

ABSTRACT

JASPERSON, NICOLE MARIE. Cooling-Out Refugees: An Examination of Employment Specialists' Strategies at Refugee Resettlement Agencies. (Under the direction of Dr. Michael Schwalbe).

This study examines how employment specialists at refugee resettlement agencies help refugees find—and settle for—jobs in the secondary labor market. To analyze this process of aligning refugees' expectations with job market realities, I draw upon Goffman's (1952) concept of "cooling the mark out." Goffman used this concept to explain how individuals help others adapt to unexpected failures or status loss. Refugees, although not victims of con games, often arrive with higher expectations than immediate circumstances can satisfy. When employment specialists confront this problem, they use various cooling-out strategies to help refugees accept the status and opportunities realistically available to them. These strategies included stressing English proficiency, discussing financial limitations, promising future upgrades, explaining labor market competition, and encouraging refugees to be patient and persistent in their pursuit of economic betterment.

Data for this study derive from interviews with sixteen employment specialists in the southeastern United States conducted between May and August of 2016. I analyzed the interviews line-by-line to discern patterns and emergent themes. This study contributes to understanding the social processes regarding refugee resettlement agencies and refugees. Cooling out can benefit both refugees and employment specialists. The strategies employment specialists used gave refugees hope that they could achieve high social status in the future. Cooling out refugees also helped employment specialists to overcome their failures and frustrations because they could get refugees to accept their reduced circumstances. My work adds an important sociological dimension to the existing literature on refugees and resettlement

by examining the interactional dynamics of resettlement, the conflicts that may arise, and the strategies employed by employment specialists to manage feelings associated with reduced social status.

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Cooling-Out Refugees: An Examination of Employment Specialists' Strategies at Refugee
Resettlement Agencies.

by
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Science

Sociology

Raleigh, North Carolina

2017

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and sisters.

BIOGRAPHY

Nicole Jaspersen is a graduate student at North Carolina State University. She graduated from Minnesota State University Moorhead in 2013, where her love for sociology first began.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my participants for taking time out of their busy schedule to sit down with me for an interview. This study would not be possible without their willingness to talk about their experiences working with refugees.

Endless thanks to my chair, Dr. Michael Schwalbe, for leading me through the qualitative process. One of my first classes in graduate school consisted of your theory course. You told me and my classmates that you would lead us deeper into the woods. You definitely did that and your help ever since that first class has provided me with the knowledge and confidence to complete this thesis. Your eye for detail has made my writing one hundred times better. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Kim Ebert and Dr. Martha Crowley, for providing helpful feedback.

Dr. Lee Vigilant and Dr. Geri Hendrix-Sloan deserve special thanks for peaking my interest in sociology and criminology at my undergraduate university. Your dedication to the study of sociology and teaching inspired me to pursue graduate school and I could not have completed this thesis without that start.

My friends and family warrant so much thanks. Mom and Dad, thank you for your endless support and always being there for me. I would not be where I am today without your life lessons and everything that you have taught me. Jessy, Joel, Aria, and Luna, thank you for the care packages and endless amounts of pictures and snapchats. I could not get through graduate school without you. Melly and Ace, thank you for the care packages as well and the great FaceTime sessions. I could not do without your words of support. Marie, my friend, thank you for revising my number of drafts and for your always encouraging words and texts (you're

awesome). Kim, thank you for always being there for me and I am glad we went through this process together. Ari, I am also glad we went through this together and will soon be celebrating together.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	4
<i>Employment Specialists' Roles at RRAs</i>	6
<i>Problems Faced in Employment Service Programs</i>	7
COOLING OUT	9
SAMPLE AND METHOD	12
ANALYSIS	13
<i>Unrealistic Expectations</i>	13
<i>Bureaucratic Limitations</i>	15
<i>Stressing Financial Necessity</i>	18
<i>Citing Labor Market Competition</i>	20
<i>Nurturing Hope of Employment Upgrades</i>	22
<i>Emphasizing the Rewards of English Proficiency</i>	24
<i>Stressing the Need for Patience</i>	25
DISCUSSION	27
CONCLUSION	30
REFERENCES	32
APPENDICES	36
Appendix A.....	37
TABLE A: Demographics of Employment Specialists (N=16)	37
Appendix B	38
TABLE B: Information of Employment Specialists (N=16)	38
Appendix C	39
Interview Schedule	39

INTRODUCTION

Refugees are victims of persecution, specifically defined by the United Nations as people 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, are outside their country of origin and are unwilling or ... unable to return to it (United Nations Convention of 1951). The United States has accepted over 400,000 refugees from 2009 to 2014 (UNHCR 2014). Refugees enter the United States after a long process of staying in refugee camps, health screenings, and vetting procedures from the U.S. government. Refugee resettlement agencies (RRAs) are non-profit organizations supported and funded by the U.S. government and various private organizations. There are 400 local affiliates that resettle refugees around the country. RRAs provide housing, cash assistance, and training for a small period of time.

Previous research has examined how refugees assimilate into U.S. culture (Finnan 1981; Portes and Clark 1987), long-term outcomes of their employment (Beaman 2012; Majka and Mullan 1992), and predictors of their economic status (Potocky 1997). These studies find that successful refugee resettlement depends on finding employment, housing, and educational opportunities (Bloemraad 2006; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long, and Sigona 2014). Much of this research relies on survey data, focusing largely on demographic factors and reports from refugees themselves. This leaves a significant gap in the literature regarding the agencies that provide services or act as resources for refugees. We know relatively little about how these agencies help refugees resettle in the United States.

A main objective of RRAs is to help refugees become self-sufficient in order to integrate into U.S. society. Because resources are limited, becoming self-sufficient generally means finding a job as soon as possible.

The current study examines how employment specialists at RRAs help refugees find—and settle for—jobs in the secondary labor market. I define the secondary labor market as the labor market consisting of high-turnover, low-pay, and part-time or temporary work (Bewley 1995). The secondary labor market is traditionally disproportionately populated by minorities and immigrants who are excluded from the primary labor market. The primary labor market consists of stable, high-wage jobs that are effectively reserved for white men (Piore 1979; Kalleberg 2009). The growing rise in precarious work in the United States is rooted in neoliberal policies, an increase in temporary agencies, as well as welfare-to-work programs.

Many refugees, however, expect to find better jobs than the secondary labor market has to offer. Refugees may enter the country with engineering, medical, and law degrees. They look forward to working in the same occupation as they did in their country of origin. On the other hand, they face barriers to achieving a similar level of employment after resettling, including the U.S. credential system and English language proficiency. Employees at RRAs may need to lower refugees' expectations in order to help refugees cope successfully with the resettlement process. To analyze this process of aligning refugees' expectations with job market realities, I draw upon Goffman's (1952) concept of "cooling the mark out." Goffman used this concept to explain how individuals help others adapt to unexpected failures or status loss. Refugees, although not victims of con games, often arrive with higher expectations than immediate circumstances can satisfy.

When employment specialists confront this problem, they use various cooling-out strategies to help refugees accept the status and opportunities realistically available to them.

Below, I present a short history of refugee resettlement agencies and discuss what refugee resettlement agencies do in terms of helping refugees when they enter the United States. I then describe the process Goffman (1952) referred to as “cooling the mark out” and suggest how employment specialists participate in a similar process. Third, I present an analysis that shows the specific cooling-out strategies that employment specialists used to align refugees’ expectations with labor market realities. These strategies included stressing English proficiency, discussing financial limitations, promising of future upgrades, explaining labor market competition, and encouraging refugees to be patient and persistent in their pursuit of economic betterment.

Data for this study derive from interviews with sixteen employment specialists in the southeastern United States conducted between May and August of 2016. I analyzed the interviews line-by-line to discern patterns and emergent themes. Because this research focuses on how the employment specialists manage refugees’ expectations, it does not attempt to analyze the larger political and economic contexts in which RRAs and employment specialists operate. Nonetheless, it is important to keep these contexts in mind. Employment specialists face limited budgets, high case loads, and high turnover at their places of work. These conditions no doubt shaped respondents’ work practices and the forms of help they could provide their clients. Under better conditions, less cooling out might be necessary.

Strategies that employment specialists use are meaningful to them because of their limitations at work, including limited time spent with clients and the small amount of cash

assistance available. Using cooling-out strategies allows employment specialists to not only diminish their feelings of guilt if refugees cannot find jobs or are unhappy with their jobs, but accommodates the resource constraints of the agency (Kolb 2014). This analysis has important implications for understanding how agency employees integrate refugees into their new culture and labor market, a perspective that has yet to be included in the existing literature.

This analysis also has broader implications for understanding the process of cooling out in everyday interaction. The general process of cooling out occurs in a variety of places, perhaps wherever it is necessary to help those who have experienced a loss of status to accept the inevitable. Understanding this process can thus help us understand a common part of everyday life. Given that cooling out is often done to get the less powerful to accept their plight, understanding this process can also help us understand the reproduction of inequality.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was the first refugee legislation passed by the U.S. Congress. This legislation allowed displaced persons from Europe to be admitted to the United States and gain permanent residence following WWII (Haines 2010). Assistance for these refugees was provided by American ethnic- and religious-based not-for-profit organizations. A few decades later, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, which standardized federally-supported resettlement services for refugees admitted to the United States (U.S. Department of State 2015). Today, these ethnic- and religious-based non-profits still partner with the U.S. government to provide resettlement services to refugees. The employees at RRAs are important because they are refugees' first contacts when they enter the country.

When refugees are forced out of their countries, they usually end up in a refugee camp for several years. People living in refugee camps may have a few life experiences in common, including their first flight from danger. They may differ in country of origin, family status, class background, and so on (Holzer 2013). They adapt themselves to the loss of security and sit idle in their place. Refugees who arrive in the United States have to learn to adapt, yet again, to a new culture, language, and society.

Refugees receive pre-departure Cultural Orientation (CO) and medical examinations before leaving their designated country. CO programs intend to prepare refugees for transition and resettlement in their new country. This orientation includes information about what to bring along, about U.S. culture, how long they will receive assistance, and how RRAs are going to help. CO has a key role in helping refugees adapt, but the actors at the CO programs may be unintentionally setting refugees' expectations too high.

The United States welcomes over half of the cleared refugees a year, more than all other resettlement countries combined (UNHCR 2015). These refugees are then placed in their new city within 30 to 90 days of being cleared by the U.S. government. The United States places refugees through 9 national voluntary agencies (VOLAGS).¹ These agencies are supervised by the Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). The VOLAGS set up local affiliates in multiple states to help resettle refugees in different cities.

¹ VOLAGS: Church World Service (CWS), Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and World Relief Corporation (WR).

In terms of work, refugees are given documentation to be able to work in the U.S. upon arrival and are legally obligated to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status after one year. Refugees are able to apply for citizenship after five years in the country. Because refugees are granted the opportunity to work in the U.S., the employees at refugee resettlement agencies work closely with refugees to help them find jobs and become self-sufficient.

Employment Specialists' Roles at RRAs

Employees at refugee resettlement agencies (RRAs) are refugees' first contacts when they enter the country. At these agencies they meet case managers, employment specialists, translators, and office managers. To begin the settlement process, employees pick refugees up from the airport, organize their documentation, and find initial housing. Refugees receive limited cash assistance (reception and placement money) from the United States government. This money usually lasts, depending on the size of the family, one to three months. However, this limited cash assistance leaves no room for error in terms of budgeting on the refugees' part. Although it can be difficult living on limited funds, the main goal of the employees at the RRAs is to help refugees to become self-sufficient as soon as possible in the United States.

The intake process is supposed to help case managers and employment specialists assess a refugee's needs, resources, and prospects. The intake includes meeting with an employment specialist to sign paperwork and go over the rules of the agency. Employment specialists gather detailed information about refugees' skills, past work experience, and educational attainment. Intakes can last up to four hours depending on the number of refugees being processed at one time. Translators are usually in the room to assist in conversations between the refugees and the employment specialist.

After the intake process, refugees are required to enroll in “job classes” taught at the RRA or community colleges. Depending on the agency, the refugees may need to complete two to four classes. In these classes, refugees learn customary workplace practices, such as how to introduce themselves to employers, how to ask for and complete a job application, and how to shake an employer’s hand. They are also taught how to dress in accord with American workplace norms.

As noted above, the main goal of employees of RRAs is to help refugees become self-sufficient. For the most part, this means minimal economic self-sufficiency. The Refugee Act of 1980 identifies economic self-sufficiency as the key to refugee resettlement work. Current federal regulation defines economic self-sufficiency as “earning a total family income at a level that enables a family unit to support itself without receipt of a cash assistance grant” (CFR 45 400.2). Prioritizing minimal economic self-sufficiency means, in the eyes of RRAs, forgoing purchases of cars, computers, TVs, and other goods deemed inessential.

Employment specialists work to find refugees employment within an acceptable time frame. This consists of job development activities, including marketing refugees to potential employers by creating connections and building relationships with these employers in the community, as well as matching client skills with employer needs. Employment specialists also take refugees to job sites and help refugees with the interview process. In short, employment specialists play a crucial part in integrating refugees into the U.S. labor market.

Problems Faced in Employment Service Programs

Employment service programs provide essential services such as job training, life-skill workshops, and job placement (Halpern 2008). These services aim to help refugees integrate

socially and find employment. This approach is consistent with the welfare policy of “work first.” Hays (2003:13) states, “Welfare policy in the United States has long been closely connected to the nation’s cultural vision of the appropriate commitment to work.” RRAs are organized around the core belief that refugees will willingly look for employment in the U.S. and take the first job they can find (see Appendix D) in order to gain economic self-sufficiency. This compels employment specialists to help refugees find jobs as quickly as possible.

When refugees enter the U.S., they may be suffering from several losses, such as the loss of family and friends, occupational status, and personal wealth (Cortes 2004). Not only do refugees lose various forms of capital, but they face barriers including language, transportation, U.S. credentialism, and housing (Potocky 1997). It is these barriers that force refugees into the secondary labor market. Refugees’ expectations may lead them to resist this necessity. When they do, it is up to employment specialists to resolve the problem.

Prior studies that explore the employees of RRAs primarily emphasize their experiences with refugees and how they help them integrate into the United States. Halpern (2008) researched various RRAs and their success in helping refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency. She found common themes among the RRAs’ workers’ responses, including what they perceived as important to successful refugee employment. These factors included not only the financial assistance given to refugees, but perceived characteristics of refugees, including “highly motivated refugees who are survivors.” Motivation, however, can be a complicating factor when it involves unrealistic expectations.

Unger’s (2013) research on refugee resettlement found that refugees’ meaning of assistance varied from employees’ meaning of assistance at RRAs. CO programs had a role in

this process, which included misinformation regarding how much RRAs could actually assist refugees. Some unrealistic expectations that refugees had included immediate access to education and good jobs. When these expectations could not be met, refugees perceived the RRA as failing them. Unger also reports that RRA employees became frustrated by the refugees' unrealistic expectations.

These results call for greater attention to the role of employment specialists in refugee resettlement. In particular, more exploration is needed of how employment specialists are handling refugees' expectations, especially when these expectations are unrealistic. Emphasizing the role of employment specialists at RRAs and how they frame labor market realities in the U.S. recognizes that not all refugees enter the country with the same expectations, social capital, or human capital. It is this variation, combined with labor market constraints, that produces the need for cooling out.

COOLING OUT

Goffman's (1952) analysis of "cooling the mark out" looks at how con artists help the victim of a con (the mark) accept the loss of status that comes with having been fooled. The cooler has the job of managing persons who have expectations that have been built up and crushed. "Cooling out" is an interaction process designed to preserve routine practices of a social order or, in other words, to keep trouble from getting out of hand. This interaction process manages a specific perception of self and reality within social relations (Nutch 2007). Although Goffman invites us to think about this interaction process by way of a sting or con game, he pushes us to consider other social arenas. Goffman (1952: 452-3) notes, "Persons who participate in what is recognized as a confidence game are found in only a few social settings, but persons

who have to be cooled out are found in many. Cooling the mark out is one theme in a very basic social story.”

There can, however, be variations on this story. As Goffman (1952: 453) contends, “In our society, the story of a person’s involvement can end in one of three general ways.” An individual may leave one involvement in order to gain status, which can lead to being “cooled in”—for example, a person who moves up in an occupational hierarchy. An individual may also leave an involvement willingly, such as choosing to leave a job (usually this does not require a cooling-out process). Refugees’ occupations do not end in the first two general ways, since they are forced to leave their homes and have no other options but to enter the U.S labor market.

The third general way an individual’s involvement can end is the most applicable to refugee resettlement. This refers to a case in which an individual is “involuntarily deprived of his position or involvement and made in return something that is considered a lesser thing to be” (Goffman 1952: 454). This is the category that defines all refugees, because they are involuntarily pushed out of their countries of origin and displaced, separated from their resources. Employment specialists have to deal with the problem of refugees losing their previous jobs and the status that came with those jobs.

Some refugees arrive with substantial human capital. These refugees’ circumstances parallel closely with Goffman’s third general kind of involuntary loss. As Goffman (1952: 454) argues, “a person may lose a status in such a way that the loss is not taken as a reflection upon the loser.” Refugees, as a group, are viewed and defined in this manner by the U.S. government, especially those with much human capital. Refugees who enter the country with professional

degrees and high levels of educational attainment, and then are channeled into the secondary labor market, experience this type of status loss.

The cooler's role is also important for minimizing the likelihood of trouble. Goffman (1952: 457) explains:

...if a mark allows himself to be cooled out, then the cooler need have no further concern with him; but if the mark refuses to be cooled out, he can put institutional machinery into action against the cooler. Underlying this tone there is also the assumption that persons are sentimentally related to each other in such a way that if a person allows himself to be cooled out, however great the loss he has sustained, then the cooler withdraws all emotional identification from him; but if the mark cannot absorb the injury to his self and if he becomes personally disorganized in some way, then the cooler cannot help but feel guilt and concern over the predicament.

Employment specialists are not con artists, even though they must do some cooling out. If they fail to do so, the consequence can include uncooperative, unhappy refugees, as well as complaints to higher-level bureaucrats. Employment specialists can also experience guilt and feelings of failure if they cannot get refugees to accept their reduced circumstances.

Cooling out has been observed and analyzed in other settings (Thompson and Young 2014; Snow, Robinson, and McCall 1991; Boles, Davis, and Tatro 1983; Wei 2016). Thompson and Young (2014) studied a companion animal adoption agency and observed how the employees working at the agency "cooled out" potential pet adopters. They found that adoption workers and potential pet adopters entered the situation with different perspectives. For example, some clients expected to adopt a pet without providing any references or demonstrating responsibility. In these cases, adoption workers had to ensure that clients did not feel so affronted that they stormed out. To do this, adoption workers used various cooling-out strategies, including emphasizing "bad timing" and [lack of] good fit between client and animal.

In what follows, I show that cooling-out strategies used by employment specialists at RRAs played an important role in refugee resettlement. By cooling out, employment specialists could help refugees salvage feelings of self-worth, while getting them employed as soon as possible. Cooling out also mitigated discontent with the bad jobs that refugees needed to hold on to, at least for a while. Many of the employment specialists entered their jobs intending to help refugees, but had their own failures and frustrations to overcome. Cooling out helped employment specialists avoid feeling like failures themselves.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

Data for this study derive from interviews with sixteen employment specialists in the southeastern United States conducted between May and August of 2016. To find participants, I contacted resettlement agency directors and employment specialists by e-mail, or met with them in person. When contacting prospective interviewees, I stated that I was a graduate student doing research for my master's thesis, and that I was interviewing employment specialists to better understand how they help refugees find jobs.

Table A presents demographic information about participants. We see that ten of the sixteen participants identified as white, one identified as Latino, and five identified as Black. Eight of the sixteen participants identified as male and eight identified as female. Interviewees were between the ages of 23 and 69. Every interviewee had a bachelor's degree; one was working on his master's degree at the time of the interview. Fourteen of the sixteen respondents were full-time employment specialists and two were part-time employment specialists.

I met with interviewees at their setting of choice. Fourteen interviews were conducted at employment specialists' place of work; two interviews were conducted at coffee shops. One

interview was conducted with the agency's director present. Interviews were semi-structured to allow participants to include information, feelings, and experiences that were significant to them. The interviews covered topics such as how respondents helped refugees find jobs, their experiences with refugees, and their daily tasks (see Appendix C). Interviews were between 30 minutes and 90 minutes in length. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded for themes. To protect the anonymity of interviewees, I use pseudonyms throughout the thesis.

Data analysis proceeded inductively (Charmaz 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2008). After conducting several interviews, I narrowed my research questions to focus on how employment specialists interacted with refugees whose employment aspirations were unrealistic. I analyzed the interviews line-by-line to discern patterns and emergent themes. To develop themes, I wrote analytic memos about various strategies employment specialists used to communicate with refugees. This process led me to identify five strategies used by employment specialists to “cool out” refugees and align refugees’ expectations with the realities of local labor markets.

ANALYSIS

Unrealistic Expectations

My analysis centers on the strategies employment specialists used to smooth refugees’ entry into the secondary labor market. Before coming to the United States, refugees go through a cultural orientation (CO) that is supposed to help them adjust to their new circumstances. But the quality of these orientations, as well as the content, varies greatly, according to employment

specialists. Brittney,² an employment specialist at Dawson³ agency, commented on refugees' expectations when they first get to the U.S., based on the information that they receive in CO:

People hear things from...they're connected with people here. I think sometimes they're misinformed by staff overseas or friends or family and what people are telling them. There's a lot of push for continuing to approve cultural orientation overseas pre trial, but cultural orientation is so very limited. Not everybody is even able to attend it. If you are able to attend it, in some places, the way it looks is, it's just this one day and a few hours. There's only so much you can tell people. Some people come with the expectation the agency is going to be my family and they're [going] do everything for me and make sure that I'm okay.

When refugees attend the CO overseas, the information can be unrealistic, setting up the employees at RRAs and refugees for some miscommunication. Refugees often expect forms of help that RRAs cannot provide. They may also have misunderstandings about English language services, schooling, and potential employment. Rhonda, an employment specialist at Woodward agency, described how CO can misinform refugees:

So, expectations...a lot of them come from orientations that they had overseas. And these orientations tell them that you need to take ESL (English as a Second Language) classes before you get employment. So you need to build your English skills, but their funding here is very limited as far as how long they are supported for paying for their housing and all the bills. So we know when they come into our program, we're already aware of how much they have left in their account and how much leeway room we have as far as before they need to have an income, a steady income coming into their home. Because we're aware of this, you know, we might push for the job before and a lot of the times we do push for the job before the ESL class. ESL is secondary in their regards, getting employment so that they can become self sufficient is our priority. So with that, having to convince them and help them see this can be a very major challenge and so they won't feel comfortable.

In these cases, which are representative of the employment specialists interviewed, CO was perceived as a hindrance to the refugee resettlement process. After CO, it befalls employment

² All names are pseudonyms.

³ All agency names used are pseudonyms.

specialists to bring refugees' expectations about their new country into alignment with the labor market.

Bureaucratic Limitations

Refugees' expectations could also be unrealistic because they exceeded what RRAs could actually do for them. Rhonda explained the bureaucratic limitations:

So, we constantly have to deal with that barrier (limited funding) with, as far as helping them understand, your funds are running out and so there is no support, as far as financial support. So, how do we support you through employment? And you have to be able to support yourself by what you make at your job and so that's one common problem that we're constantly dealing with.

Jimmy, an employment specialist at Mapleridge agency, likewise cited funding limitations:

Interviewer: What's the biggest problem that you face at your job?

The biggest problem of doing the job is getting funds to support clients. If we had some extra funds, we are always looking for money. We need another person doing the transportation. That's half of the job. Then there's another half we can do things with. It's that type of thing. And we're subject to that because we are nonprofit funded by the government by programs. So we don't have extra money lying around to do things.

This context sets the stage for how employment specialists are able to interact with refugees.

There is a pressing need, given resource limitations, to get refugees into jobs. But refugees are hindered by limited English ability, narrow work experience, transportation barriers, and lack of appropriate credentials. Once again, this contributes to a situation in which employment specialists must explain to refugees that they cannot help in the ways that might be expected.

During an intake session for four refugees, Jimmy explained to a female refugee, Balla, "I need you to work and learn English." At another point in the process he told Balla, "Little English. Little money. More English. More money. Better life." This interaction between Jimmy

and Balla suggests how much working in the U.S. is stressed to refugees and how learning English is touted as essential to success. Later I will discuss how English proficiency was invoked as part of a cooling-out strategy.

Despite resource limitations and barriers to employment; employment specialists make it known to refugees that they are welcome in the United States. During an intake session, Jimmy stressed this welcoming attitude, but with an important qualification:

This is the country who wants people from all countries. We don't discriminate against gender, race, religion. We want you here, *if you participate* (emphasis added). Does anyone have any questions about the United States? We want you. We do. We want you here in the United States. That's why you're here.

Jimmy's rhetoric of welcome includes the proviso: "if you participate." He is alluding to working, paying taxes, and being a contributing member of society. Greg, an employment specialist, described further the difference between refugees and "economic" immigrants:

[Refugees are] eligible to work in America. All refugees are eligible from day one. They're invited, they're not immigrants. It's a total different process for refugees than immigrants. Immigrants apply to come here, refugees are invited, they're guests. So, when they come in, their documents say they're work authorized; they just have to get the documents.

Legitimate access to work in the U.S. allows employment specialists to stress finding a job. This emphasis on employment also shapes refugees' expectations. The message is that getting a job—quickly—is not optional.

Employment specialists also have to deal with the expectation that credentials from a refugee's country of origin will be honored in the United States. Refugees who arrive with law, medical, or professional degrees are tough clients for employment specialists. Jimmy discussed these cases:

And the hardest cases are the educated people that have had a lot of wealth or status in their country. Those are the hardest cases. Because transitioning, it's not like you see in the movies where you're a money manager in Paris and you fly to New York and you're a money manager. It don't work that way. So we...I introduced Marlaca. There's a guy that worked for Lloyds (a bank) and was a trust evaluator. Can't get a job at the bank. So, yes, they're harder than others. The other piece is, he's capable but it took him 3, 4, 5 months to get his head straight. He didn't want to work. We had him at a job or two, didn't want that job. It's too physical. Whatever it is, and it's not just him, but it just doesn't fit them so those are my difficult cases.

Refugees who have gained status through their educational attainment and occupations have to deal with this loss while adjusting to the culture in their new country. Ten percent of refugees enter the U.S. with professional degrees (Report to Congress 2015). One of the main barriers for refugees includes the credential system in the new country. Brody, an employment specialist at Hollow agency, explained the credential variation between countries:

[Refugees] do have slightly different expectations job-wise, too. They might have an expectation that they can go into their career right away or that their credentials in another country will transfer over, but sometimes that's not always the case. Especially with jobs that require certifications, we have to kind of take them back through to get their high school education verified and approved. And then their college education verified and approved and then they have to go through whatever certification course is required in the United States. They might expect to go back into a career pretty quickly or for it to be easy to go back into a career and they find out that it's a long process no matter what job they're going back into. It will be a long process to get back into it.

Refugees rarely expect to have to repeat their education. Brody emphasizes how transferring credentials or becoming re-certified is a lengthy process. The expectation that education is a possibility must be brought into line with the reality of agency programming. Educational attainment is too time consuming and would prevent refugees from reaching economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

“Easier” refugee cases, according to some employment specialists, entail refugees being flexible and working whatever shifts are available at whatever jobs are available. These refugees usually have limited work experience, according to the U.S. qualifications, and limited knowledge of English. Refugees in this context rarely question the employment specialists’ demands to find work quickly. These refugees have seemingly already accepted their loss, often having been forced to live in a refugee camp for a span of years.

The employment specialist, as a cooler, has the job of helping refugees make sense of the barriers they face in trying to achieve the same status they enjoyed previously. If they fail to do this, then employment specialists may feel guilty and refugees may feel helpless. If the cooling-out process is successful, then employment specialists have salvaged their self-worth and the self-worth of refugees. Employment specialists promote a refugee’s value as a person, give them goals to aim for, and mitigate discontent with the bad jobs they currently hold. Although they did not think of it as cooling out, employment specialists used five strategies to help refugees with high expectations come to terms with their new circumstances: (1) stressing financial necessity; (2) citing labor market competition; (3) nurturing hope of upgrades in employment; (4) emphasizing the rewards of English proficiency; and (5) stressing the need for patience.

Stressing Financial Necessity

Employment specialists are not the only ones with limited resources to complete their tasks. Refugees have limited resources in the terms of cash assistance, housing options, and transportation. Employment specialists tell the refugees that, although they have received assistance from the agency and the U.S. government, there are financial realities that they need to

focus on. They stress financial necessity to encourage refugees to take the first job they find. As

Brittney put it:

Financially, the support is limited for what refugees have [available to them] to pay their rent and their bills when they arrive. The way the U.S. refugee program is set up is that refugees will begin working and become financially self-sufficient very quickly. There's just very limited funds to support them for very long. There's a lot of pressure for refugees to get jobs really quickly for all cases. Some refugees might have more savings or more family support than others. They're all looking for jobs, but some find them faster than others too.

An exchange between an employment specialist at Northern agency, Sammy, and her client illustrates the stressing of financial necessity. The client had been working in his country of origin as a brick layer before he and his family had to flee to a refugee camp.

Sammy explained:

When I was doing his intake he was set on learning English first. He really wanted to learn English and that's it, so that he could go back to school. I had to tell him, "That's not an option right now." I said, "You need to get a job to earn money and pay for your apartment, for food, for your wife and kids. The necessities."

Interviewer: How did he react?

He understood after awhile. I talked with them for a bit and I said to him, "The assistance is limited. You just do not have the opportunity right now to do anything other than find a job."

Sammy's client wanted to pursue education, but this was not realistic given limited funding. The client was thus advised to focus on "the necessities."

Employment specialists emphasize to refugees that in order to pay for their needs, they must find a job. This financial responsibility trumps refugees' desires for a satisfying job. As

Rhonda explained:

Now the idea is, we want to get them into their first job in the U.S. Once we get them into that, ideally we want to place them in a job that they're happy at so that

they stay, but a lot of the times, what we do find is that, especially if they're at a point of where they're running out of their funds, we end up having to put them into jobs that maybe is not their most ideal.

Rhonda knows that if a person likes their job then they will likely stay. But she also knows—and conveys to her clients—that resources are limited and that the need for a job takes precedence over the desire for a satisfying job. The expectation that good jobs are abundant must be brought into line with the reality of limited options. Refugees may also not understand that the aid they get from the U.S. government will last for only a short time. Employment specialists thus tried to convey to refugees that the agency could not provide long-term financial support. Again, the message was that financial necessity made some hopes and expectations unrealistic. Labor market competition made refugees' hopes and expectations unrealistic as well.

Citing Labor Market Competition

About half of the employment specialists used the strategy of explaining the current status of the labor market to cool out refugees. Those who enter the country with professional degrees are told by employment specialists about unfavorable labor market conditions, especially the intense competition for good jobs. Kelly, an employment specialist at Cedar agency, described a client who was a lawyer in her country of origin:

I had a client who was a lawyer before she came to the U.S. I said to her, "Even Americans graduating from law school are having a hard time finding jobs right now." I said, "It will be even tougher for you since your English is limited. You will have to find a different job."

Kelly invoked a tight and competitive labor market to manage her client's expectations. If lifelong citizens of the U.S. cannot get the jobs they want, then why would refugees be able to?

The message here is that one cannot expect a good job right off the bat and not without a potentially long, competitive struggle.

Refugees without professional degrees may also resist entering the secondary labor market right away. Based on information from friends and family in the U.S., and misinformation from the CO programs, they expect to go to school before going to work. Louis, an employment specialist at Acorn agency, spoke of a client who wanted to pursue higher education:

And it isn't just the educated ones that come to this country, but we have clients who have minimal skills to work here. They maybe sold blankets at a market or the guy worked as a teacher. Not a lot of those skills transfer here that will be great paying, great working conditions, you know? I had one guy who thought he could get his high school diploma right away [laughs].

Interviewer: How did that work out for the client?

I told him, well, he was one of my clients with not a lot of transferable skills. I said, "I know you'd like to get an education, but it's not feasible right now. There are jobs available now that you can work and even those are hard to come by." And that's true. There's a small amount of jobs out there, especially employers that are willing to hire refugees with no English abilities.

In the background here is the need for refugees to become economically self-sufficient quickly. Against this background, Louis manages his client's expectations by stressing the competitiveness of the labor market, especially for people whose English is weak. The message was that labor market competition made some hopes and expectations unrealistic—at least for the moment. The future, however, might be better, and employment specialists could invoke it as another way to cool out refugees.

Nurturing Hope of Employment Upgrades

Another strategy employment specialists used to help refugees cope with their unrealistic expectations was to nurture hope of work upgrades. According to Goffman (1952:456), cooling out occurs by providing a different status to the mark: “offering him a status which differs from the one he has lost or failed to gain, but which provides at least a something or a somebody for him to become.” The promise of employment upgrades functions in this way. One employment specialist, Brody, described how upgrades can be used to encourage acceptance of bad jobs:

But it is...we have to prioritize the financial stability, so it is a lot of talking them into taking on certain jobs. If it's just that they don't want to do a job for some reason, usually it's enough to explain to them that, the jobs we deal with initial placement are temporary and that. Then it's just as simple as I follow through with that promise of: “We're in this job, we are looking for a new one, and then we'll get placed into a different one.”

Interviewer: What are certain jobs?

The jobs that we'll be able to place refugees in, you know, factory jobs, distribution centers, department stores, and housekeeping.

Brody tells his clients that he will help them find another job if necessary. However, he still prioritizes the financial aspect and admits to “talking [refugees] into taking on certain jobs” that are in the secondary labor market. The jobs that refugees find are mainly entry level, and employment specialists know that some clients want something better.

Another employment specialist, Rhonda, noted that job upgrades are real possibilities, but are contingent on accomplishments:

...although we help them get their first job we also help them get upgrades. So, after maybe 6 months or 8 months of working at a job, if they say, you know, “I'm ready for a different job.” Maybe they've built their English level because they've been going to English class, and so they come with a little bit more skills,

so then they want a job upgrade. They want something that pays more maybe. So we can place them into a better job, more so than an entry level.

Upgrades, Rhonda says, are for individuals who have gained specific skills. Other employment specialists made the same points to refugees: upgrades are possible only after learning English, becoming recertified in their field, and gaining some work experience in the United States. As long as refugees could complete these tasks, they could expect to find better jobs with help from the agencies. This strategy affirmed refugees' value as persons, gave them goals to aim for, and mitigated discontent with the bad jobs they currently held.

Even though they nurtured hope for better employment, employment specialists said they rarely saw refugees for employment upgrades. One possible reason is that refugees get better jobs through connections they have made in the community. Jackson, an employment specialist at Rowing agency, discussed how he loses touch with refugees.

Interviewer: Do you know how the clients are faring now?

I'm not sure actually. We lost touch. Technically, clients have 5 years of our services as employment specialists but we usually lose touch over the years. They can come back to us for upgrades or to find a different job, but they can do that through other services in the community. A lot of clients find jobs through word of mouth after a couple years. If they don't like their job, then they will ask other refugees in their community if there is an opening and what jobs are the best fit.

The social networks that refugees find within their communities may help with future upgrades, relieving employment specialists and the agency from potential burdens. Employment specialists perhaps also know that what matters for eventual success is getting refugees to accept, for the time being, what is less than ideal as a stepping stone to something better. Attaining something better was often said to hinge on learning to speak English fluently.

Emphasizing the Rewards of English Proficiency

All of the employment specialists stated that lack of English proficiency is the main barrier for refugees when they enter the United States. From 2009 to 2015, about half of all refugees entering the U.S. spoke English “Not at all” (Report to Congress 2015). Even this statistic may be overly optimistic because of the crude assessment measure typically used. The categories employment specialists use to report English speaking ability are: Not at all, Some, and Well. As one employment specialist told me, “If they know how to say just hello or yes, I will check that they know some English. They have that skill.” Thus, there could be a larger percentage of refugees who do not speak English at a functional level.

The lack of English proficiency is a real barrier. I asked employment specialists how they dealt with it. Brittney, an employment specialist at Dawson agency, explained:

Yeah. We do a lot of creative strategizing [laughs]. We have a really diverse caseload with a lot of unique needs and challenges so we’re always strategizing best practices for each individual to help them enter and maintain employment.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of one of those strategies that you’ve had to use in the past?

Well, we have an employer that we work with pretty regularly that, ummm, it’s difficult to interview someone who doesn’t speak English. The traditional way a lot of employers do to hire for a position, so we...but we’ve worked with employers where English isn’t necessary a requirement for the job. So we have offered for clients before to...or we’ve offered to the employer that the client could stay and work for a couple hours and try the job out and they can see if they’re able to do it. So they shadow for a little bit, they try, the employer watches them try to see if they’ve got the skills. So that’s one way that we are able to kind of offer something different to overcome that obstacle of getting through the interview.

The jobs for which English proficiency is not essential tend to be production line jobs in factories, sorting jobs in clothing distribution centers, and cleaning jobs in restaurants and hotels.

Understandably, these are jobs that few people, refugees or U.S. citizens, find especially attractive.

When refugees do not have high English proficiency, employment specialists emphasize the importance of learning English as a path to better employment. By implication, until proficiency is gained, refugees will need to accept whatever jobs they can get. Melanie from Chestnut agency explained how she told a client that their skills were not on par yet to the U.S. employer standard: “I said, this is your skill set over there, however, you know, right now we need to get a job, the one that’s available, and then after that, then you can get into your skill set once you learn better English, because we do have requirements for certain positions.” While this strategy cools out the client at the moment, it also does not foreclose the possibility of achieving desired social status later. As have generations of previous immigrants and refugees, new refugees can learn English and do equally well.

Stressing the Need for Patience

Employment specialists also stress the need to allow time to reach certain goals, including the interim goals of learning English and gaining the skills necessary to work in the United States. Brody explained how he helps refugees learn to take the first job:

For instance, sometimes it’s as simple as they just want to be in a certain job at a certain time so that they can have English language training. Which I completely...like who doesn’t want to keep learning English while you’re in a new country? So sometimes like with a case like that I’ll have to...I don’t have any positions available second shift that fit the criteria of a full-time job, second shift, and with good transportation as a possibility. So I have to ask them to take on that first shift job and we just have to understand that and I have to explain to them. You might not be able to do English classes right now. We could work on either getting into night classes with English class or we can do this job temporarily while we look for something else to better fit your schedule and then when we’re in a financial position and you can move into a second shift job full

time. And you can do your English classes in the morning. We can go with that strategy.

Many refugees acknowledge barriers but are unrealistic about how quickly they can be overcome. In response, employment specialists urge patience and try to convey an understanding of what is reasonable.

Sometimes employment specialists encourage refugees to see their first jobs as steps in a longer process that will eventually lead to better outcomes. Greg, an employment specialist at Vallard agency, spoke of this in regard to clients with especially high expectations:

Sometimes we have clients who have professional experience, have accelerated degrees, and they're thinking they're gonna come here and get the same kind of job. And initially, that's not gonna happen, so we have to do something way before their education, skill level in order to survive, to get to those better jobs. And the better jobs require, they do much more screening, they're much more particular, so it takes much longer for your job search. You're not gonna walk in a week, two weeks, and find a job most cases. So, we have to kind of deal with those kind of expectations too. I have one guy now that I think is going to be an issue, dealing with that. He has a masters or something, he's looking for something to commensurate with his degree, and I'm saying, "You don't have time. Get a job, work on it, and then continue to look. And maybe we can find something in your field."

Greg and other employment specialists want refugees to know that the higher the expectations, the longer it will take to achieve them. In these cases, employment specialists affirm the value of the expectations, but stress the need to be patient about achieving them, given how the U.S. economy works.

Sometimes employment specialists cited specific periods of time, perhaps to make the time seem less daunting. Sammy recounted a conversation he had with a client who did not like his current job:

I told him, "That first job is an important step, especially in gaining work history in the U.S." I said, "You took this job at the factory and I know you don't like it,

but you really should try to stay there for at least 6 months to build up that work history and gain some skills.”

Interviewer: How come he didn't like his job?

The work was just work he didn't really want to do. But it takes time to get your footing here and I told him, “Hey, after 6 months if you want to quit, then quit, and I will help you every single step of the way, but try to stick it out.” That paycheck is so important.

Sammy tells his client that there is a need for patience and that, with time, he will learn skills and gain a work history that will be worth it. He also offers a specific goal: stick it out for six months. Better than merely stressing patience, this strategy gives the client a clear goal to aim for. By implication, the employment specialist is also affirming the client's value as a person able to achieve it.

DISCUSSION

Goffman (1952: 458) discusses how coolers may view the activity that they are doing as “...soften[ing] the harsher details of the situation.” This is what the employment specialists could be described as doing. Although they did not think of it as cooling out, employment specialists used five strategies to help refugees with high expectations come to terms with their new circumstances: (1) stressing financial necessity; (2) citing labor market competition; (3) nurturing hope of upgrades in employment; (4) emphasizing the rewards of English proficiency; and (5) stressing the need for patience. These strategies were used to manage refugees' expectations and get them to accept employment in the secondary labor market.

Cooling out benefited both the coolers and the cooled out. The strategies employment specialists used gave refugees hope that they could achieve high social status in the future. Employment specialists did not just dampen expectations; they affirmed their client's value as a

person able to achieve lofty goals. If they succeeded, then they had little problem with placing refugees in the available jobs. By cooling out, employment specialists could help refugees salvage feelings of self-worth, while getting them employed as soon as possible. Cooling out also mitigated discontent with the bad jobs that refugees needed to hold on to, at least for a while.

Many of the employment specialists entered their jobs intending to help refugees, but had their own failures and frustrations to overcome. Employment specialists were frustrated with refugees' unrealistic expectations and the bureaucratic system in place to help refugees. Cooling out refugees helped them to overcome their failures and frustrations because they could get refugees to accept their reduced circumstances. Cooling out is part of the process whereby blame is shifted from the system itself to those who are least powerful within the system.

Employment specialists ultimately put the onus on their clients to follow the advice they were given and make the right choices. When refugees did not follow employment specialists' advice, such as taking the first open job, the specialists blamed refugees. They cited work constraints, such as high caseloads, for their stance. Emily, an executive director at Mapleridge agency, explained:

You can't go behind 1,000 people making sure they're making the right choices. And that's the other thing to keep in mind, is that these people are adults. Right? They've already been through a horrific set of circumstances and survived it. So, they can make choices and they can find ways to move themselves along and so you can't just be treating them like they're teenagers. You know? They're not. They're grown adults and you should, and I want to respect the fact that they're adults, like would I want to be talked to or treated like I'm a kid? No. You're not a child.

Within the context of the refugee resettlement agency, Emily blamed the refugees if they could not make the "right choices." This is consistent with a general pattern of social service workers

blaming clients when resource limitations make it impossible to provide all the help that is needed (Kolb 2014).

Refugees benefited from the general process of cooling-out, because their feelings were managed in order to help them with their reduced status in the United States. This enabled them to take the first open job in order to pay for their housing, food, and bills. This process may have helped refugees, but it helped employment specialists more. Employment specialists had more power so they could set the terms of the interaction.

The cooling-out process that I describe differs from the process that Goffman (1952) wrote about. The interactions between employment specialists and refugees are not about avoiding trouble or arguments. Employment specialists did not mention any fights between refugees and themselves. The process that I describe includes realigning refugees' unrealistic expectations in order to mitigate their feelings of anger and disappointment.

Cooling-out works, but it has unintended consequences. Goffman (1952: 463) states, "But perhaps the most important movement of those who fail is one we never see. Where roles are ranked and somewhat related, persons who have been rejected from the one above may be difficult to distinguish from persons who have risen from the one below." In our society, refugees are typically viewed as interchangeable with economic immigrants. Their loss of status is quickly forgotten and the strategies employment specialists use to try to help refugees gain this status back are aimed at short-term results. These results include a steady paycheck for refugees and a closed case file for the employment specialist.

Long-term goals are listed on the intake paperwork for refugees to sign with their employment specialists. These long-term goals include learning to speak English fluently,

attaining an education, and becoming re-certified. Refugees' long-term goals are hard to accomplish and not fully supported by the resettlement system. Since refugees have to find a full-time job right away, this leaves little time for attending English classes or school.

Previous scholarship examining welfare-to-work programs has shown how such programs can empower their clients (Woodward 2014). Supportive workers who understand the constraints their clients face and who do not blame them are crucial. My research shows that even when social service workers understand the constraints faced by their clients, they may blame them anyway, in order to avoid feeling like failures themselves. I have also shown how cooling out is part of the process whereby blame is shifted from the system itself to those who are least powerful within the system.

This study contributes to understanding the social processes regarding RRAs and refugees. These findings suggest that cooling out manages not only refugees' expectations but also employment specialists' feelings of competence. My work adds an important sociological dimension to the existing literature on refugees and resettlement by examining the interactional dynamics of resettlement, the conflicts that may arise, and the strategies used by employment specialists to minimize the emotional cost of reduced social status. The strategies described here are an important element in the larger project of relieving refugees' burdens and smoothing their integration into their new country.

CONCLUSION

My analysis examined the specific cooling-out strategies that employment specialists used to align refugees' expectations with labor market realities. Although they did not think of it as cooling out, employment specialists used five strategies to help refugees with high

expectations come to terms with their new circumstances: (1) stressing financial necessity; (2) citing labor market competition; (3) nurturing hope of upgrades in employment; (4) emphasizing the rewards of English proficiency; and (5) stressing the need for patience. These strategies were used to get refugees into jobs as soon as possible and accept the status loss attendant to their new circumstances.

Employment specialists' efforts to align refugees' expectations to fit local labor markets produced intended and unintended consequences. Intended consequences included placing refugees in jobs as soon as possible, allowing employment specialists to close their files after 90 days of employment. Unintended consequences included steering refugees toward short-term rather than long-term goals. Short-term goals include refugees finding a job, paying for housing, and food. Long-term goals include refugees extending their education and becoming fluent in the English language.

This study has some limitations that should be noted. The interviews I conducted amount to post-hoc accounts. I was not able to observe the cooling-out process directly as much as I would have liked. Future research should examine information about the refugee resettlement process outside of an interview setting. Although the information provided by my interviewees offered a window to how refugees' expectations are managed, fieldwork would capture the process more fully. To better understand how refugees are faring in their resettled locations, future research should also include interviews with refugees.

This study adds to the existing literature by examining the interactional dynamics of employees at RRAs and newly resettled refugees, the conflicts that may arise, and the strategies used by employment specialists to minimize negative feelings associated with lost status. The

strategies described here are an important element in the larger project of relieving refugees' burdens and smoothing their integration into their new country.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

TABLE A: Demographics of Employment Specialists (N=16)

Age	
Mean	41
Standard Deviation	16.1
Range	23-69
Gender	
Male	50%
Female	50%
Race	
White	62.5%
Black	31.3%
Latino	6.3%
Highest Education	
Bachelor's Degree	93.8%
Master's Degree	6.3%

Appendix B

TABLE B: Information of Employment Specialists (N=16)

Pseudonyms	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Highest Education
Rhonda	28	Black	Female	Bachelors
Jimmy	69	White	Male	Bachelors
Brittney	32	White	Female	Bachelors
Brody	24	White	Male	Masters
Greg	64	Black	Male	Bachelors
Amy	68	White	Female	Bachelors
Melanie	41	Black	Female	Bachelors
Jackson	29	White	Male	Bachelors
Holly	37	White	Female	Bachelors
Mike	23	White	Male	Bachelors
Adam	29	White	Male	Bachelors
Louis	41	Latino	Male	Bachelors
Sammy	55	Black	Female	Bachelors
Elaine	58	White	Female	Bachelors
Allan	27	Black	Male	Bachelors
Kelly	37	White	Female	Bachelors

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

How did you come to have this job?

(Probe to find out how the person became an employment specialist. Previous experience doing this kind of thing? Credentials needed? How long the person has been in the job.)

How do you help refugees get jobs? Can you walk me through the process as it typically occurs? (Ask about the employment programs. How do they fit into the process? What about the kinds of jobs refugees get?)

Some employment specialists that I've interviewed state refugees come with various unrealistic expectations. Do you experience this? (Can you give an example? How did you deal with that? What did the client say then?)

How do you deal with clients who want a job in the U.S. similar to one that they had in their country of origin? (Can you give me an example? How did you deal with that? What did the client say? What job did the client end up getting?)

Everyone that I've interviewed has brought up the common barriers for refugees in the labor market, like English proficiency, transportation, and skills. Could you give an example that stands out to you when dealing with one of those barriers? (How did you help the client understand the barrier? What did you say to the client?)

The financial assistance for refugees tends to be limited. How does this influence the way you help refugees find jobs? (Do refugees understand that financial assistance is limited? If not, what do you usually tell them? Could you give a specific example? What did the client say?)

Could you give an example of a successful case that stands out to you? (Why do you think it was so successful? Did that client come in with unrealistic expectations? If so, how did you talk to them about it? What did they say?)

Could you give an example of a less successful case? (Did you try to talk to them? What did you say? What did they say?)

Many of the employment specialists that I've talked to discuss problems with job retention. Have you come across that problem? (What do you do when a client quits a job? Could you give an example? What were their reasons for quitting the job? What did you say to them?)

What do you find most satisfying about this job?

If you were hiring someone for this job, what kind of skills would you want them to have?

What is your gender?

What is your age?

What is your level of educational attainment?

What is your race/ethnicity?