



# Photo Elicitation Method and Young Refugees' Social Participation in Community

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## Abstract

This chapter discusses the use of the photo elicitation method to examine the social experiences of young people with refugee backgrounds in regional Australia. In the study on which this chapter is based, the authors explored the role of social capital and its impact on regional settlement experiences for young people with refugee backgrounds. Qualitative in-depth interviews and photo elicitation methods were conducted with 16 Congolese young people with refugee backgrounds living in an Australian regional town. Findings revealed that the participants relied on a variety of social capitals to help them integrate into their regional community. Community participation in the form of sport, music, and cultural activities were common methods to develop social capital. Importantly,

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these young people exhibited a remarkable level of resilience and determination that assisted them to succeed in Australia. This chapter highlights that social capital, including bonding and bridging capital, is important for young people with refugee backgrounds whose social relationships are often diminished during the process of forced migration. The chapter identifies community participation as a potential method for restoring social capital for young people with refugee backgrounds, particularly in regional Australia where community participation is common.

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**Keywords**

Photo elicitation method · Congolese · Young refugees · Regional settlement · Social capital · Community participation

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## 1 Introduction

Photographic images have become one of the foremost means of representation and communication in our contemporary societies. (Ndione and Remy 2018, p. 61)

In this chapter, the authors discuss the use of the photo elicitation method to examine the social experiences of young people with refugee backgrounds in regional Australia. In the study on which this chapter is based, the authors explored the role of social capital and its impact on regional resettlement experiences for young people.

There has been a strong policy push to settle a proportion of Australia's refugees in regional areas (Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2015; Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA] 2015; Piper 2017; Collins et al. 2019; Musoni 2019). Aware of the potential economic, social, and cultural contributions that refugees could make to Australia's regional towns, the government has formally and informally encouraged the regional resettlement of refugees since 2004 (Hugo 2011). Regional Australia is now home to approximately 15% of Australia's refugees (Hugo 2011; Feist et al. 2015; Refugee Health Network 2015; Piper 2017; Collins et al. 2019; Crouch et al. 2019; Musoni 2019).

Regional resettlement of refugees is often seen as a "win-win" situation. The combination of low diversity, an aging population, and the exodus of young people to metropolitan areas has stifled the economic and social prosperity of Australia's regional towns (Piper 2009, 2017). The settlement of refugees in regional Australia has the potential to reverse this trend by addressing job shortages, increasing diversity, and revitalizing country towns (Queensland Council of Social Services [QCROSS] 2014). It is also claimed that regional towns offer refugees unique opportunities that are not available to them in metropolitan areas (Hugo 2011; Piper 2017; Collins et al. 2019; Musoni 2019). However, numerous organizations have raised concerns that without sufficient planning, regional settlement policies can leave refugees disadvantaged (QCROSS 2014; Piper 2017; Collins et al. 2019; Musoni 2019).

In response to this concern, several studies have investigated the impact of regional resettlement for refugees (Taylor and Stanovic 2005; Shepley 2007; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; AMES Australia [AMES] 2011, 2015; Piper 2017; Collins et al. 2019; Musoni 2019). These studies revealed that some regional communities have limited experience of living closely with other ethnic groups. Regional towns are often unable to meet the complex needs of refugees, such as opportunities for employment and other social needs, due to a lack of social support services and isolation (Shepley 2007; Johnston et al. 2009; McDonald-Wilmsen et al. 2009; QCOSS 2014; Collins et al. 2019; Musoni 2019).

Young people make up over 70% of Australia's refugee intake (Hugo 2011). The needs of young refugees are multifaceted and distinct from the needs of adult refugees (Coventry et al. 2002). While many studies have explored the various impacts of regional resettlement on the health and well-being of adult refugees (Taylor and Stanovic 2005; Shepley 2007; AMES 2011; Collins et al. 2019; Musoni 2019), little is known about the implications of regional resettlement on the health and well-being of young refugees.

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## 2 Social Capital and Young People with Refugee Backgrounds

Social capital refers to the value within an individual's set of relationships and networks of social support (Portes 1998; Putnam 2000). Strong social connections with friends, family, and the wider community are crucial in order to maximize the opportunities for recently arrived refugees (CMY 2006; Doney et al. 2013; Bansel et al. 2016; Drolet and Moorthi 2018; Uzelac et al. 2018; Børsch et al. 2020). The Department of Immigration and Citizenship's (DIAC 2011) study regarding the settlement outcomes of newly arrived refugees revealed that over half of their respondents felt well connected to the wider Australian community. These broad external connections are what Putnam (2000) refers to as bridging capital, and can contribute to a refugee's sense of belonging (see also Hugo 2011; Doney et al. 2013; Fozdar and Hartley 2013; Bansel et al. 2016; Pittaway et al. 2016; Santoro and Wilkinson 2016; Drolet and Moorthi 2018; Uzelac et al. 2018; Børsch et al. 2020). AMES' (2015) study in Victorian regional town Nhill highlighted the importance of bridging capital for Karen refugees from Burma (Myanmar). Bridging capital was a significant factor in the overwhelmingly positive response to the Karen population's resettlement in Nhill (AMES 2015). The Karens' involvement in the wider Nhill community through sport, social groups, and service organizations has seen the Nhill community embrace the Karen people, and in the words of Hindmarsh Shire Council's CEO, "this has made Nhill a better place to live" (AMES 2015, p. 11). These studies (DIAC 2011; AMES 2015) highlight the importance of social capital for the health and well-being of refugees in regional areas. However, neither study was specifically tailored to the experiences of young refugees.

Social capital is especially important for young refugees who arrive in a foreign country during a transitional stage in their lives, where the common pressures of

adolescence are compounded by the additional stressors associated with their refugee experience (CMY 2006; Correa-velez et al. 2010; Wilkinson et al. 2017; Børsch et al. 2020). In their study, Brough et al. (2003) revealed that young refugees typically rely on social communication and participation as coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety. This included talking with friends and family, playing sport, and participating in community activities (see also Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017; Farello et al. 2019; Spaaij et al. 2019). Brough et al.'s (2003) study suggested that young refugees do not typically conceptualize their health in terms of illness. Rather, they are more likely to reflect on their health by their degree of social connection with friends, family, and their community. This highlights the importance of promoting social environments within public health approaches to young refugee health and well-being. Nathan et al.'s (2013) study in Australian primary schools revealed that fostering peer interaction can promote feelings of self-worth and happiness for children from migrant backgrounds. The young refugees in the Centre for Multicultural Youth's (2006) study emphasized peer and social connectedness as a crucial element in forming a sense of belonging and well-being. These studies highlight the importance of social capital when promoting the health and well-being of young refugees. However, all three studies were conducted in urban centers and it is unclear whether the findings could be applied to young refugees in regional areas.

Despite the increasing number of young refugees settling in regional areas and the importance of social capital among this group, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding this issue. Young refugees possess a unique form of resilience and resourcefulness that assist them to succeed in Australia (Koh et al. 2013; RCOA 2009). Coventry et al. (2002) showed that initial high rates of mental health illness among young refugees decline within 2 years after settling in Australia. Furthermore, 90% of young refugees commit to full-time study upon arrival in Australia, and 60% attain post-school qualifications, which is higher than the national average (Coventry et al. 2002; Hugo 2011). Not only do young refugees receive the majority of their education in Australia, but virtually their entire working lives are also spent in Australia (Hugo 2011). The significant contribution that young refugees could make to Australia's economy and society is increasingly being acknowledged in the literature (Brough et al. 2003; Hugo 2011). Capitalizing on the strengths of young refugees and restoring their social capital is one way of maximizing their potential.

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### 3 The Study and Photo Elicitation Method

The study on which this chapter is based adopted a qualitative approach, which is essential when an individual wants to explore and understand people's own experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions (Bryman 2016; Liamputtong 2020). The participants were 16 Congolese young people with refugee backgrounds living in an Australian regional town. Qualitative research methods gave a voice to participants of a study; it provided them with the opportunity to freely share their experiences. This approach is particularly important when working with a vulnerable population

(such as young refugees); it gives voice to the marginalized (Liamputtong 2007, 2010, 2020). Additionally, qualitative research is essential for addressing research questions that have been little researched (Liamputtong 2020).

We utilized two qualitative methods of data collection: in-depth interviews and photo elicitation. In-depth interviews were chosen for this study to give a voice to the participants (Serry and Liamputtong 2022). Due to their vulnerabilities and young age, participants were given a choice to take part in a group or individual interview. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted in total, including eight individual interviews and three small group interviews with two to three participants in each. The interviews ranged from 40 min to 70 min, depending on the participants' elaboration. The majority of the interviews took place at a university regional campus; however, some interviews took place in public spaces that were more convenient for the participants. Each interview consisted of questions relating to the participants' perceptions of the local area where they live, their social networks, their acculturation experiences, and their level of participation in the community.

In this study, the photo elicitation method was used in combination with the in-depth interviews. The photo elicitation method is based on "a simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper 2002, p. 24). Photographs evoke information, feelings, and memories from individuals, and therefore broaden the scope of conventional interviewing methods (Harper 2002; Glaw et al. 2017; Boucher 2018). Explicitly selected photographs are used by the researcher to elicit ideas and thoughts from the research participant (Marsh et al. 2016, p. 43). The photo elicitation method has also been referred to as the "participant-driven photo elicitation" method (Feng 2019) and "photo-response interviews" (McLaughlan 2019).

Originally, the photo elicitation method was adopted in sociology and anthropology. It has been increasingly used in research with vulnerable and marginalized populations and health research (Boucher 2018). Photo-elicitation is situated within the theory of personal construction, which posits that "individuals give meaning to their world on the basis of their vision of the contexts, events and situations they experience" (Ndione and Remy 2018, p. 63). Photo-elicitation creates a pyramidal exchange between the researched, the researcher, and the images. Accordingly, "the challenge for the researcher is to induce the participant to produce meaning, and the relationship between researcher and participant is transformed because it is built around the exchange, or even collaboration" (Ndione and Remy 2018, p. 63).

Collier (1957, p. 12) suggests that a photograph functions as a "tin opener." The use of images makes it possible to start a conversation and direct it in ways that could not have been done without them (Harper 2002; Ndione and Remy 2018). Additionally, the photo elicitation interview is a process that evokes more discussion and brings out a different type of knowledge during an interview (Harper 2002). This is because when individuals process visual images using words, their brain's capacity is exercised at a higher level than processing verbal information (Harper 2002; Glaw et al. 2017).

According to Harper (2002, p. 23), photo elicitation interviews can create interesting and deep conversations. Researchers who have adopted this method found that the elicited meanings are different from traditional interviewing methods

(Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 1988, 2002; Radley and Taylor 2003; Bigante 2010; Glaw et al. 2017; Boucher 2018; Feng 2019). Thus, photo elicitation helps to lead both the researchers and participants toward common understandings of the investigated issues (Harper 2002; Boucher 2018). Harper (2002, p. 20) suggests that:

Photo elicitation may overcome the difficulties posed by in-depth interviewing because it is anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties. If the interview has been successful, the understanding has increased through the interview process.

The photo elicitation method, as in other visual methods, also allows empowerment to occur among the research participants. The participants can select the photographs that make sense to their lived reality to be discussed and this permits them to guide the researcher in the interview (Harper 2002; Noland 2006). This gives them more power in the research interviews (Glaw et al. 2017; Boucher 2018). This empowerment is essential when working with vulnerable and marginalized young people (Liamputtong 2007, 2020).

According to Feng (2019, p. 720), the method can generate “rich, unique and meaningful data that would be otherwise difficult to collect through conventional qualitative interviews.” In her research that examined how people interact with and manage their personal health information from their activity trackers (e.g., Fitbit, Apple Watch) and related health applications, she contends that the method “elicited explanation, rationalisation and reflection during the interviews” that “enriched and triangulated” core research findings of her study.

How many images are used in a research project depends on the research topics and aims. There is no set of numbers that researchers must use. In her research, McLaughlan (2019, p. 254), seven photographs were used. Participants were shown the photographs and asked to talk freely about their responses to each photograph. In Muhamad et al.’s study (2019) on meanings of sexuality and feelings about having sexual dysfunction, they prepared 40 photographs that illustrated different perspectives, which were designed to be culturally acceptable. The photographs were free images found through an Internet search but were modified to make suitable for “Malay” culture. Each participant was asked to select two images to talk about the issue.

In this study, 14 photos were used as stimuli for questioning in the interviews. Of these photos, four were taken by ourselves, four were photos sourced from the Internet, and six photos were obtained from the local area news website (see also Cretin et al. 2017; Mohammad et al. 2019) who selected their photographs from the Internet for their research using the photo elicitation method. In the individual interviews, participants were asked to choose 5 photos from the pool of 14 and discuss what each photo meant to them, in the group interviews participants were asked to choose 2 photos. This method helped to bring context to the interview questions and allowed for a better understanding of the world as seen by the Congolese participants.

Prior to the data collection period, the first author actively engaged with the community. This involved attending multiple community events including a

Congolese community dinner and a community information session with the region's local Member of Parliament. These events provided an opportunity to introduce herself to the Congolese community. Furthermore, these events provided her with a greater understanding of the broader issues facing the Congolese community in the regional area. Her involvement with the Congolese community provided context to this research and made the research process meaningful to her.

Some main findings from this study are discussed in the following sections. Please note that to refer to some young people in the study in these sections, a pseudo name to protect the true identity of each participant is used.

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## 4 Social Connection and Friendship Diversity

Social connections that cross borders of class, culture, and age are referred to as bridging capital (Putnam 2000; Spaaij 2011). Establishing social connections with other cultural groups is essential for refugees to integrate into their communities (Ager and Strang 2004; Bansel et al. 2016; Drolet and Moorthi 2018; Uzelac et al. 2018; Borsch et al. 2020). All young people interviewed for this study described their friendship group as culturally diverse and they all extremely valued this. According to Monifa: "It's really good having people from different cultures and religions, like you learn a lot from them and they learn from you." Kanye supported this: "You almost pretty much understand where most people come from in the world."

The participants valued the support they received from their friends. Most reflected on the practical support they received from their friends upon arrival in the regional town. Many also reflected on the influence their friends had on their language acquisition. Lawrence stated: "So as an African it's really good to be friends with Australians, because they are the people who are going to teach you English." However, for some participants, language was a barrier to consolidating friendships. Kieran discussed his relationship with an Australian friend: "For me it's difficult, if she calls I cannot pick up my phone because I cannot understand what she's saying."

Bonding capital refers to a person's supportive social networks that are most often homogenous and are characterized by strong ties that have typically been in place for a long time (Spaaij 2011; Major et al. 2013). Bonding relationships with one's own ethnic community provide an important sense of belonging for refugees (Spaaij 2011; Bansel et al. 2016; Drolet and Moorthi 2018; Uzelac et al. 2018; Borsch et al. 2020). Several young people spoke of the instant connection they had with Congolese people. Even if they did not know each other prior to arriving in the town, their shared experiences enabled them to form a bond.

All of the participants appreciated their Congolese and non-Congolese friends and recognized the support they had received from them over the years. Regina used the following image to describe the support she received from her friends (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1** Support from friends.  
(Source: Shepparton news  
2014)



Okay this one, friendship. I honestly don't know what I would have done if I didn't have the friends that I have today or back then. Friendship is really big to me. I've been through so much but my friends are really understanding of that. (Regina)

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## 5 Community Participation and Social Integration

All of the participants had taken part in community-based activities at some point, with most still participating in activities such as sport, music, or cultural activities. To many of them, community activities assisted them to integrate into the community (Brough et al. 2003; Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017; Farello et al. 2019). Most young people discussed the sense of belonging they felt in their chosen activities. They appreciated the way in which community participation provided them with an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and talents to the wider regional community. There was general agreement among the young people that participation in community-based activities increased their level of integration in the community. Michael discussed how he used his talent for singing as a bridge in order to become friends with people who had similar interests.



Yes, I can say yes because like when we meet with one of the Australians we just, if you just tell he or her that you are a singer that person will feel much interested in you and say 'Wow are you serious? Can you do that for me?' And when you sing a little bit then you just feel it and then wow you are good and we just become friends.

Most participants played a sport of some kind. The team nature of the sport was a common theme among these young people. The level of trust generated within a sports team is thought to break down cultural barriers and enable friendships to be made (Block and Gibbs 2017; Farello et al. 2019). Obasi compared sports teams to families: "When you wear that jersey you feel like a family." Many young refugees also reflected on the way friendships formed through community-based activities could be transferred to other aspects of life. Halim stated: "If you play a sport and you have a club event or whatever, you make friends, and once you're friends you don't need a club event for you guys to catch up."

The young peoples' socio-cultural background influenced how they chose to participate in the community. Soccer and music were the most common activities among the group. Soccer is a very popular sport in Congo, and music and dancing are integral elements of Congolese culture. Several young refugees, like Obasi, discussed how they: "Grew up playing soccer." Playing soccer provided the participants with an important link to their culture.

This concept could also be applied to music. Music, like sport, has the potential to override cultural barriers (Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Henderson et al. 2017). Music represented a sense of nostalgia for some participants. For Olina, music reminded her of "back home." Through singing and dancing, many participants felt they were representing their heritage and their culture.

Most of the young people displayed a strong sense of pride in their culture and were eager to demonstrate their skills and talents to their community. Participating in community-based activities allowed them to do this. The following statement reflects Sosuke's pride in Congolese peoples' natural soccer skills:

Every Congolese [person] it seems that we can play soccer, like we have this, I don't know the word, we have this coordination that is just yeah, like it's rare to meet a Congolese guy who can't really play the ball, I just haven't really met one. . .It's just something that we have I guess.

Hussein used the following image to discuss his community's skills and talents (Figs. 2 and 3).

I know these people they are the X band they sing around, he's my friend and that's his brother up there. And they have a band where they go around singing Christian songs to like churches. . .So yeah, they're pretty cool guys, this guy he can sing as good as Michael Jackson, and this guy can probably dance as good as Chris Brown so. . .

Community participation also provided an important outlet for young people. They discussed how their participation in things like sport, music, and art allowed



**Fig. 2** Image of Congolese band. (Source: McPherson Media Group, 2014)

**Fig. 3** Image of footballers  
(McPherson Media Group,  
2014)



them to escape reality. Regina and Kanye discussed the positive effect that their hobbies had on their mental health:

When I played [soccer] I felt like it was something that I really loved. I felt like nothing else was bothering me. I just did it because I could. I didn't have to worry about everything else, not I have homework or I have this, it was just there and then. (Regina)

It's chilled, it's like music is a life you know? It's like music makes me, it almost like takes me out of the norm and takes my mind somewhere else pretty much. (Kanye)

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## 6 Community Participation: Challenges

Many young people saw community participation as an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and talents to the wider community. However, there was a sense among some that there were not sufficient opportunities in the town to do this. For some, this was due to a lack of information. Many Congolese people wanted to be more involved in the community, "but they don't know where to go." Gender was also identified as a barrier to playing sport:

Um mostly the boys, mostly all the boys that I see get involved in sport. But a lot of girls do not try. A lot of girls when they come at a mature age they don't want to try. (Lolie)

For others, perceived negative opinions about Africans affected their level of participation. Lawrence participated in the community in order to change these opinions:

First off they think that maybe we are lazy, we can't do anything. I've found that from a few students. And so once we get up and do it, they get to feel like oh yeah they can do something.

This desire to have his skills recognized by the wider community was shared by Michael:

Yeah also like me, I can play football, I can sing, I can dance, I can play everything. I don't know I just have a lot of skills. So these people are surprised, 'Oh you can do this, this as well?'... All I can say is they should give us chances to show our strengths.

Despite this perceived resistance, many young people displayed a remarkable amount of courage and determination to get the most of their involvement in the community. Lawrence, an aspiring Australian Football League umpire, used the following image to share his view:

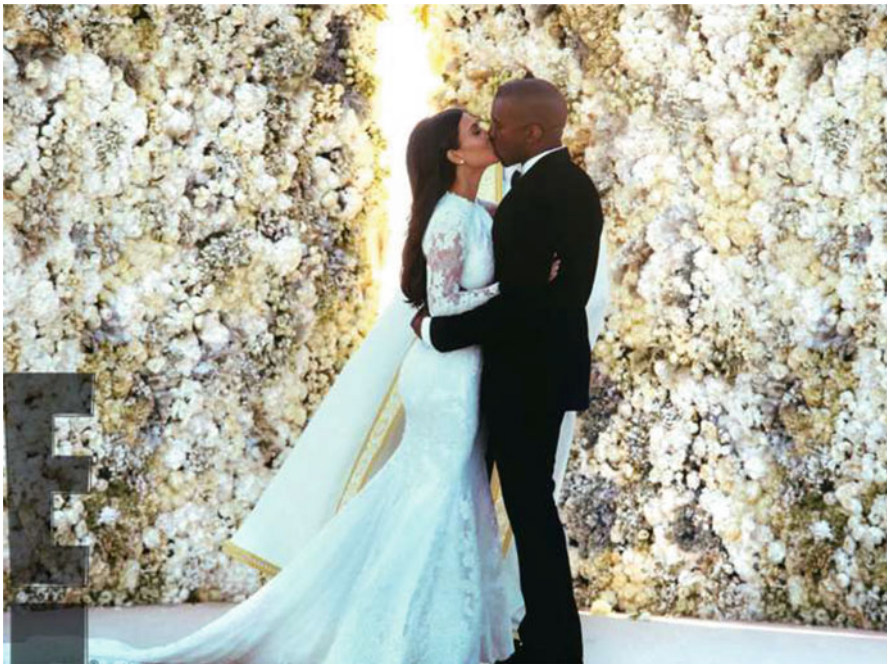
Well footy (football) reminds me that yeah I have to push myself harder in order to make it to the highest league, or one day to be seen on the TV as an African person. If I do it when someone else hasn't done it I'll be the first Congolese person to make it to leagues, which are shown on TV. Especially in X I'll be the first African that had done umpiring in footy. So that's what this picture tells me, it pushes me to keep pushing harder.

## 7 Resilience and Young People with Refugee Backgrounds

The participants all shared similar values and personal characteristics. Each individual valued multiculturalism and had a high level of respect for other cultures. The resilience of the young people and their determination to succeed in Australia was also a common theme (Koh et al. 2013; Sleijpen et al. 2017; Marley and Beatus Mauki 2018; Vindevogel and Verelst 2020).

The young people valued the cultural diversity within their regional community. Kanye discussed how in a multicultural environment “people are forced to learn what other people’s cultures are.” This was significant as many young people acknowledged that it was important to get to know someone personally before passing judgment. According to Halim, “everyone has their own story and their own reasons” for doing what they do. Monifa used the following image to express her feelings on multiculturalism (Fig. 4).

Well it’s multicultural as you can see it’s interracial. . . So to me, when I look at this picture I just see that you know love is not about the culture or should I say the skin colour, it’s what’s inside. And also friendship as well, it’s not about the skin colour of a person, it’s about their heart. And also it’s not about their religion, it’s mostly about who you are and what kind of person you really are. That’s what really matters.



**Fig. 4** Pop culture image of multiculturalism (Kardashian 2014)

The young people were grateful for the support they had received since arriving in Australia and determined to give something back to the community. They were acutely aware of the opportunity they had been given in Australia. Lolie discussed how her life in Australia compared to Congo:

We used to dream about having food every day, not having to sleep without eating, or having electricity, having lights at night, they used to be our dreams like having those. But when you come here there's more. It's like we didn't even dream enough. And now we can dream even more.

Whether they were studying, working, or looking for work, each young person displayed a strong work ethic and commitment to making the most of their life in Australia. This determination to succeed can be seen in Obasi's comment:

I guess because I came from Africa and you don't want to come here and just waste time. Like you see other kids go and start drinking and quit school. For me I feel like from where I came from, I want to make something out of myself.

The young people displayed a remarkable amount of resilience throughout their lives. Many of them acknowledged that their past experiences had made them stronger.

I don't want people to feel sorry for me because I have had the best life. I feel like that's how my life was supposed to be. Because if I didn't have everything that happened to me when I was younger, everything, you know the war and the experience that we had when we were younger, if we didn't have that, I don't know how I would be...It's made me who I am (Lolie).

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## 8 What Do We Learn from Young People with Refugee Backgrounds?

Our study revealed three significant findings. First, young people with refugee backgrounds rely on a variety of social support networks in order to effectively integrate into regional communities. Second community-based activities have great potential to enhance the social capital of young people with refugee backgrounds in regional areas. Third, despite being faced with a number of barriers, young people with refugee backgrounds possess a unique form of resilience and determination that sets them in good stead to succeed in Australia.

Research suggests that building and maintaining relationships with friends are important for providing young refugees with a sense of belonging and support (Brough et al. 2003; CMY 2006; RCOA 2009). In line with previous research, the young people in this study identified their friends as significant sources of support upon their arrival in the regional town (Brough et al. 2003). Specifically, they mentioned how their friends helped them learn the English language and integrate into the community. All of the young people described their friendship groups as

multicultural. Putnam (2000) refers to social connections that cross-cultural borders as bridging social capital. Social connections such as these are essential to the integration of refugees (Ager and Strang 2004; CMY 2006; Correa-velez et al. 2010; Wilkinson et al. 2017; Børsch et al. 2020).

All of the young people discussed the importance of having Congolese friends, and they appeared to have a unique relationship with their Congolese friends, which contributed positively to their sense of identity and belonging (Correa-velez et al. 2010; Wilkinson et al. 2017; Børsch et al. 2020). These unique relationships are what Putnam (2000) refers to as bonding social capital. Putnam suggests that strong, homogenous bonding ties such as those with family, long-term friends, and cultural groups provide an individual with a sense of comfort and support that is not attainable through other social networks.

In regional areas, sport and recreation facilitates social inclusion and shapes community identity (Regional Sport Victoria 2013). It is, therefore, unsurprising that all of the young people in this study had participated in community-based activities at some point, with most still participating in sport, music, or cultural activities. Community participation through sport, recreation, and other activities has been identified as a priority area for newly arrived young people in Australia (CMY 2006; Nathan et al. 2013; Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017; Farello et al. 2019; Spaaij et al. 2019). There was general agreement among the young people that participation in community-based activities had a positive effect on their settlement experience. Community participation enabled them to make friends with a diverse range of people, which in turn enhanced their social capital, and facilitated their integration into the community. As Putnam (2000) theorizes, bridging capital enables the crossing of social groups through the sharing of mutual interests, ideas, and innovation. Studies conducted by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2007) and Nathan et al. (2013) revealed that sport and recreation had a positive effect on the bridging social capital of young refugees in Sydney and Melbourne (see also Nathan et al. 2013; Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017; Farello et al. 2019; Spaaij et al. 2019). The participants in their studies took part in multicultural community-based activities and were able to build cross-cultural social networks. The authors contend that community participation is important as it provides young people with refugee backgrounds with an opportunity to expand their social networks, which are often diminished during the process of forced migration (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003; Ryan and D'Angelo 2018).

The young people also reflected on how they were able to strengthen their relationships with Congolese community members through community participation. Many participants enjoyed participating in Congolese activities such as choirs, bands, and community events. Spaaij (2011) and Spaaij et al. (2019) also identified the potential of community activities to strengthen relationships within ethnic groups (see also Brough et al. 2003; Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017). According to Putnam's (2000) theory of bonding capital, relationships with one's own ethnic community provide an important sense of belonging for migrants and refugees. Ager and Strang (2004) identified both



bonding and bridging capital as key indicators of integration for refugees in their study in the UK.

Building and maintaining friendships was not the only reason that young people in this study chose to participate in community-based activities. Sport, music, and art were identified by a number of them as methods to cope with the various stresses in their lives (Brough et al. 2003; Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017; Farello et al. 2019; Spaaij et al. 2019). These activities provided the young people with an important outlet where they could focus on the activity itself and nothing else. These findings are in line with previous research, which suggests that community participation is a common coping mechanism for young refugees (Brough et al. 2003; Nathan et al. 2013; Lenette and Sunderland 2016; Block and Gibbs 2017; Henderson et al. 2017; Spaaij et al. 2019).

While many young people in this study had established links to the wider community by participating in community-based activities, some of them had limited opportunities to get involved in the community. This was particularly true for those who had been living in a regional town for less than 5 years. For some, a barrier to their participation in the community was their lack of knowledge of the opportunities available to them. Coventry et al. (2002) and the Refugee Council of Australia (2009) have also revealed that young refugees are often unaware of opportunities to participate in the wider community. Gender was also identified as a potential barrier to participation. While most of the girls in this study did participate in the community through musical or cultural activities, few participated in sport. Studies conducted by Spaaij (2011), Nathan et al. (2013), and Farello et al. (2019) identified fewer opportunities for females to develop social capital through sport when compared to males. Based on the self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (2000) offer an explanation as to why some people were less inclined to participate in community-based activities than others. They claim that humans have a vulnerability to passivity when they are in an environment that is not conducive to their activity (Deci and Ryan 2000). This suggests that due to a lack of information and encouragement, unconnected young people with refugee backgrounds, particularly young females, are at risk of becoming uninvolved in the community.

Another barrier to participation was the perceived negative perceptions held by members of the wider community about Africans. While the majority of young people in this study had not experienced discrimination when participating in sport or other community activities, for some of them, discrimination was a significant barrier to their participation. The negative effect that this perceived discrimination had on their involvement in the community can also be explained by the social determination theory. Deci and Ryan (2000) suggest that self-motivation flourishes when an individual is in a secure and relatable environment; however, certain environmental conditions can subdue and diminish an individual's self-motivation. Perceived discrimination in the sport and other community-based activities may have diminished the motivation of some participants to get involved in the community. The barriers to participation that have been identified above are important given the potential of community participation to enhance the settlement experiences of young refugees. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2006) identified a need for



tailored recreational activities that meet the needs of young refugees in Melbourne. The findings from this study suggest that this need also exists in regional areas.

The young people in this study displayed a level of resilience and adaptation that has been identified in the literature as a unique characteristic of young refugee people (Coventry et al. 2002; Koh et al. 2013; Phinney et al. 2006; RCOA 2009; Sleijpen et al. 2017; Marley and Beatus Mauki 2018; Vindevogel and Verelst 2020). The personal values and strengths of the young people in this study positively affected their settlement experiences. Basing on the theory of acculturation, Berry (2005) suggests that integration is the most desirable acculturation strategy for refugees. Integration involves maintaining one's own culture while simultaneously adapting to the host culture (Berry 2005). Most participants adopted this strategy and had successfully integrated it into the regional community. This process involved overcoming cultural differences, managing expectations, and establishing new social networks. These actions are typical of young migrants when acculturating to a new community (Phinney et al. 2006). The young people had been able to do all of this while still maintaining a strong connection to their Congolese culture. The ability of the young people to balance their Congolese culture and the Australian culture is testament to the adaptability of this group of young people and also to the support they received.

Literature suggests that due to the nature of their past experiences, young people with refugee backgrounds often arrive in Australia accompanied by a fierce determination to succeed (RCOA 2009; Bansel et al. 2016). The young people in this study were committed to making the most of their lives in Australia. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), determination is an innate characteristic of humans and will develop when an individual is in an environment conducive to its expression. The young people were aware of the opportunity they had been given to succeed in Australia, and were determined to utilize every opportunity available to them. This sense of determination has been identified in previous research. Coventry et al. (2002) revealed that 90% of young refugees commit to full-time study upon arrival in Australia, and Hugo (2011) revealed that second-generation refugees are 10% more likely to attain post-school qualifications than the average Australian. The findings from this study and previous research (Coventry et al. 2002; Hugo 2011; Bansel et al. 2016) reveal that Congolese young people and young refugees in general possess a strong sense of determination and drive that should be harnessed and supported by the wider Australian community.

The resilience displayed by the young people in this study assisted them to manage their new lifestyles in Australia. When asked to describe themselves the participants used words such as "tough," "optimistic," and "confident." All of them spoke positively about the future and it seemed that if anything, their past experiences had only made them stronger. After observing the acculturation experiences of immigrant youth in the UK, Phinney et al. (2006) noted that young migrants do not identify themselves as pawns of their circumstances. The same could be said for the young people in this study. This group of young people were not passive victims of their refugee past; rather they were dynamic agents, actively shaping meaningful lives for themselves in Australia.

## 9 Conclusion and Future Directions

From other interviewing experiences, I know that, without the photographs, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to sustain interviews over a long period of time and to accomplish the kind of depth we were able to achieve. With the photographs, the interviews moved almost effortlessly, opening up subjects, in many cases, I would have never anticipated. (Harper 1988, p. 65)

In this chapter, the authors have discussed the use of the photo elicitation method as an inclusive research approach in the research concerning young people with refugee backgrounds living in regional towns in Australia. Through photographs, the authors have demonstrated the challenges and resilience of young people with refugee backgrounds in their attempts to settle into a new life in Australia. As Harper suggests (above), the authors found that photographs enhance understanding of the lived experiences of the young people who took part in this study.

To the best of authors' knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to explore the social experiences of young people with refugee backgrounds in a regional Australian town. Given the current global migration climate and the increasing numbers of refugees settling in regional areas, this chapter provides an important contribution to the literature guiding refugee policy and practice in this area. It highlights that social capital, including bonding and bridging capital, is important for young people with refugee backgrounds whose social relationships are often diminished during the process of forced migration. This chapter identifies community participation as a potential means for restoring social capital for young people with refugee backgrounds, particularly in regional Australia where community participation is common. Finally, the chapter highlights the strength and resilience of young people with refugee backgrounds, revealing their great potential to succeed in Australia.

Future research would benefit from an exploration of the social experiences of refugees of varying ethnicities, living in a range of regional towns, over a longer period of time with the use of the photo elicitation method. The authors have found that the method was valuable in allowing the young people in the study to articulate their needs to make the social connection to the wider community so that their settlement in Australia can be enhanced. The authors would highly recommend the adoption of this method in future research concerning young people with refugee backgrounds around the globe.

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