile rental service in Pittsburgh, has worked there since 2013. This is the only job he has had. When I asked him to describe the process of finding this job, he talked about his first encounter with his employer:

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<sup>95</sup> The root of this idiom comes from a mechanical duck from the 18th century and is used a philosophical argument. It is also connected to the way the Turing Test (created by Alan Turing in the 1950s) challenges artificial intelligence systems to fool people into believing that the system is human; Brian Edwards, “Did you know that the phrase ‘if it looks like a duck...’ was originally about a mechanical pooing duck?” *Mirror*, February 25, 2016, accessed April 14, 2017, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/usvsth3m/you-know-phrase-if-looks-5235884>.

Little, little English. Supervisor said, “Understand English?” So, I (points to himself) understand English. “Yeah, I understand English, I speak, I speak!”<sup>96</sup>

According to Pathik, his first meeting with his supervisor was brief. Over the years, Pathik struggled to communicate more complex situations to his employer. When I asked him if he would consider changing his job, he said that he would not, saying that he was able to communicate with his employer through what he calls “shortcut English”:

Shortcut English! Short English. Sometimes [I] call ... My supervisor’s name is Jeff. [pretends to hold a phone to his ear] Hello, Jeff! Speak, hello! I need leave. After the twentieth, I need leave [Imitates supervisor]. “Okay!” Sometimes, “No.”<sup>97</sup>

Pathik acted out a phone call between him and his supervisor. He described a time when he needed to take a day off after the “twentieth” of a month. The response was either an “Okay!” or “No.” Pathik is aware that his English has not improved as much as he wanted because he works six days a week and works with many other Nepali Bhutanese employees at his place of employment. They do not speak English to one another. The only exposure he gets to conversational English is with volunteers that visit his home once a week for a few hours. Pathik is like many Nepali Bhutanese refugees, who end up staying in entry-level jobs that often do not require high-level communication skills in English. Due to his long hours at work, he can never make time to attend ESL classes, but has expressed an interest in doing so.

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Pathik, December 3, 2016.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Pathik, December 3, 2016.

For Dhiraj, being perceived as an English language learner was a concern for him. When I asked him, “How important is English in your work?” he said:

I’m also attending some classes on a weekly basis at the Carnegie Library to further improve our spoken English. We go together with our friends, and in the beginning, we had to struggle a lot. We don’t understand. And even though we came from a background where our English was the medium of instruction at school back in Bhutan, even the refugee camps, but we are not very familiar with the way that Americans speak. They come with a heavy accent. And the way we were taught English, we were not taught by the Americans ... It can make you or break you, because your English, that I’ve experienced myself in my own life – career path in America. Sometimes, I’ve been, I tried to apply for customer service jobs, on the phone. I was not eligible because they probably thought the way I spoke would not be good for them in the customer service and those kinds of things are there. Very important, I think, English, in order to have a better job.<sup>98</sup>

Dhiraj described English as something that could either “make you or break you.” This is less about English proficiency and more about the identity of an English language learner. Dhiraj’s work experience prior to working at BCAP mirrors that of other Nepali Bhutanese refugees (and other refugee groups) in that he started with an entry-level job and sought out opportunities for economic and social mobility; in search for a “better” job. Similar to Sadar,

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.



Dhiraj listed his work experiences and said his first job did not give him a “good source of income.”<sup>99</sup> Finding a new and “better” job was difficult for Dhiraj because he was concerned about the ways in which employers perceived him based on his accent over the phone. It was not clear whether or not the employer said that Dhiraj was not eligible for the job because of his accent, but it is a factor that affects how Dhiraj and other interviewees perceive themselves as English language learners. Dhiraj and the staff at BCAP do not think that the English they learned in Bhutan and in the refugee camps was good enough to help them be successful in the United States. Since the work they do at BCAP requires the staff to be in communication with various nonprofits and employers in the region, they want to improve their communication skills (e.g. improve their “accent”).

Satya is a bright high school student who aspires to be a nurse. She was shy during her first year after resettling in Pittsburgh, but it did not take her long to place out of ESL classes and enroll in several Advanced Placement (AP) courses, including history and chemistry. When I asked her: “What would you tell other refugee students who may be struggling in school?” she explained to me what it meant for her to identify as an English language learner in the context of an American public school:

My school, my teachers and people who are like ready to speak with me with my broken English who are, like, really helpful to me and not yell at me for my broken English. My teachers, they are the reasons and my classmates. There was this one class I felt so good. It was civics and teacher, he was really good teacher and to all Nepali. He was always,

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.

like, people say force them to come up and speak but I didn't see that way. I saw he giving me a platform that I could be myself and speak and stand up instead of being [an] outcast and alone. He give me that platform I could go there and speak and be my own.<sup>100</sup>

Satya was the only interviewee who specifically used this term, “Broken English.” Her use of this term signaled her self-awareness of the stereotypes that come with being a refugee and an English language learner. I have known Satya for almost four years now, and in the past, she has asked to practice pronouncing difficult words in front of me because she was concerned that her pronunciation would make it hard for her teachers and classmates to understand her. In this excerpt of our conversation, Satya also brought up the influence of her supportive teachers and classmates. She even included the detail of her civics teacher being a “really good teacher and to all Nepali.” Satya goes to Brashear High School in Pittsburgh where they have a significant number of Nepali Bhutanese students. In the past, Satya expressed concern about the stereotypes that were attributed to Nepali Bhutanese youth in the community. Using her civics teacher as an example of someone she looks up to, Satya valued having a role model who has changed the way in which she perceives herself as an English language learner. Her civics teacher is the one who gave her “a platform” where she could be herself, “speak and stand up instead of being [an] outcast and alone.”

Satya's identity as an English language learner also brought up important questions about the relationship between gender roles and language ideologies. In Doris S. Warriner's study on the language learning experiences of two female refugees, she explored the ways in which the

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Satya, January 21, 2017.

two personal narratives highlighted the constant recreation of the women's gender identities within changing social, familial and historical contexts.<sup>101</sup> More specifically, the women embraced their identities as English language learners as a way to increase their agency (i.e. a socio-culturally mediated capacity to act), authority, and economic power for themselves, and within their families and communities.<sup>102</sup> Satya's experience demonstrated her own version of reconstructing her identity as a young female English language learner. When I asked Satya about her plans after high school graduation, she said:

I think it's different for me than others, because [my family] believe[s] that – I don't know why they believe in me – but, they think my education is more important for me. I'm the only girl in the household and they always cheer me up. They're like, you don't have to work now, you can just focus on your education so, it's really different for me. That's why my mom and my dad, they love me to do job but they also want me to help in home. The most important thing is they really wanted help, so I have to manage my time. So, if I get a job, I might not be able to manage my time for financial thing, for my home and my school and my job. My grandparents, like my grandma, see I think does not want me to get a job, yeah. Not right away and no one is home and I have to cook for my dad.

Satya's increased sense of agency is evident in this part of our conversation. She said:

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<sup>101</sup> Doris S. Warriner, "Multiple Literacies and Identities: the experience of two women refugees," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1-2 (2004): 179-195, accessed March 27, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40004399>.

<sup>102</sup> This definition of agency I use throughout this paper is the definition proposed by Laura M. Ahearn, "Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 109-137, accessed March 24, 2017, <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.anthro.30.1.109>.

“[she had] to manage [her] time,” in order for her to meet the expectations of her family members. Her explicit mention of her own gender signals her self-awareness of the specific expectations for gender roles within her family, community and culture. When Satya said: “it’s different for [her] than others,” it is not just about her identity as a girl, but also her interest in her own education. Not all Nepali Bhutanese girls are interested in applying to college and many of Satya’s Nepali Bhutanese friends want to work immediately after high school. As Satya spoke to me, she defined the limitations that come with being a girl in a Nepali Bhutanese community, and then included her response and plans to address these limitations; an act of reconstructing her gender identity in addition to being an English language learner who is also recognized for her academic achievement in school.

Arpita works in an office that is predominantly male. Her resettlement experience is different from Satya’s, mostly due to the fact that she was in her twenties when she arrived in Pittsburgh, but her narrative reflected on her own experience of recreating her gender identity as well as on her increased agency. Arpita arrived in Pittsburgh with her younger sister and she sent most of her earnings to her parents who were still living in a refugee camp in Nepal. Based on this knowledge, it is important to note that Arpita was placed in a position in which she had to adopt various roles, including that of an older sister, a parent, and head of household. Her agency had to increase in relation to her increasing responsibilities. When I asked her to describe her previous and current jobs, she said:

I went to downtown looking for the job. I went to different hotels, different restaurants.

You know like, I didn’t go to the malls and everywhere because I was not familiar. I was

there only for the two months and there was the language barrier. You know, like, the accent that we speak and the Americans. It was so tough to communicate with them, but I managed it and finally I got the job at Double Tree Hotel, they hired me as housekeeper and it was not bad. I got a chance to experience, you know, like, how we work in America. The first job is always the entry-level job. That was fine, and I worked there for maybe six, seven months. From there I could manage house bills, rent, and other food stuff and so many things. And that makes me little strong. I thought like I can fight now, you know, I can exist now.<sup>103</sup>

Arpita's narrative is another example of how her identity as an English language learner cannot fully be understood without understanding the role gender plays. What set Satya and Arpita apart from the other interviewees was not only the fact that they were female, but also that they discussed the topics of confidence and strength in the interviewees. None of the male interviewees discussed their attitude in this way, and it is likely due to the women's cognizance of their gender identities during their first years in the United States. Arpita's interviewee was about her and her younger sister; her relationship with her sister showed the increased responsibility she had to assume when they arrived in Pittsburgh without her parents. As a proud sister and guardian, Arpita equated her sister's success to her own:

My sister went to Job Corps. She was doing medical assistance at Job Corps. Same problem she faced: one, language barrier as she could not pronounce, but I told her to

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Arpita, November 19, 2016.

hold on there so that she could learn something. At least, learn something. It's not necessary for her to get the Bachelor's or get a good job, but she can learn something. I told her to hold at least for two years and she did that ... We bought a house and we live together here and everybody is happy here. My sister, she also got a job. She [is] taking care of the elders and she works here. She earns good money than me too! (laughs)<sup>104</sup>

Male interviewees also recreated gender identities as English language learners but what sets their experiences apart from that of the women was the fact that they did not talk about having found confidence or strength. In his study on Laotian men in the United States, Daryl Gordon found that they worked to create identities based on a nostalgic means with which to recapture former economic power and authority within the family and community.<sup>105</sup> I am not arguing that the interviewees in my study embraced their identities as English language learners to recapture former power and authority, but instead to gain or regain a sense of agency in their family and community life.

When I asked Sadar how important English was to him in his understanding of success, he talked about his experience in an ESL class:

I did American accent learning course, you know, I did that on my own. Like, I already have a bachelor degree in English literature from backcountry and I have Master's in sociology. So, you know, I went to ESL class, hoping that I would get some sort of, you

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Arpita, November 19, 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Daryl Gordon, "She's American Now, I Don't Like That," *Journal of Southeast Asian American Education and Advancement* 4, no.1 (2009), accessed March 27, 2017, <https://doaj.org/article/d505486b7ec54ddf9f657e109b53bbaa>.

know, that accent improvement type of course, but there was nothing like that. So, I asked my ESL teacher to find something, you know, that helps me to learn English accent. She provided me with audio player and that audio CD with a book, so I learned, you know, like, an accent that way. After learning about a month, I was able to catch, you know, how people do communication.

When Sadar arrived, his English was better than most Nepali Bhutanese refugees, but sought to learn the “American accent.” Sadar developed an agency that he saw would help him achieve a level of self-sufficiency that required his English to be spoken with an “American accent,” in order to not sound like a “new immigrant.”

Dhiraj also emphasized the importance of improving as an English language learner, even if one is already able to communicate. For him, the process of learning English extended well-beyond learning the grammar and the vocabulary. In his recommendation for people in his community to learn English, he focused the conversation on personal responsibility:

I would recommend everyone to learn English. Learn English and be better every day. Improve your English on a level that improving that you feel improving on a daily basis. That you can do it on your own, at home. There are so many different ways if you're passionate about it. If you don't just care and then you cannot blame anyone. You take care of your own life and there are so many ways you can do if you are passionate. Really interested. But you cannot simply blame the employers or you cannot blame somebody else if you don't get a chance. Or if you don't make improvement in your economic life,

because of certain baggage you bring. Sort of weaknesses you bring. It is your responsibility. It falls on you to make improvements. It's a personal responsibility you have to take.<sup>106</sup>

Dhiraj's use of the words "baggage" and "weakness" differed from both Satya and Arpita's self-perceptions as English language learners: Arpita and Satya used the words "strong" and "confident." At the end of my conversation with Satya, I asked her what she would she would have wanted to know when she arrived in Pittsburgh. She said: "I wish I was strong and confident about who I am and what can I do. I think I still underestimate myself and people tell me I underestimate myself ... I wish I could tell myself to be confident." Satya's recommendation emphasized on what one needed to face the challenges that come with learning a new language, whereas Dhiraj focused on the "weaknesses [one] bring[s]" that would become another obstacle.

Learning the English language appeared to be a shared challenge among the interviewees, but what differed was the suggested approaches. As a high school student without a job, Satya learned English quickly because she had to practice everyday in school. She also had a support system that made her feel confident. Other interviewees did the advantage of going to school in the United States and had to make more of an effort to learn English. Some of the interviewees' did not need to know English for their job when a majority of their co-workers speak Nepali. Others, such as Diwash, spoke to native English speakers almost everyday as part of their job. As an adult, especially an adult with children, regularly attending ESL classes might not be an

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Dhiraj, January 21, 2017.



option. Learning English was understood as a series of individual decisions, but they shared the experiences of being perceived as an English language learner by people outside of the Nepali Bhutanese community.

## **Conclusion**

Since the first Nepali Bhutanese refugees resettled in Pittsburgh in 2008, Pittsburgh has become home to one of the largest Nepali Bhutanese communities in the United States. This community is made up largely of secondary migrants (refugees who were resettled in other parts of the United States and voluntarily moved to Pittsburgh). They will tell you that they were attracted to Pittsburgh's hilly landscape, because it resembled that of Bhutan. Those who moved to the city in recent years might tell you that they chose to move upon hearing of the growing Nepali Bhutanese community. Nepali Bhutanese refugees have opened up numerous grocery stores, restaurants, and nonprofit organizations, making it impossible to ignore the growing presence of Nepali Bhutanese culture. The observations of this study may provide insights into the ways the Pittsburgh community could continue to support this particular community.

Primary contributions of this study aimed to expand the knowledge on the resettlement experiences of Nepali Bhutanese refugees and contribute to understanding self-sufficiency beyond the bureaucratic definition that portrays self-sufficiency as an end goal where refugees should reach some kind of level of financial stability. The aim of this study was not to suggest refugee policy reform, but rather to explore the ways in which individuals in the Nepali Bhutanese refugee community understand self-sufficiency and this includes some of the ways in which they identified and addressed the challenges they faced.

The analysis presented in this study expands on previous research on refugee economic self-sufficiency. Scholars have identified several indicators of self-sufficiency among various refugee groups in the United States to understand general patterns of refugee resettlement. However, scholars also recognized that research on a specific refugee group would provide a

more comprehensive understanding of the refugee resettlement.

The analysis of the interviews in this study was discussed in the context of three interconnected themes: family income, English language, and work history. These themes helped contextualize the interviewees' narratives as personal experiences and in relation to one another. The narratives portrayed how interviewees shifted away from the "self" in self-sufficiency, because the "self" was understood in relation to the individual's family and community; it may be more useful to use the terms family- and community-sufficiency, or in Diwash's words, "joint-family."

At the same time, the term self-sufficiency is still useful in that there is a Nepali Bhutanese individuality or identified "self" within the collectivistic culture. Interviewees valued sharing resources within the Nepali Bhutanese community, but also emphasized the individual responsibility that was required in order to contribute. Diwash, someone who found jobs for his neighbors, said: "How you feel, how you act, how you maintain, it's your own." For Dhiraj, improvement in one's economic life was a personal responsibility and said: "It falls on you to make improvements." In addition to the collectivistic understanding of self-sufficiency, the personal or individual responsibility was just as important.

The reason I chose to discuss the narratives under the label "work histories," was because of the distinct ways in which the entry-level job was viewed. Someone working an entry-level job could be seen as being "stuck" in that job, and at the same time seen as consistent in that he or she did not frequently change jobs. For Pathik, staying in one job allowed him to become comfortable and learn what was expected of him from his employer. Others who moved onto jobs with better working conditions and higher wages might perceive Pathik as being stuck.

Lastly, the analysis of English in relation to self-sufficiency shifted away from simply arguing that higher proficiency in English indicated a greater likelihood of achieving self-sufficiency. The narratives did not discuss the difficulty of measuring proficiency or reaching a certain level of proficiency, but rather the challenges the interviewees faced in relation to being an English language learner. More specifically, interviewees discussed miscommunication at work with other employees, their supervisor, and their clients. Some of them wanted to practice the “American accent” or not “sound like a new immigrant.” A couple of them mentioned the cultural differences in language such as the use of slang. While other studies on refugee self-sufficiency in relation to language looked at level of English proficiency, I did not find this term to be useful for me in understanding the way my interviewees brought up the challenges of learning English in relation to achieving their vision of self-sufficiency.

## **Recommendations**

Insights from this study may be beneficial for social service providers, Pittsburgh resettlement agencies, and ESL teachers working with adult Nepali Bhutanese refugees. As a volunteer who led some of the cultural orientation workshops during the summer of 2016, I saw the potential for collaboration between GPLC and JF&CS. Spending two to three hours on a weekday morning with two to six people is an opportunity to incorporate language learning in the context of the potential obstacles refugees face in the first months of resettlement. Some days, only two people would show up and I saw it as an opportunity for them to express their concerns as well as learn vocabulary words in the relevant contexts. If possible, having an ESL teacher with the JF&CS volunteer present at cultural orientation workshops would be beneficial for resettled refugees.

Although many scholars have criticized quick employment as an inefficient model of self-sufficiency, the reality is that refugees need a source of income. As all of the interviewees in this study discussed, the first entry-level job is an essential step. One recommendation I have for improving this experience is continuing to offer employment workshops by employment coordinators. If possible, workshops should be held closer to the communities since it would allow more people to attend. Interpreters will be necessary, but I also see the usefulness of English language instruction being incorporated into these workshops. This will help with effectiveness of presentation to recently resettled refugees. For example, using vocabulary words they will likely encounter during the job search would allow them to begin familiarizing themselves with the language use in the workplace.

Volunteers will continue to play an important role in the refugee resettlement. A few of the interviewees had volunteers teach them English and read their mail, including Diwash. He and his family had a pair of volunteers back in Idaho who made a “big difference.” They shared Thanksgiving dinner together and pointed them to community resources that they did not know about. Goman also mentioned that while he never had a volunteer, he had seen how influential volunteers were in the resettlement process. He said that it was “the best way,” especially for the elderly who cannot easily travel to ESL classes and are interested in learning English. Partnerships between resettlement agencies and institutions such as Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh will continue to be crucial in building relationships as well as fill some of the gaps that agencies alone cannot fill. In addition, volunteers are often the first to notice the challenges refugees face, so continuous communication with volunteers and the resettlement agency will always be crucial.

Since its founding, BCAP has addressed various needs of the Nepali Bhutanese community in Pittsburgh. BCAP has identified the concerns of their community and addressed them with their available resources. This is the nature of social work; it is not always about reaching a long-term solution to every problem that comes up, but rather continuing to be present and responding to the diverse needs of their community. While the U.S. refugee resettlement program's goal is to assist refugees in becoming self-sufficient, it is impractical for local service providers to take this view of their own work.

### **Future Research**

On the topic of self-sufficiency, future research should recognize that refugee groups and individuals within the same refugee group understand self-sufficiency differently. Research on a individual refugee group can be compared to the narratives of other groups in order to create a more comprehensive understanding of the refugee resettlement experience in the United States. Additionally, these comparisons could be beneficial for practitioners who work with U.S. refugee resettlement.

There is also the possibility of expanding on this study. A community of this size makes it possible for future research to examine the diversifying narratives of the Nepali Bhutanese community and the collective, as well as personal, challenges they face. A longer-term study on this topic would be able to include more female representatives and representatives of diverse age groups. For example, Satya's voice in this study brought up potential areas of further research on the topic of expectations of young women in this community. This topic of Nepali Bhutanese women entering the U.S. workforce could be explored in depth as the community is beginning to see a shift in expectations of gender roles.

Finally, further research could explore the increasing number of Nepali Bhutanese-owned businesses. Entrepreneurship within this community continues to grow and is meeting the needs of the community by creating social spaces where people can share and exchange resources. Just as immigrant businesses contribute to the conversation of the U.S. economy, refugee-owned businesses could be studied in order to understand the shifting understanding of self-sufficiency among refugee communities in the United States.

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## Appendix A

### BHUTANESE COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OF PITTSBURGH

#### LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION (SPACE COMMITMENT)

Date: September 6, 2016

MS. KAYLA LEE  
Carnegie Mellon University SMC 7030  
5000 Forbes Ave  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Dear Ms. Lee:

This Letter of Authorization ("LOA") establishes and formalizes the agreement between the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh ("BCAP") and Kayla Lee ("KL") for use of certain interior space at the BCAP facility as described below, on a need basis, through the expiration dates set forth below. All such space defined below shall hereinafter be referred to as the "Committed Premises." KL agrees to use the Committed Premises in connection with her research project, to conduct interviews.

#### Rate

BCAP agrees that KL will have access to the "Committed Premises" at times and dates previously confirmed by BCAP, between September 2016 and May 2017, free of charge. KL agrees to abide by the terms and conditions of this "LOA" for the times designated and agreed to below. KL understands and agrees that the date and time for the use of committed space depends on availability and subject to change which KL agrees to modify her schedules.

#### Rights of Space Use

Subject to BCAP's right to terminate this LOA as described above, KL shall have the 'right of use' beginning on the effective date hereof through May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017, to use, on a shared basis the "Committed Premises" as identified below without interruption to BCAP programs and operations.

#### Term and Termination

This LOA shall continue until the last right of occupancy described above has expired or been terminated by written notice to KL prior to any expiration date herein, and subject to KL approval, KL may not extend any of the expiration dates set forth herein through the end of

## Appendix B

### **Understanding the Economic Self-Sufficiency of Adult Bhutanese-Nepali Refugees in Pittsburgh through English Language Proficiency: Towards a Theory of Refugee Self-Sufficiency**

**Start Time of Interview:**

**End Time of Interview:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:** Kayla Lee

**Interviewee:**

#### **Abstract:**

On the topic of refugee integration in the United States, English language proficiency is widely seen as a key factor in achieving economic self-sufficiency. The U.S. government and resettlement agencies prioritize finding jobs for refugee adults. Usually, refugees are only able to obtain entry-level jobs because of their limited English language proficiency. Some critics have expressed concern that the high emphasis on employment does not provide refugee adults the opportunity to learn English. Refugee children, at least, have public schooling that allows them to reach higher levels of English language proficiency more quickly. This research project aims to explore the validity of this correlation in the local context, with Bhutanese-Nepali refugees in Pittsburgh. The decision to focus on refugee adults is due to the fact that refugee children often learn English faster because they have access to public school education. By the end of the study, I will have identified and analyzed the factors that influence the Bhutanese-Nepali refugees' understanding of economic self-sufficiency as a result of English language proficiency.

Be sure to inform participants that they do not need to answer any questions they do not wish to answer.

#### **Biographical information**

1. **Tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g. Name, age, sex, level of education, date of resettlement in the United States, generation in your current family, where you/they lived before resettlement in the United States):**

#### **Interview Questions**

1. **Question for all:** How would you define self-sufficiency when you lived in \_\_\_\_?
2. **Question for all:** Can you tell me about your current employment status?

#### **Questions for currently employed refugees:**

- a. Can you tell me about your current job or jobs you've had?
- b. How important is English for getting a job?
- c. What does it mean to be self-sufficient to you in the United States?



- d. How important is English in becoming self-sufficient to you?
- e. What strategies or actions would you suggest to others who are looking for a job?

**Questions for refugees looking for employment:**

- a. What kind of job would you like? Why?
- b. How important is English for getting that job?
- c. How important is education level for getting that job?
- d. How important are other qualifications? (e.g. work experience, recommendations, level of education, working hard) Please rank these qualifications based on importance. On a scale of 1-5 (5=most important and 1=least important), please rank these qualifications\*:

On a scale of 1-5 (5=most important and 1=least important), please rank these qualifications:					
	Of most importance		Of average importance		Of least importance
Work experience	5	4	3	2	1
Personal recommendations	5	4	3	2	1
Level of education	5	4	3	2	1
Working hard	5	4	3	2	1
Other(s)?	5	4	3	2	1

\*Participants will be provided two copies of this chart. One of the copies will be a completed example and the other will be a blank one for them to fill out.

- e. What does it mean to be self-sufficient to you in the United States?
- f. What do you need to do to find that job?

**Questions for refugees who are unemployed and are not looking for employment:**

- a. Why are you unemployed?
- b. What does it mean to be self-sufficient to you?
- c. On a scale of 1-5, how important is English in becoming self-sufficient to you? Why? (5=most important and 1=least important)

**3. Questions for all:** Have you participated in an employment workshop or other kinds of assistance in the job search?

**If their answer is yes:**

- a. Can you tell me about your experience in the employment workshop/other employment assistance program?
- b. On a scale of 1-5, how helpful was the employment workshop/other employment assistance program in achieving self-sufficiency? Why? (5=most important and 1=least important)

- c. What, if anything, would you change about the employment workshop?

**If their answer is no:**

- a. Have you considered going to an employment workshop or working with an employment specialist? Why or why not?

**4. Questions for all:** Have you participated in a cultural orientation workshop?

**If their answer is yes:**

- a. Can you tell me about your experience in a cultural orientation workshop?
- b. On a scale of 1-5, how helpful was that cultural orientation workshop in achieving self-sufficiency? Why? (5=most important and 1=least important)
- c. What, if anything, would you change about the cultural orientation workshop?

**If their answer is no:**

- a. Have you considered going to cultural orientation? Why or why not?

**5. Questions for all:** Have you participated in ESL classes?

**If their answer is yes:**

- a. Can you tell me about your experience in ESL classes?
- b. On a scale of 1-5, how helpful was the ESL class in achieving self-sufficiency? Why? (5=most important and 1=least important)
- c. What, if anything, would you change about ESL classes?

**If their answer is no:**

- a. Have you considered taking ESL classes? Why or why not?

**6. Questions for all:** To whom should I speak within the Bhutanese-Nepali community to learn more about what economic self-sufficiency means to them? Could you connect/introduce me to him/her? (Phone number?)

(Thank the individual for participating in this interview. Assure him or her of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews. If necessary, schedule a follow-up interview.)

## Appendix C

**Carnegie Mellon University**

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### Consent Form for Participation in Research

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**Study Title:** Understanding the Economic Self-Sufficiency of Adult Bhutanese-Nepali Refugees in Pittsburgh Through English Language Proficiency: Towards a Theory of Refugee Economic Self-Sufficiency

**Principal Investigator:** Kayla Lee

**Department:** History

**Address City/State/Zip:** Pittsburgh, PA 15213

**Phone:** (206) 458-9899

**E-mail:** [kjlee@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:kjlee@andrew.cmu.edu)

**Faculty Advisor:** Kenya C. Dworkin

**Sponsor(s):** [Dietrich Honors Fellowship](#)

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#### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify and analyze the factors that influence the Bhutanese-Nepali refugees' understanding of economic self-sufficiency as a result of English language proficiency. In discussions on refugee integration in the United States, English language proficiency is widely seen as a key factor in achieving economic self-sufficiency. This research project aims to explore the validity of this correlation in the local context, with Bhutanese-Nepali refugees in Pittsburgh.

#### **Interview Procedures**

You will be interviewed in the office of the Bhutanese Community Association of Pittsburgh (BCAP). Prior to the interview, I will introduce myself and will read the consent form to interviewees and answer any questions you may have about the interview/research project. If you choose to proceed, you will be asked to sign the consent form.

I will be using a digital voice recorder with your permission from the interviewee to record all individual interviews. The recordings will accompany my field notes. You may also be quoted in the final product of this research, which is a research paper. All participants will have access to their recordings. Since the participants will remain de-identified in the final report, photos of the participants will not be taken.

I will turn the voice recorder on prior to the interview and after the consent form has been signed. I, the interviewer will ask prepared interview questions to guide the interview. Using the interview questions as a guide, I will begin by asking biographical questions (i.e., the first open-ended question being "Tell me a little bit about yourself."). Then, I will use the prepared questions to guide our conversation, however, the interview is a chance for the interviewee to creatively share their lived experience of resettlement in Pittsburgh through storytelling. The questions will guide the interviewees in discussing economic self-sufficiency within their own personal context.

*Version 7.2015*

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**Consent Form for Participation in Research**

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The expected duration of participation for each individual ranges from one to two hours. You can choose not to answer questions during the interview.

**Participant Requirements**

Participants must be Bhutanese-Nepali refugees and at least 18 years of age. They must also be able to communicate in English without an interpreter.

**Risks**

The risks and discomfort associated with participation in this study are no greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during. There is a risk of breach of confidentiality. Participants will be de-identified for the purpose of the research and all of the audio recordings and field notes will be stored in a secure computer.

**Benefits**

There is no direct benefit to participants. However, some indirect benefits include the opportunity for the participants to be creative in the telling of their stories. Evaluations of their own experiences with ESL classes, employment workshops, and cultural orientation workshops will allow the participants to reflect. The ability to share one's story to an outsider can also be empowering for members of the Bhutanese-Nepali refugee community.

**Compensation & Costs**

There is no compensation for participation in this study. There will be no cost to you if you participate in this study.

**Confidentiality**

By participating in the study, you understand and agree that Carnegie Mellon may be required to disclose your consent form, data and other personally identifiable information as required by law, regulation, subpoena or court order. Otherwise, your confidentiality will be maintained in the following manner:

Your data and consent form will be kept separate. Your research data will be stored in a secure location on Carnegie Mellon property. Sharing of data with other researchers will only be done in such a manner that you will not be identified. By participating, you understand and agree that the data and information gathered during this study may be used by Carnegie Mellon and published and/or disclosed by Carnegie Mellon to others outside of Carnegie Mellon. However, your name, address, contact information and other direct personal identifiers will not be mentioned in any such publication or dissemination of the research data and/or results by Carnegie Mellon. Note that per regulation all research data must be kept for a minimum of 3 years.

For the purposes of confidentiality, the researcher will not use the participants' real names. They will be changed in the final publication.



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**Consent Form for Participation in Research**

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All audio recordings of the interviews will be stored in a secure place. The researcher as well as the participants, if requested, will have access to them. Part of the purpose of narrative inquiry is that it gives participants an opportunity to reflect on their lived experiences. If listening to the recorded conversation is something they would like to do, it will be permitted as it will provide an opportunity for them to continue reflection on the topic. No photos of the participants will be taken.

**Optional Permission**

I understand that the researchers may want to use a short portion of any audio recording for illustrative reasons in presentations of this work for scientific or educational purposes. I give my permission to do so provided that my name will not appear.

Please initial here: \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

**Rights**

Your participation is voluntary. You are free to stop your participation at any point. Refusal to participate or withdrawal of your consent or discontinued participation in the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits or rights to which you might otherwise be entitled. The Principal Investigator may at his/her discretion remove you from the study for any of a number of reasons. In such an event, you will not suffer any penalty or loss of benefits or rights which you might otherwise be entitled.

**Right to Ask Questions & Contact Information**

If you have any questions about this study, you should feel free to ask them now. If you have questions later, desire additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation please contact the Principal Investigator by mail, phone or e-mail in accordance with the contact information listed on the first page of this consent.

If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research participant; or to report concerns to this study, you should contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at Carnegie Mellon University. Email: [irb-review@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:irb-review@andrew.cmu.edu) . Phone: 412-268-1901 or 412-268-5460.

**Voluntary Consent**

Participants will be competent adults who can give consent prior to the interview.

By signing below, you agree that the above information has been explained to you and all your current questions have been answered. You are encouraged ask questions about any aspect of this research study during the course of the study and in the future. By signing this form, you agree to participate in this research study. A copy of the consent form will be given to you.

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**Consent Form for Participation in Research**

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PRINT PARTICIPANT'S NAME

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

DATE

I certify that I have explained the nature and purpose of this research study to the above individual and I have discussed the potential benefits and possible risks of participation in the study. Any questions the individual has about this study have been answered and any future questions will be answered as they arise.

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

DATE

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## Appendix D

# Carnegie Mellon University

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### APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

December 2, 2016

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Understanding the Economic Self-sufficiency of Adult Bhutanese-Nepali Refugees in Pittsburgh through English Language Proficiency: Towards a Theory of Refugee Self-sufficiency
Investigator: Study Team Members:	Kayla Lee Kenya Dworkin
IRB ID:	STUDY2016_00000490
Funding:	Name: DIETRICH COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Carnegie Mellon University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and granted **APPROVAL under EXPEDITED REVIEW on 12/2/2016 per 45 CFR 46.110 (7) and 21 CFR 56.110. This APPROVAL expires on 12/1/2017.**

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of **12/1/2017**, approval of this study expires on that date, unless suspended or terminated earlier by action of the IRB. **Note that submitting for continuing review in a timely manner is the responsibility of the PI.**

Unanticipated problems and adverse events must be reported to the IRB within three (3) working days. Any additional modifications to this research protocol or advertising materials pertaining to the study must be submitted for review and granted IRB approval prior to implementation.

The Investigator(s) listed above in conducting this protocol agree(s) to follow the recommendations of the IRB of any conditions to or changes in procedure subsequent to this review. In undertaking the execution of the protocol, the investigator(s) further agree(s) to abide by all CMU research policies including, but not limited to the policies on responsible conduct of research and conflict of interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Zimmerman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Zimmerman  
IRB Chair



## Appendix E

### Information about the Interviewees

**Pathik (male, 40s):** His first and only job since his arrival in 2013 was at a linen and textile rental service. He took ESL classes for a few months.

**Diwash (male, 30s):** He was initially resettled in Idaho and then decided to move to Pittsburgh. In Idaho, he was worked with an organization focused on children's rights. In Pittsburgh, he worked at Giant Eagle, then worked as a peer-support specialist with Squirrel Hill Health Center. While he was working in Pittsburgh, he managed to take a few courses at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC). Recently, he opened up his own business and runs it with his family. He took ESL classes for a few months in Idaho.

**Arpita (female, 30s):** Upon arrival, she found a job as a housekeeper at the Double Tree Hotel and also took courses at CCAC. After about six to seven months, she began working at BNY Mellon. Currently, she is a social service provider.

**Satya (female, 18):** She was a student at Brashear High School and has never had a job.

**Sadar (male, 40s):** Sadar was an employee (janitor) at a meat processing company for a few months. Then, he worked with JF&CS as a service coordinator for a few years. Now, he is the Director of an organization that provides home care for the elderly. He manages five different offices. He took ESL classes for a few months to work on his pronunciation.

**Dhiraj (male, 50s):** He is a social service provider. This is his third job since he resettled in Pittsburgh in 2008. He continues to take ESL classes when he has time.

**Goman (male, 50s):** Goman was resettled in Virginia where he worked as a janitor at a school. His next job was a customer service job at a motel. When he moved to Pittsburgh, he took

courses in accounting although he already had a degree in it prior to resettlement. He now works as an accountant.