

ABSTRACT

UNGER, CRYSTAL DAWN. Cultural Models of Assistance: Incorporating Meaning in the United States Refugee Resettlement Process. (Under the direction of James Wallace, Ph.D.)

The cultural model, or culturally constructed meaning, of “assistance” determines how refugees lend legitimacy to Refugee Assistance Programs (RAP), thereby impeding cross-cultural communications between the two groups. Furthermore, pre-departure Cultural Orientation (CO) programs intended to prepare refugees for resettlement transitions provide instruction using vague terminology, which reinforces preexisting—and often misleading—cultural metaphors of assistance and welcome. I propose that the CO curriculum and instruction must begin playing a role in rectifying the disparities between refugees’ and domestic RAP staff’s cultural models of assistance and welcome in order to manage the expectations each group has of the other. Fieldwork was conducted in the spring and summer of 2012 in the Triangle and Piedmont areas of North Carolina. I conducted formal interviews with a targeted, stratified sample of refugee men and women, as well as with resettlement agency staff members. Participant observation techniques included attendance at employment workshops, ESL classes, and housing set-ups and visits to RAP agencies and refugee households. This study suggests that misunderstandings and cultural miscommunications result when refugees’ and RAP staff’s cultural models of assistance conflict, thereby ensuring a loss of RAP credibility in the eyes of refugees.

Cultural Models of Assistance: Incorporating Meaning in the United States Refugee
Resettlement Process

by
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DEDICATION

To Rob for many evenings of fish and steamed broccoli.

BIOGRAPHY

Crystal Unger is a native of Boston, Massachusetts. She currently resides in North Carolina with her husband Rob, along with Roger and Penelope, the “not-so-wonder” wonder cats.

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¹ Pseudonym

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CO	Cultural Orientation
DHS	United States Department of Homeland Security
DHHS	United States Department of Health and Human Services
DOS	United States Department of State
ESL	English as a Second Language
LPR	Legal Permanent Resident
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
RAP	Refugee Assistance Programs
RSC	Resettlement Support Center
TAG	Temporary Assistance Grant
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
USCIS	United States Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services

DRAMATIS PERSONAE²

Amsala	Sudanese male. "Old guy." Resettled three years earlier,,,. Ch.5
Angela	Eritrean (infant) female. Parents resettled two years earlier..... Ch. 4
Bobbi	American female. World Relief caseworker..... Ch. 4
Cha La	Karen female. Resettled five years earlier..... Ch. 5,7
David	Sudanese male. Resettled fifty days earlier..... Ch. 5
Edgard	Sudanese male. Resettled one month earlier..... Ch. 5,6
Emma	American female. Refuge and Relief caseworker..... Ch. 4
Foud	Iraqi male. Resettled less than three months earlier..... Ch. 4
Francesca	Somali female. Resettled three months earlier..... Ch. 4
Franklin	American male. Refuge and Relief managing caseworker..... Ch. 4,7
Lena	Karen female. Resettled five years earlier..... Ch. 5,6
Lili	Chin female. Resettled two years earlier..... Ch. 5
Luca	Sudanese male. "Old guy." Resettled three years earlier..... Ch. 5,6
Marcus	Sudanese male. "Old guy." Resettled three years earlier..... Ch. 5,6
Michael	East African male. World Relief managing caseworker..... Ch. 4,5
Miriam	Eritrean female. Resettled two years earlier..... Ch. 4
Mohammed	Sudanese male. Resettled one month earlier..... Ch. 5,6
Monica	Eritrean female. Resettled one year earlier..... Ch. 4
Nadir	Refuge and Relief caseworker. Ethnicity unknown..... Ch. 4

² All individual and organization names are pseudonyms

Nafy	Sudanese female. Resettled three years earlier.....	Ch. 5
Nijam	Sudanese male. Resettled one month earlier.....	Ch. 5,6
Olivia	American female. Contact for local Karen organization.....	Ch. 3
Paul	Sudanese male. Unknown resettlement date.....	Ch. 5
Paw	Bhutanese male. Resettled one month earlier.....	Ch. 4
Phan	Karen male. Director of local Karen organization.....	Ch. 3
Portia	American female. World Relief caseworker and grant coordinator.....	Ch. 4
Quinton	East African male. World Relief caseworker.....	Ch. 1,3,4
Samir	Sudanese male. Resettled eight months earlier.....	Ch. 1,5,6
Thoo	Karen male. Resettled five years earlier.....	Ch. 5,6
To Kew	Karen female. Resettled five years earlier.....	Ch. 5,6
Refuge and Relief	Refugee resettlement service provider located in Raleigh, North Carolina	
World Relief	Refugee resettlement service provider located in Greensboro, North Carolina	

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“This is not what ‘welcome’ means” shared a frustrated Samir bemoaning the lack of monetary assistance he had received when he entered the United States. Samir was not complaining about the amount he had received, but rather the way in which the money was distributed and how this distribution was managed by the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) staff. I pressed him: “What does welcome mean to you Samir?” He replied, “It means you come into my home. I give you everything I have. What is mine is for you.”

My own American idea of welcome is wrapped up in a similar desire to accommodate my guests and to take care of immediate needs, but I certainly do not believe that what is mine belongs to my guests. The difference between Samir’s and my understanding is a mere reflection of the larger conflict that Samir experiences regularly between himself and the local RAP, World Relief. The frustration is not one sided either. On several occasions, Quinton, a caseworker at World Relief, commented on what he termed the “unrealistic expectations” of newly arriving refugees. In fact, during our first phone call, Quinton candidly remarked that he believes the pre-departure Cultural Orientation (CO) programs do not adequately prepare refugees for life in the United States. He pressed me, stressing the importance of uncovering what refugees are really being told during CO instruction.

I began my interviews with refugees and RAP staff by asking for information about the CO programs in Africa and Southeast Asia. However, I soon discovered that both refugees and RAP providers have what cognitive anthropologists like Naomi Quinn call different cultural models for understanding assistance. In other words, caseworkers and

refugees have separate cognitive understandings for the meaning of assistance, which are shaped by their experiences and cultural constructions, and are shared with other individuals in their cultural or ethnic groups (Quinn 2005:3). In addition, my interviews with refugees demonstrate that CO classes may regularly be giving accurate information about the reality of resettlement in the United States. However, the vagueness of terms used in these classes, like welcome and arrival, do not help prepare refugees for encountering the RAP cultural model of assistance. By not defining these terms, CO instruction reinforces refugees' own cultural construction or model of assistance. As a consequence, misunderstandings and cultural miscommunications result when these conflicting cultural models of assistance collide, thereby ensuring a loss of RAP credibility in the eyes of refugees.

Traditionally, RAP staff have seen refugees as the victims of conflict, whose unrealistic expectations for life in the United States are manifestations of mental, emotional, and physical trauma. Increasingly, however, RAP caseworkers are beginning to believe that pre-departure CO programs fail to address what life is really like in the United States and are, thus, inadvertently setting refugee expectations too high. While cultural orientation has a major role in helping refugees adapt, research must also demonstrate where the differences and similarities lie in the RAP staff and refugees' cultural models. Uncovering the metaphors and propositions for assistance that constitute these two models may provide refugees and RAP staff with a new form of knowledge that may help establish a more comprehensive and transparent resettlement program.

This paper is organized so as to demonstrate how discourse analysis can reveal the cognitive maps or cultural models of the RAP staff and refugees. Beginning with chapter

two, I will outline past research on refugee adaptation, and demonstrate how typical immigration studies administer the theory of cultural modeling without using discourse analysis. By providing more recent research that employs cognitive cultural modeling through discourse analysis, I will argue that such methodology better reveals similarities and differences between cultural groups who often experience issues of miscommunication. By incorporating these cognitive structures, formal cross-cultural communication may provide more effective mechanisms for understanding and negotiating difference.

In chapter three I will explain my methods of data collection and analysis in which I employed extensive informal and formal interviews of refugees and RAP staff. I will also demonstrate how I used these interviews to analyze for propositions and metaphors which are useful in determining the implicit cognitive cultural models for each group. Furthermore, I conducted observations of various events, interactions, and administrative functions in order to verify the cultural model schemas that were initially revealed in the interviews.

In chapters four and five I provide detailed descriptions and analysis of the RAP staff and refugee cultural models respectively. Throughout these two chapters I make extensive use of quotations and observations that best demonstrate the schema of each group's cultural model.

I use chapter six to compare the two cultural models within the context of the CO programs. Both the RAP staff and refugees tend to blame COs for the miscommunications that occur between each other. Here I will demonstrate that because CO programs do much to reinforce the cultural models of each group, refugees begin to lose faith in the resettlement system, and as a result, begin to believe that RAP staff have very little legitimate power to

effect change. I will also use this chapter to dispel the belief that CO training is the sole contributor to the misunderstandings that result between RAP members and refugees. I argue rather, that each group must also play an active role in reconciling the other group's model to their own.

Finally, in chapter seven, I will provide an overview of the schemas I uncovered in the RAP caseworkers' and refugees' cultural models. I will also call the reader's attention to the shared characteristics between the two groups' understandings of assistance and make the case for formal cross-cultural communication based on cognitive cultural models.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the significance of cognitive cultural modeling to the field of domestic refugee studies, I will outline how past research on refugee immigration into the United States has most often been concerned with the success of adaptation, particularly among the children of this group. The significance of understanding integration of individuals who did not actively choose resettlement in the United States is important to the field; however, it does little to demonstrate the systemic hurdles that are encountered by a group of individuals who depend more heavily on the social service sector than traditional immigrants. Interestingly, some immigration studies have administered the theory of cultural modeling in regards to educational adaptation without using discourse analysis. While this approach begins to uncover what a group most values, it does not allow for cross-cultural analysis. By turning to more recent research that employs discourse analysis through the use of cognitive cultural modeling, I will demonstrate that researchers like Michael Paolisso and Linda Garro have employed this methodology to reveal the similarities and differences between two cultural groups who traditionally experience issues of miscommunication.

Refugee studies is a burgeoning field encompassing a cross-disciplinary approach from anthropology to geography to mental health and beyond. Domestically, refugees have been examined most often as victims of trauma, or in terms of second generation adaptation. However, adaptation studies need to do more than understand where individuals sit along a continuum of cultural change. Oftentimes, adaptation studies also demonstrate how immigrant groups use social networks of earlier arrived families and friends, thereby

allowing immigrants to access complex safety nets that promote the self-sufficiency of newly arrived co-ethnics (Bubinas 2005). Research on refugee integration into the United States has followed similar paths, outlining how refugees fit within well-established methodologies of adaptation without sufficiently demonstrating the differences between voluntary immigration and that of third country resettlement typically experienced by migrating refugees.

Recently, immigrant adaptation studies have begun to follow the theory of cultural model adaptation as created by Margaret Gibson and John Ogbu. Their model is educationally based and narrowly argues that because most immigrants, including refugees, are voluntary minorities who have entered the United States of their own accord. As such they are willing to accommodate institutions of the white American majority in order to achieve a margin of successful adaptation (Gibson and Ogbu 1991). Unfortunately, volunteerism is not a status that refugees enjoy: “Refugeeism occurs when some aspect of the social environment of the point of origin presents such an imminent threat to survival that a population seeks refuge elsewhere. Typically, the flight is precipitous and unplanned” (Morrissey 1983:4). Gibson and Ogbu’s model has found salience among educators and later researchers like McNail, Dunnigan and Mortimer (1994), who effectively demonstrate how 1.5 and second generation children of refugees integrate into American schools. Gibson’s and Ogbu’s work is important, but would benefit from demonstrating how these cultural models are cognitively situated cultural constructs that immigrant groups bring with them when they enter the school system. Lastly, cultural model studies that follow Gibson’s and Ogbu’s theory do little to reveal the conflicting cultural models of school administrators and refugee

parents, thereby limiting our understanding of how such difference may impact cultural adaptation and communication.

In order to understand how immigrant groups like refugees adapt to the United States and how they communicate with American institutions and organizations, researchers must also employ the cognitive cultural model theory introduced by individuals like Strauss, D'Andrade, and Quinn. Cultural modeling of this second sort is based on a shared cognitive framework that allows individuals within a group "to process and organize information, make decisions, and guide behavior" (Paolisso, Weeks, and Packard 2013:15). In other words, cultural models demonstrate how cultural or social groups explain how and why the world works in particular ways. Furthermore, these models, while flexible, tend to be stable and shared among the majority of members of a social or cultural group (Strauss & Quinn 1997). Importantly, cultural models are implicit and unconscious, what Paolisso (2007:127) calls, "taken for granted" constructions. As such the models not only shape how individuals in a group reference the world, they may also be projected onto individuals outside the cultural or social group. Understanding cognitive frameworks is not an attempt to remove agency from individuals within the group, nor is it proposed as an effort to boil down differences and misunderstandings to trite references of cultural difference. Rather, it allows researchers to understand how cultural constructions are formed while also providing insights into how individuals use these constructions to operate within the world (motivational); how to give meaning to oneself or an event (orientational); how to define the merits of an event or thing (evaluative); or as a mechanism that creates emotional reactions (affective) (D'Andrade 1992).

Cultural models are a series of schema within the minds of individuals. This framework is constructed through group norms, practices, shared experiences, and events. These schemas are a series of building blocks of ideas that build upon one another in order to form a cultural model. Paolisso, Weeks and Packard provide the most concise understanding of this structure:

Schemas are cognitive frames with default values or open slots which can be filled with appropriate specifics. They may consist of images – *car*, or propositions – the *family breadwinner*. Examples of lower level schemas are filling a mug, starting a call, paying a toll. These are the building blocks of a simple cultural model of *getting to work in the morning*. This simple model is nested within a more complex model of *doing my job*, which is nested within a higher order cultural model of *pursuing my career or caring for my family*. [2013:15]

In order to locate these schemas, researchers must listen to what interviewees are saying and form linkages to more implicit understandings of how something operates or what the interviewees believe about a particular topic. The model is accessed or performed through an individual's explanation about the subject at hand (Paolisso 2007:128). Asking an informant to remember “what one knows about something and relying on this information to make sense of the present [has] the potential to illuminate interrelationships among cognitive processes, personal knowledge, cultural understandings, and social context” (Garro 2000:276). Furthermore, Paolisso (2007) maintains that this explanation reveals what the interviewee takes for granted, most often by assuming that the interviewer should already know the implicit meaning behind a phrase or idea.

By focusing on what an individual infers or on the metaphors or clichés he or she uses, the researcher can determine those underlying components that make up a schema, and

the schema that forms the cultural model. Naomi Quinn (1996:397) proposes that schemas are also revealed when informants may not be able to fully articulate why they think the world or another person or organization should operate according to the informant's norms and values. In Claudia Strauss' (1990) research, an individual's narrative which highlights his or her dissatisfaction with and conflicting views of American politics and economy will demonstrate his or her cultural model of "how one gets ahead." Strauss and Quinn (1997) advocate that cultural understanding from a discursive perspective is derived by looking for statements or proposition followed by explanation of said proposition or statement of belief. Metaphors also provide fertile ground for cultural model analysis as evidenced in Quinn's study of how people talk about marriage. Quinn's (2005:48) study demonstrates that her interviewees framed marriages as "lasting" or "not lasting" with schemas built upon notions of sharedness, compatibility, difficulty, effort, etc. Informants used metaphors to discuss these schemas, including "meshing" in relation to compatibility and "rough spots" in relation to difficulty. Quinn's subjects did not always rely on metaphor, and in such instances, framed their unconscious concepts of "lastingness" in expository statements like, "You have decided that this is the person that you are going to exert yourself to spend your life with."

Because these models are not explicitly stated, or even fully recognized by the group, discourse analysis is necessary for distilling those taken-for-granted understandings about the world and inserting them within the structure of a cultural model. The cultural model approach provides the opportunity to move beyond seeing difference as the inability to communicate with others outside the group. Instead, it charts what Craig Storti (1994) calls the "ethnocentric impulse," or in the case of RAP staff, the tendency to see refugees as

people whose unrealistic expectations can only be met with a dose of American reality. What is relevant about Storti's work is that, whether he subscribes to cultural modeling or not, the implications for not understanding different social or cultural groups has very real implications for legitimacy and relationship building.

Superficially, these cultural miscommunications may be addressed through sensitivity training or improved cross-cultural training as outlined by Storti. Such an approach allows those concerned to become aware of the "ethnocentric impulse" or the tendency to project our own norms onto individuals outside our own culture (Storti 1994:131). Storti's approach is necessary to rectifying the resulting miscommunication, however, he neglects to demonstrate how these cultural differences or norms are created. Understanding the cultural model is the missing step in uncovering why the miscommunication results in the first place. Storti (2001:20) is unable to name or analyze the phenomena that make humans believe that what they repeatedly experience, or what they know to be real, holds more truth for them than what they have heard about or experienced only once or twice. By understanding that this truth is actually a cognitive cultural model, researchers may be able to avoid cross-cultural judgments similar to those Ann Drake (1986) encountered when investigating healing medical practices in Russia. In her study Russian doctors value traditional medicine as part of the science of medicine. American researchers may have a tendency to undervalue the contributions this field of study is making. As a result, Drake argues for greater linguistic understanding in the sciences. While linguistic understanding is important to yielding greater cross-cultural understanding, we also need to be aware of the cognitive models that create these differences in linguistics and in practice.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In Fiscal Year 2011, North Carolina was the tenth largest receiver of refugees entering the United States. North Carolina accepted 2,120 individuals out of 58,238, or 3.8% of all arrivals (see Appendix A). The Triangle area, consisting of Durham, Chapel Hill, Carborro, Raleigh, and Wake Forest accepted 598 refugees, 28.3% of all FY 2012 arrivals in North Carolina. The city of Greensboro, located in the Piedmont region of North Carolina accepted 348 refugees, 16.4% of all FY arrivals to the state. (*Refugee Processing Center* online, accessed March 2013). I began my research by volunteering from May – August 2012 at Refuge and Relief, one of the largest refugee service providers in the Triangle. I later expanded my research site to Greensboro, North Carolina, which enabled me to draw on a wider informant sample.

Staff at Refuge and Relief were concerned that refugees might feel obligated to participate in my interviews in exchange for the resettlement services provided by Refuge and Relief. I realized that my volunteer status could become a conflict of interest, and I abandoned this approach to securing refugee interviewees. However, my volunteer position did allow me to conduct, with explicit written permission, participant observations and to secure interviews with staff members. Refuge and Relief also allowed me to assist where needed at events like World Refugee Day, in addition to organizing and inventorying English as a Second Language (ESL) learning aids, as well as household items for new arrivals' apartments. I also participated in purchasing household items for these apartments. My other duties included assisting refugees with résumé creation, filling out employment applications,

and functioning weekly as a one-to-one ESL tutor with a new arrival. My observations focused on the administrative functions of Refuge and Relief including: intake, housing arrangements, facilitating connections with local social services, cultural education, programs, self-sufficiency planning, ESL programs, employment services, sponsorships, volunteer management, transportation services, mentoring, and translation. My work here allowed me to become familiar with the terminology and the general experiences of both staff and refugees.

As a volunteer, I also assisted the World Refugee Day celebration in Raleigh, an annual event hosted by various RAP organizations across North Carolina where local and refugee communities gather for a day of musical performances. In addition, local community colleges, RAP providers, social service agencies, ethnic organizations, and craftspeople are permitted to sell wares or provide information to attendees. While I was assisting staff from Refuge and Relief, I was permitted to wander through the building making contacts with organizations and individuals at the vendor stalls. I made only one successful connection with an individual refugee, but luckily, a staff member from Refuge and Relief put me in contact with Mr. Quinton from World Relief. Mr. Quinton expressed interest in my study and said he would be willing to help me contact refugees who had been resettled in Greensboro. Mr. Quinton arranged for me to visit and observe office interactions between staff and clients at World Relief, a second RAP in Greensboro, North Carolina. In addition, I was able to

observe refugees in their homes through my interviews, informal gatherings between neighbors and many dinners over injera³.

As part of my research, I also collected documentation regarding resettlement within the United States. Much of this information is available online and is useful for understanding the administrative process of third country resettlement, pre-departure orientation programs, as well as the standard forms of arrival assistance received by newly arriving refugees. Additional documents were obtained from Refuge and Relief, as well as World Outreach, and provided me with information about the rights and responsibilities of newly arrived refugees, including, housing, ESL, employment, and transportation. Although I have thus far done limited formal analysis of this material, it has been helpful in demonstrating RAP staff's cultural models of assistance.

Initially, I anticipated that mapping the physical layout of refugee communities would yield significant information about the informal networks that refugees forge. I spent the first two months of my fieldwork mapping the housing complexes where the majority of new arrivals are located. During this time I intended to highlight how refugees, who have little choice over their placement, negotiate their dislocation from other refugees or neighborhoods. However, the physical location of refugee housing was not a tangible representation of the marginalization refugees often experience, as I discovered that many new arrivals are often located near their own families or individuals of similar ethnic backgrounds. However, physical marginalization may take other forms, as the available

³ Spongy flat bread made of teff flour, common to Ethiopia and Eritrea.

housing is located in areas of higher than normal violent crime, or in apartment complexes in severe disrepair and with troubling insect issues.

My mapping did reveal that access to RAP agencies, goods and services, jobs, and other refugee communities is achieved by long bus rides or a reliance on kin groups or friendships. Primarily, and perhaps for future study, mapping of this sort is useful for understanding informal networks. For this study, mapping provided me with observations that demonstrated an idea contrary to the cultural model of assistance that some refugee groups possess.

I gained understanding of both groups' cultural models through informal and semi-structured interviews that I conducted between May and August, 2012. I conducted initial interviews with agency staff who have direct experience working with and providing services to refugees. The RAP staff population I interviewed was comprised of both Americans and Africans, but my conversations with this group demonstrated that their ethnic cultural models were secondary to the RAP staff model of assistance. In addition, informal interviews with staff yielded information about grant programs, the general resettlement process, and the types of services that refugees receive upon entering the United States. My semi-structured interviews focused on issues that staff members often encounter when attempting to understand refugee expectations, as well as their personal concerns regarding the formal processes involved in resettling refugees. Similarly, informal interviews with refugees took place from May until August, most often while working as a volunteer with Refuge and Relief. These informal interviews allowed me to ask questions about individuals' expectations, hurdles they encounter, and what they believed are their most pressing needs.

Informal interviews allowed me to see that both refugees and RAP staff were concerned with how each group defines assistance. This insight allowed me to frame my interview schedule for refugees on issues regarding expectations, disappointments, orientation training, and assistance.

I formally interviewed twenty-one refugees and five RAP staff for one-hour blocks of time. Mr. Quinton at World Relief put me in touch with former refugees who regularly assist World Relief staff in translation for new arrivals. All of the interpreters had been living in the Greensboro area for over two years and were able to assist me in contacting other refugees in the area. Interpreters at World Relief are well known within the refugee community and serve to not only translate, but also welcome and orient newcomers, and informally provide transportation, food, money, and encouragement to newcomers. The interpreters used in this study were natives of Burundi, Sudan, Karen of Burma, and Eritrea.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families indicates that 45% men and 55% women refugees resettled in North Carolina in 2010 as Legal Permanent Residents (LPR). However, drawing a sample based on this proportion proved difficult due to limitations of time and hesitation on the part of my informants to allow me to speak with their female family members. Therefore, the majority of my interviewee population is male. Furthermore, I was unable to focus on a single ethnic group. Table 3.1 provides a simple breakdown of my refugee interviewees. For a more complete listing, please see Appendix B.

Table 3.1: Refugee Interviewees' Sex and Country of Origin

Country	Males	Females	Total
Bhutan	1	0	1
Burma (Chin)	0	1	1
Burma (Karen)	1	3	4
Burundi	1	0	1
Chad	1	0	1
Eritrea	2	2	4
Ethiopia	1	0	1
Sudan	8	0	8
TOTAL	15	6	21

I also located interview contacts through internet searches, which revealed a food bank in Orange County with a board member who also served on the Board for a local Karen⁴ organization. Olivia is an American, but has been working with the local Burmese Karen population to establish a non-profit organization designed to provide ESL and Karen language training to the community. Olivia put me in contact with Phan, the director of the Karen organization, which helps organize a local farming operation for Karen families in Chapel Hill and Carboro. Through Phan I visited a local farming operation where Karen families cultivate independent plots from which the produce is sold at the local farmers' market and area restaurants. Phan and Olivia were able to arrange four interviews with Karen individuals in Chapel Hill and Raleigh.

⁴ The Karen are an ethnic group of Burma.

Formal interview participants were interviewed once, although some were visited more than once to observe them in their homes, and their interactions with friends and neighbors. All interviewees were asked to sign a consent form. For those individuals who were illiterate or who spoke limited English, I used an interpreter from either World Relief or from the individual's family. The interpreter read the consent form aloud and gave the choice for the interviewee to sign or to not participate in the study. Whenever I could, I audio recorded the interviews while taking notes; however, in four circumstances, the participants were unwilling to be recorded and I took detailed notes of their responses. All, or portions of each interview, were transcribed and uploaded into Atlas.ti software to assist in basic coding of the interviews. After interviews were completed, I used Atalas.ti text analysis software to code for metaphors, propositions or statements of truth, repetitive phrases or words, and explanatory language regarding the assistance that is given to refugees. Coding allowed me to segment RAP staff interviews into quotations that deal with self-sufficiency, employment, monetary aid, and education. Refugee interviews were segmented into quotations dealing with self-sufficiency, employment and education, and transparency. Such segmentation allowed me to determine the components of assistance that each group felt were most important and that ultimately provided their definition of assistance, in other words, their cultural model of assistance. See Appendix C for staff and refugee interview schedules.

While my interviewee sample was spread across multiple countries, this thesis focuses on individuals from Sudan and Burma, as they comprise the majority of participants. The responses from these two groups were fairly representative of other refugees I interviewed from the East African and Southeast Asian regions. In addition, focusing on two

distinct ethnic groups allows me to emphasize the shared schema of these two groups' cultural models of assistance.

CHAPTER 4: RAP STAFF CULTURAL MODEL

“A lot of the stuff, almost, not hundred percent, but a lot of the work that we do is so [ingrained] into our society and in our structure that you’ve got to work within those systems to provide the answers” (Franklin, caseworker, Refuge and Relief July 2012). Franklin’s statement shows evidence that RAP staff cultural models are formulated upon the formal bureaucratic structure of the United States refugee resettlement system. While their talk sometimes indicates conflicts over how well they believe this bureaucracy assists arriving refugees, more often than not RAP staffers subscribe to the formal model as a means of informing their own cultural model of assistance. Franklin, the managing caseworker at Refuge and Relief has been working with refugee resettlement for eight years. He provided the most explicit statement regarding adherence to programmatic guidelines when thinking about assistance:

Again, we are working with a program, it depends on the program, it depends on the services that we need to provide to our clients...I think that none of us can provide everything a refugee needs, I certainly can’t do it and I don’t think that any of our staff can do everything that somebody needs. Really we can’t. And I don’t think that we are expected to...

I coded Franklin’s reference to “program” as a proposition, as it defines how he views his work, as well as how he defines assistance in terms of programmatic implementation. In addition, Franklin’s explicit negative assertions of “can’t” and “don’t” reveal the limitations he experiences due to his implicit adherence to the program mandates. While Franklin does express deep compassion for the refugee clients, he offers no indication of being able to step outside these mandates in order to fulfill an alternate cultural model of assistance. Complete

discourse analysis of each RAP staff member I interviewed reveals that they each link their explicit statements to a meaning of assistance that is regimented and bureaucratic. These linkages helped me determine that the RAP caseworkers' model of assistance emphasizes self-sufficiency which is reached through the mechanisms of rapid employment, monetary aid, and education. Furthermore, RAP staffers discuss these various schema in terms of time and surrender. For the purposes of this study, surrender is intended to convey an individual's belief that he or she must acquiesce to the formal demands of the resettlement system.

Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of the RAP staff's cultural model. The four primary schemas of self-sufficiency, rapid employment, monetary aid and education run down the middle of the diagram. Each of these schemas is represented by a quotation from a member of World Relief or Refuge and Relief. These quotations are representations of how RAP staff spoke about the corresponding schema. For example, the quotation associated with self-sufficiency demonstrates that the majority of RAP staff believe this schema to be associated with the United States government's economic definition, rather than one that relies on other social markers of successful adaptation. In each subsection of this chapter I provide detailed explanations of how quotations such as this one are analyzed and categorized within the cultural model of assistance. Also present in Figure 4.1 are two boxes labeled time and surrender, which are located to the left and right of the four central schemas. I placed time and surrender in the margins to demonstrate how these two concepts frame the discourse of the middle schema. In other words these two perceptions highlight the frustrations RAP staff must balance while fulfilling the middle schema. For example, in the time box, Bobbi expresses her frustration with the three month window in which she and

other RAP staff must help refugees become self-sufficient. While time is an important factor, the primary focus remains on the schema of self-sufficiency.

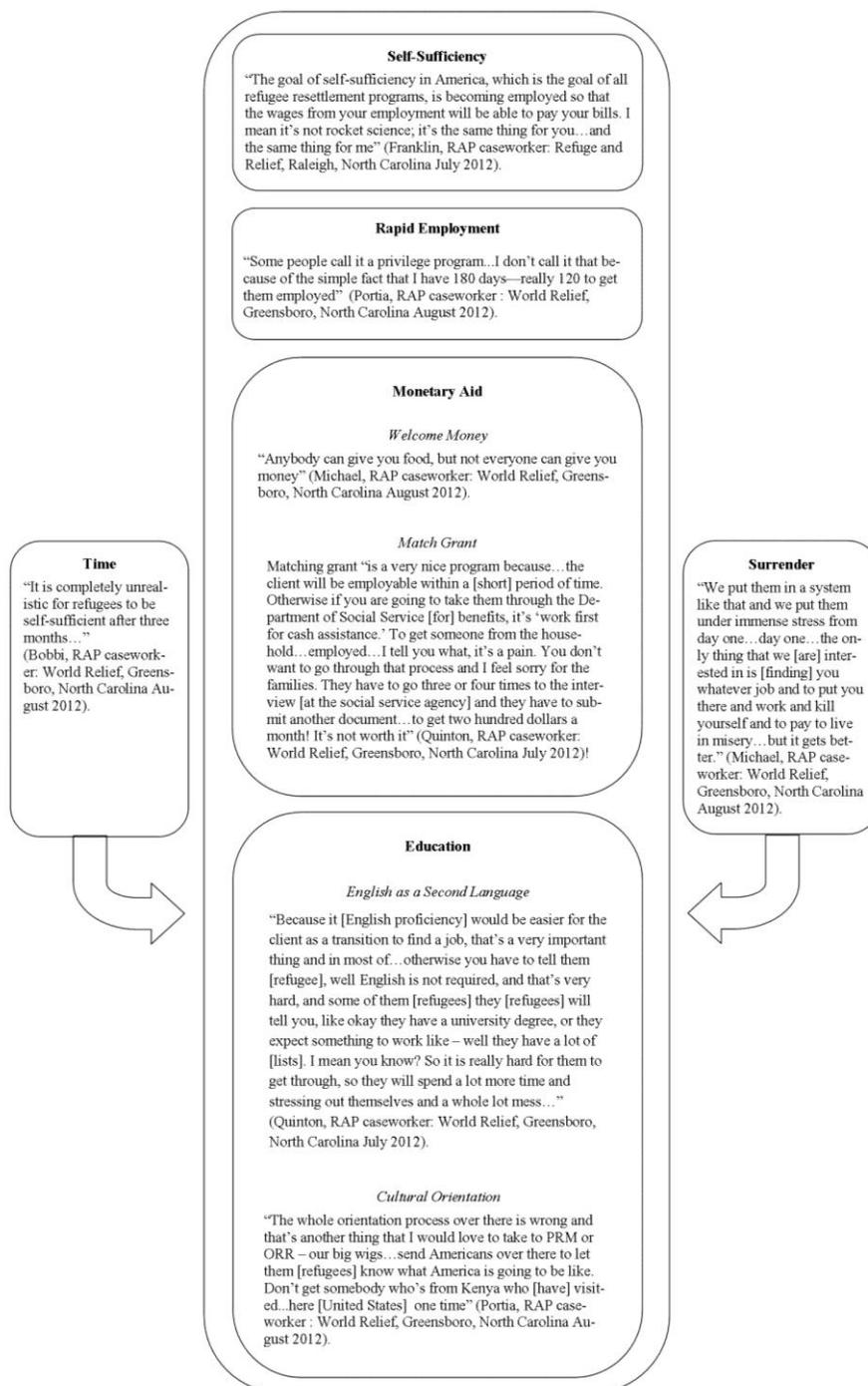


Figure 4.1 RAP Staff Cultural Model of Assistance

The System

Important to the RAP model is an understanding of the system into which refugees are grafted. The United Nations defines a refugee as someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (*Refugees* UNHCR online, accessed March 2013). Initially, displacement affords one settlement within a refugee camp. Although temporary in theory, refugee camps have become permanent spaces for many who fear returning to their countries of origin. The remaining option outside of the camp system is application for legal permanent status in a third country like the United States.

Resettlement to the United States is overseen by several agencies, beginning with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) under the United States Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which is tasked with providing "new populations with the opportunity to maximize their potential in the United States. [These] programs provide people in need with critical resources to assist them in becoming integrated members of American society" (*Office of Refugee Resettlement/About* online, accessed March 2013). Prior to entry and ORR management, refugees are adjudicated and screened through the United States Department of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In addition, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) under the Department of State (DOS) fixes refugee admission policy

and provides initial assistance prior to departure and immediately upon arrival to the United States (Brick, et al. 2010:2).

The United States accepted 58,238 refugees in 2012, approximately half the number of refugees resettled worldwide in the same year. After September 11, 2001, receiving numbers were lowered, and while the President's ceiling has steadily increased, the trend remains below the Executive Branch allotment. The discrepancy in numbers is not accidental, as each state and its associated RAP agencies are responsible for determining the number of refugees they can successfully assist. Determining the annual number of accepted refugees is often predicated on staff numbers, housing allotments, and government subsidies and grants. The latter forms of monetary aid are distributed through several mechanisms, which are used to assist refugees with rent, food, and employment within the first three months of their arrival. Assistance can be extended beyond the three months if refugees meet certain requirements. RAP staff also employ traditional welfare packages to supplement resettlement needs, although the primary goal of RAP officials is to secure employment and economic self-sufficiency for newly arrived refugees.

Self-Sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is the primary schema through which RAP staff frame assistance. According to ORR, self-sufficiency is an economic measurement achieved by “earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant” (Code of Federal Regulations, Public Welfare 2000). Economic self-

sufficiency is so fundamental to RAP programs that it infused every conversation I had with the staff. Employment for the purpose of economic independence is second nature to staffers like Franklin who stated:

The goal of self-sufficiency in America, which is the goal of all refugee resettlement programs, is becoming employed so that the wages from your employment will be [used] to pay your bills. I mean it's not rocket science; it's the same thing for you...and the same thing for me.

Franklin's expository statement of "the goal" highlights his belief that self-sufficiency is the primary outcome RAP assistance. Furthermore, his second statement of pay your bills reveals that RAP staff subscribe to economic stability as the only measurement of self-sufficiency. Lastly, Franklin's metaphorical statement of "it's not rocket science" indicates the simplicity that Franklin attaches to self-sufficiency as an economic measurement.

Franklin is not alone in his understanding of assistance through self-sufficiency. Within the first minute of my interview with Bobbi, a caseworker at World Relief, she mentioned the government's measurement of self-sufficiency. Bobbi recently received her Master's degree at a local university and was hired by World Relief a year ago. She was the youngest RAP caseworker I interviewed and recently agreed to extend her contract with World Relief for a second year. Initially, I believed that Bobbi had a different model for assistance, particularly when she commented that, "It is completely unrealistic for refugees to be self-sufficient after three months..." Bobbi often peppered her interview with similar statements of frustration, but implicitly demonstrated that, in spite of these aggravations with the system, she ultimately must surrender to the process in order to provide assistance.

Likewise, Portia, another World Relief caseworker mentioned the economic measurement of self-sufficiency within the first minute of our formal interview. Even among RAP caseworkers who were not Americans, self-sufficiency was defined as integral to their cultural model of assistance. Both Quinton and Michael did not cite self-sufficiency as rapidly as the American informants. However, within five minutes of beginning our interview, they too had mentioned and explained the self-sufficiency schema in much the same way as the American RAP representatives. The immediate and explicit mention of economic independence that each RAP caseworker described indicates that they each implicitly categorize their work and the administration of assistance in terms of this schema.

Self-sufficiency as a schema of assistance is also demonstrated through more ambiguous statements dealing with independence or doing something on one's own. As the *Welcome to America* manual endorsed by ORR indicates, "Refugee employment services will help you in your job search, but you will not find a job if you do not work at finding one yourself" (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:41). In essence, the manual conveys that self-sufficiency is a product of the refugee's own agency. Franklin supported this notion, saying, "And at the end of the day, people have to pay their bills, and they [refugees] have to function just like you or I in society here [in the United States]." Franklin's use of the metaphor "function" indicates that he supports the ORR's mandate that refugees exercise or demonstrate their own independence. He further supports the idea of personal agency by using the phrase "you or I" to express his ideals of self-sufficiency as an autonomous accomplishment, which reflect the official ORR mandates for this schema.

Similarly, Quinton uses the words “empowerment,” “independence,” and “taking control of your own life” *in* relation to economic success and personal agency. Bobbi also echoes Franklin’s understanding of independent accomplishment by using propositional statements about personal responsibility as a component of economic self-sufficiency. However, she qualifies her statements by expressing her frustration with the reality of the situation, further indicating that she fulfills the operations of the self-sufficiency schema though the mechanism of surrender:

The most fair thing I can do for the clients is explain to them what [life in America is like] reality and it may be difficult for them to hear, but it’d be worse if I lied to them, and then for them to find out about it in some god awful way. Actually if you don’t pay your utility bill, your utilities will be cut...some [refugees] have a hard time swallowing that, but if I don’t tell them and it’s cut, I mean that would have been completely unethical of me as their caseworker.

Bobbi continues to frame self-sufficiency through personal responsibility saying, “We’re ultimately here to get you [the refugee] a job. You [the refugee] can’t keep coming back and depending on your account [monetary aid allotment].”

Bobbi’s and the other RAP caseworkers’ statements demonstrate that encouraging self-sufficiency is the primary schema for how they deliver assistance. Furthermore, the schema for self-sufficiency depends on the agency of the refugee, while the schema of rapid employment is a demonstration of RAP staffers’ agency. Within the context of self-sufficiency, RAP staff hold the refugee responsible for demonstrating that he or she is taking personal responsibility to ensure that he or she does not rely on social service programs to help make ends meet. Yet, in a confusing turn of events, as evidenced in Bobbi’s last statement, rapid employment, the second schema of the RAP cultural model, is defined as the

responsibility of the RAP programs. In the following schema, RAP caseworkers become tasked with finding the first job for a newly arrived refugee.

Rapid Employment

Some people call it a privilege program...I don't call it that because of the simple fact that I have 180 days—really 120 – to get them employed” (Portia, caseworker, World Relief August 2012). Portia is an American, and the grant and job coordinator at World Relief. She is very energetic and outgoing, and not shy about sharing her frustrations with the RAP system. Matching grants will be discussed as a separate component of the RAP cultural model of assistance, although for my current purposes, Matching grants are monetary provisions that allow RAP personnel to extend monetary assistance to a refugee in order to train him or her for a specific job, or to prolong the process involved in finding employment. Importantly, the RAP cultural model does not just emphasize employment, but rapid employment. The speed at which one becomes employed is a reflection of the United States government mandates which state: “In the beginning, you will be expected to take the first job that is offered to you, even if it is not highly paid or in your former occupation. Most Americans believe that having any job is better than having no job” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004: 41).

At first, Franklin was explicit that employment was not part of the model of assistance, saying, “It's [RAP assistance] not an employment program. They [refugees] may get employed during that time, but that three-month program isn't specific to employment.”

Franklin's statement is intriguing, because a brochure from his organization lists employment as one of five primary services offered by his refugee resettlement agency. The brochure states, "Obtaining stable employment in the U.S. is one of the most critical steps a newly-arrived refugee must take on their path to self-sufficiency. Job development teams work hard to assist refugees and asylees in reaching their employment needs..." (LFS Carolinas, n.d.). Furthermore, my observation of weekly Refuge and Relief job workshops revealed that rapid employment, no matter the location or industry, was the only goal of these gatherings. During my first employment workshop, Nadir, the job coordinator, asked me to help attendees apply for any job in housekeeping, sanitation, or dishwashing at the local university. I discovered that Paw, a Bhutanese man, worked in shipping in Thailand and began looking for a job more in keeping with his skill set. Nadir interrupted, saying that through his professional connections at the university, he would be better able to secure positions in the housekeeping industry. My field and text observations are supported by Franklin's follow up remark, which though previously used, bears repeating: "The goal of self-sufficiency in America, which is the goal of all refugee resettlement programs, is becoming employed so that the wages from your employment will be [used] to pay your bills." Franklin's assertions are a wonderful example of the implicit understandings that form cultural models, but which often cannot be articulated. Implicitly, Franklin is battling over his understanding of resettlement as handed down from ORR in which employment is a fundamental component of assistance, and his implicit belief that perhaps resettlement should consist of other goals that help refugees adapt. The ORR mandates are unavoidable, and so

Franklin has unconsciously surrendered to these mandates and has developed a program that satisfies the rapid employment schema in his cultural model.

Significantly, rapid employment is also about the responsibility of the RAP staff rather than the personal responsibility of newly arrived refugees. Portia's following statement highlights the agency of RAP staffers:

The whole point of it [Matching Grant] is to get these clients working because 200 dollars a month, you really can't eat off that...so, basically my job is not only to make sure the money is allotted to them[refugees] but to get them[refugees] working...So once the clients [arrive] in August...I'll sit down with them [RAP leadership], we'll pull bio[s] and I'll look at their whole background...Do they have any medical conditions? How good is their English? And sometimes, how good [are their] other languages, because if they [do not] know English, but they speak Arabic I know I can get them a job with people who speak Arabic; they're employable to me. So I'll look at...their whole bio...and I'll make a sound decision; me and Michael and Amelia : yes they're going go into Matching grant or no they're not, and why.

Portia's use of the metaphor, "you can't eat off that" indicates here awareness of the paucity of assistance funds allocated to each refugee. Her acknowledgement of this reality demonstrates her implicit awareness of needing to quickly find refugees a job. Portia also uses expository statements such as "so, basically, my job is...to get them working" which suggests a singular focus on job placement. Lastly, Portia repeatedly uses the phrase "I'll" to demonstrate that her schema for rapid employment rests upon her personal agency in helping refugees find employment. Likewise, Quinton, a caseworker at World Relief, discusses the responsibility of RAPs in finding employment for refugees: "The agency [World Relief] has a responsibility in coaching them [refugees] through the steps and interviewing and finding a job, and taking them to the interview, and filling application[s]."

While RAP staff recognize their role in finding employment opportunities, they also frame their discourse of rapid employment in terms of surrender and time, as evidenced in Bobbi's statement:

It's unrealistic to expect the clients to be self-sufficient after three months. Of course we want to direct them towards employment, but I think they just need more time. It's a strain on our job developer to try to find them jobs immediately after those three months. So she's actually said as soon as they [refugees] resettle and are done with their basic services, like getting their social security, etcetera, she wants to meet with them so she has enough time...to [find them] a job, so that by the end of their three months they actually will have a job.

Here, Bobbi demonstrates that while the job developer is "strained" by "the unrealistic" time frame, the developer has surrendered to the RAP structure by employing coping techniques that allow her to continue to successfully operate within the rapid employment schema.

Similarly, Michael, a manager at World Relief and a former refugee, is vehement in his dissatisfaction with the resettlement process, yet his own surrender is hinted at in his closing phrase "but it gets better."

We put them in a system like that and we put them under immense stress from day one...day one...the only thing that we [are] interested in is [finding] you whatever job and to put you there and work and kill yourself and to pay to live in misery...but it gets better.

Michael's statement demonstrates that Bobbi's dissatisfaction with the constraints is not unique. While both caseworkers explicitly vent their frustration, they both continue to operate within the confines of the formal ORR mandates for rapid employment. Their adherence to the bureaucratic machine suggests that the rate at which RAP staff must find employment for refugees most often takes precedence over their frustrations with the tight schedule, a timeframe, which elicits even more angst within the schema of monetary aid.

Monetary Aid

“Anybody can give you food, but not everyone can give you money.” (Michael, caseworker, World Relief July 2012)

Cash assistance is a complicated schema within the RAP staff’s cultural model. After self-sufficiency, RAP caseworkers talk explicitly and at length about the major forms of assistance, which are Welcome Money, Match grants, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, and Targeted Assistance Grant (TAG). Of these aid packages, Welcome Money and Match grants monopolize their interviews. Even when caseworkers do not explicitly mention Welcome Money and Match grants, they continually imply their importance through propositions and expressions of frustration over limited funds and allotted time. In spite of these hindrances, RAP staff acquiesce that monetary aid is an essential construct to their cultural mode of assistance.

The Department of State’s Reception and Placement program provides Welcome Money as a form of assistance in the onetime amount of \$1,875 per refugee. Welcome Money is provided directly to the RAP providers in order to defray the expenses the organization incurs while giving aid to a refugee during his or her first few months. Expenses most often include: rent, furniture, food, and clothing. Welcome Money funds can also be distributed directly to the refugee client to be used at his or her discretion, typically for a cell phone or for food. However, much of the Welcome Money is spent prior to a refugee’s arrival in order to secure housing and to furnish the apartment. See appendix E for a supply list. In addition, a portion of this allotment is used to defray administrative costs. (Refugee

Admissions *United States Department of State* online, accessed March 2013) According to the RAP staff I interviewed, \$200 of this Welcome Money is used to defray these administrative costs. Some agencies, like World Relief, are able to use donations and outside grants to defray the administrative expenses, allowing RAP personnel to use the full amount of Welcome Money for a refugee's immediate needs (Quinton, personal communication, July 2012). Importantly, Welcome Money is administered by the RAP programs, meaning that refugees handle very little of the cash. Caseworkers possess much of the agency in the administration of Welcome Money, paying housing and other expenses without input from refugees, although refugee clients are told they may ask for a full accounting of their Welcome Money budget at any time.

Staff are very explicit about their responsibility over Welcome Money dispersal, as evidenced in Bobbi's reply to my question regarding how distribution of funds is determined:

It depends on the situation...if the client is going to live with an anchor relative⁵ then we don't have to worry about paying the client's rent for the first three months. If the family's staying with an anchor relative [it] also depends on the anchor's situation. Is money really tight for them? Because often their jobs don't pay that much, and often they are very generous with their resources. I can give an example. The family of seven that I'm resettling has anchors here in Greensboro. Unfortunately, this family has not been able to live in the same apartment complex or even with their anchors, and so their resettlement money has already gone to the first three months [of] rent.

Bobbi's explanatory statement of "it depends" reveals that while she takes into account the circumstances of the arriving refugee and his or her family members, she remains responsible for determining the final cash allocation. Furthermore, she uses the metaphorical statement of "is money really tight" to demonstrate her repeated acknowledgement of individual

⁵ Anchor relatives are family members who have already resettled in the United States prior to other family members' arrival.

circumstances and their limited access to cash. However, Bobbi implicitly assigns agency for determining need to herself when she states, “the family that I’m resettling;” thereby implying that she takes ownership or responsibility over the resettlement process.

RAP members most often exercise the same agency as Bobbi over Welcome Money when discussing its use in financing the first three months of rent for new arrivals. RAP members have much to say about rent and housing; however, because rent is typically financed through Welcome Money, it can be assigned to the Welcome Money schema of the cultural model. RAP staffers regularly link rent and Welcome Money to negative assertions, and yet, like the other schemas that comprise assistance, staffers ultimately surrender their frustrations to the system:

Honestly, we put them in sub-standard housing [in] very underserved communities. For us [RAP staff/Americans], we don’t choose it for ourselves...[Refugees ask] would you live here? And I say, ‘no, but I have better means. When you have better means I [will] move you out of here’ (Michael, caseworker, World Relief August 2012).

Michael is not happy about the circumstances in which refugees often find themselves, and he expresses this through his agreement that he would not choose to live in the housing allotted to refugees. Yet his statement about “better means” demonstrates his knowledge of reality and his acceptance of the limitations of the monetary aid schema. However, in some instances, RAP staff like Franklin express less dismay over housing:

Well you [the refugee] might come to an apartment that doesn’t look as exciting, but still, it’s yours. It’s a place that can be yours and there’s hope and there’s expectation, but then as you begin to settle into that, you see the roach going across the floor, and I don’t know about you, but I don’t know anybody in North Carolina that doesn’t have a roach crawling across their floor. But that’s not the pristine idea that many people have about America: ‘What? There [are] roaches in my apartment?’ Well, I mean, there’s not much you can do. I mean as much as you try you can’t keep the roach out.

Franklin is correct; there were roaches in many of the homes I visited. Miriam, a woman from Eritrea, did not have a working vacuum cleaner and her baby girl Angela had to be held throughout our meeting as several small roaches crawled across the floor. On another occasion, Francesca, a woman from Somalia swept her kitchen twice while serving me tea, pointing to the floor each time and repeating “roch, roch, roch.” Franklin is also correct in saying many people in North Carolina may have a roach or two in their homes. However, his statement demonstrates that he has accepted the RAP schema for monetary aid to such a degree that he does not express any struggle he may have with placing refugees in housing developments where roaches, moldy carpets, peeling paint, and paper thin walls are the norm.

Franklin’s response cannot be attributed to mere callousness: he has been a caseworker for eight years, and has in all likelihood had to learn to surrender to the vagaries of the RAP cultural model. Furthermore, the housing situation in Raleigh requires that new occupants provide first and last months’ rent, a security deposit, and a credit check – measures that most newly-arrived refugees are incapable of taking. Franklin’s staff have been able to secure relationships with three housing complexes that do not demand these preliminaries, although such agreements may force staffers to turn a blind eye to the living conditions.

Regardless of the degree to which RAP members willingly accept the constraints of Welcome Money and housing, this form of cash assistance soon runs out. The end dates for these forms of assistance are ever present in the minds of the caseworkers. As Bobbi states:

We are required to pay the first three months for you [the refugee] if applicable, and then...it gets a little more dicey...one of the client's daughters got sick and the medication she would need cost about fifty dollars without insurance and her Medicaid card had not come in yet. And the mother was hesitant to do that [spend the fifty dollars]...I would be quick to assign a value judgment to that; I would be like 'that, oh that mother, she should just get her daughter that medicine,' but then I'm just thinking, well if she's not gonna be working in three months, maybe she's worried about her family's future.

In order to prevent full surrender to the deadlines of Welcome money, yet still operate within the schema of monetary aid, RAP advocates have devised several programs to prevent the third month of monetary assistance from being the last. Primary among all of these is the Match grant program, which Quinton explains,

is a very nice program because...the client will be employable within a [short] period of time. Otherwise if you are going to take them through the Department of Social Service [for] benefits, it's 'work first for cash assistance.' To get someone from the household...employed...I tell you what, it's a pain. You don't want to go through that process and I feel sorry for the families. They have to go three or four times to the interview [at the social service agency] and they have to submit another document...to get two hundred dollars a month! It's not worth it!

Indeed the Match grant program supplements assistance and as such is also an implicit acquiescence to the formal mandates of the resettlement system. Matching grants are administered through ORR, which matches two dollars for every one dollar an agency raises, up to \$2,200 per client (*Office of Refugee Resettlement* online, accessed March 2013).

Matching grants may be administered for a total of six months for each eligible refugee, although early, successful employment effectively ends this form of financial assistance. The Match grant allows RAPs to promote gainful employment by providing a monthly cash allowance to refugees in addition to job training and placement. For example, Monica, an Eritrean refugee, participated in a two-week training program at a textile factory in order to

use the sewing machines. Upon successful completion, Monica received full-time employment at the factory at an hourly wage higher than what she would have received without the Match grant training.

Deciding who is eligible to receive a Matching grant is often based on the agencies' perception of who is easily employable, based on previous skills, and knowledge. Matching grant eligibility is also limited by the funds themselves, as agencies must raise the initial money before ORR will match it, thereby limiting the number of applicants an agency can afford to enroll. While Welcome money is essential to paying rent for refugees, Matching grants are a tangible reminder of the entire RAP cultural model together. RAP staff either explicitly discuss Match grants or they will talk about employment and vocational training which are the main outcomes of receiving Match funding. For example, Franklin states:

[You] want to be a doctor in this country? I want you [the refugee] to be a doctor too. But if I want to be a doctor, I also cannot be one tomorrow. Well, he [the refugee] says, 'I've had twenty years of experience being a doctor.' Well you're well on down the road, so let's find out how you can do that in America... [You] want to be an Anthropology professor. Hey good. Let's get you on a path where you can do that, but to get that anthropology professor position you may have to take other jobs, you may have to take some other steps; it may be a longer term goal even if you came as an anthropologist from another country...it doesn't happen overnight. And so those are the types of frame works that we're trying to work in and provide that information to the clients; [we] do the best that we can.

Franklin's expository and metaphorical statements of "I also cannot be one tomorrow" and "well down the road" and "it doesn't happen overnight" demonstrate that he understands that the process of credentialing within the United States is complicated and may take years to achieve. By using the metaphorical statement "get you on the path," Franklin is implicitly demonstrating his knowledge of the Matching grant program as it is the only RAP program

that is specifically constructed to provide the initial round of training for employment. By coding for allusions such as this, I was able to further determine the importance of Match grants to the monetary aid scheme of the cultural model.

Education

You come here with fabulous French and Arabic, but no English, so we help you. Say [you are] a single mom of two, [we] just push you...as hard as possible to put you into [a job where] you can work, but you don't need to speak English, like the chicken plant. Then you...work and you ride with somebody back and forth. You wake up and they [carpool ride] pick you up at six o' clock. You are there at seven o' clock. You finish at five pm; by [the] time you are home [it is] seven to nine pm, and if you are lucky [you may] find your birth kids up...[and being] taken care of by your neighbor...You will never get out of that cycle for years; some of them [refugees] for years. We have some clients after they are laid off they came back to us and still they don't speak a word of English. After four or five years, not even a chance to develop whatsoever –And they [refugees] had some education over there [country of origin or refugee camp], some training – Why? Because they never had the chance...to learn the proper English. They could be a mechanic and own their own mechanic shop, but they will never have the chance to do that because they don't have the time with the job at the chicken processing plant (Michael, caseworker, World Relief July, 2012).

Education is the final schema in the RAP cultural model of assistance. Michael's comment reveals that English instruction is a crucial link to employment and self-sufficiency, so much so that his remark could be used in several schemas of the model. But because RAP staff are mandated to provide English as a Second Language (ESL) training, and because refugees are strongly encouraged to attend cultural orientation (CO) training, RAP staff interviews reveal that education is a stand-alone schema with the cultural model of

assistance. As with the other schemas within the model, RAP staff continue to frame ESL and CO within the contexts of time and surrender/frustration.

ESL instruction begins within a short time of arrival. My own observations and interviews reveal that ESL begins within the first month of arrival to the United States. ESL instructors are in short supply. When Emma, an employee of Refuge and Relief, met me, she immediately set out to assign me to an English instruction role. But as with the other schemas, time becomes a critical demon with which RAP officials must deal. Emma was quite busy in her dual role of lead case manager and volunteer coordinator, and as such had no opportunity to train me. However, this did not deter her, and she asked me to begin teaching a newly arrived Iraqi man, Foud. When I reminded Emma that I had only taught literacy classes to English speaking Americans, she told me she was not concerned and that she believed I would be able to pick up on it. She followed up her comment, saying she would e-mail me some ESL materials. Again, time constraints intervened, and I did not have the promised materials in time for my first tutoring session. Emma emailed me the manuals six days later, and I began my own self-instruction while also experiencing some of the frustrations caseworkers regularly encounter.

Overcoming the obstacles associated with time are minimal compared to the frustrations many RAP staff express regarding English proficiency and language training among refugees. While many staff members do not explicitly link English to education, their desire for refugees' proficiency in English is palpable, as seen in Bobbi's anecdote:

There was a lady...from Nepal, one of our clients who came over to the US with...a severe issue with her uterus – prolapse; and she had her Medicaid for eight months...and she had [been] scheduled for surgery, but sometimes Medicaid takes up

to a month to issue and then the doctors have to...she has to go to her initial consultation, so that by the time she's actually ready for surgery she's on the cutting edge of having her Medicaid expire cause it can take a while... she's navigating a system where she doesn't know the language, the culture ...I have to say there is institutional bias in the health care system against those who don't speak the language and I don't think it's intentional, it's just you [doctors] look at them [refugees] 'they don't know what they're doing.' And so...what happened was, she had gone in to have her...pre-op appointment and her son had gone with her and her son speaks English, but they [medical staff] did not allow the son back, with her, because they [medical staff] thought he [son] cannot interpret because he's a family member. I can see that, but what happened was they used an interpreter on the phone and the interpreter screwed up and the surgery was canceled. Because of the things lost in interpretation she [Nepalese client] thought it [surgery] was a certain day and it wasn't. Thankfully she qualified for a charity care program over at UNC Chapel Hill and the surgery was done, but it took another year...and it was just a huge stress on her and her family. I, we, I'm going to say we [World Relief] were help...we were part of that solution but look at how long it took...If I were going to a completely foreign country and couldn't speak the language, I wouldn't be able to be self-sufficient after three months.

Bobbi's statement is difficult to decipher, but I chose to place it in the education/ESL category because Bobbi brings the entire story back to the idea of self-sufficiency. Her extensive use of metaphors like "cutting edge," "navigating a system," "lost in interpretation," and "screwed up" allude to her frustrations, but as Naomi Quinn (2005) demonstrates, metaphorical language is often a signal that the speaker is defining a schema of a cultural model that he or she believes should be inherently understood. Of note, Bobbi is also struggling with rectifying the cultural model she has as an RAP employee in which ESL is integral, and with another cultural model of assistance in which self-sufficiency may be tied to more than the economic factors listed earlier in this paper. However, Bobbi still employs the more formal model of assistance in order to give meaning to her idea of assistance.

Quinton supports Bobbi's implicit assertion that English proficiency is linked to independence and self-sufficiency when he addresses the role of ESL training in CO programs:

Because it [English proficiency] would be easier for the client as a transition to find a job, that's a very important thing...otherwise you have to tell them [refugee], well English is not required, and that's very hard, and some of them [refugees] they [refugees] will tell you they have a university degree, or they expect something to work like – well they have a lot of [lists]. So it is really hard for them to get through, so they will spend a lot more time and stressing out themselves [it is a] mess...

Quinton's quote demonstrates his frustration with refugees who have trouble finding a job because of their limited English. While he does not explicitly discuss ESL instruction, he is implying its importance by venting his concern about the impact limited English can have on employment opportunities.

While ESL is an important component of the assistance model, RAP staff also believe that CO is essential to refugee education as preparation for their arrival and resettlement. Crucially, CO and its organizers and instructors have their own cultural model. Unfortunately, I could not visit a CO program, and much of my information is gleaned from RAP staff interviews and a textual analysis of the CO curriculum. Regardless, limited discussion of the CO model suggests strongly the value RAP caseworkers place on the orientation program as part of the education schema.

ORR contracts with affiliates of the Cultural Orientation Resource Center (CORC) through which specific regions of the globe administer Cultural Orientation (CO) programs based upon the contents of *Welcome to America: A Guidebook for Refugees*. Given the

population of refugees I interviewed, the scope of this section will focus on materials from the Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) of Africa and East Asia.⁶

CO's goals aim to provide a brief and comprehensive understanding of what life will be like in the United States by relying on the aforementioned Welcome to America handbook. The handbook is a 110 page document which addresses: preparing for departure, the role of the resettlement agency, community services, housing, transportation, employment, education, health care, money management, rights and responsibilities, and cultural adjustment and changing roles (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004).

Providing a comprehensive textual analysis of the entire manual is beyond the scope of this study. However, some analysis of the materials as they correspond to the RAP schema of education through orientation will serve to highlight disparities between the two models. Importantly, RAP caseworkers see CO as the best way to manage refugee expectations or more implicitly, the refugees' cultural model of assistance. In particular, RAP staff believe that CO programs should manage refugee expectations in regard to arrival, Welcome Money, employment, and education. See Figure 4.2 for a visual demonstration of the CO model of assistance. As with the RAP staff cultural model of assistance, each box corresponds to a specific schema of the CO program. However, in this instance the schema and corresponding quotations have been gleaned from segments of the CO curriculum, which are available to the public.

⁶ RSC Africa is operated by Church World Services (CWS) and RSC East Asia is operated by International Rescue Committee (IRC). RSC Africa is administered by an American director, coordinator and curriculum developer and who oversee a training staff of 15 Kenyan nationals, the majority of whom "have been to the U.S. for study or work, CO Trainers Exchanges, refugee escorts or personal travel. They have a collective proficiency in English, Kiswahili, and Somali." I was unable to find similar information on RSC East Asia. (*Cultural Orientation Resource Center* online, accessed 2013)

Arrival

“When you reach your final destination airport, a relative, friend, or a representative from your resettlement agency will meet you in the baggage claim area. If for some reason there is no one there to meet you, please contact airport police right away and they will help you contact your relative or resettlement agency” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:14).

“Social service organizations provide temporary assistance to help you become self-sufficient. Service organizations determine your need by looking at how much income you earn, where you live, your age, and other factors. When your circumstances improve, the agency reduces services or stops providing them. If your situation becomes more difficult, you may become eligible for services again for a while. It is important to remember that these services are temporary; they continue only until you can support yourself” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:21).

Welcome Money

“The resettlement agency will pay all your basic living costs for the first 30 days after you arrive. Some agencies will pay the expenses directly. Others will give the money to you or to your relative, and you will pay the expenses yourself” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:17).

You will need to make good use of the services that the resettlement agency provides, because it will only provide them for the first 90 days after you arrive. After the first 90 days, available services vary depending on individual needs and your resettlement agency. You may be referred to other agencies to meet specific needs. The resettlement agency will not pay your bills or debts. (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:19).

Employment

“In the United States, there are three general types of employment: unskilled jobs, skilled jobs, and professional jobs. For each type of job, a person needs to have a different level of experience or training” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:41).

“Your own initiative and perseverance are your best tools for finding a job. However, there are other services to support you in your efforts” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:43).

“Staff at resettlement agencies and refugee employment services have helped many refugees find their first jobs in the United States. Discuss your ideas with them, and listen to their advice. They will help you understand what type of job you can expect to find with your skills and experience” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:43).

“Many resettlement agencies offer this program instead of cash assistance for refugees who want to work but need some financial help first. Refugees who enroll in this program promise to get a job as soon as possible. In exchange, they receive increased financial assistance and job counseling, and placement services for their first 4 months in the United States” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:24-25).

Education

“Most Americans view education as a lifelong process, and many enroll in courses at some time during their adult lives. After deciding to continue their education, most adults continue working full time and attend courses in the evening or on the weekend.” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:63).

“Your resettlement agency can help you find education opportunities in your community, from English as a second language (ESL) classes and high school diploma study to vocational and professional training” (Center for Applied Linguistics 2004:63).

Figure 4.2 CO Cultural Model of Assistance

Arrival and Welcome Money

RAP staff believe that CO instruction should prepare refugees for arrival by describing what refugees should bring with them, as well as the amount of time that refugees have access to assistance. However, the CO manual discusses assistance without ever defining it, which leads RAP caseworkers, like Portia, to believe that CO programs are disseminating misinformation:

I even have clients that [will] come in...I'll be like 'wow you're bag's really light' and they're like 'you're supposed to buy our clothes,' and I [say] 'no, I'm not' and they're like, 'oh, they told me back home that I could just leave all my clothes, you'll, you'll buy everything.'

On the surface the CO schema of arrival matches what RAP agencies provide, but the vague terminology leaves the door open for misinterpretation, allowing refugees or even their CO instructors to project onto the words their own models of assistance. As a result, Portia's initial thinking that CO programs are misinforming refugees begins to turn into suspicion when she concludes that:

The whole orientation process over there is wrong and that's another thing that I would love to take to PRM or ORR – our big wigs...send Americans over there to let them know what America's going to be like. Don't get somebody who's from Kenya who visited here one time.

CO programs use similarly vague and contradictory language to address the allocation of Welcome Money in the *Welcome to America* manual, which states, "The resettlement agency will pay all your basic living costs for the first 30 days after you arrive. Some agencies will pay the expenses directly. Others will give the money to you or to your relative, and you will pay the expenses yourself" (2004: 17).

You will need to make good use of the services that the resettlement agency provides, because it will only provide them for the first 90 days after you arrive. After the first 90 days, available services vary depending on individual needs and your resettlement agency. You may be referred to other agencies to meet specific needs. The resettlement agency will not pay your bills or debts. [2004: 19]

The mention of two different time frames, 30 and 90 days each refer to cash assistance that the RAP agencies will provide. Additionally, the 30-day time frame for housing assistance does not match the actual time frame in the United States in which RAP providers use Welcome Money for 90 days. Lastly, during several informal interviews with refugees, I was told stories of RSC staff using the words “Welcome Money” as an important component of assistance in the United States, yet the manual never explicitly discusses this term. The confusing language and instruction leaves many RAP staff feeling that they must reorient new arrivals. All but one staff member explicitly linked the mistrust they observe in refugees to the lack of proper CO instruction, which further strengthens the education and monetary aid components as viable schemas within their cultural model of assistance.

Employment and Education

Interestingly, RAP interviewees never told me that CO programs should be instructing refugees about specific employment assistance or education. However, given the RAP employment and education schemas discussed above, I think it is important to make comparisons between what CO and RAP employees prioritize in these areas. The CO curriculum does echo the RAP caseworkers’ understanding of ESL training, but it is listed among several forms of education a refugee may receive in the United States, including

General Education Degrees (GED), vocational training, and professional/university training. Furthermore, all of these education opportunities are given the same weight in terms of placement within the manual. Similarly, employment is listed within a series of unskilled, skilled, and professional positions, all with equal weight in terms of written length and placement within the manual. University training is given the most weight in terms of length, which serves as a visual representation of its importance, thereby implying that college is a viable opportunity that RAP members will assist with in terms of placement or funding.

Unfortunately, RAP staffers like Portia disagree, saying:

I always let them [refugees] know how successful they can be here and I always try to focus on something that they [refugees] did back home and how they can do it here. But it's going to be a process, so once they know... 'once I [the refugee] get through this process, I can do what I was doing back home...' like construction, or driving a truck, or nursing or...one of my clients, from Cuba...she's a medical assistant but she's [going to enroll] to become a PA [physician's assistance] so she be practically a doctor, but she won't be in gynecology anymore, but she'll still be a doctor...She was under the impression, 'oh, I'll just turn in my records and become a [gynecologist]'... and I had to let her know, you can't do that...it's [going to] a be a process.

Given my inability to visit a CO training, I cannot definitively argue that arrival, Welcome Money, employment, education, or any of the other topics listed in the *Welcome to America* manual constitute the CO cultural model of assistance or schema of education. However, RAP officials believe, and provide anecdotal evidence supporting their belief, that their models are different from that of oversees CO programs. Further evidence of these divergent models exists in the assessment that Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs conducted in 2010. In their assessment, the authors state that pre-departure orientation programs provide information to refugees that "is highly variable, overwhelming, and is often forgotten before arrival" (Brick, et. al. 2010: 10). In addition, the Columbia study

claims that orientation information is provided by individuals who have “little knowledge of the resettlement experience or of potential barriers to self-sufficiency” (Brick, et. al. 2010: 10).

In conclusion, the RAP model is sometimes fraught with competing schemas which frustrate the staff. However, within the seeming chaos very specific and shared schemas do arise. All my informants explicitly expressed his or her feelings and beliefs about self-sufficiency, rapid employment, monetary aid, and education differently within the contexts of time and surrender or frustration, but each shared a cultural model that incorporated very similar points about each of the schemas.

Importantly, RAP staff are deeply committed to helping refugees. Each caseworker shared at least one story about a refugee whose experiences abroad or domestically had deepened their commitment to providing resettlement assistance. Refugees are seen as complete persons who have been victimized, but whom RAP administrators believe can rise above this hardship. They shared stories of individuals who are now enrolled in medical school or who are receiving their GEDs, yet RAP caseworkers are not blinded to the difficulty that refugees face in the integration and adaptation process. Each caseworker has a deep awareness that the bureaucratic system is cumbersome at best and broken at worst, but each implicitly acknowledges that this system is how they define their work, and how they give meaning to the assistance services they provide, for good or ill. In spite of the RAP staff’s good intentions, they often recount that refugees just do not understand the process of resettlement or that refugees enter the United States with unrealistic expectations. Because RAP caseworkers are not explicitly familiar with their own cultural model of assistance, or

that of the refugee, many opportunities arise for cultural miscommunication. Only when the refugees' own cultural model for assistance is uncovered can expectations from both sides begin to be reconciled.

CHAPTER 5: REFUGEE CULTURAL MODEL

Understanding the cultural model for refugees can be a tricky exercise, as refugees commonly come from many backgrounds and a multitude of countries. I believe that the process of third country resettlement contributes to a standardization of the model of assistance, as many refugees undergo similar events in the process of migrating to the United States. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the diverse backgrounds, ages, and ethnicities of the RAP staff did little to affect the schema of the RAP model. In addition, some refugees were more vocal in expressing discontent and others more explicit in defining assistance, but those individuals participating in my interviews generally demonstrated remarkable consistency in interpreting the schemas within the refugee model of assistance. In this chapter I will focus on fourteen interviewees from Burma (Chin and Karen ethnicities) and Sudan. While the remaining nine interviewees from my research are important, a narrower focus lends credence to my assertion that the process of resettlement may, to some degree, standardize the cultural model of assistance.

My discourse analysis revealed that the refugee cultural model of assistance is manifested through the schemas of self-sufficiency through reciprocity and networks, employment and education, and transparency regarding the administration and allocation of services. As with RAP staff, refugees spoke about the schemas of assistance through the contexts of time or surrender and frustration, meaning they believe that assistance should be seen as an ongoing process that extends well beyond three to six months, while at other times

some refugees believe they are unable to change the system of resettlement and must acquiesce to the bureaucratic requirements handed down from ORR.

Figure 5.1 is a visual representation of the refugee cultural model. The three primary schemas of self-sufficiency through reciprocity and networks, employment and education, and transparency run down the middle of the diagram. Each of these schemas is represented by a quotation from a member of the refugee communities I interviewed. These quotations are representations of how refugees spoke about the corresponding schema. For example, the quotation associated with self-sufficiency demonstrates that the majority of refugees believe this schema to be associated with the creation of informal networks rather than an adherence to the RAP staff's definition of self-sufficiency through economic independence. Each subsection in this chapter corresponds to a schema in Figure 5.1, and provides additional detail as to how I determined that these areas were integral to the refugee cultural model. Also present in Figure 5.1 are two boxes to the left and right of the three central schemas labeled time and surrender. I have placed them in the margins to demonstrate how these two concepts frame the discourse of the middle schema. In other words these two concepts highlight the frustrations refugees must balance while fulfilling the middle schema. For example, in the time box, Marcus expresses his desire for more time to learn about life in America before being pushed into a job. In this instance, Marcus' emphasis on time is a concern, but it remains secondary to the schema of employment and education.

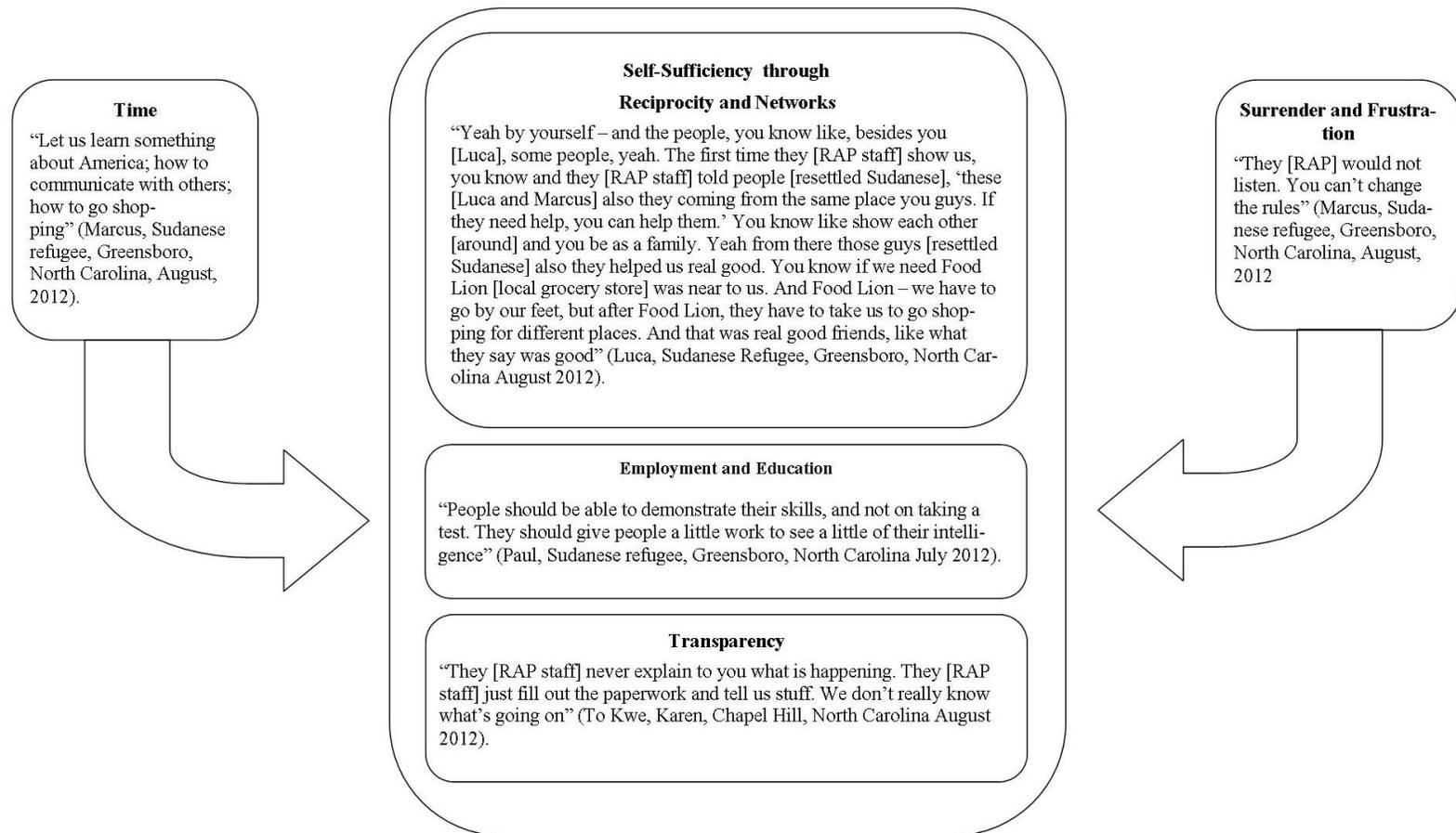


Figure 5.1 Refugee Cultural Model of Assistance

Self-Sufficiency through Reciprocity and Networks

Yeah by yourself – and the people, you know like, besides you [Luca], some people, yeah. The first time they [RAP staff] show us [around]...they [RAP staff] told people [resettled Sudanese], ‘these guys [Luca and Marcus] [are] also...coming from the same place [as] you guys. If they need help, you can help them.’ You know like show each other [around] and you can be like a family...from there those guys [resettled Sudanese] they helped us real good. You know if we need Food Lion [local grocery store]...we have to go by our feet, but other than Food Lion, they [would] take us to go shopping for different places. And they were real good friends, like what they said was good (Luca, Sudanese Refugee, Greensboro, North Carolina August 2012).

Luca and his roommate Marcus are both 30 years old. They have lived in the United States for three years and knew each other in a refugee camp in Ghana. Currently, they live in Woodgrave Heights, a run-down housing community in Greensboro, North Carolina. Among the refugee communities of Raleigh and Greensboro, Woodgrave is not unique in its disrepair. Most housing in these two cities requires a security deposit, first and last months’ rent, and a credit check. Many newly arriving refugees are unable to finance such expenses, so RAP providers have established relationships with local housing owners to forgo these expenses. However, RAP caseworkers have been unable to convince landlords of cleaner and safer neighborhoods to rent month to month. As a result, Luca and Marcus, like every refugee I interviewed, live in communities with higher than normal crime rates, insect infestation, peeling paint, worn carpet, darkened halls, pervasive odors, and no air conditioning. Usually, it is the roaches that incite the most consternation among my informants.

I met Luca and Marcus through Quinton. Luca is more open to conversations, with a slow, broad smile. He warmed to me fairly quickly, and by my second visit he had lined up

five other men from Sudan to speak with me. Marcus is very thin and tall. Most often he is withdrawn and observant, but when he speaks, it is all I can do to keep up with his monologues. Typically, I found him sitting on the patio or in a chair in the corner of the living room. He declined to be recorded during his own interview and when other men were being recorded, he opted for silence. Luca and Marcus have known each other for most of their lives and both told me more than once, “We are like brothers.” Luca once told me:

If he [Marcus] [does not] have [something he needs], I have to help him. If I don't have [something I need], he [Marcus] has to help me because we are living [in] one place and in one apartment like we are brothers. Like we are brothers, we have to take care [of] ourselves, like one mom, [and] one dad.

For Luca, Marcus and the other individuals I interviewed, self-sufficiency is not marked by the American RAP staff's schema of economic independence or self-reliance. Rather, self-sufficiency is an exercise in collaboration in which individuals provide resources to each other in order to meet their needs. In other words, they practice a form of reciprocity in which the individuals who have been resettled the longest contribute to the new arrivals, so that in the future, the previous new arrivals will help refugees just beginning their resettlement process.

Interestingly, the concept of doing something on one's own, a marker of the RAP schema of self-sufficiency is defined differently for the refugees of Sudan. I once asked Luca, “Did you do everything else [navigating the roads and buses, etc.] by yourself”? In response Luca said “Yeah by yourself – and the people...besides you.” In this instance Luca's meaning of “by yourself” includes help from other people, particularly fellow Sudanese.

Furthermore, Marcus and Luca are aware of their role in the reciprocity ring as the “old guys.” Like the formally resettled Sudanese who helped Luca and Marcus when they first arrived, the men have taken up this mantle as evidenced through Luca’s statement of:

The other guys they’re new, for real, and can’t [help themselves] – I can’t put myself on them [new arrivals] because I’m old here. I know the ways...how to get food....I need to help a lot of people right now...take them to the grocery [store], take them to the laundry...show them the place[s] they don’t know. [If] there is something at Wal-Mart they don’t have; I have to take them to the different places.

Luca’s cultural model of assistance and self-sufficiency includes showing new arrivals how to access unfamiliar resources. Such statements that seek affinity are often indicators of an individual’s cultural mode. Luca further affirms the importance of reciprocity in his schema of self-sufficiency when he mentions his role as an old man and therefore his responsibility of returning the services that were rendered to him by the old men when he arrived.

Similarly, Amsala, a Sudanese man from Darfur, in his mid-forties, has been living in the United States for three years. Currently he is living in an apartment at Woodgrave with his wife, their three children, his newly arrived cousin Samir, and Samir’s two children. Amsala is a short, rotund man who wears the traditional white jalabiya⁷. When I entered the apartment, Samir was lying on a makeshift bed behind the couch wearing jeans and a t-shirt. He is a lanky careworn man in his mid-forties, although he appears much older. His wife died a year earlier in a refugee camp in Kenya. Amsala and Samir asked to not be recorded. Both men work at a chicken processing plant in Dobson, approximately an hour and half west of Greensboro. Samir lives in Dobson during the week, while Amsala’s wife, Nafy, takes care of his children.

⁷ A jalabiya is a traditional Islamic calf-length smock that is worn over one’s clothing.

Initially, Samir had been resettled in Durham, North Carolina, but he had no relatives in the area and no way of ensuring that his young children could receive childcare. Moving to Greensboro was a matter of necessity, and while he sleeps tucked behind the couch on the floor of Amsala's apartment on the weekend, he feels better knowing Amsala and Nafy are caring for his kids. Reciprocity in this instance is not as clear cut as Luca's statements, but Samir shows deference to Amsala, allowing him to speak first. In addition, Samir has been diligently applying and reapplying for Child Care Financial Assistance through the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, in order to compensate Nafy for caring for his family.

Self-sufficiency through reciprocity as demonstrated by Amsala and Samir should not be mistaken for dependency. David is a young Sudanese man in his late twenties who has been living in the United States for fifty days. David is a soft-spoken man of medium height with a bushy mustache. His English is limited, so I relied on an interpreter to assist with the interview. When I asked him if he gets help from anyone regarding transportation or food, etc., he replied through an interpreter saying, "At first, Marcus and Luca used to help me – they used to help us [David's roommates] but right now, at this time we know the way. Right now we can go by ourselves." David refers to Marcus and Luca as the "guys who have been here a long time," to whom he turns to when seeking assistance. However, his assertion that "we can go by ourselves" indicates that these networks and forms of reciprocity are a mechanism by which individuals can learn how to navigate a system independently if needed. Interestingly, when David speaks of no longer needing Marcus or Luca, he continues

to use the pronoun “we,” referring to himself and his roommates, indicating that self-sufficiency continues to be a group effort.

I encountered a similar schema of self-sufficiency among members of the Karen and Chin ethnic groups of Burma. Thoo is a Karen male in his early forties who lives with his wife and three children. He has lived in the United States for five years. Currently he and his wife own a home in Raleigh. Thoo is a small statured man who is very open about his life. He is also very proud of his past as a soldier and the legacy of his father, a leader in the Karen National Liberation Army. Like Luca and Marcus, Thoo has become a leader within the Karen community and is actively involved in a grass-roots organization for local Karen.

Thoo has a long list of issues that he believes RAP staff need to be aware of in order to help refugees through the transition of resettlement. While he does not say he is a leader or that he speaks for his group, he is often called upon to help other Karen families. He told me, “We just have to help each other. But a person who most understands English...is the one who has to carry the heaviest burden, especially in each city. There are many, many things we have to deal with.” As with David, Thoo often uses the pronoun “we” to refer to himself and other Karen refugees. Thoo is also aware that RAP personnel only help refugees for three to six months, a time frame in which he believes is inadequate for new arrivals to become self-sufficient.

The refugee agency releases them up to – after six months of looking after them. You know. There is more difficulty [that] come[s] up, especially...for the refugees who can't speak any English...Like [in the] education area for their kids – when school teachers send homework assignments or notify them...about whether they have [to] volunteer or have to help their children with homework. There are so many difficulties...sometimes [it is] not even school. [It is] bills – electricity, many other things. Telephone bills or rent...because they don't even write their own check, so

there were so many penalties from those companies sometimes...Service providers [utilities companies] let's say, will feel very bad sometimes because [the companies think] 'these people, they are ignorant, they ignore our order because they [do not] understand the language.' So sometimes, [when] the debt collector call[s] them...I have to go and help them. Explain – like a hospital bill. There are so many of them because of the language. Only [because of] the language barrier there were so many problems coming up with the service providers.

Thoo has a long list of responsibilities due to his length of time in the United States and his advanced English proficiency. Importantly, Thoo's statement demonstrates an awareness that self-sufficiency is achieved over time and through group cooperation. In addition, Thoo mentions several hurdles people face when they resettle in the United States, including interactions with school and bill collectors, which demonstrate that his meaning of self-sufficiency encompasses more than economic independence.

Thoo and other individuals within the Karen organization have learned to meet the needs for their schema of self-sufficiency by categorizing new arrivals in terms of years in the United States. Thoo explains saying:

There were two groups of refugees. The new...between one and six months, or refugees who just came in, and after six months, one or two to five years...We just...categorized them into two groups...because we realized that refugee resettlement [agencies] only wanted to help them [refugees] before six month[s]. So after six months...we thought we need our own organization who can help them.

In the Karen organization, Thoo and others who have been living in the United States for more than five years have become the advisors within the group, signifying a transition from receiving to giving. By managing needs through a hierarchy system the earlier arrivals can prioritize the needs of newer arrivals as they move up the ladder towards self-sufficiency.

While the Karen community has a more bureaucratic way of organizing refugees and meeting needs, the Sudanese community of Greensboro is no less organized. Both groups

perform a form of reciprocity, in which the onus of assisting others, so they can in turn help future new arrivals, falls on the individuals who resettled earlier. Within the Sudanese community earlier resettled refugees are given the title of old. However, older is not necessarily attached to chronological age, but rather to length of time in the United States. Those who have resided in the United States the longest have older knowledge systems for how to live in America. Markedly, both groups have adopted the RAP language of self-sufficiency through independence, but have altered it to refer to group independence rather than individual independence.

Employment and Education

“I struggle between job and school” (Marcus, Sudanese: Greensboro, North Carolina August 2012).

Both the Sudanese and the Burmese refugees are eager to find work. Employment is so deeply linked to education that I propose that these two concepts are part of the same schema within the refugee model of assistance. In addition, the refugees I interviewed believe that responsibility for ensuring that the dual schema of employment education is carried out should fall to the assistance programs. While some refugees expressed the desire to have a job that reflects their skill set or education, all want to have a job that allows for simultaneous education. Fusing the concepts of education and employment is also demonstrated in the refugees’ desire to earn an income that makes attending classes and paying bills a possibility.

Other informants expressed a desire to have a job that allows for time off in order to attend instruction in ESL, GED, and vocational training or college classes.

Lili is a Chin woman in her late twenties or early thirties. Her concerns are similar to other refugees' with regard to receiving a job that reflects their previous job training. She and her husband live with their infant daughter and two teenage nieces in Pinnacle Park in Greensboro. Pinnacle Park is a series of one-story apartments in one of Greensboro's higher crime areas.⁸ The apartments are in a state of disrepair similar to those at Woodgrave. The three families I know in Pinnacle Park expressed a desire to move to Margate, a newer and safer apartment complex. Lili works at a local designer food distribution center in Greensboro, but she also takes time to work in a community garden with local refugees. Ultimately, Lili wants to be a teacher: "I [do] not want to work in a factory my whole life...I want to be a teacher. I was a teacher in my country, so I don't know in the United States what I can do. I'm not very good [with the] computer. I love children and I am good with children." I asked Lili if she had ever considered attending the community college where her nieces are enrolled. She replied, "To go there [community college], we need to pay money. Right, so I have to wait until they [her nieces] finish." Lili links her work in Burma and Thailand to her desire for a similar job here in the United States. She also expresses a desire to move out of the factory environment, but realizes the financial limitations she currently faces make doing so prohibitive. Finding employment according to one's skill is a complicated process for refugees and RAP members alike, as credentialing and English proficiency can stand in the way of rapid employment within one's occupation of choice.

⁸ An "event search" via the Greensboro Police department, yielded over 100 incidents within a mile radius within a three month range (<http://p2c.greensboro-nc.gov/Summary.aspx>).

Jobs that require little to no understanding of English are limited, labor-intensive, or far from home, like the chicken processing plant in Dobson, or the pork processing plant in Smithfield, a 45 minute drive south of Raleigh.

Paul, an athletic Sudanese male in his mid-twenties encounters similar frustrations. Paul did not wish to be recorded, but actively lamented that: “People should be able to demonstrate their skills, and not [by] taking a test. They should give people a little work to see a little of their intelligence.” Formerly, Paul held a secretarial position in a refugee camp. He now works part-time as a housekeeper at a local hotel so he can also attend GED classes because he cannot prove that he finished high school. This precarious balancing act leaves Paul struggling to pay rent, while living with at least two other roommates to help reduce costs. I asked Paul how he felt about the GED program and he responded, “Here you get multiple choice. Someone who knows nothing can be just lucky and guess the answers. It [the GED test] does not show my intelligence.” While Paul is unhappy with the situation, his continual attendance at GED instruction demonstrates a level of surrendering to the system. His cultural model of assistance requires that potential employers and the RAP staff give him the opportunity to prove his secretarial skills, or at least receive enough money to attend the required training. Paradoxically, he must abandon his meaning of education and assistance in order to achieve the prized secretarial position.

Refugees like Lili and Paul are not unaware of the need to receive additional training in order to become a teacher or a secretary, nor are they antagonistic to the idea, but their cultural understandings of assistance have been constructed from past experiences which allowed them to simultaneously work and to attend school. Neither has been able to reconcile

their model to the American system of self-sufficiency and education, leaving them frustrated by the hurdles they encounter.

Marcus, a Sudanese man, further articulates this struggle, commenting that he must always choose between work and school. He mentioned that World Relief is willing to assist him in entering a Certified Nursing Program (CNA), but he does not know if this vocational training will be an option, saying, "But I have to pay bills. Work is more important." Similar sentiments were shared by Cha La, a Karen woman in her late thirties who lives in Chapel Hill. Cha La has two girls in elementary school and a son and daughter in high school. Originally, she resettled in Virginia five years ago with her children. She lived near her brother who has an unspecified mental disability, but moved to Chapel Hill a year later to be near her sister. Like Thoo, Cha La sometimes serves as a Karen interpreter. She is known for owning a car in the community and mentioned that she can never get things finished because she receives so many phone calls throughout the day asking for rides. I met with Cha La at seven in the morning after her night shift as a housekeeper at the local hospital. She lives in a small wooded apartment complex where her flower garden overwhelms the small dirt plot outside her door.

Cha La attended school in Burma until the tenth grade where she learned a little English. After the tenth grade she moved away from her aunt and uncle who lived in the city, returning to her parent's village and her ten brothers and sisters. Cha La remembers having to work all the time in order to feed so many people. At the time, her son was attending school, but had to quit in order to work. Cha La remarked, "I don't need that. I want my child to have the grades. Go to school." Cha La's comment demonstrates that her education/employment

schema is as intricately linked as Marcus'. She understands that work can be prohibitive of an education, and takes pains to make sure her son does not have to work. Cha La's schema is further demonstrated in her comment concerning ESL classes:

At my work, I have break time. Because I [am] in the library, you know it has the computer. I use it, the computer to learn...English. I train on it [for] one hour, one hour...but they [her employers] don't know...we start...work at eleven, and [do] not take [a] break. [So] I work, work, work, work, and then I can take a break [for] a little bit at six to seven...I take that time [to study].

Realistically, Cha La would not be able to leave the hospital campus in order to attend a class due to her graveyard shift and her limited break times. Not only does she find time to study, she does so at the risk of being caught, thereby demonstrating her cultural understanding of education and employment.

When I asked Cha La and Marcus what suggestions they wish they could make to RAP providers, both said that the assistance providers should give refugees more time to learn English or to get used to the American way of life before asking them to work. The desire refugees have for RAP caseworkers to allow for a balance between work and school should not be misinterpreted as refugee groups' unwillingness to be responsible for carrying out the balancing act. My interviewees understand their role, they only wish that RAP staff would help orchestrate the process, making provisions for time, and money, thereby empowering individuals with the tools needed to achieve adequate economic independence.

Transparency

“They [RAP staff] never explain to you what is happening. They [RAP staff] just fill out the paperwork and tell us stuff. We don’t really know what’s going on” (To Kwe, Karen, Chapel Hill, North Carolina August 2012).

The last major schema of the refugee cultural model of assistance is transparency, understood as access to information that is free of real or perceived deceit. Furthermore, accessibility should be understood as both the ability to receive information, and to understand the contents or meaning of that information. From my observations and interviews with RAP staff, paperwork is explained to new arrivals, and in all cases, an interpreter is made available or the paperwork for receiving cash assistance, social security, welcome money, etc. is printed in a language in which the refugee is fluent. Importantly, RAP personnel also ensure all new arrivals are greeted at the airport, receive food sufficient for three days, household items from toothpaste to dinnerware to couches. My interviews show that refugees are aware of these services, and only in a few instances, did refugees indicate a delay in receiving contact with RAP caseworkers. What is missing is transparency or explanation. Due to bureaucratic time constraints, RAP staff unintentionally provide the information too quickly and usually only one time. During a job workshop I attended, I watched as the instructor briefly went over the enrollment paperwork, saying the form was to help her keep track of the attendees. She then instructed the attendees to fill out the two pages to the best of their ability. After struggling to fill out names and addresses and educational backgrounds, she asked people to sign the form without explaining why. One after the other, the attendees signed, no questions asked. Refugees sign countless forms without question.

My interviews reveal that in spite of this acquiescence to system, refugees are uncomfortable with the limited information and explanations they receive.

To Kwe, whom I cited above, is a mother of five girls and one boy, ranging in age from four to eighteen. To Kwe, her husband, and the children and live in a house built by Habitat for Humanity in the Chapel Hill area, and both parents work in housekeeping at a local university. Five years ago, the family was resettled in South Carolina, but was unable to find employment sufficient for paying the rent. Speaking through an interpreter, To Kwe said, “I felt if the help was only for six months why should I stay here....I wanted to go back [to Thailand] because there was no achievement here; there was nothing to support ourselves.”

I visited To Kwe twice; both times she was talkative and liked to tell stories that made her laugh. When I asked her what she wished she could have told her caseworker in order to make her resettlement experience better, she chuckled and said, “I remember we were given a debit card and told [that] we could get money off it. Our caseworker never showed us exactly how to get the money off it, so the money just stayed on the card. We never used it.” To Kwe then became serious and said, “If you [RAP staff] are going to support us for six months without us knowing anything, it is better for us to leave.” I then asked To Kwe if she had received any orientation instruction when she arrived in South Carolina. Interestingly, she had. She said that caseworkers had shown her where the RAP office, hospital, school, and grocery store were located in relation to her apartment; they had told her that each member of her family would receive Welcome Money to help pay the rent.

Five years have passed since To Kwe has accessed assistance from an RAP caseworker, so recalling what information she received in her South Carolina orientation may be difficult and incomplete. However, the passing of time should not negate her vivid memory of the debit card, as well as the reason she and her husband decided to relocate to North Carolina. To Kwe's comment that RAP staff "never showed us exactly how" to use the debit card demonstrates that she needed more than a verbal explanation. Because her caseworker did not physically demonstrate how to use the card, To Kwe never received the cash assistance due her. I cannot assume what took place between To Kwe and RAP staff, but her repetition of statements of confusion or unfamiliarity with paperwork or money indicates that To Kwe's schema of transparency involves both repetition over time and physical demonstrations.

I found a similar schema of transparency among my Sudanese informants. One day while visiting with Luca, three men arrived saying Luca had asked them to interview with me. They told me they would do so, but only as a group. I readily agreed. Luca agreed to interpret for me. Edgard, Mohammed and Nijam had arrived in Greensboro 30 days earlier. All three are from Darfur, Sudan. Edgard and Mohammed live together with one other roommate, while Nijam lives with his two young children and his wife. All three are still acclimating to their new life and have not yet located jobs, nor have they received TANF or food stamps, although their paperwork for these benefits is being processed. I asked each of them to tell me about their contact with RAP caseworkers and later I asked how they felt about the contact or communication they have so far had with World Relief.

Nijam, a small framed man in his late twenties with a small round face, was the most talkative of the three, saying, “They [RAP staff] just came and picked me up and we went to some office. They [RAP staff] opened my IOM [International Organization for Migration] bag and we filled out the papers in it....I don’t know what I signed or why I signed it.”

Edgard, a tall man in his mid-twenties with a thick-set face, interrupted, “They [RAP staff] told me the papers [were] for Medicaid and food, but the rest, I don’t know – and for social security.” Edgard and Nijam did not express much worry over not knowing the purpose of the paperwork. However, their concern regarding transparency was made most evident when Mohammed, a thirty-year old man whose short, muscular body the guys joke about, calling him the “wrestler,” recalled:

I told my caseworker that I was sick and wanted to see a doctor. My caseworker said, ‘okay, I will get back to you,’ but he did not. The second time I met with him, I told him again about needing the doctor, and he said ‘okay, I am going to come back.’ After four days he met me again and I asked him again, and he said ‘you are not sick, why do you want to see a doctor.’ He is not a doctor; how does he know I’m not sick? Then they [RAP staff] took me to the office to fill out applications for a job, and I told them ‘right now I am not feeling good. I have to go and get [treated]. After that I will work. Right now I have to see a doctor...

Mohamed was eventually taken to an urgent care clinic and had an appointment with a specialist four days later. After he finished telling his story, I asked Mohammed if he told someone other than his caseworker what had happened. He replied:

[While] I want to tell my caseworker these things, I don’t feel comfortable talking with them [in the way] you and I are talking...when I told my caseworker that I was sick, he said ‘no, you are not sick.’ So when I asked for a new caseworker because of this, [name omitted] said [to his manager], ‘no, I did not say that, I just told him [Mohammed] I was not a doctor, so we will take [him] to a doctor.

As with To Kwe, I will not attempt to assume who actually said what. What is important in this instance is that Mohammed's schema of transparency requires both explanation, as well as an understanding of time that is different from what the RAP caseworkers are able to deliver. During an interview with Quinton, he told me that the new requirements and paperwork for applying for food stamps have lengthened the approval process from one week to one month. Approval for Medicaid progresses along a similar timeline. I can only conjecture that taking Mohammed to a doctor before his Medicaid was approved would have proven to be an expensive deduction from his Welcome Money account. Whether or not such conjecture matches the thinking of the caseworker, Mohammed was not given any reason for the delay in care, thereby disrupting his model of assistance.

In closing, the refugee cultural model of assistance is constructed from a hierarchy of schemas that include promoting self-sufficiency through reciprocity and networks, providing simultaneous employment and education, and allowing for transparency regarding the administration and allocation of services. Each time my interviewees implicitly define the meaning of assistance, they do so in terms of time and surrender, like Mohammed who laughed and said, "Can you give me some time to adjust? Give me six months so I can learn a little English. I don't even know how to say hello [in English]!" In other instances, my informants feel they must acquiesce to the system, acknowledging that they may have to scrub floors in order to pay rent rather than attend school. One day, while speaking to Michael the managing caseworker at World Relief, he eloquently described the situation of refugees who wanted more affordable housing. One woman had told him she would rather have some plastic sheeting to make her own home in a field. Michael informed her that this

was out of the question; squatting was against the law and that doing so would result in the police taking away her children. He then said, “They [United States government] can’t provide for you [the refugee] in the system and they [United States government] won’t allow you [the refugee] to apply your system. See the dilemma?” Because refugees cannot apply their own system, they must rely on RAP providers who face similar constraints and frustrations, and whose model of assistance is distinctly different from that of refugees. While this creates a problem that most researchers call cultural miscommunication, the implications should not be seen as a simple misunderstanding over terminology. Refugees are unable to have the schema for their model filled in the way they have constructed assistance, which results in the belief that RAP staff cannot actually meet their needs or help them achieve self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER 6: “YOU WILL HAVE EVERYTHING” – DELEGITIMIZING THE RAPs

“We were told that you when you come here [to the United States] you will have everything you need. You will have all the support that you need – whatever you need. Everything is there for you.” (To Kwe, Karen, Chapel Hill, North Carolina August 2012)

Every RAP staff worker and refugee I interviewed related information about the pre-departure CO programs that contradicted the CO curriculum materials, which often results in disappointment among refugees when they discover that this information does not match the reality of RAP assistance and life in the United States. Demonstrating the differences in the RAP staff and refugee cultural models of assistance may be sufficient for knowing where the differences between two groups lie. However, understanding the implications of perpetual misunderstanding, if these models are not reconciled or acknowledged, is fundamentally important to preventing miscommunication. Checking such miscommunication is also crucial for preventing refugees from delegitimizing the role of RAP staff as viable members in their adaptation to life in the United States. Pre-departure orientation is fundamental to averting the RAP providers’ and refugees’ misunderstandings by providing information that refugees may use to assist in navigating a new cultural model of assistance.

I was unable to observe a pre-departure orientation because they are conducted abroad; however, by asking refugees to recount their orientation experiences, this chapter will demonstrate that refugees enter the United States with expectations that do not match the RAP cultural model of assistance. Most often, this disappointment results from the CO

programs' use of vague language onto which refugees transpose their own cultural model of assistance. The information that refugees provide is exhaustive. For the purposes of this study, I have categorized the evidence offered to me according to two schemas of CO outlined in chapter four: arrival, and Welcome Money. By demonstrating the disparity between the text of the curriculum and the discourse of refugees, RAP caseworkers may begin to unravel why refugees' expectations for RAP assistance are unaligned with their own.

Arrival

Among the Sudanese refugees I interviewed, CO information about arrival is marked by the word "welcome." Nijam's arrival to the United States was so recent, I believed he would have the most to say about entering the United States, and what he had been informed of in the CO training. Nijam told me:

What we are hearing back home is totally different. [We were told,] 'when you arrive, the people [RAP staff] are just going to welcome you; they will show you everything you [need]...[RAP staff] will welcome you from the airport; take you to the house, and welcome you; [they will] be with you for hours, then they will leave you. The next day they will come and show you the freezer or the stove or the oven...' People...welcome[ed] us at the airport and [took us] to the house...When we arrived there was a table with four cups and plates and a gallon of juice – some water – but what we received was not even enough.

I asked Najim why his arrival was disappointing, and he informed me that he had been told he would be welcomed, but that he did not get welcomed. I re-read Najim's transcript of his arrival and from my perspective, I find it difficult to understand in what areas he was not

being welcomed. According to the RAP protocol for arrival, he was greeted at the airport, transported to his new home, given housing items, and fed. But Nijam insisted that “what we received was not even enough”. Yet, Nijam’s response should not be interpreted as an unrealistic expectation or a sign of ingratitude. CO programs gave Nijam a fair assessment of what he would receive the first day, but the instruction did not dispel Nijam’s cultural construct of welcome, resulting in his disappointment.

Similarly, among my Karen informants, CO training about arrival is marked by the word “everything.” I met Lena at a local community farm where Karen refugees may cultivate a small plot of land and sell the produce at a local market or to restaurants in the Chapel Hill area. Lena’s daughter Mo Paw is attending a local college and interpreted for me. Lena has been living in Chapel Hill for five years; she speaks better English than she lets on, but she is more comfortable expressing herself in Karen. When I asked her about CO programs in Thailand, she said, “Orientation [instructors] told us [the RAP] would have everything, for example, like applying for [a] green card... [Instead] they [RAP personnel] just give you directions and you have to go on your own. They gave me a map, but I had no car, so I just waited [for] two or three years to go get it.” To Kwe, another Karen female, also used the word “everything” in her description of CO instruction stating, “We were told that you when you come here you will have everything you need. You will have the support that you need – Whatever you need. Everything is there for you.” As with the cultural construction of welcome, “everything you need” can be interpreted in many ways. Both Lena and To Kwe listed the types of aid CO programs would provide. For example, Lena had earlier recalled:

They [CO] talked about the laws in the US and [what] life [would be like] in the US. They told us if you work hard your life is going to go up higher. If you are not working that means you are going to be lower. You [have] to attend school, [and] take ESL classes. They [CO] told us Refuge and Relief would help us apply for food stamps, social security...a job, Medicaid...they said they [the RAP] would pay the rent for you, but if you get a job, they [will not] pay rent.

For Lena and To Kwe, the above list does not comprise “everything.” As a result, they would often laugh ironically about their concept of “everything.” “Everything” became an irony that they linked to the RAP providers’ inability to distribute supportive services. I asked both women if their RAP caseworker had helped them receive the things they listed. Each replied yes, but immediately, said they did not receive the support, or they did not receive everything. As with the case of Nijam, the CO program seems to provide Karen refugees with a technically fair assessment of what to expect upon arrival, but instructors are unable to dispel the refugees’ cultural constructions of vague terminology like “welcome” and “everything.”

Welcome Money

Refugee cultural models are also applied to the word “welcome” in regards to Welcome Money. Particularly among the Sudanese informants, their meaning of “welcome” contradicts how Welcome Money is administered. In particular, the refugees’ construction of Welcome Money is linked to their schema of transparency. When I asked Luca about his CO program, he stated:

Over there [in Africa] they [CO instructors] told us what they [RAP staff] would provide for you. I’m coming from the outside! I don’t know what they [RAP staff]

have here, right? And [if] I needed soap or I needed... a tooth brush [that] they [the RAP] [would pay with] their money... not with your money [Welcome Money].

Luca was very excited during this statement, and so I clarified, asking him that, if he needed something like soap, the RAP caseworker said they would have to take it out of his Welcome Money account. He replied, yes.

Luca's information about RAP's administration of Welcome Money is accurate. Each RAP agency has a comprehensive list of items that must be purchased for an apartment prior to a refugee's arrival. All items, including those for personal hygiene are deducted from an individual's Welcome Money account. However, because the CO instruction is only informing refugees that they will receive this money without explaining how that is defined or allocated by the American RAP system, refugees apply their own construction of "welcome" and believe that they will receive the full amount to do with as they wish. Luca never told me explicitly that CO programs told him he would receive the full amount of cash, rather he commented, "Everything... you [are] going to get it completely – pillars – welcome money. You [are] going to just find it on the table, or the person [RAP caseworker] will bring it [to you] the first day... That is the first thing you're going to get." Later, Luca informed me that he had received \$80 in cash for pocket money rather than the full amount in his Welcome Money account. From the RAP model, the Welcome Money is used exactly as is mandated, and Luca did receive money to use as needed, but CO instruction reinforced Luca's understanding of "welcome" by not educating him about the RAP system's understanding of "welcome" and Welcome Money. As a result, Luca wonders if he and other refugees are being cheated.

Luca is not alone in speculating that RAP agencies are cheating refugees out of money. RAP Welcome Money is closely watched by administrators and an individual refugee may view his or her account at any time. But because RAP agencies are not fulfilling the Sudanese schema of welcome or transparency, refugees begin to doubt the integrity of the organization. Furthermore, RAP staffers are being transparent according to their own cultural construction; each individual Welcome Money account is administered according to the needs of the individual. However, members of the Sudanese refugee community often share their situation with other members in the community. For example, Samir, one of the “old guys,” reports that some refugees’ Welcome Money is spent on rent, while others do not have this expense. As a result, Samir believes that individuals whose welcome money is not administered for rent are being given rent money from a separate RAP account. Yet, Bobbi, a caseworker at World Relief, indicated that often times an anchor family will house a new arrival, making it unnecessary to spend the new arrival’s welcome money on rent. But Samir was not given this information during CO training, and while RAP staffers were individually transparent with Samir and his account, they were not transparent according to Samir’s cultural model of assistance.

Such miscommunication has a tremendous impact on how refugees see RAP personnel. In extreme cases like Samir’s and Luca’s the RAP staff are believed to be cheating them out of money. In other cases, RAP staff are seen as ineffective because they are unable to provide “everything.” I asked my refugee informants what advice or suggestions they would make to their RAP caseworker that would make resettlement easier or better for new arrivals. In response I received answers ranging from: caseworkers need to be more

available; caseworkers need to be more transparent, both in monetary accounting and in providing information about the city; and caseworkers need to provide new arrivals with more time to adjust and learn English before they begin working. I then asked each interviewee if he or she felt comfortable giving this advice to their caseworker, followed by why or why not. Responses like Marcus' were typical. He informed me he would feel comfortable, but that, "They [RAP staff] would not listen. You can't change the rules." In other instances, individuals like Edgard, a new arrival Sudanese man, commented that he believed RAP caseworkers should provide new arrivals with a telephone so they could communicate quickly with their caseworker. He then stated, "I would feel comfortable giving this advice, and I think they would listen." Yet a moment later when I asked who Edgard would turn to for help like this, he replied, "If I am going to ask for help, I will ask my friends or my neighbors." Edgard's unconscious contradiction demonstrates that he believes in his ability to give his RAP staff programmatic suggestions, and that he believes the RAP caseworkers will listen. However, by turning to his friends and neighbors he is implying that he does not believe his RAP program will be able to effect such change, or that RAP staffers are appropriate persons to turn to for help. Of note, I did encounter individuals who recounted that CO training had told them they would receive a television, or a microwave or internet service. However, cases such as these are not the norm. Most informants report that what they were told in the CO class was different than what they encounter when they resettle. Instead of listing specific services or items, many interviewees reported being told they would be "welcomed," or would receive "everything."

While the CO may be providing accurate information, I would argue that more often during CO instruction, teachers are offering few alternate constructions or models for understanding the RAP system and American ideas of “assistance,” “welcome” or “everything you need.” Such limitations to defining these American cultural models create an environment in the United States in which, both RAP staff and refugees, are mutually dissatisfied with the process of resettlement. Refugees continue to frame the concepts of “welcome” and “everything” according to their own cultural model, thereby engendering disappointment upon arrival in the United States. Furthermore, since cultural constructions are not defined or dispelled, refugees believe that RAP caseworkers are not fulfilling their resettlement responsibilities. Instead, refugees’ meanings of RAP assistance are differently framed, perpetuating cross-cultural miscommunication, and perhaps a level of cognitive dissonance. As a result refugees’ perceptions of the RAP system’s failures leads them to turn to personal networks to find employment or food, or move to another area of the United States for support. They also begin to share their misunderstandings of RAP assistance with new arrivals perpetuating a climate of mistrust among refugees. Meanwhile RAP staff members begin to generate a climate of exasperation over the perceived unrealistic expectations of refugees, as perpetuated by the CO programs.

Ensuring that RAP staff, refugees and CO instructors understand the cognitive cultural modeling for each group is essential for preventing much of the finger pointing that takes place once refugees arrive in the United States. While refugees and RAP staff may define their schemas differently, many of the schema rest on similar constructs of education,

employment, and self-sufficiency. Drawing on similarities like these will allow effective cross-cultural communication to take place.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

I have used this thesis to demonstrate how the cognitive cultural model approach allows us to understand how two different groups – in spite of having common goals – can misunderstand or misinterpret the actions of the other as suspicious or misguided. In this chapter I intend to show that the cognitive cultural model can also work to manage one's expectations, or at the least improve cross cultural communication between two groups. Craig Storti (1994: 2) points out that, "much of what we assumed was universal in human behavior, is in fact, peculiar to a particular group." He further states that cross-cultural communication takes place because both sides of the misunderstanding "[assume] that the other looks at the world exactly as he or she does" (Storti 1994: 3). In the case of my study, misunderstanding and cultural miscommunications result when these conflicting cultural models of assistance collide, thereby ensuring that members from both groups lose credibility in each other's minds. Supporters of cross-cultural communication strategies have advised that misunderstandings can largely be avoided by applying knowledge of the expectations and norms of the culture one is communicating with. This chapter demonstrates that the cultural model approach is effective for delineating norms and, more importantly, deciphering the meanings of these norms. In addition I show how the flexibility of the cultural model can be employed over time as people's perspectives change.

Using the cultural model has more salience when considering an informal interview I had with Franklin, a caseworker at Refuge and Relief, I asked him if he felt that newly arriving refugees had unrealistic expectations about the RAP program. He remarked that he

believed everyone has a dream or a preconceived idea of what a situation will bring. For him, refugees experience disappointment like anyone else who faces the reality of a new situation; hoping for the best is part of human nature. But restricting ourselves to this perspective does not get to the heart of what creates and nurtures the expectations of refugees, nor does it resolve the mutual miscommunication that results between RAP caseworkers and refugees. Recognizing that individuals from different social and ethnic groups see the world differently is not a new idea. However, chalking up the resulting miscommunication to a cultural difference does not provide an appropriate solution to dealing with difference

Deconstructing how RAP staff and refugees define the concept of assistance takes cross-cultural understandings to a deeper level of insight. The cognitive approach allows us to unpack the schema that the model is built upon and find commonality among the two groups' meaning of resettlement assistance. In chapter four, I demonstrated that RAP staff define assistance through four main schemas: self-sufficiency, rapid employment, monetary aid, and education. In chapter five, I outlined how refugees define assistance through three main schemas: self-sufficiency, employment and education, and transparency. In chapter six, I provided a comparison of both models, which revealed that both groups hold in common the schemas of self-sufficiency, education, and employment. Furthermore, I recounted how both groups expressed much of their frustration with the assistance model through the concepts of time and surrender. In essence, these various schemas are the beliefs behind the norms that can either aid or hinder effective communication. However, Johannes Fabian (1997:48) cautions that beyond knowing the schemas' attributes and meaning, individuals must participate in the practice and confrontation of these schemas. In other words, knowing

where to bridge the gap is crucial, but is also complicated and cannot be achieved by simply redefining terms; the process of rectification is one of negotiation. Sana Reynolds, Deborah Valentine, and Mary Munter use a visual model to demonstrate where the similarities and differences lie between two different cultural groups. Their visual representation breaks the culture concept into Individualist and Collectivist societies in which each society is marked by schemas of transaction/relationship-oriented practices, or independent/interdependent relationships. The authors then demonstrate how these two types of societies are transaction or relationship oriented, independent or interdependent, etc. (Reynolds, et.al. 2011:10).

While this perhaps is oversimplified, Table 7.1 serves as a visual aid to my findings of the RAP staff and refugee cultural models as outlined in chapters four and five. I have applied their technique in Table 7.1 to RAP staff and refugees schema in order to better clarify the differences and commonalities each group demonstrates in their shared schemas. By breaking the two models down in this way, refugees and RAP staff may be able to begin the process of understanding each other.

Table 7.1 is divided into two columns, one representing the RAP staff model and the other representing the refugee model. In the far left column are the three shared schemas, and in the columns underneath each group is a summary of how each group defines these schemas. Note that I am not suggesting that one group can or should adopt the other group's cultural model of assistance, or that the RAP staff or refugees can or should insert components of each other's schema into their own. Rather, Table 7.1 demonstrates how each group is grounded. Both groups can then use this knowledge to understand how each group's

schemas may or may not be accommodated within the bureaucratic context of the American system of resettlement assistance.

Table 7.1 Shared Schemas of RAP staff and Refugee Cultural Models of Assistance

Schemas	RAP staff	Refugees
Self-Sufficiency	economic independence from the social service system/ achieved on an individual basis/ personal responsibility	economic and social interdependence of community members through networks and reciprocity/ group responsibility
Employment	must be gained as quickly as possible/ employment according to one's skill is optimal, but not required or feasible/ employment in any capacity is preferable/ responsibility is placed on RAP to find the first job	employment should be based on past skills or education/ education needed for employment is secondary to finding education/RAPs should be responsible for finding employment
Education	ESL instruction is of primary importance/ vocational and college training should be pursued in one's free time	Vocational, ESL, and college instruction are of equal importance, depending on one's career goals/ education is paramount to finding a job/RAPs should be responsible for ensuring educational development
Time	3-6 month timeframe for assisting refugees is unrealistic	employment should be delayed so refugees may receive appropriate training or have more time to become more accustomed to life in the US
Surrender	resettlement system is the only way in which to assist refugees and staff feel they must make do with what the government gives to the RAP providers	system cannot be changed/RAP staff are too busy to deal with all of a refugee's concerns

Moving Forward

While RAP staff and refugee interactions and negotiations are important to the process of effective cross-cultural communication, CO training, as I indicated in chapter six, is integral to the process of introducing refugees to new cultural models. The active process of learning is crucial to ensuring that a refugee's model is not the only one he or she uses to evaluate many of the new experiences he or she will encounter throughout the resettlement process. Of course it will not always be enough to just know what the differences are. Cross-cultural communication writers like Storti (2001:48) warn against prolonged miscommunication as it results in animosity in which the non-local, or in this case the refugee devises "elaborate (often costly) strategies to get things done, deciding not to try certain things because you believe that they won't succeed in these circumstance." RAP staff and the United States government want to see refugees enter into the American way of life with increasing independence. However, these two organizations need to recognize the persisting belief of refugees that they should avoid receiving any assistance from the RAP agency. Such avoidance techniques can also be potentially detrimental to incoming refugees who must rely on caseworkers for housing, food, employment, and help navigating the complex social services system.

In addition to acquiring more knowledge about cultural modeling, RAP staff could limit the effect of mistrust by accounting for the levels of adaptation that refugees often experience as they acclimate to the United States. Barry Stein (1981:325) believes that refugees go through four stages of adaptation once they are resettled in the US. Throughout

my research, refugees like the newest arrivals from Sudan were experiencing the first stage that is marked by nostalgia and frustration. The “old guys” who had been residing in the United States for three years were experiencing the next level marked by hard work and a desire to achieve a better life, while experiencing road blocks in terms of education and language. Often, the “old guys” may partake in aggressive innovation to achieve economic status or fall into some measure of mental dysfunction. On the other hand, the individuals from Burma had all been residing in America for more than five years. In addition, Thoo and Cha La had recently become American citizens. Stein (1981:325) argues that individuals in this group have begun to resign themselves to whatever job or economic level they have achieved and transfer their hopes to their children. Researching people who have been in the United States for the same period of time may give greater coherence to the cultural model.

Stein also demonstrates that many of the issues that I encountered in my research are part of the process of resettlement: RAP staff feel that refugees are too demanding or have unrealistic expectations, and refugees are often suspicious of the RAP caseworkers and their goals and thus, limit their interaction with this group. (Stein 1981:327-328) Because adaptation is a process, many of the difficulties that Stein outlines cannot be avoided; adjusting to any new culture or experience is difficult. However, rooting the interactions that do take place between RAP staff and refugees in a cultural model approach may better enable both sides to understand each other and to also understand that they experience many of the same frustrations with the system.

Future Study

My research was limited in the number of individuals I was able to access. I attempted to remedy this deficit by interviewing individuals from multiple countries, while also focusing the scope of this paper on individuals from Burma and Sudan. Even so, a more extensive study would be helpful in revealing whether the cultural model of assistance as defined by refugees and by RAP staff is consistent across multiple communities, ethnic groups, and RAP organizations. Future studies would also provide benefit by comparing the diverse groups at different times throughout their adaptation to the United States. My research among the Karen is consistent with Stein's (1981) adaptation model. Many of the Karen recounted that RAP staff did not deliver "everything," yet they recognized the work of the RAP staff as somewhat helpful. For the Karen who were much farther along Stein's adaptation spectrum, drawing on specific frustrations was secondary to ensuring a better future for their children. The change in perspective about assistance seems to demonstrate the most valuable contribution of a cultural model approach: flexibility. Researchers can use the cultural model while incorporating Stein's adaptation theory, thereby demonstrating how and why norms and beliefs change over time. Furthermore, incorporating a multiple method approach like this may also provide RAP personnel with cognitive maps that allow them to adjust to the changing needs of refugees based on length of stay and thus, bolster formal cross-cultural instruction and communication.

I recently discovered that the CO manual from 2004 has been updated as of March 2013. My glance through the sections reveals that CO personnel are attempting to manage

some of the expectations that refugees will encounter. I recall one anecdote from the curriculum that spoke about a refugee woman who entered her new apartment to find that the furniture was clean, but shabby and previously owned. The manual asks the reader to consider why this refugee woman was disappointed. While this is a positive first step to rectifying the cross-cultural communication taking place between refugees and RAP, the anecdote is only encouraging the reader to use his or her own cultural model to interpret the disappointment. The manual does not provide the reader with the RAP staff cultural model of assistance, which would demonstrate why shabby housing is all that is available, or why the RAP staff believe that shabby housing is an appropriate form of assistance. CO programs cannot change the expectations refugees or RAP staff have about each other or about resettlement, but they can offer the cognitive cultural model approach as a way of knowing the other, and as a way of coping with and communicating through the difference.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A – United States Refugee Arrivals – Fiscal Year, 2011

Top 10 State Recipients of Refugee Arrivals

State	% of total arrivals
Texas	10
California	8.8
New York	6.3
Pennsylvania	5.3
Florida	5.2
Georgia	4.7
Michigan	4.6
Arizona	3.8
Washington	3.8
North Carolina	3.8
TOTAL	56.3

Appendix B – Interviewee Demographics

Refugee Interviewee Demographics

Interviewee	Sex	Approximate age	Country of Origin	Length of time in US	Civil status	Family Location	Current Residence	Number in current residence
1	Male	30	Sudan	3 years	Single	Sudan	Greensboro, NC	2
2	Male	30	Sudan	3 years	Single	Unknown	Greensboro, NC	2
3	Male	45	Sudan	3 years	Married	US and Unknown	Greensboro, NC	9
4	Male	45	Sudan	10 months	Widowed	US and Unknown	Greensboro, NC	9
5	Male	25	Sudan	2 months	Single	Unknown	Greensboro, NC	4
6	Male	25	Sudan	1 month	Single	Unknown	Greensboro, NC	4
7	Male	25	Sudan	1 month	Married	US and Sudan	Greensboro, NC	4
8	Male	25	Sudan	1 month	Single	Unknown	Greensboro, NC	4
9	Male	35	Ethiopia	3 months	Single	Ethiopia	Raleigh, NC	5
10	Female	40	Burma (Karen)	4 years	Married	US, Thailand, Burma	Chapel Hill, NC	6
11	Female	45	Burma (Karen)	5 years	Divorced	US, Thailand, Burma	Chapel Hill, NC	3
12	Female	40	Burma (Karen)	4 years	Married	US, Thailand, Burma	Chapel Hill, NC	4
13	Male	42	Burma (Karen)	5 years	Married	US, Thailand, Burma	Raleigh, NC	5
14	Female	40	Burma (Chin)		Married	US, Thailand, Burma	Greensboro, NC	5
15	Male	26	Bhutan		Single	US and Unknown	Greensboro, NC	3
16	Female	20	Eritrea	2 years	Single	US and Eritrea	Greensboro, NC	5
17	Female	24	Eritrea	2 years	Married	US and Eritrea	Greensboro, NC	5
18	Male	25	Eritrea	2 years	Married	US and Eritrea	Greensboro, NC	5
19	Male	25	Eritrea	1 year	Married	US and Eritrea	Greensboro, NC	Unknown
20	Male	27	Chad	2 years	Single	Africa	Greensboro, NC	4
21	Male	27	Burundi	2 years	Single	Unknown	Greensboro, NC	4

Appendix C – Interview Schedules

RAP Staff Interview Schedule

1. What are your primary responsibilities?
2. How long have you been in this position?
 - a. What did you do before you took your current position?
3. What interests you about refugee resettlement programs?
4. How are policies or procedures created at _____?
 - a. What role so you play in the implementation of those policies?
 - b. In what ways do you feel you have a voice in the creation of such policies?
 - c. In what ways do you feel refugees have a voice in the creation of these policies?
5. What do you believe works or does not work in terms of delivering assistance to refugees in the Triangle?
6. What works and does not work from a business or managerial point of view?
7. What influence do you or LFS have in regards to implementing ideas for change?
8. What do you feel is the greatest concern for refugees settling in the _____ area?
 - a. How have you made this determination?
9. What do you feel refugees expect when being resettled?
 - a. Is this different than what is being delivered?
 - b. How do you reconcile that difference?
10. Personally, what is most important to you in regards to delivering assistance?
 - a. Do you see tension between what you are mandated to do and your own views about delivering assistance to refugees?
11. Who do you work with most closely in creating your goals and objectives?
 - a. Can you list five and their relationship to you?
12. Who do you work with most closely in implementing resettlement policies?
 - a. Can you list five and their relationship to you?
13. Do you interact with independent refugee groups?
 - a. Can you list 5 and how you interact?
 - b. Does LFS play any role in connecting refugee from similar ethnic backgrounds when they arrive?
14. In what ways do you feel refugees in the _____ may be marginalized?
15. What are your future goals and objectives for delivering assistance in _____?

Refugee Interview Schedule

1. Where are you from?
2. How long have you been in the US?
 - a. How long have you lived in the Orange County area?
3. Where did you live when you first came to the US?
 - a. How long did you live there?
 - b. How far was the grocery store from your house? How did you get there?
 - c. How far was work from your house? How did you get there?
 - d. How far was the bus from your house?
 - e. How far was your assistance program from your house?
4. When you came to the US who did you live with?
 - a. How did you come to live with them?
5. Did you have family in the area you first settled in? Who?
6. Did you have friends in the area you first settled in? Can you name five and their relationship to you?
7. Tell me what you thought life would be like in the US before you moved here?
 - a. How was this different when you first moved to the US?
 - b. How did you feel about these differences?
8. What did your assistance program do for you when you moved to the US?
 - a. How helpful was this assistance?
9. How many times a week did you talk to your primary case worker?
 - a. Do you have any contact with your case workers now?
10. What do you talk about with your case worker?
 - a. Is this different from when you first arrived?
11. When are you able to reach your case worker?
12. If you could make a suggestion for the resettlement program what would it be?
 - a. How do you feel this suggestion could be made possible?
 - b. Have you ever made suggestions like this to your caseworker?
 - c. How did he or she respond?
 - d. How do you feel about his or her response?
 - i. Did you feel like you had a voice?
13. What kinds of groups are you involved in or a member of?
 - a. How did you learn about these groups?
14. What concerns you most about your life in the US?
15. Do you have a job?
 - a. Where do you work?
 - b. How long have you worked there?
 - or...
 - c. How long have you been without a job?
 - d. What was your previous job?

- e. How did you get your current job?
 - f. How does or did your assistance program assist you when you are looking for a job?
16. Who do you ask for help if you need a job, a ride, a recommendation or food?
- a. Can you name five people and their relationship with you?

Appendix D – Housing Supply Checklists

World Relief Housing Supply List

Housing Supply Checklist					
Affiliate _____		Case Number _____	Case Size _____		
P.A. _____		Case Manager _____			
Supplies	Quantity (# units or sets)	R&P Grant (\$)	Private Funds (\$)	Donation Value (\$)	Supply Sub-Total (\$)
Household Furnishings					
Bedding (bed frame and spring, or equivalent, and mattress) appropriate for age and gender composition of family.					
One set of drawers, shelves, or other unit appropriate for storage of clothing (in addition to closet, unless closet has shelving to accommodate clothing) per family					
One kitchen table per family					
One kitchen chair per person					
One couch per family or equivalent seating (in addition to kitchen chairs)					
One lamp per room unless installed lighting present					
Kitchen Items					
One place setting of tableware (fork, knife, spoon) per person					
One place setting of dishes (plate, bowl, cup) per person					
Pots and pans: at least one sauce pan, one frying pan, one baking dish					
Mixing/serving bowls					
One set of kitchen utensils (spatula, wooden spoon, knife, serving utensils, etc.)					
Can opener					
Baby items as needed					
Linens and Other Household Supplies					
One towel (and wash cloth) per person					
One set of sheets and blankets for each bed					
One pillow and pillowcase for each person					
Alarm clock					
Paper, pens and/or pencils					
Light bulbs					
Cleaning Supplies					
Dish soap					
Bathroom/kitchen cleanser					
Sponges or cleaning rags and/or paper towels					
Laundry detergent					
2 waste baskets					

Supplies	Quantity (# units or sets)	R&P Grant (\$)	Private Funds (\$)	Donation Value (\$)	Supply Sub-Total (\$)
Mop or broom					
Trash bags					
Toiletries					
Toilet paper					
Shampoo					
Soap					
One toothbrush per person					
Toothpaste					
Personal hygiene items as appropriate					
Food					
Upon arrival, culturally appropriate, ready-to-eat-food, and one day's worth of additional food supplies and staples.					
Within one day of arrival, food or food allowance at least equivalent to the food stamp allocation for that family unit until receipt of food stamps or when unit is able to provide food for him/her/themselves.					
Clothing					
Appropriate seasonal clothing and proper footwear for each family member, and diapers for children as necessary					
Other					
Funding Source Sub-Totals (\$)					
TOTAL VALUE (\$) (R&P, Private, Donation)					

Comments _____

Client Signature _____ Date _____
 Case Manager Signature _____ Date _____
 Interpreter Signature _____ Date _____

Refugee and Relief Housing Supply List

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICE

Affiliate: _____ Site: _____

SUPPLY LIST

PA's Name:		Case #:		
Address:		Numbers of Persons in Household:		
** Denotes one per person	Quantity	Cash from R&P direct assistance	Value In-Kind	Cash from other sources
1. Furnishings				
Matress* - Twin/Double				
Box Spring				
Bed Frame				
Set of drawers, shelves or other unit appropriate for storage of clothing				
Kitchen table				
**Kitchen chair				
Couch or equivalent seating (in addition to kitchen chairs)				
Lamp (one per room unless installed lighting is present)				
2. Kitchen Items				
**One place setting of tableware (fork, knife, spoon)				
**One place setting of dishes (plate, bowl and cup)				
Pots and pans; at least one sauce pan, frying pan, and baking dish				
Mixing/serving bowls				
One set of kitchen utensils (such as a spatula, wooden spoon, knife, serving utensils, etc.)				
Can opener				
Baby items as needed				
3. Linens and Other Household Items				
**One towel				
One set of sheets and blankets per bed				
**One pillow and pillowcase				
Alarm clock				
Paper, pens and/or pencils				
Light bulbs				
4. Cleaning Supplies				
Dish soap				
Bathroom/kitchen cleanser				
Sponges or cleaning rags and/or paper towels				
Laundry detergent				
Two waste baskets				
Mop or broom				
Trash bags				
* Appropriate for age and gender composition of family Only married couples and small children of the same sex may be expected to share beds.				

