

Columbia University
Graduate School of Arts & Studies
Human Rights Studies Master of Arts Program

Resettled Sexual and Gender Variant Refugees:

USRAP, VOLAGs, and the Navigation of the American Life while Queer and Displaced

Joseph Elisha Lareby Naron

Thesis Advisor: Paisley Currah

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

January 2023

Contents

Abstract:	2
Introduction:	3
I. Existing Outside of Gender and Sexual Norms and the State	3
II. U.S. Government-Specific Categorizations and Practices	5
Research Question and Theoretical Significance:	8
Literature Review:	11
Methodology:	19
Limitations of Research:	22
Hypothesis:	25
Results and Data Analysis:	26
I. Participants and Their Initial Observations	26
II. Retraumatization, Labels, and Gendered Expectations	30
III. Dichotomy of Inaccessibility	35
IV. Material Effect	39
V. Discomfort with Dissatisfaction	42
Conclusion:	43
Future Research	45
Works Cited	46

Abstract:

Over the past several decades, there has been an increase in the amount of open Sexual and Gender Variant (SGV) Refugees being resettled in the United States. Despite this, there is very little literature regarding this specific and vulnerable population. The little research has been conducted on resettled SGV refugees in the United States as well as more general literature on SGV resettlement, has shown that SGV refugees seem to not be receiving adequate support from the government or resettlement organizations for problems which they uniquely face. This has been confirmed by those who have worked with SGV refugees in the field. These problems include mental health issues, lack of accessibility to resources, and social isolation. More work needs to be done to create a space where SGV refugees feel comfortable asking for support and where they can expect to receive it.

Introduction:

I. Existing Outside of Gender and Sexual Norms and the State

According to a report from The Williams Institute, there were an estimated 30,899 individuals who have applied for asylum in the United States for “reasons of fear as a result of being LGBT” between 2012 and 2017.¹ This represents a significant increase from the past several decades. As gay, queer, and trans rights movements have gained more mainstream recognition in the West, such identities have begun to be recognized both as aspects of a person which are immutable and involuntary and as identities which may be persecuted and therefore necessitate security through residence in other nations.² This has led to an increase in nations creating official protocols for individuals seeking asylum based on gender and sexual identities which are considered to deviate from the standard, usually using the label of “LGBT+” or some such variant, most often in under the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugee’s definition of refugees’ “Particular Social Group” classification.³ These individuals, for the purposes of this paper, will be referred to as “sexually or gender variant” (SGV), in order to permit conceptualizations of sexuality and gender which may not fit into ideas which are conveyed by the LGBT+ acronym.

A brief note on the choice of terminology: Individuals who may be classified as sexually or gender variant are those whose sexual or gender expression or identity falls or has at one point

¹ Kerith Conran and Winston Luhur, “Asylum Applications to the US by LGBT People.” The Williams Institute, October, 2021, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-asylum-applications/>.

² *LGBTQ HISTORY TIMELINE REFERENCE*, Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, accessed February 15, 2022, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBTQ-History-Timeline-References.pdf>.

³ Rebecca Hopkinson, Eva Keatly, Elizabeth Glaeset, Laura Erickson-Schroth, Omar Fattal, and Melba Nicholson Sullivan, "Persecution Experiences and Mental Health of LGBT Asylum Seekers," *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no.12 (2016): 1650-1666, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1253392>.

fallen outside of generally accepted norms for their culture of origin. LGBTQ+ individuals would fall into this category, but it may also include those who are cisgender and heterosexual but are perceived as queer, people whose understandings and expressions of gender not commonly understood or known in the Occident, specific subcategorizations of gender and sexual identities which may be more prone to persecution and discrimination, and people who may not have identities which are variant but have taken actions or regularly take actions which may be perceived as a deviation from the standards of the (presumably heteronormative and heterosexist) society of the individual (e.g. sexually experimenting with someone of the same sex, behaving in a way which may be considered overly gendered in a way contrary to expectation for one's sex, etc.). It is also important to avoid using labels like "gay" or "transgender" as general blanket labels, as the expectations for these categories manifest themselves differently in various cultures and represent something of a moving target when it comes to the burden of proof in asylum applications. They are, furthermore, terms which are locked within a specifically Occidental cultural and linguistic context and may therefore not encompass or convey different and more nuanced understandings of gender and sexuality held by those from non-western contexts, as discussed and observed in scholarship which centers gender and non-normative gender expression in the works of scholars such as Joseph Massad and Saleh Fadi.⁴ While the use of the term "variant" is in and of itself counterintuitive in an Anglo-American academic context focusing on queer studies as it suggests fixed normative standards for gender and sexuality, I have chosen to use this term to avoid limiting the kinds of identities and experiences that could lead someone to refugee status and may be seen by their society and

⁴ Joseph Massad, "Pre-Positional Conjunctions: Sexuality and/in 'Islam'", in *Islam in Liberalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 226-235.; Saleh Fadi, "Transgender as a Humanitarian: The Case of Syrian Queer and Gender-Variant Refugees in Turkey," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1, (February 2020): 37-55, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7914500>.

culture of origin as fundamentally flawed and incompatible with pre-established gender and sexual norms and thereby be socially rendered as variant. In this thesis, the term “LGBTQ+” is used in reference to organizations or individuals who deem themselves as such explicitly or implicitly through identification with one of the terms in the acronym. Use of the term “Queer” is also used and made in reference to theories of gender-based non-normative experience, expression, and aspiration in a specifically Western (and often Anglophonic) context.

This thesis analyzes previously conducted research regarding resettled refugees in the United States and the greater contexts which affect their ability to acclimate effectively and efficiently and uses interviews with professionals and academics who have experience working with SGV refugees in a North American context to supplement the lack of academic literature. Through this, this thesis aims to identify the unique conditions that resettled SGV refugees are placed in upon arrival and the ways in which they are expected to navigate such circumstances. It also seeks to determine how such refugees acclimate to the United States and what boundaries, if any, present themselves in a way that is not present for non-SGV refugees. It will also offer potential courses of action for future research and potential changes in resettlement practices in the United States.

U.S. Government-Specific Categorizations and Practices

In the United States generally there are two ways in which one may apply for and receive asylum. The first type is what is known as “Application for Asylum,” where one would apply by entering the U.S., filing an asylum-seeking claim, and going through the processes of hearings

and appeals exclusively within the United States legal system.⁵ Of the two methods, this is the one that has the most research pertaining to SGV refugees and the largest pool of research for United States refugees as whole.⁶ The second method, which will be the main focus of this thesis, is the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which admits applicants from overseas and provides integration aid upon arrival. Applicants are chosen and reviewed based on the recommendations of external NGOs and Supernational organizations such as the IOM or UNHCR and approval from several internal U.S. agencies.⁷ Upon being accepted to USRAP, individuals or families who have been selected by the United States government are assigned to a city and state which has made an agreement with the federal government on the number and nationalities of refugees to be brought in. Approved refugees and any family members brought with them are also usually assigned to a Voluntary Resettlement Organization (VOLAG) which takes primary responsibility in ensuring the refugees' wellbeing.⁸ This is done by finding them housing and supplies before arrival, assisting in benefits applications, and translating any appropriate paperwork, to list a few examples.

⁵ "The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, last modified August 6, 2021, accessed December 19, 2021. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/usrap>.

⁶ Kerith Conran and Winston Luhur, "Asylum Applications to the US by LGBT People." The Williams Institute, October, 2021, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-asylum-applications/>.

⁷ "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services | Asylum," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, last modified November 15, 2021, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/asylum>.

⁸ "What is a VOLAG?" Washington State Department of Health and Security, accessed March 2022, 23, <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/faq/what-volag>; "Resettlement Agencies," Office of Refugee Resettlement; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, last modified July 17, 2017, accessed March 23, 2022, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/resettlement-agencies>.

Previously, to settle refugees in local communities, churches and local social organizations such as the Lions Club or Rotary Club were tasked by the government with very little oversight and minimal standards.⁹ This was particularly common for resettling Vietnamese refugees shortly after the Vietnam War. However, during the Regan administration and particularly after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, in an attempt to have greater oversight of incoming refugees and supposedly give them more direct information regarding public benefits, the United States shifted to a heavier reliance on VOLAGs.¹⁰ Programming in VOLAGs is generally streamlined and designed, in theory, to be highly personalized for the needs of the individual or family arriving to the United States while still allowing for a large number of refugees to be accommodated.¹¹ It is also often meant to provide refugees with direct access to government benefits and employment or job training schemes if they do not already have a family or personal tie living in the area that they have been resettled. VOLAGs, while usually having a central location, will also have local branches throughout the United States. The federal government will then often send refugees to where there are both VOLAG branches and a previously-established community of individuals from the same ethnic or national background in order to facilitate community building and interpersonal structural support for refugees, creating, in theory, greater chances and opportunities for self-sufficiency.¹²

It is also worth noting that a large part of the funding that VOLAGs receive are from contracts with the United States government and in many ways operate as hired out labor. These

⁹ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement," in *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 58-69.

¹⁰ Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement," 59-61.

¹¹ Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement," 59-61.

¹² "The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, last modified August 6, 2021, accessed December 19, 2021, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/usrap>.

contracts grant VOLAGs a certain level of autonomy in their internal practices and methods of resettlement.¹³ This includes being allowed to have a specific religious affiliation, prioritize individuals from certain regions or nationalities, or, most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, have varying policies for how to work with and help resettle LGBT+ refugees. Of the nine largest VOLAGs which are considered to be of the most import, seven have an Abrahamic religious affiliation and only one third of them have an official policy regarding LGBT+ refugees and their resettlement, one of which is explicitly in favor of discouraging the discussion or encouraging of such “behavior” as it is not in line with “our Christian values and the values of God.”¹⁴

This subcontracting to VOLAGs, rather than creating an extension of the federal government to help resettle refugees, places pressure upon VOLAGs to produce the results which appear more impressive on paper. This means that a VOLAG, in order to show that they are producing good quality work and have a high capacity for refugees (and therefore deserve more funding in the next annual contract), will attempt to have the refugees left in their care to as bare minimum of functioning within their initial ninety days after arrival as possible in order to provide assistance to as many refugees as possible.¹⁵ In essence, VOLAGs are incentivized to provide as little care as possible in order to appear effective and efficient to the higher powers which control their capacity, even if it is at the cost of the quality of care that those refugees receive.

¹³ “What is a VOLAG?” Washington State Department of Health and Security, accessed March 2022, 23, <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/faq/what-volag>.

¹⁴ James Edwards, “Religious Agencies and Refugee Resettlement,” Center for Immigration Studies, last modified March 16, 2016, accessed December 2022, 22, <https://cis.org/Religious-Agencies-and-Refugee-Resettlement>

¹⁵ Jennifer Erickson, “The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement .” In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 58-69.

Upon arriving into the United States and being placed in the charge of VOLAGs, refugees are typically given ninety days to find work, sign up for state benefits and Social Security, and complete language and cultural orientation courses and other necessary tasks with the aid and supervision of their assigned VOLAG branch.¹⁶ After the ninety-day mark, refugees are usually expected to be self-sufficient and are left to continue without VOLAG support except for intermittent check-ins which are then reported back to the federal government. Those who are particularly struggling to complete certain tasks or who have extenuating circumstances (e.g., disability, sudden death or medical issue, etc.) can receive an extension up to 180 days.¹⁷ Due to their strategic placement in or near areas with populations of similar ethnic or national background, refugees are often connected to these communities through VOLAGs and then expected to naturally build bonds and communal connections through which they can find further resources and social connection.¹⁸

SGV resettled refugees are most often placed under the nominal umbrella term of “LGBT refugees.” For the purposes of streamlining and simplifying the analysis process, the United States government has elected to stick to easily definable terms that the average American would be more or less familiar with. Because of the aforementioned difficulty of “proving” that one is both LGBT and that one is in danger of or has previously been persecuted as a result of their being LGBT, it is notoriously both difficult and easy to establish this.¹⁹ Because of certain

¹⁶ “What is a VOLAG?” Washington State Department of Health and Security, accessed March 2022, 23, <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/faq/what-volag>.

¹⁷ “The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security, last modified August 6, 2021, accessed December 19, 2021, <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/usrap>.

¹⁸ Jennifer Erickson, “The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement .” In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 58-69.

¹⁹ Saleh Fadi, “Transgender as a Humanitarian: The Case of Syrain Queer and Gender-Variant Refugees in Turkey,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1, (February 2020): 37-55, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7914500>.

cisheteronormative standards and expectations of how an LGBT+ person would act either generally or in certain situations pertaining to their application, there is a reputation for arbitrary denials of both resettlement applications and applications for asylum.²⁰ Conversely, because most non-SGV single men who have not survived torture are almost inevitably rejected by the USRAP system, there are many anecdotal accounts of those who fear persecution on a basis which may be harder or dangerous to demonstrate in an application who end up using LGBT status as an alternative means of receiving resettlement.²¹

Research Question and Theoretical Significance:

As more SGV refugees are arriving to the United States, issues specific to SGV individuals in the context of refugee or asylum-seeking status come into play more prominently. This thesis focuses both on the general issues at the intersection of their being a sexual or gender variant refugee in the United States as well as the specific ways in which the U.S.'s refugee resettlement scheme and its affiliated organizations address those issues and the level of effectiveness with which they do so, attempting to address the question "How does the current construction of the USRAP system and VOLAGS affect the lives of SGV refugees?"

This question has been asked and addressed of the resettlement systems of other nations, but there is a distinct lack of research for SGV refugees in USRAP after the initial application process. There is also a startling lack of research regarding the formative role played by VOLAGs in a refugee's ability to acclimate to the United States as well as a discrepancy in the

²⁰ Siobhan McGuirk, "(In)credible Subjects: NGOs, Attorneys, and Permissible LGBT Asylum Seeker Identities," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 41, no. 1, (September 2018): 4-18, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1111/plar.12250>.

²¹ Siobhan McGuirk, "(In)credible Subjects: NGOs, Attorneys, and Permissible LGBT Asylum Seeker Identities," 10-11.

amount of literature which discusses SGV refugees who achieved status through Application for Asylum as opposed to those who did so through USRAP.²² This is troubling, as this would be and is a particularly vulnerable group with specific means of assistance and social connection and one that merits careful research in order to understand how to best minimize said vulnerability. The thesis addresses these gaps in the literature.

Literature Review:

This thesis incorporates queer theory into current theories of refugee and migration studies, particularly in policy analysis. This will be necessary, as such fields of study have traditionally utilized a lens which, while not always necessarily queer-exclusive, often does not take into account the specific impact of queer and gender non-conforming experiences and identities.²³ An important aspect and a necessary component of this field also requires a greater emphasis on mental health, as this is a regularly occurring and often defining aspect of the lives

²² See, for example:

Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, Hanna Kim, Leah Woolner, and Christina Olivieri, "Facilitating Mental Health Support for LGBT Forced Migrants: A Qualitative Inquiry," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 96, no. 3, (July 2018): 316-326, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12205>; Aryan Karim, "Limits of Social Capital for Refugee Integration: The Case of Gay Iranian Male Refugees' Integration in Canada," *International Migration* 58, no. 5, (October 2020): 87-102, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12691>; Sarilee Kahn, "Experiences of Faith for Gender Role Non-Conforming Muslims in Resettlement: Preliminary Considerations for Social Work Practitioners," *The British Journal of Social Work* 45, no. 7, (October 2015): 2038-2055, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcu060>; Sarilee Kahn, "Cast Out: "Gender Role Outlaws" Seeking Asylum in the West and the Quest for Social Connections," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 13, no. 1, (2015): 58-79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2014.894169>; Sarilee Kahn Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738; Katherine Fobear, "'I Thought We Had No Rights' – Challenges in Listening, Storytelling, and Representation of LGBT Refugees," *Studies in Social Justice* 9, no.1, (December 2015): 102-117, <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v9i1.1137>; Linda Jean Kenix, and Femi Abikanlu, "A comparative analysis of social media messaging by African-centred LGBT refugee NGOs," *Journal of African Meida Studies* 11, no. 13, (September 2019): 313-329, https://doi.org/10.1386/jams_00003_1; David A. B Murray, "Real Queer: "Authentic" LGBT Refugee Claimants and Homonationalism in the Canadian Refugee System." *Anthropologica* 56, no. 1, (2014): 21-32.

²³ Martin Zebracki, "Public Activism: Queering Geographies of Migration and Social Inclusivity," *Citizenship Studies* 24, no. 2, (February, 2019): 131-153, <https://doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1080/13621025.2019.1706447>.

of queer individuals which effects their material conditions as well as physical and mental health.²⁴ Mental health issues appear among SGV populations in unique ways and are, for the purposes of this thesis, given special weight in the consideration as to how they manifest at the intersection of their experiences with displacement and how they interact with material struggles and successes.²⁵

Most research conducted around SGV refugees within or attempting to enter the United States focuses is on those who have made affirmative asylum claims through the Application for Asylum system which takes place on US soil or are else about the application process for SGV refugees applying to USRAP.²⁶ Research which directly addresses the issues faced by Sexual and Gender Variant (SGV) refugees and USRAP focuses predominantly on issues faced by individuals during the application process, particularly surrounding issues of the burden of proof when applying for refugee status or fear of (additional) persecution based on SGV existence.²⁷ This sizeable gap of information means that there is not a large amount of literature from which information and inspiration can be drawn and applied directly to this research. And because of

²⁴ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.; Rebecca Hopkinson, Eva Keatly, Elizabeth Glaeset, Laura Erickson-Schroth, Omar Fattal, and Melba Nicholson Sullivan, "Persecution Experiences and Mental Health of LGBT Asylum Seekers," *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no.12, (2016): 1650-1666, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1253392>.

²⁵ Jack Drescher, "Queer Dialogues: Parallels and Contrasts in the History of Homosexuality, Gender Variance, and *The Diagnostic Statistical Manual*," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39, no. 1, (September, 2009): 427-460, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1007/s10508-009-9531-5>.

²⁶ Kerith Conran and Winston Luhur, "Asylum Applications to the US by LGBT People." The Williams Institute, October, 2021, accessed January 17, 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-asylum-applications/>.

²⁷ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.; David A. B Murray, "Real Queer: "Authentic" LGBT Refugee Claimants and Homonationalism in the Canadian Refugee System." *Anthropologica* 56, no. 1, (2014): 21-32. ; Saleh Fadi, "Transgender as a Humanitarian: The Case of Syrain Queer and Gender-Variant Refugees in Turkey," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1, (February 2020): 37-55, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7914500>.

this gap, there is insufficient scholarship concerning the particular topic of resettled SGV refugees in the United States, particularly after resettlement. However, there have been discussions surrounding this topic indirectly or with regards to points that could be considered relevant to this research. While this thesis is primarily concerned with the conditions of SGV refugees in USRAP, research concerning intersectionality and resettled refugees both in and outside of the United States in a more general sense acts as a highly informative source of knowledge with which to frame this thesis, particularly through the lenses of mental health and communal connection.²⁸

A particularly poignant debate in this field revolves around the benefits of efficiency in the recent streamlining and centralizing of American resettlement as opposed to more individualized, participant-lead approaches, which is relevant to this discussion for reasons explained below.

Debates surrounding intersectional refugee identities in a resettlement context usually point to the shift to larger reliance on nation-wide non-profits organizations and NGOs for resettlement. One researcher, Jennifer Erickson, from her observations of resettlement practices and conditions in small cities, is a major advocate for a more participant-led, individualized approach to the resettlement process and believes this can be done without losing efficiency or decreasing the number of refugees taken in by the United States. Erickson, in her book, *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, discusses the “NGO-ization” of refugee resettlement and VOLAGs over the past few decades.²⁹ Through feminist and

²⁸ These particular lenses are repeated points of focus in most relevant literature and will therefore be deeply incorporated into the framework of this thesis.

²⁹ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 58-69.

Marxist frameworks, the author notes how the act of resettlement has shifted from what was traditionally a collection of local philanthropic undertakings often run by churches to an operation much more directly overseen by the United States government with nine large, national Voluntary Resettlement Organizations heading most of the operations and functions.³⁰ The author lays out how VOLAGs and the United States Government rely upon structures that do not meaningfully address the concerns of refugees whose identities or circumstances intersect in ways that the United States government or VOLAGs do not anticipate, namely, in her observations, single women with children, those who were of a lower economic class in their country of origin, and elderly women.³¹

Erickson notes that because the VOLAGs are so eager to please the US government in order to receive funding they need to continue their work, they are often encouraged to relay certain ideas and get as many refugees to achieve the minimum level of functionality as possible in a quick amount of time, specifically ninety days.³² Problems that cannot be addressed and skills that cannot be acquired within that time period then become the responsibility of refugee who would presumably learn it from their respective ethnic, religious, or national community within the locale. This occurs because, as previously mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, VOLAGs, rather than being an extension of the United States government, are independent organizations which rely on contracts with the United States and local governments in order to receiving funding and operate.

³⁰ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 67-68

³¹ Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." 58-62.

³² Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." 58-69.

This process of NGO-ized resettlement, because of its streamlined structure, is often one-sided in its approach to problem solving for the sake of efficiency. As a result, unanticipated needs are not heard and are left by the wayside, which particularly affects those outside what might be considered a “standard” refugee (those with unique or less considered intersecting identities or circumstances) that might not be able to receive the same amount of support from their presumed communities. The most often foreseen issues of the paradigmatically standard refugee are presumed to be their status as head of family with or without children (frequently presumed to be a man unless there are older male children), potentially a victim of torture, moderately educated (minimum of primary is expected), and fleeing due to political persecution, ethnic persecution, or general violence in their nation of origin. More nuanced or unique experiences are left unaccounted for in preparation and are then left unaddressed in resettlement. This, the author points out, silences refugee voices and concerns within their resettlement.³³ It is not a stretch to view this expectation of normativity to be extended to sexual and gender identity or expression as well. An application of theories of hetero/cisnormativity and heterosexism suggests this approach assumes refugees are heterosexual and gender conforming and therefore does not address the concerns of SGV individuals.

Other scholars, such as Forrest and Brown, however, disagree with this argument and argue that even further streamlining is necessary.³⁴ Those who make such arguments agree with Erickson that VOLAGs have taken on the dominant role in resettlement in addition to the fact that not enough scholarship reflects this and that the new role that VOLAGs have has led to the

³³ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 59, 78, 90.

³⁴ Tamar Mott Forrest and Lawrence A. Brown. "Organization-led Migration, Individual Choice, and Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Seeking Regularities," *The Geographical Review* 104, no. 1, (2014): 10-32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2014.12002.x>.

generalizing of resettled refugees and their concerns. However, they argue that this streamlining is not necessarily harmful despite the amount of reductive programming it might produce. They argue that VOLAGs should leave more responsibility to local communities of the same ethnic or religious origin in order to process more refugees and have issues addressed at an individual level by the community by means which seem most appropriate to it.³⁵

However, such an assertion also ignores the possibility of not feeling safe or connected to many members one's ethnic or national group and also presumes that problems that the U.S. government or VOLAGs are ill-equipped to handle can be resolved by the individual's group. This is particularly relevant to SGV refugees who may risk facing the same prejudices from individuals of similar origins here as much as they do in their country of origin. Many of the known cases of SGV refugees being resettled are still being placed into areas where there is a large number of individuals with similar ethnic backgrounds, and with the minimal support provided by VOLAGs and the U.S. government. For those who do not have connections in the United States and come from a community or culture which does not accept their SGV status, they are essentially put in a position which is only nominally different from the one they fled in the first place in which they either become dependent on a culture which does not approve of them or else be cut off and left to fend for themselves in a foreign land with little accessibility to social protections. And, if one is entering a group which is accepting of their SGV status, they are less likely to be able to adequately address issues which arrive as a result of being at an intersection of refugee status, within a certain racial or ethnic community, and being SGV

³⁵ Tamar Mott Forrest and Lawrence A. Brown. "Organization-led Migration, Individual Choice, and Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Seeking Regularities," *The Geographical Review* 104, no. 1, (2014): 25-28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2014.12002.x>.

because of a group's new history in the United States and smaller population making it less likely for an SGV community of that national or ethnic group to be both formed and contactable.

If the needs of SGV refugees are continuously left to communities that they might be barred from if they choose to express openly, the refugees' mental health consistently suffers as a result, affecting their physical and psychological health and material conditions. There is significant evidence that, across the board, SGV refugees are more likely to face mental health issues from abuse in their nation of origin, re-traumatization from the application process, and isolation in the communities of their hosting country or region.³⁶ Portman and Weyl found that, as a group, resettled SGV refugees are more likely to be dealing with issues such as a lack of established community, higher levels of mental unease, intra-ethnic violence, and fears of disclosing personal information.³⁷ The first three issues listed are attributed to the over-emphasis on efficiency on the part of the US government and VOLAGS creating lack of "facilitated participant-led social groups" which, when they have been present, have predominantly only been run by LGBT+ organizations performing independent outreach rather than VOLAGs or the government.³⁸ Though the paper is somewhat out of date because of the headway that SGV rights have since made in the mainstream and because massive changes were made to

³⁶Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.; Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.; Rebecca Hopkinson, Eva Keatly, Elizabeth Glaeset, Laura Erickson-Schroth, Omar Fattal, and Melba Nicholson Sullivan, "Persecution Experiences and Mental Health of LGBT Asylum Seekers," *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no.12, (2016): 1650-1666, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1253392>.

³⁷Scott Portman and Daniel Weyl, "LGBT Refugee Resettlement in the US: Emerging Best Practices," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 42, (April 2013): 44-47.

³⁸ Scott Portman and Daniel Weyl, "LGBT Refugee Resettlement in the US: Emerging Best Practices," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 42, (April 2013): 46.

resettlement during the Trump administration, certain key observations about specific patterns of resettled refugees who openly identify as SGV remain pertinent.³⁹ These are key in helping understand why certain issues occur and how they may progress for SGV refugees in a specifically American context.⁴⁰ They also give credit to Erickson's argument surrounding the NGO-ization of resettlement while pointing out the flaws of Forrest and Brown's arguments stating the necessity of the streamlining of resettlement and greater emphasis on reliance upon local communities and intra-ethnic ties.⁴¹ Portman and Weyl also discuss some solutions to specific issues which have worked on the micro scale but which could be adopted for the larger numbers of SGV-identifying individuals being resettled in the United States, such as the active intervention and formation of SGV refugee networks, refugee-led social groups and problem redress (the identifying of and creating solutions to communal problems), and identifying preferred sites of resettlement, particularly for transgender refugees.⁴²

Unfortunately, this is the only recent published work which exclusively addresses SGV refugees resettled to the United States and their mental health and acclimation directly. However, significant research on this topic has been conducted in other nations, especially in Canada, with comparable resettlement programs which can potentially be used to inform the American

³⁹*LGBTQ HISTORY TIMELINE REFERENCE*, Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, accessed February 15, 2022, <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/LGBTQ-History-Timeline-References.pdf>.: Sofia Carratala and Silva Mathela, "Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Program for the 21st Century", Published: October 26, Accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/rebuilding-u-s-refugee-program-21st-century/>.

⁴⁰ Rebecca Hamlin, *Let me be a refugee : administrative justice and the politics of asylum in the United States, Canada, and Australia*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13-32.:

⁴¹ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 59-63.: Tamar Mott Forrest and Lawrence A. Brown. "Organization-led Migration, Individual Choice, and Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Seeking Regularities," *The Geographical Review* 104, no. 1, (2014): 17-27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.2014.12002.x>.

⁴²Scott Portman and Daniel Weyl, "LGBT Refugee Resettlement in the US: Emerging Best Practices," 44-47.

context. Kahn et. al additionally have helpful work in analyzing access to mental health services and the steps necessary for integration within the context of SGV refugees in Canada.⁴³ Though certain aspects of the study are not applicable in an American context, such as the affordability and accessibility of health care, greater levels of definitive government policy for LGBTQ+ refugees, and more unified systems and regulations controlling and informing the resettlement process, it identifies key elements in SGV refugee life and existence. Such elements may go unaddressed or be exacerbated by the resettlement system in the United States given the similarities between USRAP and the Canadian system, especially within the context of mental health issues which are more prevalent in SGV refugee populations.⁴⁴ The authors identify four themes which they consider both necessary and insufficiently addressed in refugee resettlement and acclimation in Canada: “recognizing stigma and shame, accessing competent mental health providers, managing distress/manifesting resilience, and healing through community connections.”⁴⁵

While mental health will not be the only lens through which this issue is analyzed in this paper, it is undoubtedly an important one for the subjects in question and directly affects the quality of life for refugees. Because of this, the scholarly works cited above will provide critical background to this study before conducting further research.

⁴³Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, Hanna Kim, Leah Woolner, and Christina Olivieri, "Facilitating Mental Health Support for LGBT Forced Migrants: A Qualitative Inquiry," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 96, no. 3, (July 2018): 316-326, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12205>.

⁴⁴Rebecca Hamlin, *Let me be a refugee : administrative justice and the politics of asylum in the United States, Canada, and Australia*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 13-32.; Scott Portman and Daniel Weyl, "LGBT Refugee Resettlement in the US: Emerging Best Practices," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 42, (April 2013): 44-47.

⁴⁵ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, Hanna Kim, Leah Woolner, and Christina Olivieri, "Facilitating Mental Health Support for LGBT Forced Migrants: A Qualitative Inquiry," 316-326.

Methodology:

This thesis is a qualitative study with key informant interviews. Experts and professionals in the field of refugee resettlement and with ample experience with SGV refugees, two of whom were SGV refugees themselves, acted as informants as to the most common patterns observed and their origins. While some of this information would be, as a consequence, anecdotal (particularly from those in the field not concerned with or connected to academic research), it provided a perspective on the topic from those who try to provide support for or understand the phenomena described in this paper.

And, while some additional resettled SGV refugees including those who do not have professional experience in resettlement were contacted in the hopes that they could be interviewed, there have been some factors that made enrollment difficult. Firstly, if one is attempting to make an asylum claim based on SGV status, it is usually much safer to make such a claim once in the United States.⁴⁶ Those who are applying abroad through USRAP may cite other reasons for their application due to the potential risk caused by the outing of oneself without the protection of distance and international borders.⁴⁷ Since a claim on SGV status creates a greater level of visibility, those who arrived on different claims but are SGV would be more difficult to locate. Additionally, unlike USRAP decisions, cases for Application for Asylum usually involve domestic NGOs and legal firms who could be used to identify SGV asylees willing to participate in a study, as opposed to USRAP recipients who have no equivalent assistance and might not reveal their SGV status to workers in VOLAGs out of a fear of being

⁴⁶Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

⁴⁷ Kahn, Alessi, and Van Der Horn "A Qualitative Exploration," 940.

perceived as deceitful.⁴⁸ All these factors make SGV refugees in the United States willing to take part in this interview difficult to locate, contact, and arrange interviews with on the author's current time and budgetary constraints. This makes a primary reliance on interviews with the aforementioned experts and professionals who do work with resettled SGV refugees the optimal source of information and accounts given the circumstances.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured and conducted either over online video chat software or over the phone. The questions were open-ended in order to allow the interviewee to discuss in detail and explain relevant perspectives, opinions, and experiences without the limitations that might be had from a yes-no question. The questions asked covered a broad range of subjects, predominantly focusing on the observations of the participants regarding the structure of resettlement in the United States in relation to SGV refugees and issues, coping skills, and problem-solving strategies had by SGV refugees.

The goal of the interviews was to have the interviewees relay their thoughts and experiences pertaining to SGV resettlement in the United States, either from personal experience or as a second-hand witness or researcher. The interviews were designed to demonstrate individual effects, both positive and negative, of the USRAP Program and VOLAGs on SGV refugees. These were then analyzed within the greater structural and policy-based context using relevant literature and queer theoretical frameworks. The stated goal of this thesis is to, in part, acknowledge the way in which members of an already vulnerable group could be left behind because their own individual identities and experiences are not properly considered.

⁴⁸ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

Limitations of Research:

Ideally, the author would have been able to obtain the perspectives and accounts of fifteen to twenty refugees firsthand and be less wholly reliant on the accounts of the broad, potentially anecdotal observations of professionals in the field, as is frequently done when studying this and similar subjects.⁴⁹ However, due to the highly sensitive nature of this topic and the limited time frame and resources which the research for this thesis was conducted in, there was a limited pool of resettled SGV refugees from which I could draw on. This is to be somewhat expected, as refugees, after feeling persecution, are less likely to divulge personal information for the fear of it being discovered and traced back to them.⁵⁰ Logically, it would be even more risky for SGV individuals, especially those who have never been completely open about their SGV status because of their previously mentioned dependency on their local ethnic community. There is also the difficulty of overcoming the emotional or cultural hurdle to name such experiences in relation to be SGV out loud after not having done so for the majority of one's life. And unless one speaks English relatively well and is connected to local LGBT+ communities or else has permitted their VOLAG to share contact information, there would very few means with which to establish contact.

It is for these reasons that the author has selected academics and professionals working in the field of refugee resettlement with specific knowledge of SGV experiences as interviewees for this thesis. While the perspective of non-SGV-refugee experts on SGV refugee experiences are

⁴⁹Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

⁵⁰Tanja S. van Veldhuizen, Robert Horselenberg, Sara Landström, Pär Anders Granhag and Peter J. van Koppen, "Interviewing asylum seekers: A vignette study on the questions asked to assess credibility of claims about origin and persecution," *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* 14, no. 1, (January 2017): 3-22, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1002/jip.1472>.

useful and may serve as a good back up or supplementary source of information, they cannot accurately report on the experiences of the individual, especially within every refugee's personal cultural, religious, or political context. They also cannot be expected to understand the refugees' perspectives of the resettlement system, as they are operating within it and have a full understanding of the broader mechanisms at work. A study which involves interviews with SGV refugees, on the other hand, would better acknowledge that problems faced by SGV refugees and how these problems arise in their perspective. It would also potentially highlight some aspects of the USRAP mechanism with profound consequences not identified by previous research or experts. Furthermore, due to language and cultural barriers, they generally do not have the means to adequately and precisely explain the emotions, cultural contexts and base assumptions of the many cultural, religious, and national contexts from which these refugees might originate. Of course, even asking these refugees directly would not be able to provide that information in its entirety, but it would better allow for more precise and expanded contextualization that could prove to be relevant for this research.

Additionally, only two of the interviewees are SGV refugees. As such, much of their perspectives are external as non-diasporic and/or non-SGV citizens of wealthy North American nations. While not automatically the case, there is always the potential risk of people in such a position to have perspectives and identify patterns based off of orientalist presumptions separate from grander cultural and historic contexts. This is not to say that those interviewed have done so consciously or otherwise nor that the author also may potentially and unknowingly engage in such practices, but rather it is to acknowledge biases from previous academic and cultural works that may be present in this work that the reader is encouraged to be observant or critical of should they appear. The author of this thesis will attempt to notice and avoid these problematic

patterns and representations as they occur; however, as a non-diasporic person himself and as someone who is not a professional regularly working with resettled SGV refugees, there will inevitably be gaps in his knowledge and experience that may prevent him from catching such things as they arise.

It is also worth noting that, within the realm of refugee resettlement, the statistics of who flees and is granted asylum among SGV refugees is not balanced. According to all participants, the most common group of SGV refugees living openly to be accepted by USRAP were gay men (usually with a certain level of income), followed by transgender women, then lesbians, with very little to no mention of bisexual, transmasculine, or otherwise uncategorized SGV individuals. This imbalance will inevitably shape the way in which the experiences of resettlement and the risks of existing as an SGV refugee are perceived. If the most common representative of the resettled SGV refugee experience is a man with a certain amount of money and education, observations by professionals will most likely be skewed toward an experience which might come with a slightly greater amount of privilege as well as an overstatement or overestimation of a certain type of harm occurring in other groups. Additionally, with other forms of SGV refugees such as transmasculine individuals or bisexual refugees being barely accounted for if at all, forms of harm or privileges that they may possess or experience within the USRAP system may go unrecognized and unknown and therefore remain unaddressed. Additionally, those few individuals of certain groups who are observed out of the context of the rest of those like them cannot have their experiences be considered as a general pattern, as there is not a sufficient opportunity for observation to establish one.

As unfortunate as this is and as necessary it is for it to be acknowledged and born in mind, it is a limitation to the observable data set which cannot be altered and cannot be sufficiently addressed until something causes a change in resettled SGV refugee demographics.

Finally, the politics of global conflict, VOLAG organization, United States refugee policy, and migration opportunities are always in shift. Because of this flux, it is also difficult to fully understand how such changes affect SGV refugees in the present and how it will affect the structure around refugees in the immediate future. Even among the interviews from the experts and academics, there was much emphasis on the effect of changes from the Trump administration to the Biden administration. As such, some observations will be highly contextual to this time period and, when read, should not be seen as representative of future contexts.

Hypothesis:

The author's hypothesis for this paper was based largely on evidence suggested by the works of Kahn, Kahn et. Al. and Erickson. Given that Erickson observes that refugees which fall outside of categorical expectations of the U.S. government and VOLAGs are less likely to receive comprehensive support attuned their specific needs, one could reasonably assume that SGV refugees, given the ever-present status of cisheteronormativity in program and policy structuring, fall outside of normative expectations as well.⁵¹ Portman and Weyl also note the particular level of interrelated social and emotional vulnerability with which SGV refugees are left upon resettlement.⁵² From this assessment and based on the mental health needs as observed by Kahn et al, this author hypothesizes that SGVs due to the streamlined structure of support

⁵¹ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 53-55.

⁵² Scott Portman and Daniel Weyl, "LGBT Refugee Resettlement in the US: Emerging Best Practices," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 42, (April 2013): .

from the federal government and VOLAGs either become reliant upon communities built upon fragile social bonds which restrict gender and sexual expression or are else left with minimal resources and social support. In either case, the final result, unless intervened upon, becomes a cycle of worsened material conditions and lower quality of mental health.

Results and Data Analysis:

I. Participants and Their Initial Observations

Of the professionals and academics working and specializing in the field of SGV refugees, five were willing to provide interviews and gave crucial insight into the structuring of refugee resettlement and its effects on SGV refugees. Among these five, three were located in the United States and two were in Canada with significant experience in the United States, two were academics, three were professionals working with SGV asylees and/or refugees. All of them had a deep knowledge of the USRAP and U.S. asylum policies and programs. Interviews lasted at least 45 minutes and covered a large range of topics. One has asked to remain anonymous while the others will be mentioned by name and/or place of employment.

Among all five, there was a consistent theme across all subjects: accessibility. According to those interviewed, the vast majority of issues faced by refugees in the United States were centered around accessibility (physically, socially, monetarily, or linguistically) to services and assets both public and private that would aid in their transition into the United States.

Specifically, a lack of access to knowledge and the ability to gain knowledge was most often referenced. A linguistically barricaded and socially stratified ethnic enclave of those not yet used to the systems or structures of the United States is not likely to receive information about where to learn new, reliable information or the services available to them by the local and federal government, regardless of sexuality or gender. This issue can sometimes be successfully

anticipated and acted upon when VOLAGs and government agents make it a point to disseminate information relevant to the community in their language to local leaders or people of influence, though this is dependent on many factors and is often not efficient if executed at all.⁵³

This is consistent with the discussion on Erickson's research on VOLAGs and newly arrived refugees in North Dakota.⁵⁴ As previously mentioned, in Erickson's observations, a mode of being as a refugee which is not in line with what is expected or requires more assistance than a "average" newly arrived refugee leads to a more difficult time receiving services and care that would be helpful or even necessary. Furthermore, those working within the VOLAGs were unprepared to provide relief to and unable to comprehend specific issues had those outside the standard refugee mold.⁵⁵ Accessibility, as observed by Erickson, is derived from the ability to meet the expectations and stay within the caring capacity of the VOLAG, the United States government, and the communities one is being introduced to both within and outside of their national heritage or ethnic classification.⁵⁶ The respondents generally confirmed that this was consistent for openly SGV refugees as well, though often without the context of greater patterns regarding acceptability and expectations regarding the intersection of refugee status and other modes of being.

One respondent, who will be referred to as Respondent K, whose extensive academic work on SGV refugees from around the world is referenced several times throughout this thesis, points out that, due to their "tainted" status as someone who is known to be SGV within the community, even when attempts are made to spread information and resources, they are often

⁵³ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 86-87.

⁵⁴ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ," 57-91.

⁵⁵ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ," 60-91.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." 87-91.

prevented from receiving such information. This is because, those removed from their community of non-SGV counterparts of the same national or ethnic origin, either voluntarily or by force, are ostensibly cut off from the vital flow of information between community members. She lists two resources of particular value from which they are often cut off: translation and language-learning resources and employment opportunities.

In order to prevent this scenario for SGV and/or other refugee intersections that may be less connected to communal resources, some VOLAGs, even if they do not have a specific internal policy for such clients, will refer a client to an intensive case manager (ICM) in an external partner organization. An ICM's responsibility is to work with refugees who do not fit the expected mold of what a refugee might be. This can include single parents, the elderly, unaccompanied children, children who grew up in refugee camps, and those with severe mental health problems alongside SGV refugees. According to one respondent working as an ICM, Respondent C, this programming is "a type of extended case management program for refugee/asylee clients and other qualified immigration status and basically provides intensive case management services for particular clients who... may need extra support in navigating the systems." In theory, the extended and more personalized form of care that VOLAGs are structurally unable to provide would present opportunities to openly expressive or known SGV refugees which would otherwise be lost from a lack of connection to a community.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Note the avoidance of the term "out (of the closet)." Such language will be avoided as it implies an active choice in disseminating such information to others (a choice many are not given) as well as for the reason that such a term also carries with a specific image of fully and proudly declaring one's sexuality or gender which would otherwise be hidden, thus creating a stark dichotomy which is belied by the lived complexities of individuals as they move through different institutions, family, and cultural hegemonic norms. It also often implies a final end goal at which one may be considered "fully out" which is not complete until one's identity or experiences are shared with everyone in one's life regardless of circumstances and makes any partial attempt to live openly to be considered invalid by some.

Similar services have occasionally been offered by LGBT+ organizations in larger cities in the hopes to not only provide a greater level of care to SGV refugees but to also help them establish a community of their own based on their gender or sexual orientation. According to one interviewee with experience in such organizations, Respondent A, though these programs are less likely to receive a referral, as they often lack the connections to major VOLAGs and are often viewed, ironically, as too particular in their services. VOLAGs usually prefer organizations that can provide extended care to refugees with a variety of needs in order to help increase efficiency. This can be seen as an extension of and potential exacerbation to the original issue which leads to the creating the necessity of ICMs in the first place.

And, while such services are greatly beneficial to those who receive them, C points out that they are often few and far between. Due to resource and demographic constraints, there are not enough ICMs to successfully meet the needs of all of the refugees that would need them. Furthermore, she noted that, if a refugee who is SGV out of coincidence and arrived to the United States under a different claim does not feel comfortable expressing that part of their existence for any number of reasons, then there is no realistic way for them to request ICM assistance and be referred by their assigned VOLAG. ICMs are also restrictive in that they, by nature, prioritize those who have had the willingness and social privilege of expressing their status and articulating their specific needs. Individuals who are not in a position in which they feel like they can safely articulate their needs without either being ostracized by the group or else posing an inconvenience to others, as a result, are unable to receive this specialized care, even though it may suit them. Another hurdle mentioned by Morris is that personal issues and intersections of external modalities and refugee status may not be easily or succinctly be

conveyed or translated into English. So, even if one is referred to an ICM, they may not fully understand how to best go about addressing the issues held by the client.

Because many SGV refugees are left without additional or specific assistance including those who might need it the most, it must be asked then, what, then, is the resulting effect?

II. Retraumatization, Labels, and Gendered Expectations

The issues that arise from the societal expectations surrounding certain gender and sexual labels and their real-world consequences with regard to asylum and occasionally USRAP applications have been well-studied and documented.⁵⁸ What has less documentation however, is the pressure with which something like a resettlement application forces someone to adopt an identity, make sense of it, and be ready to stand by it loudly and openly in order to be granted safety by foreign governments.⁵⁹ One may only be engaging in sexual experimentation with someone of the same sex, unsure if one actually enjoys it, but if discovered and is no longer safe, suddenly has to take on the mantle of a gay or bisexual person as defined by another culture in order to be granted safety with little time to emotionally process or properly question. And to furthermore announce on a government document and repeat multiple times in recorded interviews that you have had or desired to have sex with someone of the same gender or to dress

⁵⁸ Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.: Saleh Fadi, "Transgender as a Humanitarian: The Case of Syrain Queer and Gender-Variant Refugees in Turkey," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7, no. 1, (February 2020): 37-40, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7914500>.: Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

⁵⁹ Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 23-25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

and live in a way which is not in line with your society's expectations of gender and gender performance is a complete shift from what one has come to know as either acceptable or safe.

Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi in their study, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada," describes the processes through which individuals applying for resettlement under threat of persecution for being SGV and the ways in which it affects the mental health of the refugees in question.⁶⁰ She notes that, while some may find a comfort and a sense of relief that a government would take such care as to provide refuge to individuals who fall outside of the sexual or gender norms of another nation (albeit with foreign and potentially ill-fitting categorizations), most do not have as smooth of an experience. It is at one point compared to a confessional.⁶¹ Something which has been taught one's whole life as something unclean and unholy must be admitted to or else suffer the eternal consequences of pain and misery, even if one is not necessarily ready to admit or discuss such topics.

In the United States, for those who are applying and accepted because of their SGV status, there is a paradoxical point of support. Because of the presumption of communal support, they are placed in an area where there is already a large population of a similar ethnicity.⁶² For example, Somali refugees are frequently placed in Minnesota due to an influx of Somali refugees to the Twin Cities Metro Area in the 1980's producing a disproportionately large Somali

⁶⁰ Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

⁶¹ Kahn and Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada," 35.

⁶² Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 59-60.

population.⁶³ Such a new population with specific cultural roots has subsequently not created a space which an openly SGV individual may be welcome. As such, SGV individuals are likely to be kept out from these cultural ties and are left to navigate a new country on their own.⁶⁴ The effects of this are potent and severely damage the mental health of the refugees in question and can even lead to suicidal thoughts or actions, such as the famous case of Sarah Hegazi, an Egyptian LGBT+ rights activist who was arrested and lambasted in the Egyptian press leading to her fleeing to Canada where she was met with isolation and eventually committed suicide.⁶⁵

Of course, such standards and dark results are not entirely the fault of the receiving nation. It is reasonable to expect that a nation be provided a reason as to why someone is applying for resettlement to their country. However, that does not change the fact that doing so, as it currently stands, may require someone to fight against cultural instincts and mores and explicitly mention something which might still be considered shameful in their head. It is often a choice between repeating something which has been considered by them to be otherwise unspeakable or risk harm by not receiving refuge.

Even when this is not the case, there is also the danger posed by having one's name on an official document associating them with homosexuality or transgender identity. Even if an applicant is in a third country of refuge where they are unknown, any plausible deniability of such an association has a risk of disappearing if a new related threat arises in the third country of

⁶³ Elizabeth Lightfoot, Jennifer Belvins, Terry Lum, Amano Dube, "Cultural Health Assets of Somali and Oromo Refugees and Immigrants in Minnesota: Findings from a Community-Based Participatory Research Project." *Journal for the Health Care of the Poor and Underserved* 27, no. 1, (February 2016): 252-260, 10.1353/hpu.2016.0023.

⁶⁴ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

⁶⁵ "How One Gay Egyptian Woman Stood up to Homophobia and Paid the Ultimate Price," Sarah El Sirgany, last modified June 17, 2020, accessed January 5, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/17/middleeast/sarah-hegazi-egypt-intl/index.html>

refugee or the applicant is forced to return to their country of origin. And, considering that the time between initial application and final decision can span from a period of months to several years, this is a long period of time of a potentially perilous limbo which further exacerbates the association with the expression of what is perceived as non-normative sexuality and gender practices and the sense of danger and instability.⁶⁶

Additionally, during interviews and processing, applicants may be expected to recount acts of violence and persecution enacted against them before they have had the proper opportunities and tools to process the ways in which it affected them.⁶⁷ While one may think that merely expositing the trauma that one has experienced can aid in the healing process, if not done in the right environment or with the right people, it may very well do the opposite. The application process for USRAP is a stressful one. Interviews are conducted in windowless rooms between two people who do not know each other. The applicant must create a cohesive story of traumatizing events or risk being denied and must therefore analyze their memories of the event. This is then reinforced when officers ask clarifying questions and pick apart parts of the story as the applicant has presented it. An applicant may be bombarded with questions that they do not know how or are difficult to answer all while attempting to navigate memories while maintaining a level of professionalism, and with the case of SGV refugees, this is often done without another person there to help provide a sense of familiarity and social support.⁶⁸ None of these circumstances provide a safe or calming environment to help process such difficult memories

⁶⁶ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

⁶⁷ Kahn et. al, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," 936-948.

⁶⁸ Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

and only serves to further associate them with the fear and stress of potentially having such acts repeated if the applicant is rejected.⁶⁹

According to Respondent K in her interview, for all of these reasons listed above, the act of applying for refugee resettlement as an SGV refugee often constitutes an act of retraumatization in itself which from the outset makes acclimation to life in the nation of resettlement more difficult from the outset and leads to further isolation from local LGBT+ communities, the diasporic communities in the area of resettlement, and even from areas where the two intersect and overlap. Such a form of isolation has a subsequent effect on both the mental health of the resettled refugee as well as their material conditions and ability to access resources. This has been shown to lead to higher rates of suicidal thoughts and actions and poverty.

Retraumatization as a result of applying for asylum or refuge is a phenomenon which is, naturally, strongly connected with the mental health of the applicant subsequent to their acceptance.⁷⁰ Many retraumatized applicants report having to access memories that they had actively tried to repress or suddenly remembering painful and harrowing incidents which they were not emotionally prepared to deal with.⁷¹ This is particularly poignant in cases that have to do with survivors of sustained physical violence and torture.⁷² However, SGV status is fairly stand-alone in that many applicants do not necessarily see their being SGV as immutable, serving a higher purpose, or as something which should part of the constitution defining oneself

⁶⁹ Kahn and Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada," 28-30.

⁷⁰ Kahn and Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada," 22-41.

⁷¹ Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 28-30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

⁷² Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 28-30, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

in the way that ethnic or racial identity, political affiliation, religion, or other status which may lead to violence.⁷³ This is not a universal presumption and many do find their SGV status as something immutable and potentially something to even be proud of. However, this feeling of shame and violation with having so definitively claimed SGV status on record for safety is frequently noted by studies of resettled SGV refugees. Such feelings are deeply complex and difficult to parse out for an individual, especially when they do not have access to potentially healing channels of expression, which can aid in the isolation and stunted development in acclimation for the resettled SGV refugee.

III. Dichotomy of Inaccessibility

Not every SGV refugee, however, arrives to the United States as a result of a claim based on SGV status. Such individuals, while they may fit the criteria for being SGV and either actively choose to hide it or see it as not worth examining, seek refuge on the basis of other claims of persecution. These individuals are more likely to have options with regards to immediate access to co-national and co-ethnic communities and resources.⁷⁴ However, among those, there are a distinct number of individuals who see their SGV status as something to hide or, if it is seen as perhaps an identity (positive or otherwise), something to suppress. For these individuals the risks and consequences of such an intersection is distinct from those described in the above section.

K, during the interview, discussed how, for incidental SGV refugees, there are two major potential negative outcomes. Either, the SGV refugee in question, due to their desire to stay

⁷³ Kahn and Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada," 36-38

⁷⁴ Kahn and Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." 22-41.

connected to their community for personal reason or to stay connected to the support and flow of information a community provides, does not reveal their SGV personhood to those around them or the SGV refugee becomes isolated and falls behind their peers in terms of acclimation and economic stability.

It should be noted here, however, that K discusses the act of sexual desire and gender expression as things which are seen as inherent to oneself and deeply emotionally charged, which is not necessarily reflective of how resettled SGV refugees may come to view themselves. Many resettled refugees may not see themselves as SGV and merely partake in sexual activities with members of the same sex in private without feeling as though they are missing something or hiding a core aspect of themselves, particularly if they are secure in their gender role and place within the community. As such, we should consider the observations of Kahn to be in reference to those of what those in the west might consider an experience in line with being transgender, someone of a sexual orientation and personal expression that they have a desire to express openly or otherwise, and/or someone who does have an outlet for expressing their gender or sexuality but has negative mental health consequences as a result stemming from feelings of guilt, stress, fear, or other potentially debilitating emotions.

In her previous research, Khas observed and published studies in focused on SGV refugees in several nations, including the United States. However, up until now, her primary focus has been on SGV refugees in Canada. Though she has more experience with SGV refugees in Canada, she is familiar with American refugee and resettlement laws and practices and believes that many of the issues faced by SGV refugees in Canada are directly applicable to those within the American system as well. Another informant, Respondent A, who also works in the Canadian system but is familiar with and has worked in the United States system as well,

considers the two nations to be directly comparable in their policies and treatment of SGV refugees, with the United States underperforming Canada in most quality-based metrics.

In their observations of SGV refugees, both discussed the harm inflicted by normalizing effects of both mainstream white-Anglo (or Franco in the case of Quebec) society as well as their fellow members of their respective diasporic communities.

Respondent K described what she referred to as a form of “social entrapment” whereby access to resources is granted on the basis that one possesses the ability to stay within normative structures in a manner similar to a more general idea of the social contract. The distinction between social entrapment and general cultural norm-setting is that one in the case of social entrapment is that the consequence threatened for deviation is not put into explicit terms and is meant to prevent one from joining another group. In many diasporic communities, queerness and transness, particularly when expressed openly and as a factor to one’s identity, are not seen as in alignment with the collective image of the community. To express otherwise then means to either wish for the changing of the collective consciousness of the community or for oneself to be separated from it. Members of diasporic communities that have particularly strong senses of nationalism, religious piety, or other forms of collectivist identity are likely to view such sentiments as a form of betrayal to the community and to immediate family.

A lack of sexual identity and the necessity to allow one’s community plausible deniability in order to meet their cisheteronormative expectations is a common acknowledged SGV experience in many cultures and is particularly poignant when one is still young and dependent on the support of adults for survival. SGV refugees in the United States often do not have such the luxury of being able to reach out and connect to the Queer and Trans communities of the United States at large to act as a social safety net, particularly if they do not have a firm

grasp of the English language. Cultural differences and a lack of experience in the unspoken collective knowledge of those who have spent significant time in American queer and transgender cultures are at a disadvantage in terms of accessibility to the appropriate spaces.⁷⁵ Furthermore, non-diasporic American queer and transgender individuals may not accept or provide space for those entering without knowing certain protocols or another well-established person within that space. Even if this was successful, it is unlikely that SGV refugees without previous connections within the community will be able to access many of the resources and communal support that they are likely to need.⁷⁶

In a more SGV-specific lens, due to frequent pressures within such communities to maintain an identity which is often being held in opposition to the hegemonic American society and culture, there is an unspoken understanding that one must stay in line with cultural expectations in order to be fully embraced and receive the care which is necessary to maintain oneself when one has no previously established social network. The irony being that one is meant to follow these in-group social and cultural expectations or else be seen as abandoning them for the American alternative when there is, in reality, no readily accessible American alternative in most cases.

This is also not to mention the additional pressures of maintaining social relationships with family members for its own sake. Some SGV refugees who arrived for alternative causes of persecution may have the benefit of having done so with family members. In addition to the previously established reasons to presume a cisgender heterosexual lifestyle, doing so to avoid

⁷⁵ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

⁷⁶ Kahn et. al, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," 936-948.

the risk of losing connection with one's family after fleeing conflict is also a frequently sighted cause for hesitation noted by A.

The consequences of such performativity are mentioned in Dr. Kahn's previous research.⁷⁷ In this, she notes how an inability to confront sexual identities and desires often leads to a cycle of guilt, fear, and coping mechanisms, the continuation of which prevents healing and further mental health progression. Kahn et. Al establish this as a deeply unhealthy pattern for all involved and consider it to be the first step in the process of being able to establish one's own stability of mental health.⁷⁸

It is also important to establish how one's mental health in such a scenario also subsequently effects their material conditions.

IV. **Material Effect**

Erickson, in her previously discussed research, asses that her subjects that fell outside of the parameters of a paradigmatic refugee had a much greater level of difficulty applying for benefits, finding stable non-exploitative employment, and finding sustainable levels of self-sufficiency.⁷⁹ Each of these speak to the social and economic boundaries which are faced by refugees on a more general level and which are exacerbated when one is saddled with additional

⁷⁷ Sarilee Kahn and Edward Alessi, "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2018): 22-41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fex019>.

⁷⁸ Sarilee Kahn, Edward Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada," *Journal of Sex Research* 54, no. 7, (September 2017): 936-948, doi:10.1080/00224499.2016.1229738.

⁷⁹ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 60-91.

concerns that programs designed to reduce such burdens are either unwilling or insufficiently able to address. The result is an increased risk of poverty, housing instability, and exploitation.⁸⁰

For SGV refugees, this manifests in several key ways. According to all of those interviewed, the operative word is “accessibility.”

There are barriers for [SGV] refugees ... that may or may not exist for other kinds of refugees. For example, we've had instances where [SGV] refugees are harassed at language class by other refugees ... This particularly pertains to those who can't or refuse to “pass” (as cisgender and heterosexual). - Respondent K

As K states, being openly or suspected as being SGV acts as a critical barrier to key resources which are likely to improve the quality of life for refugees, such as the given example of a lack of access to language learning resources.

In this manner, one could apply the social theory of disability. This theory posits that disability is socially constructed from the presumptions that humans look and operate in a certain manner and constructs the world around them based on that presumption.⁸¹ Those who do not fit within this presumed mold therefore have little or reduced access to spaces and services shaped around said mold and are therefore rendered by society as disabled. This framework can be applied to the structuring of refugee resettlement and VOLAGS, who often structure their resettlement practices presuming certain modalities for the refugees in their care. This makes accessing the resources they actually need incredibly difficult, as it is often the case that they have little to know means of accessing said resources themselves or through their local co-

⁸⁰ Jennifer Erickson, "The NGOization of Refugee Resettlement ." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, ed. Jennifer Erickson, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 88-99.

⁸¹ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

ethnic/co-national community. Additionally, if there are certain expectations as to what the local community offers and provides assistance with for newly arrived refugees, lack of access to the community itself leaves certain refugees dependent on their VOLAGs who are likely to be unprepared to provide additional assistance, if the refugee in question is willing or able to request assistance at all.

While being SGV often does not itself restrict accessibility to spaces and resources in contemporary United States, this is largely due to the fact that there is also a larger built-in community that can provide resources if one is truly unable to be self-sufficient, this is particularly true of SGV individuals who are cisgender, adults, and/or living in urban metropolitan areas. However, it is at levels of intersecting experience and identity that a person's mode of being is met with various assumptions from which one can deviate. In so far as refugees are concerned, they consistently are granted restricted access to only certain spaces in American society with varying degrees based on money, education, language ability etc. A refugee that fits with paradigmatic expectations of both the resettlement agency as well as government bodies and local communities, while they may have less access to American society at large, they often are still able to access local community spaces, VOLAG and government resources, and religious spaces. However, when a refugee deviates from this in some capacity or capacities, this accessibility is shut off and barriers are reinforced, firstly by VOLAGs who are ill-equipped to place them in spaces and provide aid relevant to them and secondly by the local community which may actively outcast or ignore the variant individual. This is not limited to SGV refugees but all refugees without a high income or education and who do not or are perceived to not fit within the normative expectations being set by the community. Because the two primary points

of access to resources and services are these to collectives, restriction from them both ultimately leaves those who are non-normative paralyzed with no direction to turn to.

However, such restrictions largely to those who cannot or chose to not to “pass” as cisgender and heterosexual. Those who are presumed to be non-SGV and can comfortably continue their lives without this assumption do not necessarily face the same level of accessibility. However, it is also not possible for one to know one way or the other the internal thought processes and sources of stress for individuals who match the above description.

In any case, for those who are presumed to be or are SGV refugees and do not have a certain level of connections, education, or monetary assets, their material conditions are negatively impacted by a feedback loop of a lack of access to resources and services that would allow them to become more self-sufficient, keeping them in precarious positions and thus perpetuating their need for such access.

V. Discomfort with Dissatisfaction

There are a number of reasons why a refugee may not come forward with their issues to the VOLAG or another body providing aid. The problem could be incredibly personal, it could be embarrassing, the refugee may want to not seem ungrateful, or they may come from a culture where offering criticism is only done when someone cannot bear a situation. Regardless of this, as the current model sits, there are few opportunities through which refugees can comfortably share their problems with their case manager or other staff. While there may nominally be some procedures to allow refugees to request more help or complain, they are often either in a manner which places them in front of a lot of people’s gazes or else are very impersonal check-ins which

come across as though the wellbeing of the refugee is but a mere formality to the staff of the VOLAG.

As such, another problem which presents itself is that, there is often not enough opportunities for SGV refugees to disclose the issues they have been having generally speaking, let alone to the issues which they must deal with because of their SGV status. As previously discussed, revealing one's SGV status poses a significant risk. However, even if one wished to offer this information to their case manager under the reassurance that such information would not be disclosed, there are often few opportunities which present themselves which would allow for a refugee to communicate their needs in the first place. Furthermore, if an SGV refugee does not wish to be open to their community but is still facing difficulties regarding their being SGV, it may be difficult to conceive of a manner which a VOLAG could provide aid that would not risk revealing this in some way.

Conclusion:

Resettled SGV refugees in the United States are an understudied demographic. It is plain to see that they represent a significant portion of the resettled refugee population, yet there are scarcely any studies which go over issues which are specific to them. However, through analyzing and implementing the information of previously conducted research on relevant and parallel groups, a pattern begins to immerge. One where, upon arriving in the United States SGV, refugees who identify with correlating experiences or desires within themselves are left with their needs unattended to by the agencies made to aid in their transition to life in the United States. They are then places in a position of reliance upon either local LGBT+ communities, which is unlikely due to a lack of accessibility on several fronts, or else their local co-ethnic or co-national communities which have been shown to likely be either unwilling or unable to

provide assistance regard SGV-specific issues, such as the mental health issues deriving from a stressful and potentially dangerous application process, lack of access to certain resources and spaces due to heteronormativity, and confusing and complex shifts in gender and sexual dynamics with which to contend.

It is also often difficult for openly SGV refugees to access aid from their communities in a more general sense. This is because many come from cultures in which having or having had sexual or gender expressions or identities which deviate from the expected norm lead to isolation, abuse, or disownment. This is why many SGV refugees come to United States in the first place. Because of this alongside the presumption that primary interpersonal care of the refugee within their co-national/co-ethnic community, many are forced into a position where they must either no longer be openly SGV and hide their SGV experiences or else be kept out of the mutual care and support provided by their local co-ethnic or co-national community. In many cases, SGV refugees do not have the choice at all, having already had their status or experience disclosed to the local community. The resulting isolation both from communal support and from continued support from VOLAGs due to their hyperfocus on efficiency in resettlement, consistently leads to worsening mental health issues and deteriorating material conditions.

Such issues cannot be traced back to a single source. However, VOLAGs, despite being the primary sources of care for refugees, often operate in such a way that refugees are unable to take full advantage of their services and are often encouraged to fend for themselves either implicitly or explicitly. VOLAGs are often the only chance for SGV refugees to gain access to resources and aid that can sufficiently address their concerns and needs at the point when such assistance is most vital to ensure that they are set up for a stable acclimation to life within the United States. As such, it is most efficient and vital that steps to intervene are taken at the stage

of initial arrival by setting up VOLAGs as a safe point of contact to freely and privately discuss SGV-related issues and find solutions either within the VOLAG's immediate resources or through their networks. This would require moderate restructuring of the current resettlement system to build more trust and more private focus on refugees, encouraging them to share issues with their case managers on a one-on-one basis. It is also proposed that VOLAGs expand their networks to include LGBT+ organizations and SGV alumnae for newly arrived SGV refugees to receive supplemental assistance that is more SGV-focused in the event that those managing an SGV refugee's case is unable to sufficiently advise or problem-solve. These findings are in line with the author's hypothesis.

This is not to color the experience of resettled SGV refugees in the United States as one that is inherently negative or particularly harrowing when compared to other refugee experiences. But there are observed reoccurring patterns that have consistently been shown to negatively affect the lives of many SGV refugees at a material, internal, and interpersonal level. It is the responsibility of the United States and its VOLAGs as the care providers accepting the responsibilities of assisting refugees to make sure that all refugees have sufficient means to healthily and stably exist during their time in the United States, however long.

Future Research

While much was learned in the course of the research of this thesis, the author believes that a broader and more in depth understanding of this topic could be formed by interviewing a larger number of SGV refugees in order to better understand what their priorities and experiences are first-hand. This information can be used to form more specific policy proposals and impact additional research on refugee resettlement in the United States.

Works Cited

- Carratala, Sofia, and Silva Mathela. 2020. *Rebuilding the U.S. Refugee Program for the 21st Century*. October 26. Accessed March 22, 2022. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/rebuilding-u-s-refugee-program-21st-century/>.
- Conley, Terri, Patricia Devine, Jerome Rabow, and Sophia Evett. 2003. "Gay Men and Lesbians' Experiences in and Expectations for Interactions with Heterosexuals." *Journal of Homosexuality* 83-109.
- Conron, Kerith, and Winston Luhur. 2021. *Asylum Applications to the US by LGBT People*. Immigration Statistics, Los Angeles: UCLA The Williams Institute.
- Cox, Adam, and Cristina Rodriguez. 2009. "The President and Immigration Law." *The Yale Law Review* 458-547.
- D'Emilio, John. 1993. "Capitalism and Gay Identity." In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David Halperin, 467-476. New York: Routledge Publishing.
- Drescher, Jack. 2010. "Queer Diagnoses: Parallels and Contrasts in the History of Homosexuality, Gender Variance, and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 427-460.
- Edwards, James. 2016. *Religious Agencies and Refugee Resettlement*. Washington D.C.: Center for Immigration Studies.
- El Sirgany, Sarah. 2020. *How one gay Egyptian woman stood up to homophobia and paid the ultimate price*. June 17. Accessed January 3, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/17/middleeast/sarah-hegazi-egypt-intl/index.html>.
- Erickson, Jennifer. 2020. *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Erickson, Jennifer. 2020. "THE NGOization of Refugee Resettlement." In *Race-ing Fargo: Refugees, Citizenship, and the Transformation of Small Cities*, by Jennifer Erickson, 57-91. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Fadi, Saleh. 2020. "Transgender as a Humanitarian: The Case of Syrain Queer and Gender-Variant Refugees in Turkey." *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 37-55.
- Fobear, Katherine. 2015. "'I Thought We Had No Rights' – Challenges in Listening, Storytelling, and Representation of LGBT Refugees." *Studies in Social Justice* 102-117.
- Forrest, Tamar Mott, and Lawrance A. Brown. 2014. "Organization-led Migration, Individual Choice, and Refugee Resettlement in the U.S.: Seeking Regularities." *The Geographical Review* (Taylor & Francis Ltd.) 10-32.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Penguin Publishing.
- Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. 2020. *LGBTQ HISTORY TIMELINE REFERENCE*. Educational Report, Washington D.C.: Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network.
- Hamlin, Rebecca. 2014. *Let me be a refugee : administrative justice and the politics of asylum in the United States, Canada, and Australia*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

- Hopkinson, Rebecca A., Eva Keatly, Elizabeth Glaeset, Laura Erickson-Schroth, Omar Fattal, and Melba Nicholson Sullivan. 2016. "Persecution Experiences and Mental Health of LGBT Asylum Seekers." *Journal of Homosexuality* 1650-1666.
- Kahn, Sarilee. 2015. "Cast Out: "Gender Role Outlaws" Seeking Asylum in the West and the Quest for Social Connections." *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 58-79.
- Kahn, Sarilee. 2015. "Experiences of Faith for Gender Role Non-Conforming Muslims in Resettlement: Preliminary Considerations for Social Work Practitioners." *The British Journal of Social Work* 2038-2055.
- Kahn, Sarilee, and Edward Alessi. 2018. "Coming Out Under the Gun: Exploring the Psychological Dimensions of Seeking Refugee Status for LGBT Claimants in Canada." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22-41.
- Kahn, Sarilee, Edward Alessi, Hanna Kim, Leah Woolner, and Christina Olivieri. 2018. "Facilitating Mental Health Support for LGBT Forced Migrants: A Qualitative Inquiry." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 316-326.
- Kahn, Sarilee, Edward J Alessi, and Rebecca Van Der Horn. 2017. "A Qualitative Exploration of the Premigration Victimization Experiences of Sexual and Gender Minority Refugees and Asylees in the United States and Canada." *Journal of Sex Research* 936-948.
- Karimi, Aryan. 2020. "Limits of Social Capital for Refugee Integration: The Case of Gay Iranian Male Refugees' Integration in Canada." *International Migration* 87-102.
- Kenix, Linda Jean, and Femi Abikanlu. 2019. "A comparative analysis of social media messaging by African-centred LGBT refugee NGOs." *Journal of African Media Studies* 313-329.
- Lightfoot, Elizabeth, Jennifer Belvins, Terry Lum, and Amano Dube. 2016. "Cultural Health Assets of Somali and Oromo Refugees and Immigrants in Minnesota: Findings from a Community- Based Participatory Research Project." *Journal for the Health Care of the Poor and Underserved* 252-260.
- Massad, Joseph. 2015. *Islam in Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McGurick, Siobhan. 2018. "(In)credible Subjects: NGOs, Attorneys, and Permissible LGBT Asylum Seeker Identities." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 4-18.
- Murray, David A. B. 2014. "Real Queer: "Authentic" LGBT Refugee Claimants and Homonationalism in the Canadian Refugee System." *Anthropologica* 21-32.
- Office of Refugee Resettlement; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2017. *Resettlement Agencies*. July 17. Accessed March 23, 2022. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/resettlement-agencies>.
- Portman, Scott, and Daniel Weyl. 2013. "LGBT Refugee Resettlement in the US: Emerging Best Practices." *Forced Migration Review* 44-47.
- San Veldhuizen, Tanya, Robert Horselenber, Par Ander Granhag, and Peter van Koppen. 2016. "Interviewing asylum seekers: A vignette study on the questions asked to assess credibility of claims about origin and persecution." *Journal of Investigator Psychology and Offender Profiling* 3-22.

- Siebers, Tobin. 2008. *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Snapp, Shannon, Ryan Watson, Stephen Russell, Rafael Diaz, and Caitlyn Ryan. 2015. "Social Support Networks for LGBT Young Adults: Low Cost Strategies for Positive Adjustment." *Family Relations* 420-430.
- The Economist. 2021. "Bowing to pressure, Joe Biden will admit more refugees to America; Daily chart." *The Economist*, May 5.
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 2021. *The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Consultation and Worldwide Processing Priorities*. August 6. Accessed December 19, 2021. <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/usrap>.
- Vinogradova, Nadezhda, and Elena Yu Leontyeva. 2018. "Gender Representations / Transpositions: Peculiarities of the "Third Age"." *Logos et Praxis* 65-72.
- Washington State Department of Health and Security. n.d. *What is a VOLAG?* Accessed March 2022, 23. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/faq/what-volag>.
- Zebracki, Martin. 2019. "Public Artivism: Queering Geographies of Migration and Social Inclusivity." *Citizenship Studies* 131-153.