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The adjustment and acculturation process of single Liberian mothers resettled as refugees in the United States was examined in this qualitative study. Liberian experiences largely have been left out of refugee studies, a field that recently has taken a turn away from a problem-focused, policy-oriented approach to a more culturally aware constructivist approach. The refugees' post-immigration experiences, attitudes, and behaviors were the focus of the research.

Ten Liberian single mothers who resettled in the US between the years of 2004 and 2006 were interviewed using a semi-structured protocol. Transcripts were created from these interviews that were analyzed by a four person reflecting team. A phenomenological approach was used to structure the transcripts, breaking them down into experiences, behaviors, and attitudes. The structured data was used to create a rich description of Liberian women's acculturation in the US. The reflecting team used the description and the original transcripts to identify five dominant themes (opportunity/progress, responsibility, family reunification, relationships as resources, spirituality) and two variant themes (conflict and cultural maintenance).

Understanding the acculturation process of Liberian women will help counselors create culturally appropriate services for a group "triplely-marginalized" (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004) by their ethnic, economic, and gender statuses.

MAKING MEANING OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT
EXPERIENCES: THE ACCULTURATION
ATTITUDES OF LIBERIAN WOMEN

by

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For Liberian women

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Refugees are an international population with high numbers and high need. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated there were 15.2 million refugees worldwide as of December 31, 2008 (UNHCR, 2009). Between the years 2000 and 2006 the United States accepted about half a million refugees for permanent resettlement, more than any other country (UNHCR, 2007). The US government, in accordance with a United Nations definition of refugees, grants refugee status to citizens of other countries who have “fled his or her country because he/she fears persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion” (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, n.d.(b)). The proposed 2008 US budget allotted 722.8 million dollars related to processing, admitting, and resettling refugees into this country (US Department of State et al., 2007). The United Nations, the US government, and other non-government organizations (NGOs) have invested significant resources into helping refugees relocate and adjust to life in the US. By applying for resettlement, refugees also are making an investment, many times without much knowledge of what opportunities they will have, trusting that life in the resettlement country will be better than their current situation.

The experiences of refugees before and after resettlement are distinct from those of other immigrants in a number of ways. Although many people who come to live in the

US from other countries faced economic hardship and unsafe conditions in their home countries, those designated as refugees typically also have experienced the trauma of sudden or multiple displacements, violence against themselves or their family, torture and persecution, and inability to return to their country of origin (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, n.d. (a)). Because of their special designation by the US government, once refugees arrive they receive access to targeted governmental and non-profit services. These services include cash assistance, employment and language training, preparation of residences, and referral services (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, n.d. (a)). With the support of these services, refugees simultaneously cope with present acculturation tasks and traumatic experiences of the past. Many refugees deal with these processes creatively and resourcefully, but there are significant hardships.

Although there are some common refugee experiences, there also is much variability in experiences along the lines of ethnicity and gender (Chung, 2001). As an example, one could compare the experiences of Hmong refugees with Liberian refugees. Hmong people are a distinct ethnic group mostly from Laos who have come to the US in significant numbers (over 200,000) and established large communities in Minnesota and California (US Census Bureau, 2006). The Hmong were targeted for resettlement in the US because of their assistance to the US military during the Vietnam war, a reason for their persecution by the Laotian government. Because of their military ties, many of the Hmong refugees were single men or men with families (Lee & Pfeifer, 2007).

Smaller numbers of Liberian refugees, with varying ethnic and tribal backgrounds, have developed small communities all over the United States. The Liberians had to flee their country not because of ethnic persecution by the government, but because of internal civil war (Dunn-Marcos, Kolllehlon, Ngovo, & Russ, 2005). Single Liberian women were the focus of UN resettlement efforts due to the women's extreme vulnerability to poverty and sexual exploitation or assault while living in temporary settlements just across the Liberian border (Schmidt, n.d.). Thus, many of the Liberian families that have arrived in the US are female-headed households. Each refugee group has taken a different path toward becoming part of the US population, just as each refugee has his or her own story.

There also are differences in the breadth and depth of the research on different refugee groups. There is a large body of research involving Hmong refugees and other southeast Asian groups, particularly in the area of mental health and post-traumatic stress. There is even a *Hmong Studies Journal*. In general, Southeast Asian groups have received the majority of the research attention, as opposed to groups from African or Latin American countries. The story of Liberian refugees, including the women who were the target of the UN programs, has yet to be told in the refugee studies literature. This is despite the fact that Liberian single mothers are likely consumers of assistance programs in the US. These women have experienced trauma and continue to face economic hardships after resettlement due to lack of education, job training, or family network support. Further, these women attempt to adjust economically in addition to coping with the lingering effects of their traumatic histories, which may continue to affect them

emotionally, physically, and socially. Like all refugees in the US, Liberians will come into contact with a number of service providers, including counselors. Having some knowledge of refugees' collective and individual experiences and acculturation processes is imperative for counselors who work with these groups. Our understanding of the refugee experience continues to expand, yet more study is needed to make the best use of the resources being applied to helping refugee single mothers in the resettlement process.

Purpose of the Study

Researchers across academic disciplines have created a large body of research to understand the concerns of refugees and how they can best be served. The “refugee experience” has been examined by those studying culture, health, economics, law, politics, psychology, trauma, armed conflict, counseling, and policy. The field has its own interdisciplinary journal, the *Journal of Refugee Studies*, started in 1988 to provide a forum for ideas and policy about the concerns of refugees and those assisting them. Also in 1988, the first article about refugees appeared in a journal associated with the American Counseling Association (Firling, 1988). In the last 20 years, the knowledge base on refugee resettlement has been growing, although not equally in all areas. The three primary areas of investigation have been economic adjustment, emotional adjustment, and acculturation.

Across these three areas, refugee research has been problem-focused and policy oriented (Black, 2001). Much of the government and non-profit services provided to refugees are geared toward helping them adjust economically. The US government has explicitly stated that economic adjustment is their priority in helping refugees (US

Department of State et al., 2007). In accordance with this goal, there have been government initiatives to limit refugee and immigrants' dependence on welfare programs (Capps, Ku, & Fix, 2002). The focus on refugee economic outcomes has been mirrored in the research. Researchers have sought to determine the factors that influence the economic "success" of refugees (e.g., Edin, Fredriksson, & Aslund, 2003; Potocky-Tripodi, 2004). "Success" has been measured by constructs such as income, job status, or reliance on government assistance. These constructs are easy to quantify and easy to measure through census data and large-scale phone surveys. Overall, the findings are not surprising. Factors that predict positive economic outcomes among refugees are speaking English, being male, having some education or job skills, and being in a household with more than one earner (Potocky-Tripodi, 2003, 2004). This means that single female refugees who are heads of household would be predicted to have poorer economic outcomes, a dynamic that is mirrored in the native US population (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003). With the addition of racial, language, and literacy factors, refugees like Liberian women are at an even greater disadvantage. There is little to no information about resettled refugees' perceptions of economic processes or satisfaction with employment and economic opportunity, other than some studies that have reflected refugees' dissatisfaction with not having their professional credentials recognized in host countries (Waxman, 2001).

Another main focus of social science research with refugees has been the emotional consequences of acculturation and trauma. Much of this research also has been problem-focused and based on the presumption that all refugees would have emotional

difficulties upon resettlement. Emotional health has been assessed mostly through reports of health care providers or refugees' self-reports of symptoms related to disorders found in the DSM-IV (APA, 2000). Researchers conducting large-scale surveys of refugee mental health, primarily with groups from Southeast Asia, have found more symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress than in the native US population (Beiser & Wickrama, 2004). Unfortunately, the large scale-surveys have not included all refugee groups and many of the assessment instruments used were not validated with non-Western samples. This means it is difficult to draw broad conclusions from the current state of research on refugee emotional health. There is evidence that both refugees' emotional well-being and distress manifest differently depending on gender, ethnicity, and pre-migration experiences (Chung & Bemak, 2002).

Similar to the economic research, what is lacking appears to be an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and meanings that the refugees themselves have about their emotional adjustment. Some qualitative researchers have begun seeking out this perspective (e.g., Keyes & Kane, 2004), but there are still many gaps in what is being published. More attention has been paid to outcomes of emotional adjustment, such as pathology, rather than the process of emotional adjustment or refugees' perceptions of emotional well-being. Many refugees do not show signs of emotional distress, despite the presence of multiple risk factors established by Western mental health research. There are a variety of potential explanations for this that could be explored further.

Researchers also have attempted to study refugee acculturation, both as a process and an outcome. There is a long history of acculturation research in a number of fields,

particularly anthropology. Unfortunately, refugee researchers have not always used this body of knowledge and theory to guide their studies. John Berry, a researcher in the field of cross-cultural psychology, has built a career studying psychological acculturation. His models and theories, however, have not been extensively applied to refugee studies. His primary contribution to acculturation psychology is a model of what he called *acculturation strategies* (Berry, 1989). His model includes four strategies that describe both the attitudes and behaviors of an acculturating person. These strategies are assimilation, integration, marginalization, and separation. He suggested that the strategy used by the acculturating person would affect the outcome of the acculturation process.

The four-strategy model has not been fully supported among different types of acculturating groups (immigrants, refugees, indigenous people). However, the idea behind the model, that the attitudes and expectations of the acculturating person would have a significant impact on the acculturation process (Berry, 1989), has been supported in the research involving resettled refugees. For example, how often a refugee thinks about his or her home country may influence levels of depression (Bemak & Greenberg, 1994). Whether or not they are more focused on the present or the past also may be related to emotional adjustment (Beiser & Wickrama, 2004). Ai, Peterson, and Huang (2003) conducted a study of refugee women from Bosnia and found that the cognitive resources of hope and positive religious coping were related. Westermeyer, Vang, and Neider (1983) found that refugees permanently resettled in a Western country who anticipated an *easy* adjustment were more likely to become psychiatric patients than those who anticipated a difficult adjustment.

In her work with refugees, the current researcher has anecdotally observed the effects of cognitions on the adjustment process. A refugee from Liberia recently showed the researcher a picture of Disney World and explained that it is an image of what people in her refugee camp believed America was like. The researcher was left to speculate how this woman's disappointment colored her ability to cope with life in the US.

Beyond the anecdotal evidence, there have been suggestions, in what literature exists on Liberian refugees, that their adjustment process may be closely tied to their cognitions about adjustment. Buseh, McElmurry, and Fox (2000) found that high levels of depression and acculturative stress among Liberian men were correlated with thoughts of homesickness and missing friends and family. Also, professionals serving Liberian refugees during resettlement have suggested that Liberians may be particularly affected by their expectations of resettlement in the US. This is because of Liberia's shared history with the US. Liberia is a country that was never colonized but was created as a nation by freed slaves who returned to Africa from the US. Numerous regime changes and a civil war culminated in a spike in violence during 2002 that led hundreds of thousands of Liberians to flee to neighboring countries. Since 1992, 27,460 Liberian refugees have been permanently resettled in the US, but the resettlement reached its peak in 2004 when 7,140 Liberians came, and over 4,000 more came in 2005. Based on their interviews with resettlement service providers, Dunn-Marcos, Kollahlon, Ngovo, and Russ (2005) stated that Liberians may make assumptions such as "Americans will be well versed in the history of the two countries and know about Liberia and its recent problems" and "Liberians will have much in common with their African Americans

counterparts” (p. 51). There has been no empirical work to determine if these expectations, or other attitudes about acculturation, have been reported by Liberians themselves, nor to assess the effects of these attitudes.

There also has been no follow-up research with the group of Liberian women who came to the US as a result of the targeted UN programs to resettle vulnerable women. Many of these women were single mothers, vulnerable in the refugee camps because they had no male relatives (husband, father, or uncle) to protect them. These women could be considered highly in need of social services in the US based on their history of vulnerability in refugee camps, as well as their “triple marginalized” (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004, p. 724) status once in the US: disadvantaged by their ethnicity, economic access, and gender.

Statement of the Problem

Refugee studies research has shifted away from an early emphasis on problem-focused research that was driven by policy needs. Researchers have become interested in the process of refugee acculturation and adjustment from the perspective of the refugees themselves. The purpose of the current study is to improve our understanding of how refugees cope cognitively with their past experiences and present challenges. Cognitive resources could include anticipation of the future, beliefs about current difficulties, hope, and religious beliefs. In particular, the researcher will examine the attitudes and expectations that refugees have about their adjustment in the US, and how those expectations and attitudes relate to their adjustment strategies.

Unlike the few studies that have involved Liberian refugees to date, the current study will not simply provide a description of problems in Liberian women's lives, but will seek out the women's own interpretations of past and present experiences. Because there is evidence that gender and country of origin influence the resettlement experience, it is preferable to hold these variables constant in refugee samples.

Research Questions

Accordingly, this study is designed to address the following research questions:

1. What attitudes do Liberian refugee women have about acculturation in the US?
2. How are their attitudes related to their acculturation behaviors?
3. How have their attitudes helped Liberian women cope with resettlement?
4. What are Liberian women's desired outcomes of the acculturation process?
5. To what extent has gender and culture guided Liberian women's acculturation strategies?
6. What experiences have influenced Liberian women's acculturation attitudes and strategies?

Need for the Study

Given the potential for significant mental health concerns of Liberian women, understanding the *internal* adjustment process is key in addressing emotional and psychological issues. Researchers like Miranda and Matheny (2000), who worked with Latino immigrants, have stressed the need for more research on cognitive resources as mediating effects of refugee distress. In addition, the UNHCR has identified women who were granted refugee status for gender-based reasons as particularly in need of

resettlement assistance tailored to their specific needs. Understanding how refugee women cope with the stresses of resettlement, trauma, and loss would help service providers build on women's resources and address any deficits in access or knowledge of coping resources. Marotta (2003), in discussing counseling tortured refugees, stated that cultural meaning making of traumatic experiences is one of the primary pathways for healing in this population. She encouraged counselors to consider how culture affects the way a refugee client makes sense of the world and the things that have happened to her.

Helping refugees adjust emotionally has proved to be a challenging task for the mental health care system in the US. Professionals' inability to speak multiple languages, a mental health system based on Western philosophies and culture, and the overwhelming task of helping refugees deal with the past while trying to adjust to the present all have contributed to the challenge. Studying the experiences and cognitions of Liberian refugee women would provide a new understanding of how gender and culture guide refugees' coping with difficult circumstances. This would help counselors build on the already existing resources and promote healthy coping.

Definition of Terms

Refugee is a person who has fled his or her country due to persecution or violence and is residing outside their country of origin. Unless otherwise stated, the term refugee in this manuscript will refer to those persons who have been permanently resettled in a country like the US (as opposed to living in temporary camps).

Resettlement is “the selection and transfer of refugees from a State in which they have sought protection to a third State which has agreed to admit them – as refugees - with permanent residence status” (UNHCR, 2005, p. 2).

Culture refers to the behaviors, traditions, and beliefs demonstrated by a group of people who claim to share a common identity.

Acculturation refers to the changes that occur when two or more cultures come into contact.

Expectations are beliefs or thoughts about future events or experience.

Adjustment refers to a person’s response when encountering some type of life change.

Acculturation strategies are the attitudes and behaviors that are demonstrated in one’s everyday intercultural experiences (Berry, 2006).

Overview of Chapters

This study is presented in five chapters. The first provided an overview of the state of refugee studies and the need for the current study as it can be utilized by counselors. The second chapter gives a detailed review of scholarly literature related to this topic and further elaborates the need for counselors to understand the cognitive coping of Liberian women. The third chapter contains a description of the methods to be used to collect data on the cognitions and strategies of Liberian women. In the fourth and fifth chapters, the researcher will report the data collected and interpret this data, respectively. The fifth chapter also will include implications and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers in the helping professions, particularly social workers, began examining refugee issues in the 1940s, about the same time the rest of the academic world became interested in international migration, sparked by World War II (Black, 2001). Counseling being a “younger” profession, an article about refugees or immigrants did not appear in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*, flagship journal of the American Counseling Association, until 1988. This article was written by a school counselor in Virginia who provided anecdotal accounts of counseling Afghan refugees. His report was based simply on his conversations with and attempts to help members of that group. He did not conduct an empirical study and he cited no sources, with the explanation that he could find no published information on counseling Afghan refugee clients (Firling, 1988). The Afghans were a new refugee group in the US at that time and so he based his work on what he learned from the Afghans themselves. This is a good example of how researchers and practitioners interested in helping refugees have had to be flexible to the evolving refugee concerns in their own communities. Policy-makers change procedures that affect the lives of refugees, and professionals in contact with refugees must be alert to the impact of these changes on their work. Firling exemplified counselors who are focused on finding the best ways to address the needs of their refugee clients, even if it means charting new territory culturally and clinically. Unfortunately,

Firling's article also exemplified some of the problems in refugee research done by helping professionals, including a lack of theory and empirical rigor.

Since Firling's (1988) article, there have been seventeen more articles in the *Journal of Counseling and Development* about refugee and immigrant concerns, and there has been a similar increase in refugee research in other professions. Today, Firling would have a harder time claiming there is no information available (it seems a dubious claim even in 1988), as there is an extensive body of research related to the refugees who have been resettled in the US and elsewhere. In addition, there continue to be new groups of refugees arriving in the US who should be incorporated into research.

Counselors have a lot of research to draw on in assisting their refugee clients but there are still crucial areas that are underdeveloped. To date, research on refugee resettlement adequately provides the "who," "what," "when," and "where" regarding the experiences of refugees resettled in the US. Researchers have provided information on "who" makes up the refugee population, "what" happened to them before resettlement, "what" happens during the post-resettlement adjustment process, as well as "when" and "where" they have undertaken the adjustment process. There also have been a number of attempts to examine "why" some refugees adjust differently than others. Recently, refugee researchers have turned their attention toward "how" refugees navigate the resettlement process. The difference in the newer research is a move to focus on the internal experiences of the refugee in the adjustment process versus a previous focus on the external events and outcomes related to this process. This research is complemented by research on how counselors and other psychotherapists can provide services to

refugees to meet their needs in a culturally competent way. Counselors seek both to understand how their refugee clients are coping and how (or if) counseling can support them in that process. The convergence of these two trends is in the spirit of that first article by Firling (1988): by listening to the experiences of refugees and their perceptions of those experiences, counselors can better serve them.

The current study seeks to follow these trends by exploring Liberian refugee women's perspectives on the resettlement process. Liberians rarely have been included in the research on refugee resettlement to date. The research we do have on Liberians hints at rich areas of knowledge to be explored (Buseh, McElmurry, & Fox, 2000; Dolo, & Gilgun, 2002; Stepakoff, et al., 2006). In addition, the current research provides examples of the adjustment process, based on other refugees with similar backgrounds. Liberian women have been selected for this study for a number of reasons that will be addressed in subsequent sections.

Political Context of Research

In 2001, Black reviewed the current state of refugee studies and noted that refugee adjustment researchers have tended to focus on outcomes, events, and problems. This is in part because research involving refugees occurs in a political context. Understanding this context is helpful when evaluating the research and determining how it may be applied. Black provided a thorough explanation of this context. Black analyzed and critiqued the history of refugee studies, starting from 1950 when the Association for the Study of the World Refugee Problem was established; his analysis was published in the *International Migration Review*. Black used this review to address the relationship

between refugee studies and refugee policy. This relationship exists due to the United Nations, governments, and non-governmental organizations being involved in determining who refugees are and how (or if) they are to be helped. These bodies have used, funded, and conducted research to meet their own goals. Black asked, 1) How has refugee studies' connection with policy affected the research? and 2) Has research involving refugees impacted policy?

In addressing the first question, Black (2001) noted some of the pitfalls in having policy-making organizations sponsor and use refugee studies. Black provided evidence that refugee studies have been overly policy-oriented, and have served the interests of policy-makers, at the expense of furthering social science inquiry. He noted evidence of this happening in a lack of theory in the literature. Other evidence he provided is an abundance of research studies so narrowly focused, geographically and temporally, on a specific policy issue, that they cannot be applied or expanded by either academics or policy-makers outside of those sponsoring the research.

In addressing the second question, Black noted that a "problem-centered approach" (2001, p. 67) in refugee studies has led to the real concerns of refugees (such as gender-based violence) being addressed by those in the position to help refugees. Black viewed this as a positive in the relationship between research and policy. Black provided a number of examples of research results being used to inform better and more effective resettlement policies. He noted, however, that these instances were inconsistent. Some research has been ignored by refugee policy-makers, despite its potential to inform better refugee policy, and some is utilized in a limited way. Black's review showed the

great potential that refugee research has to help those it is intended to help. But Black also warned that there has not been enough critical reflection and broad thinking to accept the research as a thorough understanding of refugee issues and sufficiently unbiased. With these constraints in mind, an examination of the literature begins with the who, where, and when of refugee resettlement.

Population

Refugees Internationally

Who makes up the population of refugees worldwide? Information on the international population of refugees is collected and published by governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in refugee services and resettlement. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the branch of the UN created to address refugee issues, reported that it monitors 32.9 million persons of concern worldwide (UNHCR, 2007). Of those, 9.9 million are classified as refugees (UNHCR, 2007). The UN defines refugees as people who have been forced to flee their home country and who are hoping to be resettled permanently in other host countries or be repatriated to their own country. Those persons of concern not designated as refugees fall into three other categories. The first is people who have fled their homes to other areas within their own country, and are so called internally displaced people. The second are called asylum-seekers; these are people who have migrated by their own means to other countries and have appealed to that country's government for permanent asylum. The third is stateless persons who are not recognized as being citizens of any country. The research on forced migration also falls along these category lines because the three

groups (i.e., refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum-seekers) have different experiences and needs.

Data collection with those classified as refugees can take place in two different settings: at the temporary settlements or camps where they await repatriation or permanent resettlement, or in the host countries where refugees have been permanently resettled. Host countries are generally located in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, and refugees have come mostly from Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (UNHCR, 2006). Most researchers interested in refugee issues are based in host countries, which makes data collection with local refugees living in their countries easier to do and therefore more common. Some research is carried out in temporary refugee camps or among internally displaced persons. This kind of data collection is usually done by members of organizations serving that population, or visiting researchers from the West (Black, 2001). Pre-resettlement research is less common due to the travel required for Western researchers and the perceived risk of visiting countries in turmoil.

Refugees in the United States

When and where have refugees resettled? The US has a long history of accepting immigrants from other countries as future American citizens. Data on refugees in the US are compiled by numerous government agencies, including the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), the Department of Homeland Security, and the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Since 1992, over 1 million refugees have been resettled permanently in the United States.

In the fiscal year 2006 (the most current year for which data are available), the US government accepted 41,300 refugees for permanent resettlement, more than any other industrialized country (UNHCR, 2007). For 2008, the US President set the ceiling for accepted refugee applications at 80,000 people (McCormack, 2007). The US, in accordance with a United Nations' definition of refugees, grants refugee status to "someone who has fled his or her country because he/she fears persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group, or political opinion" (USCRI, n.d. (b)).

Refugees coming to the US have become increasingly diverse over the last decade. In the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, refugees were predominantly from the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, and Vietnam. In 2005, 55 nationalities were represented in the refugees who settled in the US. The highest percentage came from African countries, although the former Soviet Union still had higher numbers than any single African country (Busfield, 2006; O'Hara, 2006). In 2005, the African countries with the most refugees coming to the US were Somalia, Liberia, Ethiopia, and Sudan (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2005). Refugees have been initially assigned for resettlement to every US state for the last five years, with the exceptions of Wyoming and West Virginia (Office of Refugee Resettlement). Refugees do move to other states after their initial resettlement, and so it is more difficult to determine refugee populations by state once they have moved out of their primary resettlement area. The states in which the highest numbers of refugees were resettled initially in 2005 were Florida, California, Minnesota, and Texas. These states continue to have high numbers of refugees living in them (Office of Refugee Resettlement).

Liberian Refugees

Although small numbers of Liberians have been living in the US for decades as immigrants and citizens, Liberians are one of the newer groups of refugees to come to the US. Perhaps because they are a newer group, a thorough body of data on Liberian refugees living in the US has yet to be developed. The US Office of Refugee Resettlement funded the writing of *Liberian Refugees: Cultural Considerations for Social Service Providers*, by Susan Schmidt (n.d.). In this document, Schmidt, provided a background of Liberian history and reported some of the common experiences of Liberian refugees. Schmidt reported the following information. Liberia is a republic on the West coast of Africa that was never colonized, and was officially founded by freed slaves from the US in 1847. Ancestors of the freed slaves make up one group living in Liberia today; there are also 16 officially recognized indigenous tribes. Schmidt noted that the recent history of Liberia is reflected in the migration trends to the US over the last decade. The number of Liberian refugees has climbed from 231 in 1996 to over 4,000 in 2005 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2005). The highest number came in 2004, when over 7,000 Liberians immigrated with refugee status to the US. From 1996 to 2005, a total of 27,460 Liberian refugees became permanent US residents, with 14,000 coming in the last three years (UNHCR, 2006). Schmidt reported that the climb in numbers was due to the civil war in Liberia. Fighting began in 1989, continued off and on, and then escalated in 1998. At that time, thousands of refugees fled to neighboring countries, Ivory Coast and Ghana, where they lived in refugee camps overseen by the United Nations or they integrated into the host society. A civil war began in the Ivory Coast in 2002 that

made the situation for the Liberian refugees increasingly unstable. When no neighboring countries were able to accept the Liberians as permanent residents, the US brought thousands of refugees from the Ivorian camps to the states for permanent resettlement (Schmidt). Since then, Liberia has stabilized and held free elections. The US, in an agreement with the Liberian government, stopped accepting refugee applications from Liberians in 2006, with the exception of family reunification cases (US Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, 2006).

In 2006, Liberians were resettled in 42 different states, with the highest numbers going to Pennsylvania, Minnesota, New York, and Texas (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2006). In the North Carolina county where the current research is being conducted, there are estimated to be 1,200 Liberians residing (Center for New North Carolinians, n.d.). There are no published data on what percent of these Liberians are women. Most Liberian refugees seek citizenship and are likely never to return to Liberia, even as visitors.

Refugee Experiences

Pre-immigration experiences

What makes a person a refugee? There is debate as to whether “refugees” can be considered a discrete group for research. This is partly because they come from hundreds of cultural groups, which means differences in language, behavior, family structure, and belief systems. Adding to the confusion, “refugee” is defined differently depending on the agency or researcher (Black, 2001). However, researchers have revealed that despite great demographic diversity among refugees, they do have common experiences. In order

to meet criteria for resettlement, displaced persons must prove they have experienced threats to life or persecution, which means that all refugees accepted for resettlement have experienced some form of these events. These shared experiences are part of what separates refugees from other immigrants and adds to what they must cope with after resettlement. Researchers assessing pre-flight experiences have collected data from refugees who were living in temporary settlement locations (usually refugee camps close to the border of their home country) and also those who have been permanently resettled (usually in Western countries). Occurrences have been measured in simple ways, such as adding up the number of refugees in a sample who respond “yes” when asked whether or not they had been displaced within their home country before resettlement (e.g., Simich, Hamilton, & Baya, 2006), and in more sophisticated ways, such as using the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, a standardized instrument designed to assess for particular traumatic experiences common to Southeast Asian refugees (Mollica et al., 1992). Some of the more common experiences that have been assessed are displacements (fleeing), violence against themselves or their family members, witnessing violent events, separation from family members, and forms of torture or persecution. A principal components analysis of pre-immigration events reported by Bosnian refugees yielded four trauma dimensions: human rights violations, dispossession and eviction, life threat, and traumatic loss (Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004).

Researchers have surveyed resettled refugees to determine what pre-immigration experiences they had, the variety of their experiences, and the frequency of those experiences. These methods have yielded extensive information on “what” occurred, but

did not always address “how” refugees view these experiences or cope with them. Like other areas of refugee research, research on refugees’ pre-immigration experiences is based primarily on Southeast Asian and European refugees, and less on refugees from African countries. An example of this is Hollifield et al.’s (2002) review of over 300 studies measuring trauma among refugees, all but one of which sampled Southeast Asian refugees, with the exception being a Latin American sample. Hollifield et al. concluded from their review of this literature that most refugees report significantly traumatic events, but perhaps a more accurate conclusion would have been that Southeast Asian refugees report traumatic events.

Research involving Southeast Asian refugees includes more complex and thorough assessments of refugee experiences. Carlson and Rosser-Hogan (1994) assessed the traumatic experiences of Cambodian refugees resettled in the US. They used the Post-Traumatic Inventory (Meinhardt et al., 1986), which, like the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, was developed specifically to assess the experiences of Southeast Asian refugees. The researchers removed two events from the inventory, “loss of personal property” and “spending more than a year in a refugee camp,” because they determined that all 50 research participants had both of these experiences. They found that 80% or more of the participants reported experiencing feeling that their life was in danger, feeling that their relatives’ lives were in danger, having a relative or friend who disappeared, being displaced due to nearness of battles, and having friends or family forced to move in or forced change of residence. Around half reported being physically assaulted and having a friend or family member killed when trying to leave Cambodia.

The mean number of traumatic experiences endorsed was 14 (out of 21). The instrument was not designed to assess frequency of each event.

Chung and Bemak (2002) conducted a secondary analysis of data from the California Southeast Asian Mental Health Needs Assessment (Gong-Guy, 1986). They compared the experiences of over 1,000 Southeast Asian refugees by gender and nationality (Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian). Refugees were interviewed about pre-immigration trauma experiences (victim, witness, or knowledge of torture, forced separation, imprisonment or murder), number of years in refugee camps, number of family members who died, death or separation from spouse, and who made the decision to leave the country of origin. The researchers reported significant differences in experiences by gender and nationality. For example, less than half of the refugee women reported they had made the decision to flee their home country, while about three-fourths of men said they made their own decision to leave (as opposed to a spouse or family member making the decision for them). Twenty-two percent of the Cambodian women reported the death of a spouse, which was much higher than any other group of women or men, with the highest being 3% and .5% being the lowest in the other groups. Chung and Bemak concluded that the experiences of refugees, even from the same country, are not identical, although most of their sample had experienced some traumatic or distressing events. This is perhaps the same conclusion that can be drawn from the research more broadly, that, depending on gender, nationality, age, etc., the refugee experiences may vary, but almost all refugees report distressing events.

Recent research regarding the experiences of refugees from African countries does exist. Simich, Hamilton, and Baya (2006) surveyed 220 Sudanese refugees resettled in Canada and found that 33% had experienced displacement (moved place of living) within Sudan before leaving that country; half reported being displaced more than once. Paardekooper, de Jong, and Hermanns (1999) compared the experiences of Sudanese refugee children living in a temporary camp in Uganda with the experiences of native Ugandan children who had not been displaced. This is a rare study in that it compared a refugee group to a culturally similar non-refugee group. These researchers used the Trauma Events Scale, part of Mollica et al.'s (1992) Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, to assess the experiences of both groups. Experiences reported by over half of the Sudanese children included loss of property, lack of food and water, loss of a family member, witnessing the death of a family member, illness with no medical care, and events which almost led to their own deaths. Among the Ugandan children, the only events that over half reported were witnessing the death of a family member and lack of food. In a similar study, Basoglu et al. (2005) compared the number of war related events experienced by survivors of the war in the former Yugoslavia, which produced one of the largest refugee groups in the last 20 years, with other Yugoslavians who had not been directly exposed to the war. Among the 1,358 survivors surveyed, the average number of war-related events reported was 12.6. To measure the number of events, participants were asked how many times they had experienced combat, torture, displacement, siege, and aerial bombardment. The number of experiences for the control groups were not measured by the researchers because they were chosen based on having no direct war experiences.

Basoglu et al. noted that participants who would qualify for the control group were difficult to find in the former Yugoslavian states, but their data analysis revealed that the control group had significantly less cognitive and emotional distress as an outcome of their experiences (or lack thereof).

Another source of knowledge about refugee experiences are the reports of professionals “in the field” who are working with refugees and refugee resettlement on a day-to-day basis. Professionals work both in Western agencies which help refugees adjust to life in new countries, as well as the camps where refugees await resettlement. These professionals, particularly case managers, counselors, and social workers, hear the stories of refugees. The knowledge arising from hearing these stories is shared in agency manuals that guide helping services for refugees. An example of this kind of manual is *Lessons from the Field: Issues and Resources in Refugee Mental Health*, which was compiled by members of the National Alliance for Multicultural Mental Health (NAMMH, n.d.). This organization is supported by grants from the US government’s Office of Refugee Resettlement and is made up of member agencies that serve refugees, such as the Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights in Chicago and the Center for Multicultural Human Services in Falls Church, Virginia. The manual produced by the NAMMH is not dated, but a founding date of 1996 is listed for the organization. Dennis Hunt, a psychologist, wrote a section of this manual naming some common stressful pre-immigration experiences for refugees, broken down into “pre-flight” experiences and “during flight and processing” experiences. Pre-flight experiences listed included imprisonment, being forced to kill or inflict pain, loss of property and

livelihood, repeated relocation, fear of unexpected arrest, living underground with false identity, exposure to toxins or diseases without medical care, physical assault, and death or disappearance of a family member. During flight and processing experiences included illness, robbery, assault on self or family members, witnessing beatings or killings, malnutrition, loss of contact with family members, interviews with officials to justify refugee status, and long waits in refugee camps.

Fred Bemak, Rita Chi-Ying Chung, and Paul B. Pedersen have conducted extensive research and counseling with refugees in the US. In their book, *Counseling Refugees* (2002), they also provided an overview of refugee experiences. They noted the common thread of pre- and post- immigration experiences across groups of refugees despite differences in culture and nationality. They have observed and reported similar experiences to those described in the NAMMH manual. In addition, they noted that refugees typically make hasty and involuntary departures from their homes, which leads to separation from family and results in living in places where the culture is different and one's sense of self may be challenged. These forced migrations also result in loss of socioeconomic status, changes in gender roles, and language problems. Bemak et al. also reported that certain subsets of refugees were vulnerable to certain experiences. One particular set of experiences they addressed is that of women, along with the experiences of older refugees and refugee children.

Experiences of Refugee Women

Researchers have begun to pay more attention to how *refugee* experiences are also *gendered* experiences. As evidence of the fact that refugee research is no longer gender-

neutral, two of the most recent refugee-related articles in the *Journal of Counseling and Development* were about refugee women's specific experiences. In one of them, Bemak, Chung, and Pedersen (2002) reported that refugee women are likely to have experienced rape and sexual abuse prior to permanent resettlement. UNHCR report writers and policy-makers have created the term gender-based violence (GBV) to describe much of the violence against refugee women. GBV is defined as "any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females" (Inter-agency Standing Committee, 2005, p. 7). Gender-based violence includes sexual violence, and it can be in the form of harassment, domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation, and withholding of resources in return for sex (UNHCR, 2006). There are a number of agency reports and some research focused on assessing the particular experiences, especially those related to GBV, of refugee women.

In the 2006 version of *The State of the World's Refugees*, a document created by the UNHCR, the authors discussed the problem of gender-based violence. Based on their contact with refugees through humanitarian programs, they concluded that refugee women are at high risk for becoming the victims of GBV, including sexual violence, because political and social protections against these acts often have broken down in the women's community. They also reported that refugee women's vulnerabilities included a lack of access to political and economic power and victimization by human trafficking. Because many of the situations that create refugees involve civil war or other conflict, they also reported that women are exposed to mass rape as war tactic. This tactic was

used in the conflicts leading up to contemporary refugee flights from Bosnia, Somalia, Liberia, and Cambodia. Unfortunately, the authors also reported that violence against refugee women may not end when they flee the area of conflict. Some women continue to be targeted for violence in the refugee camps by others in the camps, by peacekeeping or humanitarian workers, or by citizens of the temporary host country.

In 2001, a meeting at UN headquarters in Geneva brought together 47 refugee women to share their experiences with the UNHCR's Executive Committee and members of other NGOs involved in protecting women. The women were from a variety of countries. The themes and reports from this meeting were published by the UNHCR (Baines, 2001). A primary theme in their reports was the women's feeling of unsafety due to witnessing and experiencing sexual and gender-based violence. Compounding this trauma, the women reported the taboo nature of rape in all of their cultures, which ostracizes victims and prevents punishment of perpetrators. The women also reported increased incidences of unaddressed domestic violence. They attributed this violence to their male relatives taking out anger about limited economic activities and trauma from war on the women. The women also addressed the need for access to economic and political privileges that men enjoyed in temporary host countries.

Hynes and Lopes Cardoza (2000) are public health researchers who have written about the prevalence of refugee women's experiences with sexual violence. They work for the Centers for Disease Control, so their research could still be considered within the policy-making realm. They discussed the difficulties in obtaining accurate information about sexual violence prevalence among refugees, including the strong stigmas in many

cultures and the women's fear of being re-victimized for reporting their experiences, despite assurances of anonymity. The authors cited a study (Lopes Cardoza, Vergara, Agani, & Gotway, 2000) of ethnic Albanian women who had been displaced during the conflict in Kosovo. There had been anecdotal reports that this population had experienced mass rapes. Yet, the researchers found only 4.3% of the 1,358 Albanian women acknowledged being raped. Just over six percent reported they had experienced *or* witnessed rape. The researchers believed that rapes were underreported in this assessment. Hynes and Lopes Cordoza used this paper to highlight the difficult nature of researching the traumatic experiences of refugee women; anecdotal reports and hard survey data do not always appear to match up. Despite this, most researchers, policy-makers, and direct service providers do conclude that refugee women are at high risk for experiencing some type of gender-based violence (Bemak Chung, & Pedersen, 2003).

Liberian Refugee Experiences

Despite the length of time that the Liberian refugee situation persisted and the large numbers of Liberians who have been resettled in Western countries, there is little information about their particular immigration experiences. What information is available mostly comes from agency reports and one published study in a refereed journal. Susan Schmidt's (n.d.) report was funded by the US's Office of Refugee Resettlement and was based on the work of two non-profit agencies which work in refugee resettlement. Schmidt indicated the document was compiled based on interviews with Liberians in the US and service providers working with refugees, as well as other available agency documents. Schmidt reported that there are a number of aspects in the Liberian refugee

experience that have affected them and differentiated them from other refugees. One aspect is that many of those now living in the US had protracted displacement experiences, meaning there were a number of years between when they left their original homes in Liberia to the time they were accepted for permanent resettlement. Sometimes this displacement was as long as 10 years and often involved moving from place to place, depending on where safety and resources could be found. Liberian children's education was interrupted, with many of them being out of school for years. Families spent years apart and the adults were not able to maintain livelihoods or agricultural property. Although many Liberians spent long periods waiting for a safe place to go, once they were accepted into the US refugee resettlement program their processing and evacuation went very quickly. Family members were located and reunited hastily by humanitarian workers prior to the Liberians leaving the country. This means that extended families now living together in the US had not seen each other for long periods of time prior to resettlement. There are also cases where Liberian refugees misrepresented family information in order to have more people eligible for resettlement; because of the quick processing, the mismatched families came to the US together (Schmidt, n.d.).

Liberian Women's Experiences

Schmidt (n.d.) identified a number of particular experiences for Liberian women refugees. She reported that Liberians were involved in one of the UNHCR's initiatives against gender-based violence, which was put in place because, at home and in the refugee camps, Liberian refugee women were targets of war-related rape and vulnerable to prostitution. To deal with this the UNHCR promoted the resettlement of "double flight

female heads of household.” These were single mothers who had been displaced at least twice, and typically did not have a male family member or husband supporting them. As a result of this, the percentage of single mothers among the Liberians in the US is high, although no percentages were given by Schmidt. Schmidt also reported that many Liberian women were deprived of economic opportunity during their displacement and had to rely on men for income through prostitution or having what Schmidt described as “sugar daddies.”

Swiss et al. (1998) is the only report of a survey-based research study on the experiences of Liberian refugees. Health workers in Liberia surveyed 205 women who had lived through the civil war there. They surveyed the women about various forms of gender-based violence, but focused on war-related sexual violence. They reported that 49% of the women reported being victimized physically or sexually at least once by a soldier or fighter. Sixty-one percent of the women who were accused of being of a particular ethnic group were forced to cook for and serve combatants, experienced attempted rape, and were beaten, locked-up, or strip-searched. These data came from women who remained in Liberia; there are no data to determine if resettled Liberian women would report the same number or type of experiences.

Resettlement Experiences

The initial resettlement experience tends to be similar for all refugees coming to the same country. This is a process administrated by national governments, the UN, and non-profit agencies that move refugees from temporary living situations to permanent living situations in other countries. Each host country has variations in the process, but all

refugees going to the same country would go through the same procedures unless lawmakers create changes from year to year. The USCRI (n.d. (a)) produced a document called *How Refugees Come to America* which is available on the agency's website. The process is described as follows.

Once refugee men and women have reached a temporary settlement location, they begin to make decisions about whether to apply for permanent resettlement. Refugees generally do not make the choice about which resettlement country they would prefer, except in cases where they would join family members. The USCRI document includes steps refugees undertake in becoming permanently resettled in the US. The first two steps are identification as a refugee and seeking admission to the US resettlement program. By the US government's definition, becoming a refugee involves fleeing one's country to escape war or persecution when there is a real threat to the person's life or someone else's life. Refugees can be referred only by the UNHCR or a US embassy to the US government for permanent resettlement when all other options have been exhausted, including repatriation back to the home country. The application process involves interviews and producing documentation. Once refugees have applied and been accepted for resettlement, they go through a series of preparations which can take from two months to two years. Refugees are matched with a US resettlement agency that agrees to provide services upon arrival, given a health exam for medical clearance, cleared of security issues such as involvement with a terrorist group, and provided a cultural orientation about their future host country. The orientation is typically done by UNHCR workers or whatever agency is supporting the temporary living situation.

Refugees travel to the US by plane, the cost of which they agree to pay for over time after their arrival. The refugees' assigned resettlement organization is responsible for welcoming them and assisting them with initial adjustment activities, including setting up residences, getting medical attention, applying for a social security number, enrolling children in school, and beginning to learn English (USCRI, n.d.(a)). Refugees gain access to a number of targeted governmental and non-profit services. These services often include cash assistance, employment training, referral services, and social services benefits (US Department of State et al., 2007). Proposed for the 2008 US budget was 722.8 million dollars related to assisting entering refugees (US Department of State et al.). All refugees are eligible for cash assistance and Medicaid for eight months after their arrival, after which time refugees with children are eligible for standard welfare services and Medicaid for up to two years after their immigration date. Other social services such as job training and adjustment counseling are available sometimes for up to five years after arrival, but the length and depth of the programs vary by state, provider, and refugee needs. Refugees eventually can apply for citizenship and petition for family members to be brought to the US (US Department of State et al.). There are other agency documents about the resettlement process for refugees coming to the US, but they do not add anything significant to the information outlined by the USCRI. No independent research has been conducted on refugees' experiences with the bureaucratic process of resettlement in the US.

Although much of the information on pre-immigration experiences comes from policy documents, not empirical research, there is consistency in terms of the types of

experiences that refugees have reported to researchers. Certainly by Western standards many refugee experiences would be deemed distressing or traumatic, especially those reported by women refugees. However, this type of research does not address what these experiences mean to refugees and how they have coped with these experiences.

Refugee Adjustment

Refugees' experiences after arrival in the permanent host country have been studied in some depth. The term "refugee adjustment" will be used in this review to reference post-immigration experiences. There are differences in the research on refugee adjustment versus research on pre-immigration experiences. One of the differences is that refugee adjustment research has included more variables and more variety in research methodologies. This is in contrast to research on pre-immigration experiences, which has tended to focus more narrowly on traumatic experiences and experiences that contributed to the person having refugee status (flight, persecution, etc.). Refugee adjustment research also has come from a wider range of sources than pre-immigration research. Although there are a number of reports by policy-makers on refugee adjustment, there is also a significant body of scholarly research. The abundance of scholarly research has led to the use of more sophisticated methodologies, including testing of theories and models in some areas of refugee adjustment studies.

An example of the large number of variables and complexity in refugee adjustment research is exemplified by Kuhlman's (1991) proposed *comprehensive model of refugee integration*, which he created by combining the immigrant adaptation model of Goldlust and Richmond (1974), Berry's (1988) model of acculturation strategies, and

Kunz's (1981) model of refugee movements. Kuhlman's model incorporates pre-immigration experiences as one part of the refugee adjustment process. Although Kuhlman's *full* model has not been empirically tested, the number of variables he included demonstrates the multi-dimensionality of refugee experiences, both before and after resettlement. Some of the relationships among certain variables included by Kuhlman have been examined, and Kuhlman's more focused model of economic adjustment, addressed below, has been tested by other researchers.

There are a number of possible reasons why post-immigration research has been more plentiful and variable. For one, Western researchers have easier access to refugees once they are resettled in Western countries. Second, researchers can study the adjustment process across time or at any point in the process (as opposed to a retrospective approach for studying pre-immigration experiences). In addition, Western governments and non-profit agencies invest significant time and resources into helping refugees adjust to life in the US, something that could be driving the desire to understand the adjustment process, so as to use those resources most effectively and efficiently.

Researchers working in different disciplines have tended to focus on different aspects of refugees' post-migration experiences. Political scientists have studied engagement of refugees in the legal system, anthropologists have studied changes in refugees' cultural or linguistic practices, and economists have studied their employment patterns. Counselors and other helping professionals have been interested in the emotional and psychosocial effects of refugee's experiences, as well as their involvement in the Western mental health care and educational systems. However, counselors and

counseling researchers working with refugees can benefit from examining the wider adjustment research because it paints a picture of *what* refugees are coping with, even if it only begins to describe *how* they are coping.

Cultural Adjustment

One of the most obvious changes for refugees after resettlement is living in a different culture. As discussed above, most refugees are resettled in countries in Western Europe or countries colonized by Western Europeans (Canada, US, Australia). Most refugees do not have a Western European cultural identity. Refugee service providers have reported that refugees are often immediately aware of cultural differences in the host country (Chung, Bemak, & Pedersen, 2003). These reports have led to an interest in how refugees adapt to the cultural difference, a process most often called acculturation. Acculturation does not just apply to refugees, but can refer to any instance of people of different cultures coming into contact. This can happen through colonization, immigration, sojourners (missionaries, foreign business), or minority groups living among dominant groups.

Strangely, refugee researchers historically have not referenced or built upon the significant body of acculturation research (Allen, Vaage, & Hauff, 2006). This is evident in the lack of theoretical orientation in refugee studies as noted by Black (2001), despite there being a number of well-researched theories in acculturation studies that could be relevant. Kuhlman's (1991) refugee research model does include the acculturation strategy theory from Berry (1980), who is an acculturation psychology researcher. Kuhlman labeled the acculturation strategies "adaptation" (See Figure 1). A few refugee

researchers have followed Kuhlman's lead by incorporating Berry's model, but most have used the concept of acculturation outside of any theory and without a consistent definition.

Acculturation Research in Refugee Studies

Perhaps in part because refugee researchers have ignored the research pedigree of acculturation, but still attempted to incorporate it as a construct, they have yielded inconsistent research findings and applications. Allen, Vaage, and Hauff are psychiatrists and a psychologist who reviewed the research on refugee acculturation for the *Cambridge Handbook of Acculturation Psychology* (2006). They identified 100 studies specifically about refugee acculturation. Their review, as well as the current researcher's review of the literature, led to the identification of a number of problems in how acculturation theory has been applied to refugees.

The first problem is that acculturation and related terms have been defined inconsistently, with each researcher using different definitions for the same term. In the introduction to a research study with Vietnamese refugees, Marino, Stuart, and Minas (2000) consolidated a number of definitions of acculturation from other writers and defined it as "the process of change in knowledge, attitudes, cultural beliefs, values and practices that occurs when the individual is exposed to a new cultural environment" (p.1). By their definition, acculturation is an individual change process induced by novel stimuli. Hunt, Schneider, and Comer (2004) reviewed definitions of acculturation in order to critique the use of the construct in health outcomes literature. They cited Rogler, Cortes, and Malagady (1991) who defined acculturation as "the process whereby

immigrants change their behavior and attitudes toward those of the host society” (p. 585). This definition also presumes an individual change process, but it is more specific about the direction of the change: becoming more like the dominant culture. It would seem, however, that this is a more appropriate definition of assimilation rather than acculturation.

In their review, Hunt et al. (2004) also cited a definition created by the Social Science Research Council and used in Chun, Organista and Marin’s (2003) comprehensive review of acculturation research. Chun et al. defined acculturation as “culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems...” (Social Science Research Council, 1954, p. 974). By this definition, change occurs at a group level instead of an individual level, occurs within the minority group, and is not one directional (toward the majority culture). This definition is more inline with the original meaning of acculturation as developed by American anthropologists in the late 19th century (Hunt et al.). The anthropologists were examining what happened when two groups with identifiable differences came into contact with one another (particularly colonial groups with native groups). Hunt et al. criticized health researchers for attempting to measure a construct without a consistently used and explicit definition. Some researchers (e.g. Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004; Zane & Mak, 2003) have questioned whether the term acculturation should even be used.

Another problem that has arisen from the use of the term acculturation is that its definition and measurement can be biased towards the worldview of the researcher. This bias is evident in some of the unproven assumptions embedded in the above definitions of

acculturation. First, some of these researchers have conceptualized acculturation as a one directional change: newer immigrants becoming like the people who already were living there. Underlying this definition appears to be the belief that “they” should become like “us.” It is possible that some immigrants and refugees seek to make themselves similar to those already living their new country, but there is not sufficient evidence to assume this is in fact the goal for all refugees and immigrants. In fact, there is even evidence to the contrary. Cheung (1989) stated it is important not to assume that immigrant adjustment is equivalent to immigrant assimilation. By surveying older Chinese immigrants, Cheung found that they did have concerns about learning to live in a new country (adjustment), but they did not desire to assimilate or become more like non-immigrants.

Mamgain and Collins (2003) provided a rare example of conceptualizing acculturation as two-directional between the host society and refugee community. They used the term “occupational integration” to refer to both how refugees fared in the labor market and how the labor market responded. This definition is more in-line with the original use of terms like acculturation and is less ethnocentric.

Despite using a culturally sensitive definition, Mamgain and Collins (2003) did not measure “occupational integration” in a way that was consistent with their own definition. This exemplifies a third problem with the way acculturation and similar terms are used in the refugee studies literature. Mamgain and Collins described occupational integration as a three part process: 1) refugees’ entering the labor market, 2) the response of the labor market to the refugees, and 3) refugees’ success in the labor market. What they measured were refugees’ wages, apparently indicating that occupational

integration=higher wages (compared to other refugees). When used in this way, they have described a process (integration) but measured it as an outcome (successfully integrated = higher wages). Additionally, they were purporting to measure a process, yet there was no time element in their research design (longitudinal or cross-sectional.) They could conclude that some refugees had higher wages than others, but could not show that any individual refugee had an improvement or decline in earning. The researchers provided no rationale for their apparent determination that the refugee sample had reached an endpoint to their occupational integration and thus could be measured as a completed process.

Another example of this problem is found in Chung and Kangawa-Singer (1993) who stated that their study examined “acculturation concerns” (p. 631), “acculturation problems” (p. 638), and “difficulties in acculturation” (p. 638). They did not define acculturation, and what they measured were factors relating to psychological distress (depression and anxiety) in refugees.

This breakdown between definition and measurement, where the term is defined as a process and measured as an outcome, is fairly common in refugee and immigrant focused research. As another example, Miranda, Frevert, and Kern (1998) initially defined acculturation as “a process of culture learning and behavioral adaptation that takes place as individuals are exposed to new cultures” (p. 121). However, in the same article Miranda et al. categorized immigrants as having high-acculturation or low-acculturation. They defined high-acculturation as a stronger preference for the host culture, and low-acculturation as a stronger preference for the culture of origin. Their

definition says nothing about preference for cultural practices, yet this is what was measured.

Young (2001) measured what she called “cultural adjustment” (p. 847) using Valdes and Baxter’s (1976) scale of migration-related life events. This scale was used to measure the number of events (out of 18) that Salvadoran refugees experienced after coming to live in the US. An example of an event was being separated from spouse or parents. The participants also rated the events as to how positively or negatively they viewed these events. The number of negative events was used to create a “migration stress” variable (p. 848). The author did not explain how “migration stress” is an indicator of cultural adjustment.

Marino, Stuart and Minas (2000) reviewed the use of standardized acculturation inventories as a way to measure the process of acculturation for an individual. They reported that they found no consensus on how to measure acculturation and that there is great variety in the surveys that have been developed for this purpose. They revealed that the composition of acculturation surveys ranged from a one-question scale (e.g., what language do you speak in the home?) to inventories with larger numbers of items related to a variety of behavioral changes (e.g., language, food, dress). Marino et al.’s description of other researchers’ use of acculturation inventories echoed all of the definitional and methodological problems discussed so far. Researchers have used the same term but measured it in many different ways. They have chosen which behaviors reflect “culture” without any theory or rationale other than their own worldview. And, they have defined a broad process and measured a discrete behavior.

Even if researchers measure acculturation in a way that is consistent with their own definitions, there remains a lack of research into the “how” of cultural adjustment. Instead of studying acculturation as a *process*, most refugee researchers have examined acculturation as a *state* in relation to outcome variables. In other words, researchers have asked how refugees’ *level* of acculturation has affected their success in the resettlement country, with success being defined by the researcher, not the refugee. Refugee acculturation has been studied in relation to food insecurity (Hadley, Zodhiates, & Sellen, 2007), mental health status (Tran, Manalo, & Nguyen, 2007), school adaptation (Trickett & Birman, 2005), gender role change (Nghe, Mahalik, & Lowe, 2003), employment status (Vinokurov, Birman, & Trickett, 2000), social support (Chung, Bemak, & Wong, 2000), and marital satisfaction (Spasojevic, Heffer, & Snyder, 2000). Although these studies are helpful in attempts to describe the post-immigration experiences of refugees, they do not necessarily explain how refugees respond to these experiences.

Marino et al. (2000) suggested another problem with assessing acculturation is researchers’ tendency to measure only behavioral indicators, as opposed to psychological indicators. This is a common critique of the acculturation literature (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001). Marino et al. developed an instrument to measure both the behavioral and psychological aspects of acculturation and their factor analysis revealed support for the idea that behavioral and psychological acculturation are separate but related constructs. Marino et al. based their instrument on the definition of psychological acculturation as

The degree to which the target group approached the value orientation profile of the dominant group in relation to interpersonal behavior, conception of human nature, human activity, relationship with the natural environment, and time perspective. (p. 24)

Although they attempted to measure a cognitive aspect of acculturation, values, their definition of acculturation remained tied to assimilation (“them” becoming like “us”) and they measured cognitive states, (e.g., beliefs about human nature), not cognitive processes.

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) measured their construct, “resettlement process,” by asking refugees about feelings of control and normalcy in their lives. Their method did not rely on an assimilation model and it did attempt to address a psychological aspect of acculturation. Additionally, they obtained refugees’ own reports of these feelings (subjective) instead of attempting to observe a behavioral variable (objective) that would indicate “normalcy” or “control.” In this case, the authors did not decide for refugees what “normalcy” and “control” should look like, but asked the refugees what normalcy and control had been achieved. However, they did not provide evidence that the achieving of control and normalcy was how refugees defined successful acculturation.

Although there are still limitations, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury’s (2003) study is an example of a shift that has been made in a number of areas of refugee studies.

Researchers are moving away from attempting to determine which refugees have positive or negative outcomes, such as “acculturated” or “unacculturated,” and towards understanding how the refugees make sense of their experiences.

Economic Adjustment

There is a large body of research on what refugees experience in new economies and labor markets after arrival. This sub-category of refugee studies may be the most well developed, likely due to the policy-research connection in refugee studies. Much of the practical aid and programs that are offered to refugees by the government and non-profit agencies after their arrival is directed at helping them become successful in the American economy. In order to make conclusions about positive and negative economic outcomes, researchers have attempted to operationalize “successful” economic adjustment. They have indicated that some outcomes in the refugee economic adjustment process are better than others. For example, staying in a job for more than six months may be a way of defining and measuring “successful” economic adaptation, whereas utilization of welfare programs defines “unsuccessful” economic adaptation. Although these valuations may make intuitive sense for policy-making, and it is possible they reflect the priorities and values of the refugees themselves, it should not be assumed as such and they should be recognized as value judgments by a Western researcher. For example, Fadiman (1998) described the Californian Hmong refugee community’s attitude toward welfare as one of entitlement; they believed the US government had promised them lifetime financial support for the military support the Hmong provided in Laos during the Vietnam War. This belief is obviously very different from seeing long-term welfare utilization as an indicator of failure to adjust economically. Despite potential biases like these, the economic adjustment research is still useful in understanding the role of economics in the lives of refugees. The economic research is also helpful as an example of how refugees

have been involved in social science research.

A complete review of the literature related to refugee economic adjustment is not necessary for the purposes of the present study, but overall some researchers have suggested that refugees have economic difficulties in the US. Studies in major urban areas of the US have indicated that immigrants (including refugees) are sometimes as much as two times as likely to be living in poverty or be low-income than those who are native born (Capps, Ku, & Fix, 2002). Food insecurity and housing instability are also more likely compared their native counterparts. This is often despite refugees and immigrants having higher employment rates than US citizens (Capps et al.). Refugees are sometimes under-employed in their host countries due to difficulties getting their professional credentials from their home country transferred to the host country (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). Western researchers and policy-makers have seen economic problems as pressing issues for refugees, and so researchers have naturally sought to understand what causes and prevents these perceived problems.

In order to consolidate the large amount of research on refugee economic adjustment, Kuhlman (1991) proposed a model for refugee economic adaptation (see Figure 1). This is one of the few empirically tested models in refugee studies. His model included a number of moderating variables which he hypothesized would have an influence on the overall outcome variable of “economic integration.” The moderating factors he included were demographic characteristics, flight-related characteristics, host-related characteristics, policy characteristics, residency characteristics, and noneconomic adaptation (including stress). He proposed that successful economic integration of

refugees would include four outcomes: “1) adequate participation in the economy, 2) an income which allows an acceptable standard of living, 3) access equal to that of the host population to those goods and services which access is not determined solely by income levels, and 4) the impact of refugees on the host society... has not deteriorated [the economic variables of the host society]” (p. 16). His proposal for viewing economic outcomes in this way was based on his belief that researchers should not simply determine what success looks like for refugees, but “must attempt to establish the extent to which refugees achieve a standard of living which is acceptable in their own cultural context” (p. 7). His choice of moderating variables was based on the models of refugee experiences and adjustment by Goldlust and Richmond (1974), Berry (1988), and Kunz (1981). Kuhlman did not state definitively how his outcome variables could be measured, but suggested that other researchers should conduct research to find appropriate ways to operationalize these outcomes.

Despite the thoughtfulness of Kuhlman’s (1991) model and his attempt at a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach, only one researcher has undertaken testing the model. Miriam Potocky-Tripodi (2003 & 2004), a social work researcher, attempted to test Kuhlman’s model by doing secondary-analyses of large-scale refugee surveys conducted in the US. However, Potocky-Tripodi operationalized and measured “economic adaptation” in a way that was not in the spirit of what Kuhlman proposed. She measured economic adaptation by estimating income level based on the refugee’s job title and by employment status (employed vs. unemployed). Although Potocky-Tripodi does not explicitly state it in her definitions, it can be inferred from her statistics that higher

income and employed status indicated that the refugee was “more” economically adapted.

Based on Kuhlman’s (1991) definitions, it is not accurate to say that Potocky-Tripodi (2003 & 2004) contributed to our understanding of refugee economic adaptation, but it is accurate to say she contributed to our knowledge of refugee employment status and perhaps income level. Potocky-Tripodi’s fourth analysis of Kuhlman’s model was published in 2003 and used data from a phone survey of 542 Hmong, Somali, and Russian refugees living in Minnesota in 2000. Based on her correlational and multivariate analyses of the survey data, she concluded that Kuhlman’s model was not fully supported. Flight related characteristics, host-related characteristics, acculturation, and adaptation stress did not explain significantly the outcomes of annual earnings or employment status. The significant predictors were demographic variables, with education level, gender, and household composition being the strongest. Potocky-Tripodi noted that these results were generally consistent with previous findings on refugee economic adaptation, although acculturation factors like English learning have been shown to be important in studies conducted by her and others.

In 2004, Potocky-Tripodi supported her 2003 findings when she analyzed data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal study (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). She used the survey responses of 2336 adults who were first generation Americans but did not do separate analyses for immigrants and refugees. For this study, Potocky-Tripodi included the independent variable of social capital, using Putnam’s (1995) definition of social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”(p. 67). Potocky-Tripodi

wanted to test previous research that had indicated the importance of social networks and supports in economic outcomes for refugees. Kuhlman (1991) did include “social relations” as a variable in his model that could influence economic adaptation. Potocky-Tripodi measured social capital by assessing social network (number of friends and relatives and the ethnicity of those friends and relatives), workplace ethnic composition, perception of informal assistance by friends and family, and formal assistance (i.e., contact with social service agencies). Dependent variables were employment status, public assistance utilization, and earnings. Overall, social capital was not found to be a significant factor in general economic adjustment. Interestingly, there was a negative correlation between employment and the tendency to have contact with only one’s own ethnic group. Based on her research, Potocky-Tripodi (2004) summarized that “human capital, household composition, certain acculturation indicators, and gender” (p. 60) are the best predictors of economic outcomes. Human capital refers to the skills and experiences that give a person “value” in the job marketplace. The household composition most likely to be economically adapted is one where there is more than one earner and/or no dependents. English speaking, citizenship status, and length of time in the country were the indicators related to acculturation.

The importance of demographic variables on economic achievements has been supported in a sample of Africans who came to live in the US for various reasons. Kolleholon and Eule (2003) analyzed the 1990 US census and found that employed white Africans, English-speaking Africans, and African men were better off socioeconomically (as measured by hourly wages) than employed black Africans, non-English speaking

Africans, and women from Africa (white and black). Interaction of race and level of education had no significant effect on the outcome variable. There was, however, a relationship between years in the US and earning power, indicating that, for all the groups, they could achieve higher wages over time.

The research on refugee economic adaptation appears to indicate that refugees are like the citizenship of the US and other types of immigrants in that more education, having European heritage, and being of the male gender are correlated with greater income and less use of welfare programs. In a sense, this research is more remarkable for what it does not demonstrate versus what it does demonstrate. It does not demonstrate how (or if) refugees as a whole are different from other immigrants or citizens of the US on economic variables. In addition, it does suggest within-group differences: refugees experience varying outcomes depending on ethnicity, race, and gender.

Despite the breadth of the research, psychological aspects of the economic adjustment process largely have been ignored by researchers. In one attempt, Vinokurov, Birman, and Trickett (2000) measured life satisfaction and feelings of alienation in relation to employment status. Employed refugees reported more life satisfaction and less alienation than underemployed or unemployed refugees. However, measuring life satisfaction and alienation still may not be addressing the refugees' own economic goals, and it does not necessarily measure anything that is particular to the refugee experience. The research on economic adjustment of refugees provides a context for the psychological adjustment of refugees, but it does not yet provide an understanding how refugees internally navigate changes in the external system in which they must survive.

Physical Adjustment

The medical and health concerns of resettled refugees also has received attention from researchers. Health outcomes have been measured both in terms of the refugees' success in accessing health care and in the actual medical problems reported. Weinstein, Sarnoff, Gladstone and Lipson (2000) and Ascoly, Van Haleman, and Kysers (2001) examined refugee contact with the health care system in the US and the Netherlands, respectively. Both concluded that there were access problems for refugees in getting health care, especially women seeking culturally sensitive gynecological care.

A number of researchers have examined the frequency of health problems reported by refugees who come into contact with their host country's medical system. Weinstein, Sarnoff, Gladstone and Lipson (2000) conducted a refugee health care utilization and medical record review in a large California county health care system. Most refugee patients came from the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, and Vietnam. Almost 20% of refugee patients were diagnosed with "ill defined symptoms and conditions" (p. 314), meaning that the health care provider was unsure of the actual diagnosis. When a diagnosis was given, it was most often for tuberculosis or another infectious disease. Notable in the findings was an extremely low percent of diagnoses of mental health and gynecological problems. It is impossible to tell whether these low percents reflect the absence of these problems, under diagnosis, or misdiagnosis. The authors suggested, as many others have, that refugees' vague reports of pain, fatigue, and malaise may be a way of expressing stress and emotional symptoms related to the refugee experience. Fadiman's (1998) description of health care providers diagnosing Hmong

men with “whole body pain” is an example of this phenomenon. Weinstein et al. found that diagnosis patterns did vary by country of origin and age, which suggests that those demographic variables may have a significant influence on health outcomes.

A heterogeneous sample of refugees in England surveyed by Blackwell, Holden, and Tregoning (2002), reported having few chronic health care problems such as cardiovascular or respiratory conditions. Their most common health concerns were symptoms related to the central nervous system, including anxiety and gastro-intestinal complaints. Refugees seeking medical services in Turkey also had a high likelihood of being diagnosed with gastrointestinal problems, as well as infectious disorders (Yaman, Kut, Yaman, & Ungan, 2002). These researchers also found that refugees often reported general symptoms of malaise that could not be attributed to a specific disorder. The low incidence of chronic illnesses among first-generation immigrants and refugees, in comparison to original citizens of Western countries of similar socioeconomic status, is sometimes called the “healthy immigrant effect” (Chen, Ng, & Wilkins, 1996). This phenomenon has been noted by a number of researchers, although there is debate about its cause and why it disappears in the second generation (Viruell-Fuentes, 2007).

Health researchers have proposed various explanations for providers’ diagnosing refugees with “vague” symptoms. One school of thought is that the physical symptoms are somatization of psychological struggles. Another explanation is that it is culturally more acceptable for certain refugee groups to report physical symptoms rather than emotional ones due to taboos around mental illness. However, there is also evidence that interpreters are not always used properly (or at all) in medical settings, which could lead

to physicians being unable to make accurate diagnoses (Marshall, Koenig, Grifhorst, & van Ewijk 1998). Improper or no language interpretation is among the myriad of reasons that refugees may struggle to obtain culturally competent medical care. This is unfortunate as dealing with medical problems has shown to be a priority for refugees (Blackwell, Holden, & Tregoning, 2002).

Social Adjustment

Besides dealing with a new economic and medical system, refugees also are confronted with new social norms. Researchers have been interested in refugees' changing relationships within family, within ethnic group, and within the greater host society. Similarly to economic adjustment research, social adjustment research has been focused on what factors produce good vs. bad adjustment outcomes for refugees. Professionals who work with refugee communities have observed that refugees may struggle with the way family structure and dynamics change in the new country. This includes new gender and generational roles, such as women becoming the primary wage earners outside the home or children taking on a powerful role in the family due to their access to education and English learning (Dolo & Gilgun, 2002). Gang activity (Kposowa & Tsunokai, 2003) and domestic violence (Walter, 2001) are two of the more pathological problems that have been noted in refugee communities in the US, but to date there is no evidence that these occur with more or less frequency than in native communities.

Numerous researchers have hypothesized that the qualities of social networks, the connections and contact among groups of people, and social capital, the resources

available due to social contacts, would contribute to social adjustment outcomes, most often emotional distress. However, the relationship between mental health and social relationships has not always been confirmed in the research. For example, Ager, Malcolm, Sadollah, and O'May (2002) asked 26 refugees in Scotland about household composition and frequency of social contacts outside the home, then correlated their responses with the refugees' levels of clinical depression and anxiety. Clinical depression was correlated with being single, but no other social factors, including frequency of social contacts, was significantly related to anxiety or depression.

Rousseau and Drapeau (2003) also hypothesized a link between refugees' mental health and social adjustment. They interviewed 57 adolescents and their parents resettled in Canada. Both adolescents and parents rated the adolescents on three mental health dimensions (internalizing, externalizing, and risk behavior) using standardized inventories and on two dimensions of social adjustment (social competence and academic performance). Regression analyses of these variables revealed that social adjustment variables predicted little of the variance in mental health. Based on studies such as Rousseau and Drapeau and Ager et al., one might infer that the variables or methodology those researchers chose was not appropriate for capturing the dynamics of social adjustment among refugees.

Young's (2001) review of social adjustment research with refugees noted the above problem and others. In an attempt to correct some of these problems, she used a different approach in hypothesizing that social and personal resources could moderate the effect of life stressors on subjective well-being among two groups of Salvadoran refugees

resettled in Canada. The groups were created by splitting the sample of 120 refugees into 60 newly arrived refugees and 60 established refugees who had been there for more than 5 years. By using a cohort model, Young incorporated time as a variable, thereby acknowledging that refugee adjustment is a process not an outcome. Another strength of this study was that, instead of simply attempting to quantify social resources, Young used the Social Support Resources Inventory (Vaux, 1982) to assess refugees' satisfaction with their social network in terms of support received, not just the amount of social contact they had. Also, instead of measuring psychiatric symptoms as outcomes (objective assessment of well-being), Young surveyed refugees about their perceived quality of life and life satisfaction (subjective assessment of well-being). Locus of control and self-esteem also were assessed to see if personal resources buffered stress along with social resources.

Young's (2001) approach yielded more meaningful and complex results than studies in which the researchers measured only objective variables. Perhaps most noteworthy were the differences she found between recently arrived refugees and established refugees. For the recent arrivals, satisfaction with social support had no moderating effects on stress for any subjective well-being measures. Locus of control and self-esteem (personal resources) moderated stress in relation to quality of life and life satisfaction. For established refugees, social support moderated the effect of hassles on quality of life. Also, self-esteem and social support moderated the effect of life events on life satisfaction. Another interesting finding was that in neither sample were life satisfaction and quality of life correlated, which supports their validity as separate

constructs; Young also concluded from this result that the refugees' degree of overall life satisfaction was not tied to how they rated the quality of various aspects of their life (family, income etc.). Young's findings highlight the fact that the perspectives and possibly the needs of refugees change over time. Understanding refugees' subjective experiences and the changes they go through is important for professionals, including counselors, who are attempting to support refugees in their process of adjustment. We also can conclude from Young's outcomes that subjective measures can better capture experiences, needs, and outcomes rather than objective ones.

McMichael and Manderson (2004) used a qualitative approach to understand the perceptions of refugees' about their own social adjustment. In particular, the authors were interested in social networks and social capital. They interviewed 42 Somali refugee women who had been resettled in Australia, using a format that allowed the participants to talk in a free form about their life narratives. One of the themes the authors identified was how the women connected their perceptions of the social structure in Somalia to their social contacts and support in Australia. In general the women felt a sense of alienation and a lack of support from other Somalis in Australia, which contrasted sharply with their reports that in Somalia there had been a lot of mutual helping and daily contact with numerous friends and relatives. The women believed these fractures in social networks and lack of social capital negatively affected their own and other Somali women's emotional states. The authors cautioned service providers from assuming that all immigrant communities are cohesive and that refugees will find support from their countrymen who are resettled in close proximity. Unlike Young's (2001) sample,

McMichael and Manderson's sample was not separated out by years of resettlement, and the latter authors did not address the concept of time and whether this appeared to be a factor in the women's satisfaction with their social support. However, McMichael and Manderson's study does demonstrate the dual processes that refugees undertake by simultaneously making meaning of the events of their past and coping with present struggles. These two processes were interwoven in the Somalian women's case; their nostalgia of the past shaped their expectations and responses to new realities in the present. This was not an outcome that the researchers predicted, and because they focused on the refugee's perceptions of social adjustment, the study revealed a new and richer understanding of that process.

Barnes (2001) also conducted a qualitative study with refugees in Australia. She interviewed 14 Vietnamese refugees who had arrived in Australia in the 1970's and 1980's. The researcher also used a life narrative format for the interviews but did ask specifically about engagement in the Vietnamese and native communities in Australia, as well as any feelings about returning to Vietnam. At the end of the interview the refugees were asked how they viewed themselves ethnically and nationally, and their sense of attachment to Vietnam and Australia. Barnes concluded that he found a number of within-group differences, particularly regarding attachment to Vietnam or Australia. He noted some refugees felt more attachment to Vietnam, some felt more to Australia, some to both, and some to neither country. Social inclusion and exclusion in both pre- and post-migration experiences were important in the refugees' feelings of attachment to Vietnam and/or Australia. Although there are limitations to what contributes to these four

categories due to the small sample size and lack of quantitative analysis, Barnes attributed some of the difference to the fact that some refugees associated a feeling of alienation to Vietnam even prior to leaving (if they had been persecuted for some reason) and some primarily remembered a sense of inclusion. Other factors that Barnes believed contributed to sense of attachment included still having family in Vietnam, the desire or absence of desire to return to Vietnam, and whether or not they had made their own decision to leave or were brought over by family. A number of the refugees also discussed their experiences in Australia as contributing in positive and negative ways to their attachment to that new country. Like Young (2001), Barnes demonstrated how refugees' feelings about the past complicate how they respond to being in a new community.

Emotional Adjustment

Refugee adjustment also is complicated by the emotional consequences of common refugee experiences. To be considered for resettlement, refugees must prove their lives have been threatened and they have been forced to relocate. Researchers also have shown the threat to life is often accompanied by loss and trauma. Knowing what refugees experience naturally has led to inquiry about how those difficulties have impacted them emotionally. From the beginning of studies involving refugees, Western researchers have been interested in the emotional well-being and mental health status of resettled refugees (Black, 2001). However, the study of refugees' emotional adjustment, like studies in other areas of refugee adjustment, has been problem focused (Black). Also, researchers' conclusions often have been contradictory or inconclusive. There have been

large-scale studies of refugee emotional health, and some of the involved researchers have concluded that there is a high prevalence of psychiatric symptoms among resettled refugees (Bemak, Chung, & Pedersen, 2003). There is a corresponding conclusion that refugees are underserved in terms of mental health treatment (Bemak, et al. But there is also evidence to the contrary for both of these conclusions, and there are significant limitations to the methodology behind these conclusions and their implications.

Emotional Adjustment-Prevalence

Emotional adjustment research has followed a similar development as other areas of refugee adjustment. Early research was driven by policy to determine how many refugees were suffering mental health concerns. Southeast Asian groups have received the most attention in the research on refugee emotional adjustment, and the related studies exemplify the problem-focused research. One of the assumptions underlying this research is that the refugees' life experiences would necessarily lead to more pathology. To test this hypothesis, prevalence of psychiatric diagnoses among Southeast Asian refugees has been assessed in both community and clinical samples. Among community-based samples, one of the first and largest studies of refugee emotional health was Gong-Guy's (1986) report on the findings from the California Southeast Asian Mental Health needs assessment. Over 2,100 refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were assessed for depression, anxiety, and psychosocial dysfunction using sub-scales of the Health Opinion Survey (Leighton, Harding, Macklin, Macmillan, & Leighton, 1963). Data were collected through interviews over the phone and in person, depending on

which medium was more comfortable for the refugee. Significant levels of depression and anxiety symptoms were found in this community sample.

Other researchers working with community samples of Southeast Asian refugees have reported varying prevalence rates. Carlson and Rosser-Hogan (1994) assessed prevalence of PTSD, depression, and anxiety among 50 Cambodian refugees who had never received any kind of mental health treatment. To assess for PTSD, the researchers used a checklist based on the DSM-III-R diagnostic criteria, minus 5 checklist items that were deemed culturally inappropriate. They used the Indochinese Hopkins Symptom Checklist-25 (HSCL-25; Mollica, Wyshak, deMarneffe, Khoun, & Lavelle, 1987), Cambodian version, to assess for depression and anxiety. Their reported prevalence rates of diagnoses were 86% for PTSD, 80% for depression, and 88% for anxiety. Nicholson (1997) also used the Indochinese HSCL-25 to assess 447 Southeast Asian refugees in the community for symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Nicholson found that 14% met criteria for PTSD, 35% met criteria for other anxiety disorders, and 40% met criteria for a depressive disorder.

Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, and Chun (2005) reported prevalence rates of 62% for PTSD and 51% for major depression among a community sample of 491 Cambodian refugees. Although there is some variance in these prevalence rates, they are all higher than the prevalence rates for the greater US public, as reported by the American Psychiatric Association (APA; 2000) in the DSM-IV-TR. APA reports US community point prevalence rates for major depressive disorder are 5-9% for women and 2-3% for men, for generalized anxiety disorder the one year prevalence is 3%, and 8% lifetime

prevalence for PTSD. The difference between the Southeast Asian prevalence rates reported in the above research and the prevalence rates of the general US public does appear to indicate that resettled Southeast Asian refugees had high rates of psychiatric symptoms, particularly symptoms associated with PTSD, at the time they participated in the research.

Researchers working with clinical samples of Southeast Asian refugees generally report even higher prevalence rates of psychiatric diagnoses than in community samples, which is to be expected. Mollica et al. (1990) reported that in a sample of 52 Southeast Asians seeking mental health treatment, over 90% received a psychiatric diagnosis. In this study, participating psychiatrists trained in cross-cultural mental health used interviews and the NIMH Diagnostic Interview Schedule for PTSD to determine diagnoses. They gave 23% a major affective disorder diagnosis alone, 48% major affective disorder and PTSD diagnoses, 17% other diagnosis and one refugee a PTSD-only diagnosis. Kroll et al. (1989) found that of 404 Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese patients visiting a mental health clinic in Minneapolis, only 17% of the patients did *not* meet criteria for at least one Axis I diagnosis. They were mostly diagnosed with major depressive episodes (73%), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; 14%) and anxiety disorders (6%) using a 19-item symptom checklist and clinical interviews administered by psychiatrists. These studies would appear to indicate that Southeast Asian refugees seeking mental health treatment often meet criteria for psychiatric diagnoses.

Community samples of refugees from former Yugoslavian, Central and South American, and African countries also have been assessed for psychiatric symptoms, although less thoroughly than Southeast Asians. Community samples have shown varying rates of psychological distress. Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, and Steel (2004) reported on a community sample of 126 Bosnian Muslim refugees who were evaluated for depression and PTSD using standardized clinical interviews. Forty percent were given a comorbid diagnosis of PTSD and depression, 23% a PTSD-only diagnosis, 31% no diagnosis, and 6% depression-only. Rousseau, Mekki-Berrada, and Moreau (2001) found significant levels of psychological distress among a heterogeneous community sample of refugees from Latin America and Africa who had been resettled in Canada. In a community study with 333 refugees of heterogeneous nationality, but primarily from former Yugoslavian countries, Lie, Lavik, and Laake (2001) found 48% met criteria for a mental disorder based on the HSCL-25 and 18% met criteria for PTSD based on the Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms Scale (PTSS-16).

Refugees presenting for medical care may differ from those presenting specifically for mental health care. Weinstein, Sarnoff, Gladstone, and Lipson (2000) reviewed 2,361 medical charts of refugees from Vietnam, Bosnia, former Soviet Union, and other countries who visited a public health facility. Six and a half percent of diagnoses given and noted on the charts were psychiatric. This is a small number compared to other studies assessing prevalence; however, the authors suggested that psychiatric symptoms may have been undiagnosed. Some symptoms reported by the refugees did not lead to any diagnosis or were labeled as “vague” symptoms by the health

care provider. Ill-defined symptoms were diagnosed 460 times (19.5% of diagnoses) and 759 charts (32% of charts) had no diagnoses.

There is very little information about the mental health status of Liberian refugees. In one of the few scholarly studies involving Liberians, Busch, McElmurry, and Fox (2000) collected data from 50 Liberian men resettled in the US. The men completed the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) and the Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), and from this the researchers concluded 60% of the participants were depressed. The depression and acculturative stress scores were correlated. An additional source of information on Liberian refugees' mental health is anecdotal evidence from service providers who report their Liberian clients show symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Stepakoff et al., 2006).

Through a review of 183 research publications on the health status of refugees from various countries, Hollifield et al. (2002) reported that the prevalence of post-traumatic stress and depression has been found to be consistently high in clinical refugee samples, but prevalence rates vary widely among community samples (4%-86% for PTSD and 5%-31% for depression). This seems to call into question the ideas that refugees, when viewed as a group, have higher rates of psychological distress than other groups of people. To understand these differing prevalence rates, it is helpful to examine some of the limitations in researching refugee emotional health.

Research Limitations-Emotional Adjustment

Studying the emotional adjustment of resettled refugees has some inherent limitations that can influence how the resulting research is interpreted and applied. The first consideration is that cultural norms may guide an individual's expression of emotions, thereby complicating the study of those emotions. There is evidence in cross-cultural research that emotional expression is culturally regulated (Kim & Sherman, 2007; Matsumoto & Kupperbusch, 2001). Conforming to one's ethnic community may influence what emotions are expressed, how emotions are expressed, and to whom they are expressed. This is important because assessing emotions for the purpose of research typically relies on self-report. This means that in order for emotions to be measured they must be expressed or disclosed. If culture moderates the expression or disclosure, researchers cannot be sure if they are indeed assessing the participants' personal and universal emotional states or if they are observing a culturally determined mode of emotional expression. Anthropologists have studied culture and emotion, and one of the famous examples of culturally bound emotional expression is Rosaldo's (1989) essay *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage: On the Cultural Force of Emotions*. Rosaldo lived with the Ilongot people in the Philippines and asked about their former practice of headhunting. Rosaldo reported that the men of the tribe explained to him that they experienced the emotion of rage when a family member died, and the cultural norm was to express this rage and grief by hunting and killing people outside of their ethnic group. Rosaldo stated that he initially expressed disbelief at their explanation for headhunting behavior, but came to empathize when his wife was killed in an accident and he too

experienced rage in his grief. Is “headhunting” a measurable behavior that indicates the experience of a specific emotion (rage)? It is an extreme example, but it is a reminder of the complications of studying emotion, especially in a cross-cultural context where the researcher and participant do not share a culture. Sue and Sue (2003) instructed counselors that not all people value emotional expressiveness. Certain Chinese and Japanese traditions place value on withholding of emotions, and Hispanic groups may see emotional restraint as a sign of maturity (Sue & Sue). In short, refugees participating in research may not feel comfortable reporting certain emotions or they may do so in ways that are not recognizable to the Western researcher.

The second limitation to research on refugee emotional adjustment is researchers’ reliance on diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition, text revision (*DSM-IV-TR*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000) as indicators of emotional distress. This is a limitation because there is debate as to whether the DSM is cross-culturally applicable (Rogler, 1999; Ruchkin et al., 2005; White Kress et al., 2005). White Kress et al. summarized the key issues with cross-cultural use of the *DSM*. These include value judgments about what is “normal” and “abnormal” behavior by Western scientists, the historical and political influences on what disorders are included or excluded, and the absence of consideration of cultural influences on the manifestation and course of a disorder.

A number of studies have been conducted to determine if the *DSM* is relevant in other cultures, with mixed results. Chung and Kagawa Singer (1993) did a factor analysis of the Health Opinion Survey (HOS; Leighton, et al., 1963) with the data from Gong-Guy

(1986). They wanted to assess whether Southeast Asian refugees' reports of symptoms clustered by the subscales of depression, anxiety and psychosocial dysfunction. These subscales were based on DSM criteria. They found that the Southeast Asian refugees' reports of symptoms did not cluster into specific diagnoses but yielded a strong single factor. The authors suggested that this single factor is similar to the diagnosis of neurasthenia, a disorder no longer used in Western psychiatry but commonly diagnosed in Asian countries. A neurasthenia diagnosis requires both psychological and somatic symptoms, which is complementary with an Asian view of the mind/body connection. Mental and emotional symptoms may be common across cultures, but the construction of mental disorders may be influenced by the culture in which they are being diagnosed.

Some studies have supported the cross-cultural use of the *DSM*. Ruchkin et al. (2005) found that adolescents in the US and Russia who had experienced trauma reported similar symptom clusters that matched the diagnosis criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder. Fawzi et al (1997) validated the PTSD diagnosis for symptoms reported by Vietnamese refugees resettled in Boston. Many researchers have used *DSM* diagnostic criteria and assessments that rely on these criteria in their study of the mental health of refugees (e.g., Gong-Guy, 1986; Lie, Lavik, & Laake, 2001; Marshall et al., 2006). Certainly it is helpful for Western researchers and clinicians to understand the experiences of refugees in terms that are familiar to them. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the *DSM* was constructed by Westerners and should not be applied to diverse groups without consideration of this fact.

These measurement and conceptual problems may contribute to the lack of consistency in prevalence rates of pathology observed in refugees. Researchers' focus on prevalence was perhaps a sincere attempt to demonstrate the need for counseling and other services to be made available to resettled refugees. But knowing the presence or absence of psychiatric symptoms does not provide much information to guide the counselor in addressing the emotional needs of refugees, and it does not provide guidance on particular refugee needs by age, race, ethnicity, or gender. Researchers have attempted to address some of these concerns and explore the emotional processes of refugees beyond the prevalence of pathology among refugees as a whole.

Comparative Studies of Emotional Health

One alternative to asking "how emotionally healthy are refugees?" has been to ask "which refugees have more emotional problems than others?" The comparative research approach does avoid the problem of grouping diverse ethnic groups, ages, and genders into samples with the intention of drawing conclusions about all refugees. Researchers doing comparative studies of the emotional health of refugees have used demographic variables to create groups and also compared them by what experiences they have had, most commonly amount of pre-immigration trauma or loss.

Chung and Kagawa Singer (1995) did a secondary analysis of the California Southeast Asian Mental Health Needs Assessment and found that Cambodian and Laotian refugees reported significantly more emotional distress than did Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese refugees. They also found differences in the symptom clustering of less educated, English limited, Southeast Asian refugees as compared to more educated,

English proficient refugees, which they interpreted to mean that level of acculturation was a factor in symptom presentation. However, they also acknowledged that this later difference could be due to bias in the measurement of the symptoms, particularly because the variable of length of time in the country did not differentiate the emotional symptom clusters in the same way.

Significant gender differences also have been found. Women tended to report higher levels of distress and the distress they experienced did not decrease the longer they had lived in the US, a decrease that was seen in the male refugees (Chung & Bemak, 2002). First generation refugee women who came to the US from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe are also likely to have high rates of emotional distress, lack of education, and dependence on welfare (Chung, 2001). Refugee women have been called “triple marginalized” (Goodkind & Deacon, 2004, p. 724) in the US, being disadvantaged by their ethnic, economic, and gender statuses. Chung and Bemak pointed out that their findings require health care providers not to assume that there is one manifestation or pathway of emotional distress in refugees. Pre-migration experiences, post-migration experiences, and gender should all be considered in assessing mental health.

Lie, Lavik, and Laake (2001) compared both demographic and life event variables in studying the emotional well being of refugees in Norway. Their sample included 462 male and female adults who identified themselves as Bosnian, Kosovo-Albanian, other Yugoslavian ethnicities, Somali, or Vietnamese. These participants responded to questions about whether or not they had experienced a list of war-related traumatic events. Symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD also were assessed. The researchers

did find significant differences in anxiety, depression, and PTSD, with the Kosovo-Albanian group reporting significantly more symptoms. In a multiple regression analysis, gender was found to be a significant predictor for results of the symptoms checklist, trauma questionnaire, and PTSD assessment. Women reported more symptoms than men. The researchers also established that experiencing certain types of traumatic events tended to predict negative emotional health. They described these events as “intrusive physical and psychological traumatic exposures” (p. 288), such as exposure to direct threat of life, having been beaten unconscious, and witnessing killing.

Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, and Steel (2004) assessed traumatic events, PTSD, depression, and complicated bereavement among Bosnian refugees. They found that the experience of traumatic loss tended to predict complicated grief, but they were surprised to find that PTSD symptoms and grief were not related. Depression and complicated grief were significantly related. The researchers concluded that the traumatic experiences may lead to grief but not necessarily a pathologic response. Kroll et al. (1989) found similar patterns of relating trauma and grief to depression and anxiety among Southeast Asian refugees.

Nicholson (1997) incorporated pre- *and* post-immigration events into a path analysis to analyze their effects on the emotional health of Southeast Asian refugees. The sample of participants included equal numbers of Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong people. Criterion variables measured were anxiety, depression, and PTSD. The HSCL-25 was used to measure anxiety and depression, and Part 2 of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) was used to measure PTSD. Predictor variables were divided into

pre-immigration variables and post-immigration variables. Pre-immigration variables included constants like gender, and also what their marital status and location (rural vs. urban) were prior to resettlement. Part 1 of the HTQ was used to measure pre-immigration war-related trauma experiences. Post-immigration variables were current stress, perceived health status, and income level. A significant finding from the results was that the degree of current stress was the strongest predictor of all three types of mental health status. Perceived health status (post-immigration) was also a significant predictor of mental health status. The only pre-immigration factor that predicted all three mental health outcomes was number of experienced traumatic events (vs. witnessed events), but it most strongly predicted PTSD, as would be expected.

Emotional Adjustment- Future Directions

Similarly to research on refugee cultural, social, and economic adjustment, studies of refugee emotional adjustment do not provide evidence that refugees, as a group, are different from other people. It is not surprising that people with traumatic losses had more complicated bereavement, or that grief and depression were correlated. There is some evidence that refugees might have higher rates of psychological distress, but even this varies widely by ethnicity, gender, and experience. Few studies comparing refugees with parallel indigenous populations exist. Knowledge of refugee's experiences seemed to lead Western researchers to the conclusion that arriving refugees would have a lot of emotional and social difficulties that would require Western service providers to help them. Certainly there is evidence that refugees have been affected by the difficult experiences they had before resettlement. But this is a simplistic and perhaps obvious

conclusion that does not lead to a better understanding of the nuances of such a distinct human experience.

Another issue that complicates the view of refugees' emotional health is the inconsistent link between emotional symptoms and psychosocial functioning. In order to give anyone a DSM diagnosis of major depressive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or generalized anxiety disorder, the person must be identified as having significant functional impairment. In other words, the symptoms must be interfering with the person's ability to carry out necessary life tasks. Most refugee researchers have assessed symptoms of psychological disorders without also assessing functioning. When they have assessed functioning, the impairment they expected to find has not been borne out consistently. Lie, Lavik, and Laake (2001) found that refugees with a particularly high level of functioning (as measured by the Global Assessment of Functioning) also had a high level of psychiatric symptoms. Rousseau and Drapeau (2003) similarly found that the parents of Cambodian adolescent refugees reported few social problems for the adolescents, despite reporting high levels of depression and anxiety symptoms in their children. Five years after the war in the former Yugoslavia, Momartin et al. (2004) assessed 126 resettled Bosnian refugees on measures of depression and PTSD. Based on the results, they created three groups: no diagnosis, PTSD-only diagnosis, and co-morbid PTSD and depression. They compared the functioning of these three groups and found that the co-morbid group had significantly more impairment in overall functioning than the PTSD-only group and the no-diagnosis group. There was no significant difference in functioning between the no-diagnosis and PTSD-only groups. Their results replicated

findings from Mollica et al (1999), which were carried out with Bosnians in Croatia only one-year after the war. Momartin et al. interpreted that their findings demonstrated either that symptoms of PTSD are by themselves not debilitating for this group, or the difference between those who meet diagnostic criteria and those who do not is not really meaningful.

On the extreme end of this controversy, Summerfield (2004) proposed that trauma is a socially constructed concept that can vary by culture. He suggested that the health outcomes of a traumatic experience are only as severe as society expects them to be, and he accused Western mental health care providers of the “medicalization of human suffering.” He suggested that what Westerners are calling “symptoms” are simply normal reactions to abuse and persecution. All these researchers point to the gap in our understanding between the effects of what refugees experience and their ability to survive and thrive in a new culture. What lies in that gap is how refugees navigate the process of simultaneously coping with past and present. Nicholson (1997) referenced Lee and Lu’s (1989) statement that refugees must resolve “loss” (difficulties from past) and “load” (stress of adapting to a new environment) (p. 100). It has been suggested that these processes are not only parallel but intersecting- each influencing the other.

Beiser and Wickrama (2004) addressed refugees’ coping with the past and present directly by researching the relationship between depression and temporal reintegration. They defined temporal reintegration as “recapture of the past and reconnecting it with present and future” (p. 900). They used the concept reintegration as opposed to just integration because they previously found evidence that in the short- and mid- term after

a catastrophe people may cope by suppressing the past and dissociating it from the future (Beiser & Hyman, 1997). They hypothesized, however, that people are unable to suppress the past permanently, and reintegration eventually will take place.

To test their hypothesis, Beiser and Wickrama (2004) collected data three times from the same Southeast Asian refugees resettled in British Columbia: in 1981, 1983, and 1991. In the 1981 data collection there were 1348 participants, 1169 in 1983, and 648 in 1991. Temporal reintegration was measured by having participants label three different-sized circles “past,” “present,” and “future,” with larger sizes indicating more importance. The participants then arranged the circles to demonstrate their perceived connections between the past, present, and future. The researchers interpreted the size of the circles as the importance placed on the time period, and any overlapping of the circles as an indicator of reintegration. Beiser and Wickrama (2004) found that one of their hypotheses, that refugees would show more temporal reintegration over time (1981 to 1991), was not supported. Instead they found that the connections in the circles did not change in a discernable pattern, but over time the focus on the past faded and the focus on the present dominated. The relationship they found between temporal reintegration and depression supported their second hypothesis, that the process of temporal reintegration could put one at risk for a depressive disorder. They found that variances in temporal reintegration did predict changes in depression between the three assessment times. The highest risk was found among those whose focus on the past increased and whose three time measures became more connected. The lowest risk was found among those whose past focus decreased and past, present, and future became less connected. The authors did

find that some groups of participants were buffered from the effects of temporal reintegration on depression. Having low-risk for depression in 1981 or continuously employed or partnered over the 10 years mediated the relationship between temporal reintegration and depression. The authors suggested that these groups had the support and stability to confront the painful process of reintegration, but that for some refugees without these resources, trying to make meaning of the past and present would be overwhelming.

Beiser and Wickrama's (2004) work is one of the few studies designed to address the question, "how are refugees coping?" as opposed to "how well are they coping?" or "what are they coping with?" This study is also remarkable in that it is based on a large-scale longitudinal data gathering effort by the first author. The kind of information these researchers produced is significant and applicable for counselors working with refugees. Instead of searching for problems to fix, counselors could be learning from refugees how people grow from difficult circumstances and providing support to them in the painful parts of this process. More study is needed to explore the role of temporal integration and other cognitive constructs in refugee adjustment.

Cognitive Constructs in Refugee Studies

In Black's (2001) review of the current state of refugee research, he concluded there is no theory developed solely in refugee studies, only the application of theories from other disciplines to refugee issues. Because of this, Black suggested that

The search for theoretical grounding of refugee studies may be better achieved by situating studies of particular refugee groups... in the theories of cognate areas (and major disciplines). (p. 66)

To follow Black's suggestion, counseling researchers should look for theories of cognitive adjustment that are relevant to the work of helping refugees. One area that fits well is acculturation psychology. Although there are problems with how the construct acculturation has been applied to the field of refugee studies, researchers in the field of acculturation psychology have proposed theories and models that address the cognitive aspects of dealing with living in a new culture.

John W. Berry, a Canadian psychology researcher, has made an entire career of studying acculturation psychology. The majority of his research has not involved refugees, but a few researchers have directly applied his models to refugee studies. His ideas for studying culture and change align well with the current direction of refugee studies. In addition, the work of he and his collaborators could provide the needed theory and consistency that is currently lacking in adjustment studies with refugees.

Definitions

One of the ways Berry's writing (1989, 2003) can aid the work of designing studies in refugee adjustment are the clearly articulated definitions he developed. Berry (2003) proposed that there are actually three processes that are all sometimes labeled acculturation. Differentiating these processes was based on his proposal that culture change could occur at the population and individual levels, as well as within one culture or between two cultures. Berry (1989) summarized that

The term *culture change* refers to the process that results in population-level changes that are due to dynamic internal events. The term *acculturation* refers to the process that results in population-level changes that are due to contact with

other cultures. Finally, the term *psychological acculturation* refers to the process by which individuals change, both by being influenced by contact with another culture and by being participants in the general acculturative changes under way in their own culture. (p. 204)

The term acculturation that is referred to in much health and social sciences research is actually what Berry called psychological acculturation: individual change as a result of contact with another culture. Given that counselors typically work with individuals or families rather than whole communities or cultural groups, they would be more interested in individual change (psychological acculturation) rather than group change (what Berry calls cultural change or acculturation). Thus, for the purposes of this study, Berry's theory related to psychological acculturation is most relevant.

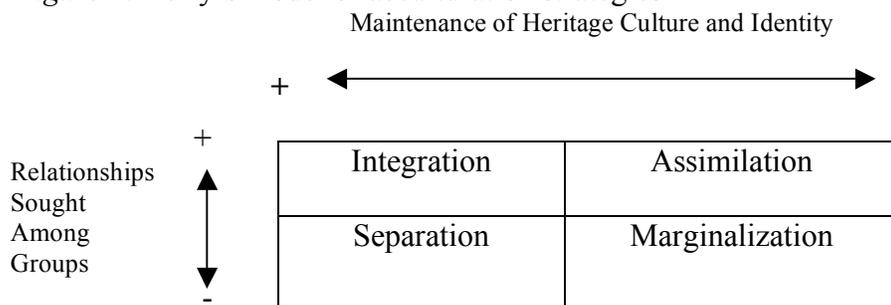
Berry (2003) identified two constructs that make up the process of psychological acculturation. He proposed that the process includes *contact* (i.e., sustained interaction between cultures) and *change* (i.e., behavioral or psychological). It is clear from the descriptive research with refugees that they experience both contact and change, and therefore psychological acculturation. Berry (2003) also proposed that acculturation is both a process and a state. He defined the process as "activity during and after contact that is dynamic" (p. 206), and the state as "a result of the process that may be relatively stable" (p.206). An example of the *process* of acculturation is a refugee learning how to seek employment in a new economic system and having responses, thoughts, and feelings while interacting with employers, educators, and co-workers. An example of the *state* of acculturation, or becoming "acculturated," is a refugee becoming ineligible for public assistance due to income level. Berry also addressed some researchers' tendency to

conceptualize acculturation being uni-directional. About the bi-directional alternative, the idea that two cultures mutually influence each other, he said, “In principle each could influence the other equally, but in practice one tends to dominate the other” (p. 206). This phenomenon clearly can be seen in refugee studies, as most of the focus is on how refugees change and adapt, not how a host culture responds to the arrival of refugees.

Variables

Berry’s (1989, 2003) main contribution to acculturation psychology research has been what he called *acculturation attitudes* and *acculturation strategies*. Berry proposed that immigrants, refugees, and minority groups have individual acculturation strategies. Acculturation strategies have two components: acculturation attitudes, which are preferences about how the acculturation process will go, and acculturation behaviors, which are the observable practices of acculturation. Berry (1980) proposed four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (See Figure 2). Each strategy is based on two dimensions: 1) the extent to which the acculturating person wants to maintain her cultural heritage and identity and 2) to what extent the person seeks relationships outside his or her own cultural group.

Figure 1. Berry’s model of acculturation strategies



Source: Berry, J. W. (2006). Contexts of acculturation. In D. L. Sam and J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of acculturation psychology* (pp. 27-42). New York: Cambridge University Press.

According to Berry's model, a refugee who chooses integration chooses to maintain the original cultural identity while also seeking contact with the host culture. Assimilation means the refugee has not sought to maintain original cultural practices and primarily seeks out contact with the host. Separation means they have maintained their cultural identity without seeking outside cultural contact, and marginalization means they have become alienated from their own culture as well as the host culture. Berry's model is one of the first to systematically explain how people deal with cultural contact.

The use of the term strategy implies that the refugee or immigrant is choosing certain acculturation behaviors or attitudes. Berry (2003) did acknowledge that the acculturating newcomer did not necessarily have free will in choosing the strategy, but the attitudes and strategies of those in the host society would influence the newcomer's choices and behavior. For example, a host society with a melting pot mentality (valuing sameness) might lead a refugee to adopt an assimilation strategy (rejecting heritage culture and seeking relationships outside cultural group).

Berry (1989, 2003) proposed that acculturation strategies are related to what he called the *consequences of acculturation*, which are the outcomes of the process of acculturation. In particular, Berry was interested in how a person's acculturation strategy was related to *acculturative stress*, or the emotional outcomes of acculturation. In a study that examined this connection, Dona and Berry (1997) found that Central American refugees resettled in Canada, who were categorized as using the Separation and Assimilation strategies, meaning they were respectively on the high and low ends of valuing their original culture, had more acculturative stress than those categorized as

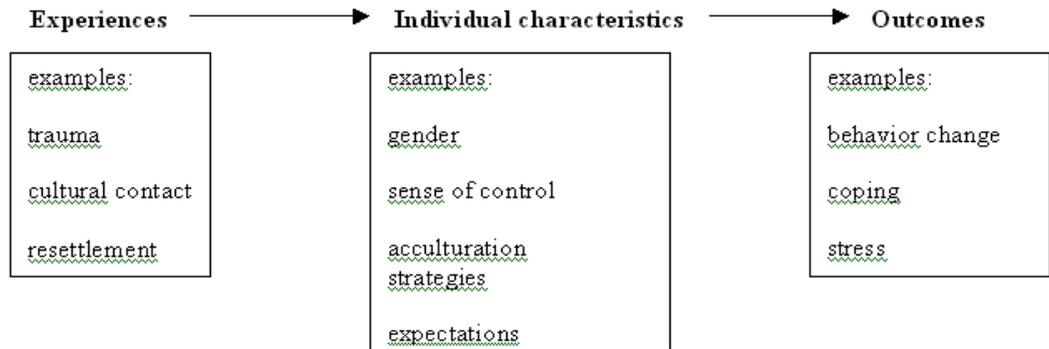
using the Integration mode. This finding is limited by the fact that Dona and Berry's data analysis only gave partial support to the acculturation four-strategy model. Over three-fourths of the respondents in the study were labeled as using the Integration strategy and none as using Marginalization, something that the authors stated could be explained by a positive response tendency to the Likert scales on the measurement instruments. Berry developed his acculturation strategy theory with native groups in Canada, and its application for refugees has yet to be adequately researched. However, it is one of the few theories that could address *how* refugees adapt.

Berry (1989) believed there are two cognitive constructs that mediate acculturative stress. These variables also have emerged in the refugee studies literature as important. The first is a sense of control in the acculturation process, or the feeling that one has the power to achieve whatever the acculturation goals are. Berry proposed that a continued sense of control during the acculturation process would lead to positive emotional outcomes. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) studied feelings of control among refugees in Australia. In fact, they defined the resettlement process as "a process during which a refugee, having arrived in a place of permanent asylum, gradually re-establishes the feeling of control over his/her life and develops a feeling that life is "back to normal" (p. 62). This definition is in part based on the World Health Organization's definition of positive emotional health. And indeed Colic-Piesker and Tilbury found through qualitative data collection with refugees that a sense of control or a lack thereof was a theme in how the refugees viewed their acculturation experiences and seemed to affect their emotional well being.

The second cognitive construct that Berry proposed as a mediator between acculturation strategy and outcomes is acculturation expectations, or how the person hopes to engage with the host culture. Little research has been done in the field of acculturation psychology on how acculturation expectations have contributed to acculturation strategy. However, support from refugee studies research outside of acculturation studies has supported the importance of expectations. Berry (1989) cited a task force report based on the testimony of Canadian refugee service providers (Beiser, Barwick, Berry et al., 1988) that revealed the number of areas where refugees' expectations affected their adjustment process. Examples included refugees who expected to have their occupational or education credentials recognized in Canada and refugees who expected to be fully supported by sponsoring agencies for significant amounts of time. Disappointment and disillusionment, when these kinds of expectations were not met, led to poor refugee adjustment as perceived by the service providers. Refugee researchers have demonstrated that the thwarting of expectations could be detrimental to the well-being of refugees from Pakistan (Kahn & Watson, 2005), the Caribbean (Murphy & Mahalingham, 2006), and Sudan (Simich, Hamilton, & Baya, 2006).

Berry's (1989) theory of acculturation strategies is one piece of a greater model that could incorporate all the variables affecting the acculturation process of refugees. Berry's theory is based on the premise that there are relationships among experiences, individual characteristics, and outcomes.

Figure 2. Refugee acculturation variables



Source: Adapted from Berry, J. W. (2003). Conceptual approaches to acculturation. In K. M. Chun, P. B. Organista, & G. Marin (Eds.) *Acculturation: Advances in theory, measurement, and applied research* (pp.17-37). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Although Berry did not develop his theories through research with refugees, current refugee research seems to support the connection he has proposed between the experiences, individual attitudes of the acculturating person and their emotional adjustment. To date researchers have revealed that variables like temporal reintegration, expectations, attitudes about the host culture, and feelings of control might be a part of how refugees make sense of the changes they experience. But it is unclear if these cognitive constructs are only relevant for certain ethnic groups or differ by gender. Exploring how different groups of refugees make sense of their experiences could reveal new cognitive coping variables or affirm the importance of variables already identified. It could also help counselors choose appropriate interventions that complement the work that refugee clients are already doing to cope.

Research on Cognitive Coping

There are some examples of research that has added to our understanding of how

particular groups of refugees make sense of their experiences. Keyes and Kane (2004) used a phenomenological approach to collect and analyze qualitative data from interviews of seven adult Bosnian refugee women resettled in the US. The interviewers asked the women to describe their experiences living in the US as a Bosnian refugee. From the transcripts of the women's responses, the researchers converted what the women said to units of meaning and established themes of meaning that ran across the interviews. Two themes emerged from the data analysis that revealed how the women conceptualized their experiences: the desire to belong and the necessity of adapting. The refugee women connected what it felt like to belong in their home country with their desire to have a sense of belonging in the US. This desire to belong was part of what guided their adaptive behaviors and strategies. These data support the spirit of Berry's (1980) theory that relates acculturation attitudes (desire to belong) to acculturation consequences (shifts in adaptive behavior). However, the women's attitudes toward acculturation did not appear to easily fit into one of Berry's four categories. They did not speak of choosing between their culture of origin and host culture. This suggests that a model of acculturation attitudes may need to be more complex than what Berry proposed, although the guiding principle is applicable.

Keyes and Kane also provided examples from their data of how refugees use their past *and* recent experiences to create strategies for living in a new country. For example, all of the women they interviewed chose to focus on perfecting their English as a way to improve their ability to connect on a deeper level with people, something that had been important to them in their country of origin. The refugee women all reported choosing to

work long hours to escape thinking about their painful memories and present struggles. One Bosnian woman chose to repress her feelings of nostalgia but images and feelings of her past life came out in her dreams. The same woman conceptualized surviving in the US as a game to be won, a game that required her to take small steps and focus on her successes.

Keyes and Kane (2004) reported that the women discussed how they changed their identities in order to feel “normal” and belong in the US. Identity change included both internal aspects (e.g., attempting to become a more independent person) and external aspects (e.g., changing habits of dress). The researchers noted that the outcomes and emotions of these women could not be conceptualized as successful or unsuccessful, positive or negative. The refugees saw themselves as being both better and worse off in the US, and expressed both painful and positive emotions. Keyes and Kane contributed to our understanding of how cognitive and behavioral adaptations are related among Bosnian refugee women. The researchers concluded that refugees’ experiences and identities contributed to their methods of adaptation.

Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis, and Buchan (2005) also used phenomenological analysis in their study with young female Somali refugees resettled in Britain. Whittaker et al. wanted to understand the women’s perspectives on psychological well-being and what the women believed helped them have a sense of well-being. The researchers conducted group focus sessions and individual interviews with 5 Somali women who had come to the UK as adolescents. Their interpretive analysis of the women’s discussions with the researchers yielded three themes and six sub-themes. Like Keyes and Kane (2004),

Whittaker et al. also found that the women's attitudes toward adjustment affected how they chose to deal with living in a host culture. The first theme they identified was "resilience and protection." The researchers noted that the women portrayed a "get on with it" approach to coping with life in the UK. The Somali women reported believing that they should not dwell on the past or show too much distress at their losses and traumatic experiences. The women reported that they believed this is what their community expected of them and what they saw modeled in other Somalian refugees in the UK. This led the women to hide their emotions from certain people within the community. These coping attitudes and behaviors also had a distinctly cultural component in that some of the women believed that if they showed too much distress they would be labeled as possessed by a *zar* spirit.

Some of the Somali women's beliefs affected their utilization of support services within both the Somali community and the host culture. The women believed that the host culture medical and mental health providers would not understand Somali distress, especially as it could be related to spirit possession. Yet the women also expressed fear of being labeled mentally ill or spiritually possessed within their own cultural group due to lack of confidentiality within the community and tendency for gossip. These beliefs meant that they were strategic about to whom they disclosed any feelings or difficulties, based on how they believed the listener would respond to their feelings. The researchers drew from this finding that service providers should make available help that utilized community resources (where the women could feel understood) as well as services outside of the community (where they women might not feel as judged). This application

contradicts some recommendations that individuals from collectivistic societies will feel more comfortable with family members involved in their treatment.

The researchers (Whittaker et al., 2005) noted that they had difficulty achieving their initial goal of having the women define psychological well-being because the women did not differentiate between states of emotional wellness and distress; they presented themselves and everyone in the Somali community as being psychologically well. The researchers related this portrayal of the Somali community to the women's fears around labels of mental illness and spiritual possession. This finding also has implications for practice, in that certain cultural groups may have some strong stigmas around stating a need for psychological help, and thus may prefer a round about way of getting help other than a referral to counseling.

Cognitive coping of Liberian women. Keyes and Kane (2004) and Whittaker et al. (2005) demonstrated the value of research methodology that permitted refugees to express their perspective of adjustment processes. The researchers' interpretations of their data supported the connections proposed by Berry (1980) among the acculturation attitudes, strategies, and outcomes. However, the *specific* attitudes, strategies, and outcomes appeared to be dependent on culture, religion, gender, and personal experiences. The researchers did not predict, and perhaps could not have predicted, some of the attitudes and strategies the women disclosed. Leaving room for new information to be discovered is an advantage of research methods that focus on personal experiences. This type of research also generates very useful ideas about how refugee communities and individuals can be supported in their adjustment process.

Involving Liberian refugee women in research similar to that of Keyes and Kane (2004) and Whittaker et al. (2005) is an excellent way to continue to flesh out the relationships among acculturation attitudes and consequences. Exploring how Liberian women have simultaneously coped with past and present could add to our understanding of how culture and gender contribute to these processes. Many of the Liberian women now in the US were chosen by the UNHCR for the refugee resettlement program particularly because of their gendered trauma experiences. Liberian women have been the objects of both benevolent and harmful forces that have affected their lives. Their perspectives on what has been done to them as well as their own agency in the adjustment process has not been acknowledged, despite the potential usefulness for counselors and other service providers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature has revealed an evolution in refugee studies. The current need in refugee studies is to understand the acculturation process from the perspective of the refugees themselves so that in the future appropriate assessment instruments can be developed and used, and relevant models of acculturation applied. In particular, cognitive aspects of acculturation have been underdeveloped in refugee studies, although some researchers have demonstrated what an important role they may play in refugee adjustment. Berry (1989, 2003) has suggested that acculturating people have attitudes that shape their behaviors, experiences, and outcomes. Cognitive coping and meaning-making processes are important for counselors to understand when working with refugee clients. In accordance with these needs, the researcher will collect data to address the following questions in relation to the acculturation of Liberian women:

1. What attitudes do Liberian refugee women have about acculturation in the US?
2. How are their attitudes related to their acculturation behaviors?
3. How have their attitudes helped Liberian women cope with resettlement?
4. What are Liberian women's desired outcomes of the acculturation process?
5. To what extent have gender and culture guided Liberian women's acculturation strategies?

6. What experiences have influenced Liberian women's acculturation attitudes and strategies?

The current lack of documented knowledge about Liberian refugee women's experiences or cognitions necessitates an exploratory methodology rather than a confirmatory one. The researcher created the research questions based on the general hypothesis that Liberian women's attitudes and construction of meaning of their experiences are vital parts of the acculturation process. A phenomenological methodology, qualitative and interpretive in nature, will be used to address the research questions.

Participants

From the beginning of 2003 to the end of 2005, 295 Liberians came from refugee camps to North Carolina (Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d. (a)). These Liberian refugees represented 10% of the refugees arriving in North Carolina during those three years. It is unknown how many of those refugees were settled in Guilford County. The 295 refugees arriving in the state are 2% of all the Liberians who arrived in the US during that time period.

All the participants will be adult Liberian women who arrived in the US with refugee status between the years of 2003 and 2005, with minor children and without a husband accompanying them. Ten Liberian women will be interviewed. This number is based on similar qualitative studies of refugee women and guidelines for phenomenological methodology. The participants will be offered no compensation for their participation other than referrals to social services. Almost all refugees from Liberia

speak what linguists call “Liberian English” and many of them also speak tribal languages. Some also speak French if they were living in camps in the Ivory Coast.

Demographic data collected from the women will include age, ethnic group, religious affiliation, family composition (number of children, marital/partnered status-current and at time of migration, relatives in US/Africa/Other, household composition), date of arrival, date of first flight from Liberia, location of birth, initial resettlement location, and services received upon arrival to the US. A map of Liberia and the surrounding countries will be used as a visual aid for participants as they discuss their journey out of Liberia and then out of Africa.

Setting

The study will be conducted in Greensboro, North Carolina, a mid-sized city in the southeastern US, which has been a resettlement location for a wide variety of refugee groups. There are four resettlement agencies in Guilford County, where Greensboro is located. Liberian immigrants have been living in the area for decades, but the biggest surge in Liberian refugee resettlement to the city began in 2003 and ended in 2005. This recent local surge was representative of increased numbers of Liberian arrivals across the country. This timeframe would include the arrival of Liberian women who were resettled as part of the UNHCR’s efforts to help women at risk. It is unknown exactly how many persons who identify as “Liberian” now live in this metro area. After their initial resettlement, refugees in the US have the freedom to move to other parts of the country. This “secondary migration” is not tracked by any agencies. An estimated 1,200 persons in Guilford County consider themselves Liberian (Center for New North Carolinians,

2007). The gender breakdown of those 1,200 individuals and whether they were women identified by the UN as especially vulnerable is unknown. However, for the women participating in this study, their resettlement dates will coincide with the timeframe of the UNHCR's focus on women at risk. Liberians are predominantly "Black," but this does not necessarily mean that they identify with African-Americans born in the US. The researcher is not aware of any "White" Liberians who have arrived in Guilford County as refugees.

The county in which the research is taking place has a diverse population of citizens with a large African-American community and a growing Latino community. The city has a history of racism and segregation, and there were significant events between African-American and European-American communities during the civil rights era (e.g., sit-ins and violence against peaceful civil rights activists). In 2006, the unemployment rate for all people living in the county was 4.7% (Bureau of Economic Analysis, et al., 2007). In 2006, North Carolina's Department of Human Resources reported that 73% of arriving refugees entered employment, with an average hourly wage of \$8.47 and 84% having some sort of health benefits (Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d. (b)). There are numerous universities, social service organizations, and religious organizations in the county which support refugees in various ways. The setting of the study should be accounted for in the interpretation of the data because acculturation is being defined as resulting from contact between cultures. In reviewing and interpreting the data, the researcher will be mindful of the host culture as an influence on the acculturation process.

Procedures

Data Collection

The researcher will employ the philosophy and qualitative methodology of phenomenology to collect and analyze data. A review of the literature has revealed support for this methodology in relation to the purpose and research questions of the current study. A review of the literature also has revealed the limits of prematurely using standardized instruments in quantitative studies with refugees. In studying cognitive constructs related to refugee adjustment, researchers have quantified constructs like expectations, locus of control, and acculturation attitudes. The current researcher believes that these constructs may be relevant for Liberian women, but there is no more than anecdotal evidence of this. The current researcher wishes to take a “bottom up” approach in allowing the refugees to determine the relevant constructs for further study, an approach that is gaining ground in refugee studies (Voutira & Dona, 2007). Additionally, using standardized instruments to measure cognitive constructs does not allow the refugee participants to fully express the meaning they make of their experiences and coping methods, which is part of the purpose of this study.

There are a number of other reasons why this methodology is best suited to addressing the research questions. First, a qualitative methodology is desirable in cross-cultural research (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). In the current study the researcher and participants do not share a culture. Qualitative research has been used to better understand a variety of culture-related phenomena, and its reflexive nature allows for the cultural perspective of both the participant and the researcher to be accounted for

in how the data are interpreted (Yeh & Inman, 2007). This accounting for the researcher's perspectives is often done through writing activities, including bracketing and journal writing. Qualitative methodologies also allow researchers to work with populations for whom there are few or no culturally relevant standardized instruments, something that has been the case in studying the emotional adjustment of certain refugee groups, including those from West Africa (Ahearn, 2000). Qualitative research can be a step toward developing a culturally sound instrument related to the construct of interest (Halabi, 2005). The present study could identify the cognitive coping constructs that are most relevant for Liberian women, which would allow the researcher to create an instrument to measure these constructs on a larger scale in the future.

Another advantage of qualitative inquiry is that the hypotheses of the researcher do not drive the data collection but rather emerge from it (Berrios & Luca, 2006). This can mean that it is less likely that the researcher's cultural biases will confine the outcomes of the data collection. Additionally, avoiding a hypothesis testing approach allows new information to surface and new variables to be identified, which is one of the purposes of the current study (Ahearn, 2000). As there is little previous literature for the researcher to make well-informed hypotheses about Liberian women, an approach that does not require hypotheses is ideal until more data are generated on Liberian refugees, such as the work done with Hmong refugees.

Choosing from among qualitative methodologies is also appropriate for the current study because qualitative methods are used to gain an "insider's view" of experiences and allows researchers to explore the meanings people attach to their

experiences (Omidian, 2000). Omidian suggested that qualitative research was an excellent tool for researchers interested in refugee mental health who desire to clarify what the adjustment process means to the refugees.

Phenomenology

Among the qualitative methodologies, phenomenology is the study of the universal essence of a lived experience (van Manen, 1990). In their review of qualitative methodologies in counseling research, Creswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales (2007) suggested that phenomenological methods should be employed when research questions are about a group of people who have a specific shared experience. The current study is seeking to better understand what it is like to be a Liberian refugee woman who has arrived in the US as a single mother. Phenomenological research has been used to fill the gap between “knowledge and reality” (Wertz, 2005, p. 170) when qualitative data is needed to get a subjective understanding of human experiences. Often, phenomenology has been employed when the experience of interest is a life transition (Berrios & Lucca, 2006), such as becoming a parent or experiencing refugee resettlement. Creswell (1998) recommended that phenomenology be used when the researcher is using theory as a general guide to the research, but not as an exercise in creating or proving a theory. The current study will employ Berry’s (1980) theory of acculturation strategies as a framework for exploring refugee women’s experiences, but the researcher does not seek to prove or disprove Berry’s four-strategy model.

Phenomenology was designed to address both the universal and the specific. As Keyes and Kane (2004) and Whittaker et al. (2005) demonstrated, phenomenology can be

used to uncover some common themes in the perceptions of refugees as well as to describe how particular group members use their culture to guide them in the process. In line with this philosophy, the current study seeks to uncover both the essence of what it means for a refugee to adjust, as well as how Liberian women have undertaken that process.

Van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology has been employed by researchers conducting qualitative research in many health fields. Per van Manen, "[Hermeneutic] phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience" (p. 10). Hermeneutic phenomenology is expressly not a problem solving methodology, but provides a way for researchers to focus on the meaning of experiences. It would not be appropriate to use phenomenology to determine which refugees are more successful than others, but it could be used to examine what success means to a refugee. Hermeneutic phenomenology involves six research activities (van Manen). The six research tasks in hermeneutic phenomenology are 1) turning to a phenomenon we care about, 2) investigating the experience as it is lived, 3) reflecting on the themes which characterize the phenomenon, 4) describing the phenomenon through multiple writings, 5) maintaining a strong relationship to the research topic, and 6) considering the parts and the whole. As these tasks are somewhat ambiguous, different researchers have conducted hermeneutic phenomenology in different ways, but have stayed true to the basic philosophy and methodology espoused by van Manen. Variations in phenomenological inquiry include how data are collected in order to describe the essence of an experience. Data collection

can include reading biographies or memoirs, writing autobiographical accounts of an experience, observation, and reviewing literature or art (van Manen, 1990). But most phenomenological descriptions are based on interviews with those who have directly experienced the “phenomenon.”

Interviews

Interviews are a cornerstone of phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990). The researcher will interview 10 Liberian refugee single mothers who have experienced acculturation in the US. This number is based on recommendations for phenomenological inquiry as well as comparisons to similar qualitative studies with refugee women (Suzuki et al., 2007). The researcher will stop conducting interviews with new participants when meaning units overlap enough to create a description of the essence of the Liberian women’s experience (van Manen). The researcher has developed contacts in the Liberian community through volunteer work for local resettlement agencies. Potential participants for this study will be contacted through the researcher’s own network in the Liberian community and referrals from other participants.

The interview guide was initially developed through reflection on the research questions and van Manen’s (1990) guidelines for collecting phenomenological data through interviews. Van Manen suggested that interview subjects should simply describe the experience - not be asked to rationalize behavior or state why they did something. Additionally, when gathering data to create a description of a lived experience, questions should be asked in chronological order so as to mirror the experience. Also in accordance with phenomenology, the questions were designed to elicit both the concrete details of

experience along with the meaning of these experiences, in particular participants' cognitions about the process of acculturation. Emotions are also important in phenomenology, as they correspond with one's state of mind while living an experience. Defining moments or specific experiences that characterize the experience are especially helpful to gather, and so questions should be designed to elicit these. The interview questions were designed to illicit information that would provide an understanding of the women's experiences, attitudes, and outcomes, the foci of the research questions.

The researcher will meet with the participants at least three times. Initial meetings with participants will be in person to describe the purpose of the study and secure informed consent for the interview and audiorecording. The informed consent script will be read aloud to account for any variations in literacy. Because the informed consent information will be presented orally, a witness present for the reading of the script will be required also to sign the informed consent affidavit. The witness is likely to be a friend or family member. All questions will be answered and great care will be taken to ensure that the women understand both the purpose of the interviews and who will have access to recordings and transcripts. A general impression of the researcher's ability to understand the participant's English speaking will be noted. If the researcher is unable to understand most of what the woman says, the researcher will recruit an interpreter for the data collection interview. Initial interviews and the follow-up interviews will be conducted in a location of the participants' choosing at a time that is mutually agreeable. At the end of the first meeting, a time and place for the interview will be agreed upon. The study will

be approved by the Institutional Review Board of the researcher's university prior to any contact with participants or data collection.

The second meeting will provide the primary data gathering opportunity. This interview will be audio recorded and the researcher will take notes. The researcher will note any statements, words, or phrases that seem distinctive to Liberian English and might need further clarification. The researcher also will note phrases or words that seem to have significant meaning in describing the essence of the experience. The interview will begin with small-talk and it is anticipated that the interviewer often will be offered food or drink by the participant if we are meeting in her home. At a point in time when the woman seems comfortable, the researcher will review the purpose of the interview and provide opportunities for the woman to ask any additional questions about the research process. The researcher will begin by collecting demographic data and then begin asking deeper questions. (See Appendix C for main study interview guide.) Questions may not necessarily be asked in the same order every time, but will be asked at natural times during the interview. Questions may be modified during the interview depending on what feels comfortable and what the women share spontaneously. The researcher will use the interview guide as a general structure for gathering information, not a verbatim script. At times the researcher may ask the participant to say more about a statement, using minimal encouragers and follow-up questions.

After the first data collection interview, the researcher will return to meet with each participant to ask follow-up questions and clarify anything that the woman said during the previous interview. The follow-up interview will take place a number of weeks

after the initial interview so the researcher has time to transcribe and reflect on the initial interview and conduct interviews with other participants. Follow-up questions may relate to topics brought up by other participants (without breaking confidentiality) or any themes that emerged in the data collection. If there were any parts of the recording that were unclear or phrases that the researcher did not understand, the researcher will clarify these things with participants at the follow-up meeting. Also at this meeting the researcher will give the participant a copy of the recording and transcript of the previous meeting. The follow-up meeting will not be recorded, but the researcher will take extensive notes. This is to help the women feel as comfortable as possible and give them a chance to say things they did not want recorded, if any.

The interviews for the main study will conclude when all questions have been adequately addressed as evidenced by repeating stories or comments, or by the participant not having anything more to say. The researcher will be prepared with a list of local social service resources in the event that the participants bring up any ongoing concerns, including mental health issues, during the interviews. These resources will be provided at the end of the first data collection interview. After each interview session, the researcher will record observations about the conduct and demeanor of the participant as well as any personal reactions to the interview in an ongoing research journal.

Ethical and Cultural Considerations

There are some specific issues to consider when refugee research is based on personal interviews. These issues are summarized from Goodkind and Deacon (2004),

Pernice (1994), and Bertrand (2000), who all made suggestions for interviewing refugees based on their own qualitative research with refugees.

Informed consent and language. The issues of obtaining legitimate informed consent from refugees and language differences often go hand in hand. For example, Goodkind and Deacon (2004) reported that when doing interviews with Hmong refugee women, they discovered there is no word in the participant's language for "interview." Thus they had to negotiate with the interpreter for the best way to convey the desired activity of the researcher. The use of interpreters has been discussed in manuscripts regarding refugees; but their use should not be necessary in interviewing Liberians. Due to time spent with Liberian women, the researcher is able to understand most Liberian English. The researcher also speaks and understands basic French, a language spoken by Liberians who fled to the Ivory Coast. The researcher will use an interpreter as necessary and use the follow-up meetings to clarify language or meaning.

Pernice (1994) noted that obtaining informed consent from refugees can sometimes be difficult because of their experiences with interviews in the past. Typically, refugees have experienced interviews in the context of interrogation by government agents in their country of origin and/or the interviews they underwent to apply for refugee status in temporary host countries. Obviously, these two types of interviews do not lend themselves to the participant feeling comfortable or talking openly. Those interviews of the past required refugees to tell the interviewer what they believed the interviewer wanted to hear, which is not a desirable dynamic to reproduce in qualitative research. For these reasons, the process of obtaining informed consent in this study will be thorough,

culturally appropriate, ongoing, and as non-threatening as possible. To do this, the oral script for the description of the study and rights of the participant will be detailed but written in layman's terms that will be understandable to the women. The script will emphasize the women's right to decline participation and stop the interview at any time, and the procedures for protecting their identities. The researcher/interviewer will emphasize that she does not work for any government agency or resettlement agency. (See Appendix D for main study informed consent script and signature page).

Relationship with the interviewer. The researcher will serve as the interviewer. She is a European-American doctoral student and a Licensed Professional Counselor. She has spent time with resettled refugees through her work as a counselor, as an ESL instructor, and as a volunteer for refugee services agencies. She is known well by two local Liberian families for whom she has served as a co-sponsor with a resettlement agency, and through those families has met many other Liberian families. She has been seen at events in the Liberian community such as baby showers or summer programs for children.

Many researchers doing qualitative studies with refugees are already familiar in the local community of refugees. For example, Bertrand (2000) worked as an administrator in a refugee camp and therefore was known to the refugees he interviewed in the camp. He established trust and credibility during interviews by sitting on the same level as the interviewees, explicitly explaining the reason for the interview and why that particular refugee had been chosen. Bertrand suggested the researcher should attempt to 1) listen empathically to the interviewee so as to understand her point of view, 2)

demonstrate unconditional acceptance, and 3) avoid being overly directive in a way that could influence the refugee's point of view. The current researcher's training as a counselor has prepared her to do empathic, non-judgmental listening. In Goodkind and Deacon (2004), Goodkind reported that she spent two years working in a Thai refugee camp with Hmong refugees and continued working with this population after returning to the US. Her research came out of running programs she developed *with* Hmong refugee women to promote psycho-social well-being among Hmong women in the US. Goodkind and Deacon recommended following the cultural norms of refugee women when visiting their homes for interviews. This may include sharing food, asking after the health of one's family, and small talk. The current researcher has experience visiting Liberian homes and so will feel comfortable engaging in these activities.

Bertrand (2000) noted that because many refugees either in camps or after resettlement have not previously interacted with "researchers" and therefore do not have a schema for this role, researchers may find themselves viewed as friend, helper, informant, agent of the government, or even oppressor. Not only might there be transference in the relationship, but Bertrand also raised the issue of counter-transference and the possibility the researcher may see the refugee as the "other" or victim in need of rescuing. Bertrand viewed projections and emotional reactions as a natural part of the qualitative inquiry process on both sides. However, most qualitative research methodologies require the researcher to undertake a conscious exercise of setting aside hypotheses and personal agendas when collecting data. This bracketing exercise is often through an interview or by writing out one's own feelings and thoughts about a topic.

This material can then be used as a record of possible biases that later can be compared against interpretations of the data. For the present study, the researcher/interviewer and all other persons involved in the data interpretation (reflecting team) will participate in written bracketing exercises. The researcher and reflecting team members will read each others' bracketing manuscripts so as to be aware of each others biases and temper these biases in the interpretation of the data. All involved in reviewing the data also will sign a confidentiality agreement

Goodkind and Deacon (2004) also addressed how to deal with gender in the interviewing relationship. Their first principle was that marginalized women should be involved in research, particularly “triply marginalized” (p. 724) women who experience oppression due to gender, race, *and* economic status. The current researcher also would suggest that Liberian refugee women are further marginalized by their immigrant and English-literacy statuses. Liberian women’s marginalization from research participation is evidenced by the lack of published research on this population. Goodkind and Deacon asserted that refugee women often are left out of research samples because they are not as visible or as easily reached by researchers, but their experiences are equally as valuable. Goodkind and Deacon also reminded researchers to be sensitive to the multiple burdens and barriers women may have that could impact research participation, including lack of transportation, childcare needs, permission from husbands, and working hours. These issues will be addressed by allowing the women to choose the time and place of the interview. In addition, the researcher anticipates doing most of the interviews in the

participants' homes where there may be interruptions related to childcare, visitors, meal preparation, etc. The researcher is prepared to shape the interview around these realities.

Pilot Study

The interview protocol developed by the above methods was modified after the researcher conducted a pilot study. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine if the interview questions would be understood easily by Liberian women, if they were culturally appropriate, and if they elicited the desired categories of information (i.e., experiences, attitudes, and outcomes). (See Appendix A for initial interview questions.)

The first step of the pilot study consisted of the interview questions being reviewed by a cultural broker, a woman who identifies with both American and Liberian culture. This woman lives out of the area from where the study was conducted and was not part of the immediate community of the women participating in the interviews. Having a master's degree from an American university, she also was aware of Western research methods. The cultural broker was asked to provide any suggestions on the linguistic and cultural appropriateness of the interview for Liberian women. After reviewing the initial draft of the interview questions, the cultural broker stated that she felt the questions were appropriate, not offensive, and would be understood by the women. She did not have any suggestions for improving the interview questions or process. Based on this initial feedback, the researcher proceeded with the pilot study without changing the initial interview protocol.

In the second step of the pilot study, the researcher conducted interviews with two Liberian refugee women using the initial interview protocol. The women also were asked

to give their feedback on the interview process. The first two women who were invited to participate in the pilot study agreed to do so. As both had limited English reading ability, the researcher read aloud the informed consent script and the women signed a short consent form that was witnessed by a family member. (See Appendix B for pilot study informed consent script and signature page). Informed consent was secured in an initial meeting and the interviews were scheduled for a later time. Both interviews were conducted in the women's homes by their choosing and both took just under an hour to complete. The researcher estimated she understood 95% of the women's language. However, the researcher was aware that the participants may have been making an effort to speak English in a more American way. This may have limited their expressiveness. Because of this the researcher added a question to the interview guide for the main study about how much the women were changing the way they talked. There were young children present in both of the homes at the time of the interview and the women did tend to the children (e.g., breastfeeding, hair braiding, holding) but they did not appear distracted by the children. It is possible the women's responses were sensitive to the presence of the children but neither explicitly stated this. For the main study, the researcher will ask the women if their responses to questions were shaped by anyone else who could hear their answers.

Cultural appropriateness. In conducting the interviews there appeared to be a couple of things that caused discomfort for the women. At the time of the second interview, one woman expressed her discomfort at being recorded and stated she did not wish to have the interview recorded. She stated she was comfortable with the interview

proceeding without recording, which is what the researcher did. For this interview the researcher took notes that were as close to verbatim as possible. For the main study, the researcher will be aware that the desire to record the sessions may cause some women discomfort. This encounter also emphasized the importance of stating very clearly how the women's confidentiality will be protected in the process of obtaining informed consent. At the same time, it is also important to respect that the women had to learn to question the trustworthiness of most people in authority in order to survive in a civil war and a refugee camp.

For the main study, if a participant refuses to be audio-recorded at the time of the second interview the researcher will proceed with the interview and take verbatim notes. Directly after the session the researcher will transcribe the interview based on the handwritten notes and memory. To eliminate the data altogether because it could not be recorded would discount the women's experiences simply because of their discomfort and prevent the uncovering of some potentially rich information.

Both women expressed comfort with all of the demographic questions and answered them appropriately. The researcher noted, however, that they both laughed and were reluctant to disclose how much education they had completed (3rd grade and 4th grade). It is possible that the women felt embarrassed by the limits of their education. The researcher eliminated this question from the demographic part of the interview protocol as it is not vital to the purpose of this study and appeared to cause some discomfort. The women answered the rest of the interview questions without hesitation and at the conclusion of the interview stated that they felt the questions were appropriate for

Liberian women to answer. One woman expressed an eager willingness to introduce the researcher to friends who would want to answer the questions because the friends “love America.” The researcher took this as an additional indicator that the questions were not offensive and did not cause excessive discomfort.

Comprehension. Based on the type of answers they gave, both women appeared to understand all of the questions except for one. When asked the question “What would you send to Liberia to show them what life is really like here?” both women answered in the literal sense and said they had not sent anything but money to Liberia because the mail system was poor. The purpose of this question was to elicit their attitudes toward life in America, something they did express in response to other interview questions. For this reason, the question was eliminated. The question about family outside the US was modified to include the possibility that the woman could have family in other places besides Africa and the US (i.e., resettlement locations in Europe or Australia).

Content. The interview questions did elicit information about attitudes, experiences, and outcomes for the women. The women shared numerous experiences about how they came to the US and what their lives have been like here. They were able to identify times when they had been surprised, worried, and happy since arriving in the US. They expressed thoughts about what it is like to live in the systems of the US, such as receiving food stamps and having to pay bills. They mentioned some of the things that had changed for them since coming to the US (e.g., being able to have all children in school for free). They expressed hopes for the future (desired outcomes). Because the women shared their experiences and emotions related to those experiences

spontaneously, the researcher found it was not necessary to ask for specific examples of times when they felt worried, happy etc. These questions will be used only as needed for the main study if the woman does not address the issues without prompting.

After reviewing the research questions and the women's responses to the interview questions, the researcher noted that the women largely did not address their own agency in the acculturation process. Although they discussed things that were different from Africa and the US, they mostly did not say if they themselves had made any thought or behavioral changes since coming to the US. Because individual change is a central part of psychological acculturation, the researcher added the question, "What do you do differently since coming to America?" It is possible that the women see themselves as passive vs. active players in their own lives. Both mentioned God's intervention in explaining how they came to America. If Liberian refugee women tend to take a passive stance, the question about active change may not elicit a description of what they have done actively to cope in the US, but it is important to provide the opportunity.

The researcher also added a question at the end of the interview to allow the women to provide any additional information. This was done in both pilot interviews and felt like a natural way to ease out of the interview discussion.

Data Analysis

Based on the steps of van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology, after the phenomenon is identified and lived experiences are investigated, there is reflection on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon, and then the phenomenon is

described through writing. The structure of the data is investigated first, and then these structures are given meaning. The primary investigator of the current study will undertake the initial structuring tasks and then use a reflecting team to validate and modify the structure and to develop themes and meanings. A reflecting team is a small group of people invited by the researcher to review the qualitative data in order to generate a variety of ideas about themes and balance any biases the researcher may have. The reflecting team will be comprised of four human service professionals. The professionals will include a faculty member in a counselor education department who is the researcher's advisor and is therefore familiar with the background of the study, a faculty member in the social work department at the researcher's university who has experience doing research with Liberian women, a doctoral student in counselor education who is a native of Kenya and has interests in African immigrants in the US, and another doctoral student in counselor education who has experience with qualitative research but has no background in refugee issues. Having someone on the team who does not come to the process with significant knowledge of refugee issues provides an "outsider's" perspective that can balance the views of those who already have created their own ideas about the topic due to previous experiences and knowledge. Prior to being exposed to the data, the researcher will train the team on hermeneutic phenomenology in order to orient them to the process and philosophy of the phenomenological data analysis. This training will include readings assigned by the researcher on hermeneutic phenomenology and individual discussions with the researcher on the readings to affirm the team member's understanding. There will also be a group

discussion of the readings to align the team in purpose and method. Before reviewing the transcripts the reflecting team members and researcher will complete a bracketing exercise in which they write out their thoughts and opinions on the topic of the study.

Establishing Structure

After each interview is completed, the researcher will transcribe the audiorecording or handwritten notes. Any words or phrases that are confusing to the researcher will be noted to be addressed in follow-up interviews. Participants will be given copies of the transcriptions and audio recordings to keep as family records. After doing the interviews and transcriptions, the researcher will have been exposed to the data numerous times. The researcher's initial responses to these data will be kept in a journal. This reflective journal will be used later in the process of identifying themes.

The researcher will begin the structuring process with a list of information categories that are the focus of this investigation. The initial categories include attitudes, behaviors, experiences, coping and outcomes. Each transcript will be broken down into meaning units by the investigator and assigned to a category. A meaning unit may be an expression of a single thought, experience, or emotion, depending on the structure that the participants give to their narratives. If a meaning unit does not fit into a category, a new category will be created. This is in holding with the spirit of phenomenology that requires the researcher to allow the data to create the structure, rather than imposing a structure on the data (Van Manen, 1990). After a transcript is broken down into meaning units and assigned categories, the researcher will meet with a member of the reflecting team to review the categories used and created for that manuscript. The reflecting team

member will review the structure created by the researcher and make suggestions about any biases on the part of the researcher or categories that are overlapping or missing. The researcher and reflecting team member will agree on modifications to the structure. Once this exercise has been completed with each of the manuscripts, the researcher will create a new document that groups the meaning units by category. The meaning units will remain labeled by their source (participant who said them). These new documents will be distributed to all reflecting team members to begin the process of identifying themes. Van Manen promoted the use of reflecting teams as a way to achieve a deeper level of understanding of a lived experience. The reflecting team will also review the researcher's journal to gain information about the context of the interviews.

Identification of Themes

In phenomenological inquiry, themes are also called the “structures of experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 79). Once the data have been organized by type of information (structuring), the reflecting team and researcher will create themes that reflect the essence and meaning of the data. A theme may come from the relationship between two different categories (e.g., how Liberian women connect acculturation experiences and attitudes). A theme also may arise from certain meaning units that embody an experience or aspect of Liberian women's acculturation experiences. The reflecting team first will review the structured documents independently and make notes on possible themes. The individual team members will be asked to use the selective approach of identifying themes as described by van Manen which involves asking oneself “What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the

phenomenon or experience being described?” (van Manen, p. 93). The researcher will refer the team back to the orientation readings and examples when questions arise about what constitutes a theme.

The team then will meet together with the researcher to discuss themes and reactions to the data. Socratic dialogue will be used to identify both what van Manen termed incidental and essential themes. These themes are differentiated by asking oneself “Is this phenomenon still the same if I imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?” (van Manen, p. 107). The purpose of this questioning is to pare down the themes to those that are essential or particular to the phenomenon being studied. These categories will be validated by noting the number of participants whose narratives reflect certain themes, with essential themes being expressed by all or almost all participants and incidental themes being expressed by less than half of participants. The end result will be themes that can be used to describe both the universal and particular aspects of the phenomenon in question, acculturation experiences of Liberian refugee women.

Description of Phenomenon

Based on the reflecting team’s discussion, the researcher will write a description of the phenomenon (Liberian single mother’s acculturation) based on the themes. This description will be submitted to reflecting team members for final validation and any revisions will be made. An alternative would be to present the description to the participants themselves for validation. However, because the phenomenological description relies so heavily on writing this would be very difficult due to the women’s limited literacy. There is also some value in capturing the women’s initial responses

instead of how they might want to “clean up” their responses to appear a certain way. The final description of the women’s experiences will serve as the data resulting from this study. This description will include a summary of all the themes with selected quotes from the participants that exemplify the essence of a theme. Both essential and incidental themes will be described. The researcher will use this document in order to address the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Participant Recruitment

The data collection phase of the study yielded 9 interviews with 10 women. Two women were interviewed together because one woman was with her friend at the time of the interview. Her friend met the criteria for the study and agreed to participate. The researcher's first recruitment effort was aided by a woman in the Liberian community whom the researcher knew well and who agreed to introduce the researcher to a number of other women. Some of these women were known already to the researcher through volunteer work with refugee resettlement agencies and teaching English as a second language. However, it was extremely helpful to have a Liberian woman describe the interview process to other women in her own words in addition to the recruitment script. This approach also had the effect of communicating to the potential participants that "this person is trustworthy and what she is asking is worthwhile." At the time of these initial meetings the researcher only asked for the permission to contact the women again about the study, so they did not feel pressure from the researcher or their Liberian friend to agree on the spot. This also protected their confidentiality because the Liberian woman making the introductions ultimately would not know who participated in the study. These introductions yielded six women who agreed to participate in the study. Five of them actually completed the interviews. While at the home of one of these interviewees, the

researcher met another Liberian woman who agreed to participate in the study and did complete an interview. The two women who were interviewed together were referred by another Liberian friend of the researcher and the tenth woman was someone known to the researcher from her volunteer work. Two women initially agreed to participate in the study but when attempts were made to arrange an interview they gave reasons why they could not meet. It became apparent that they had been polite in initially agreeing to be in the study but did not really have the desire to do so. Four of the women who were interviewed declined to be tape-recorded and so the interviewer created those transcripts from her notes. This was an expected event as a woman in the pilot study had declined to be taped. Informed consent was obtained from all women using an oral script and a signature page that was signed by a witness. Only two women indicated they could read the signature page themselves.

Participants

Eight of the women interviewed fit in the cohort of women that the researcher desired to study. The target cohort was Liberian women who came with refugee status to the US as single mothers between 2003 and 2005. One of the ten women was an exception because she was born in a country that neighbored Liberia and came to the US with a Liberian husband whom she met in the refugee camp. She reported that people from her country and Liberia were both in this camp. She came to the US at the same time as the Liberian women. There was overlap in the themes of her experiences with the experiences of the unmarried Liberian women. The other exception was a woman who came to the US in the late 1990s as a school-aged child. She was able to come then

because her grandparents lived in the US and they brought her family over. She had never been married but had two children and so shared the “single mom” status with the other women. The fact that she grew up in the US, not Liberia, would affect her experiences and attitudes, although her themes also overlapped with those of the other women. She did seem a part of the Liberian-American community; the fathers of her two children were Liberians living in the US and she had Liberian friends. The contributions of these women’s experiences to the research were deemed valuable enough that their interviews were included in final data set. Their stories also provided some contrast in terms of what factors impacted the experiences and attitudes of the women.

The women who were interviewed ranged in ages from 24 to 59, with a mean of 28 and a median of 38. Except for the woman noted above who arrived in the 1990s, all the women arrived in 2004 or 2005. They all left Liberia in the 1990’s, with the earliest leaving in 1990 and the latest leaving in 1996, which meant they spent between nine and fourteen years outside of Liberia in neighboring countries prior to resettlement in the US. The age at which they left Liberia ranged from 7 to 41. All but three left as adults. Just prior to coming to the US, the women were either in Ghana, Guinea, or the Ivory Coast. Most lived in refugee camps, but two lived in towns in the Ivory Coast because the camps were too full. Except for the woman who arrived in the US as a child, all the women brought children, including some adult children. All but one arrived without a husband, either because they had never been married or their husbands had been killed in Liberia during the war. The women who were widowed in Liberia were generally older because the younger women would have left Liberia as adolescents or young women. None of the

women have married since coming to the US and none reported being in a partnership, although there appeared to be adult males living in some of their homes. All of the women identified themselves as Christian and they represented Kran, Grebo, Kru, Temne, and Sapoh ethnic groups, with most being of the Kran group. People in the Kran group, particularly men who had previously worked for the government, were attacked during the civil war of the 1990's because the president of the country who was overthrown was Kran.

Interviews

All of the interviews took place in the women's homes during the day. Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours. There were often other people coming in and out of the room, usually the participants' children. The researcher brought coloring books and colored pencils to give to the children if they were present and of appropriate age. Some of the interviews took on a strictly question and answer format with very little spontaneous information sharing on the part of the participant. Other participants began sharing their stories without even being asked a first question. The women who declined to be taped were less talkative than those who agreed to be taped. It could be inferred from this that they did not feel as comfortable with the research process or the researcher as much as the women who agreed to be taped. All the women spoke English and the heaviness of their accents varied. The researcher was able to communicate with the women, although in most cases there were questions or answers that had to be clarified or repeated. The researcher used a lot of reflecting back to confirm she understood what the women were saying. Even then, the researcher got a lot more understanding when she

was able to listen to the tapes over and over again. There were sometimes words or phrases that were unfamiliar to the researcher, but the meaning of them in context was clear. After spending time with Liberian women and doing the interviews, the researcher came to understand some of the ways Liberians used particular English words or phrases. For example, they often used the word bigger to mean older and “to carry someone” means to drive them somewhere.

Transcription

As soon as possible after the interviews that were not taped, the researcher created a transcript replicating the interview using her notes. Directly after every interview the researcher made notes about the atmosphere and physical characteristics of the interview location, the behavior of the interviewee, any events that happened during the taping, and any emotional responses the researcher had to the interview. These impressions became part of the transcripts that were shared with the reflecting team. The taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. A copy of the transcripts and the original tapes were returned to the women when the interviewer visited them again to ask follow-up questions. At the time of follow-up, none of the women wished to add to what they shared in the initial interviews. Having both the written and oral records of the interviews could be viewed as a benefit to the participants as it allows them to be in control of their stories and provides a family record of their experiences. Because most of the women reported being unable to read beyond a basic level and would therefore be unable to read the interview transcripts, also giving them the tapes seemed important.

Reflecting Team

A reflecting team was used to validate the structuring of the data and identify themes. The initial group of people recruited for the reflecting team ultimately was not able to follow through with the entire study. Two members of the team dropped out and one additional person was invited to join. These changes happened prior to the data being analyzed by the team so there was no effect on the analysis. Including the researcher, there were four members of the intact reflecting team. These people included the researcher, who is a doctoral student in counseling, the researcher's dissertation adviser, who is a professor of counselor education, a social work educator whose area of interest is Liberian women, and a counseling doctoral student with a background in literature and an interest in qualitative research. The professor of social work had previously worked at a refugee resettlement agency and continued to do volunteer work with refugees, including Liberians. She also has conducted research with Liberian women. All on the team were women with ages ranging from 27 to 59. All were born in the United States. Three of the members of the team were Caucasian and one was African American. The three Caucasian women were mothers, one of those a single mother of an adopted son who was born outside the US, one married to a Caucasian man with one biological child, and one married to a man who was born in an African country (not Liberia) with four biological children. The fourth member was single with no children.

The researcher trained the team to participate in the analysis of the data by having them read Chapter 3 of this manuscript, an article on phenomenological research, and an example of a manuscript that used a qualitative phenomenological methodology. These

readings were discussed and clarified at the first meeting of the reflecting team and through individual correspondence as needed.

In order to expose and set aside preconceived ideas and biases the reflecting team might have in working with the interview data, the researcher created a bracketing activity. It is not possible to completely remove the influence of personal biases from the data analysis, but in making those biases explicit it becomes easier to separate them from the results. Prior to reviewing any data, the team was asked to do a writing exercise in which they considered their relationship to the topic of the research and disclosed any known biases that might influence their views of the data. The team was asked to write about their reasons for participating in the project, including any anticipated benefits, their personal value system and its development, and any feelings about the acculturation of Liberian single mothers. Each person's writing was distributed to the rest of the team members and the team met to discuss the writings. The team revealed the following motives for participation: wanting to learn about the topic and research methodology, wanting to help the researcher, and believing that research with immigrant and refugee groups is important. Values shared by everyone on the reflecting team were the importance of education, the equality and dignity of all people, and a responsibility to help others. Other values revealed by members of the team were a strong work ethic, a belief in the good motives of others, and personal responsibility. Potential biases revealed by the team included a strong desire for this research to be "successful" and reach a wider audience, a preference for qualitative research, an affinity for Liberian refugee women and a desire to portray them positively or heroically, and a tendency to interpret the

women's stories from a therapeutic standpoint (as a counselor). Also, one member of the team had done her own research with Liberian women and it was possible she would interpret the data in a way that would replicate and support her own findings.

Data Analysis

Structuring Phenomenon

To address the research questions and create a rich description of the phenomenon of interest, transcripts of the participants' interviews were broken down into meaning units by the researcher. The initial units were experiences, behaviors, attitudes, coping, and desired outcomes (to the acculturation process). These labels were chosen because they reflected the concepts of interest in the research questions. Only the part of the interview about the interviewees' acculturation process (post-migration) was labeled with these units. Discussion of the participant's pre-migration experiences was transcribed but not labeled. There were a few exceptions to this; most commonly a label was added if a participant had an attitude about acculturation they reported having prior to their arrival in the US, such as an expectation of what life would be like. The researcher wrote a summary of the women's pre-migration experiences (see below) to give the research more context and to honor this part of the participants' stories. However, that description was not the content used to address the research questions because the questions were centered on the acculturation process.

The researcher/interviewer labeled the meaning units and members of the reflecting team each reviewed three transcripts to validate the labeling and make suggestions for changes or additional units. The team did not recommend any additional

categories but they did recommend collapsing them into three broader categories. Because coping is often a behavior, the coping category was collapsed into the behavior category. Because desired outcomes were essentially attitudes, these categories were collapsed together. In simple terms, the three categories show what has happened to these women (experiences), how they have responded (behaviors/coping), and what they think about all of it (attitudes/desired outcomes). Using the researcher's initial meaning units with the reflecting team's modifications, the researcher created the following description of the phenomenon, the phenomenon being the acculturation process of Liberian single mothers arriving in the US as refugees. This description along with the original manuscripts were used to establish the broader themes of the interviews.

Pre-immigration Experiences

By their accounts, the experiences of the women in the years leading up to their immigration to the US parallel the stories of many other refugee groups. This makes sense because groups of people are granted refugee status and approved for resettlement precisely because they have experienced certain things. In general, refugees have experienced a threat to their lives that requires them to flee their country. None of the women used the word chaos, but that is the picture that emerged when they described the sudden and traumatic way they left their homes in Liberia. All of the women reported leaving because of "war," "shooting," or "fighting." They left on foot and fled to wherever they could get that was deemed safer. Every woman reported having to leave so suddenly that there was no time to find family members who were not with them when the fighting broke out. One woman had to flee by herself as an adolescent without her

parents. Another woman was separated from her 9-year-old daughter when the rebels came to beat her, kill her husband, and burn her house. She was taken away in an ambulance and the daughter hid in a neighbor's house. They were reunited in somewhat miraculous circumstances in a refugee camp 10 years later. Other women reported finding out second hand that their husbands or parents had been killed in another area. Some witnessed family members being killed or saw their dead bodies. Even the woman who left Liberia as a school aged child remembered shooting and the smell of dead bodies. The five women who were married and had children in Liberia all lost their husbands to violence in the war. All of the women were forced to leave some family behind in Liberia, including children, not knowing if their family members were also able to get out alive. Four of the women were of the Kran ethnic group, who were particularly targeted by the anti-government rebels.

Once they left their homes they reported having to walk long distances and having to survive in the "forest" or "bush" where there was no shelter or food sources. Three of the women fled to Monrovia where they boarded a ship that took them to a neighboring country. During their flight they continued to be in danger from rebel groups who would periodically raid the areas where the refugees were hiding out, particularly along the border areas. One woman's mother was killed when they were fleeing from rebels in the bush at the Ivory Coast border. Once they had crossed out of Liberia they were still in danger. Seven of the women reported having to move from place to place to find safety. Sometimes this was because Liberian rebels were crossing over into the other countries to raid the refugee camps or, in the cases of Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast, because those

countries had their own civil wars starting. Sometimes the women moved to look for better economic opportunities or to locate family. This changing and uncertain lifestyle went on for about 10 years. Their access to resources during this time varied but they all described difficulty meeting basic needs, though they got some sort of aid from charities or governments at different times. This help was inconsistent or inadequate and the administrators sometimes were corrupt. There was limited access to education or medical care for the women or their children. One woman got cholera while in the boat that took her from Monrovia and another had a daughter with a limb that became seriously infected. During this waiting time was when the women became single mothers. For some it was because their husbands had died and they were now the sole caretaker. And for others it was because they had children for the first time but did not marry. Seven of the women had children while living outside Liberia prior to coming to the US. To try and take care of their families, four of the women discussed selling things, like bundles of wood for burning, in markets.

The women described the process of becoming chosen for resettlement more as something that was done to them rather than something they did. A number of the women reported confusion about the interview and selection process. One woman believed she was going to be sent back to Liberia rather than resettled in the US. Somebody would tell them to do the interview and then they would wait. The women described the interview process in terms of pass/fail, with passing meaning that they were selected for resettlement. They would find out about their selection when their names would be posted on a board or announced over a loud speaker. One woman described how she had

to prove in her interview that her life had been threatened in Liberia. She had to give detailed accounts of armed men coming to her home and pointing guns at her and her family. Only one woman mentioned specifically applying for a refugee program targeted at helping single mothers resettle. None of the women said why they thought they were selected other than attributing it to an act of God.

When finding out about their selection for resettlement in America all the women reported some positive emotion, ranging from relief to joy. Four of the women had to decide to go forward with resettlement before all their children could be located. All of the women reported they did not know much about the US prior to their arrival. Two specifically mentioned that they knew their children would get free education in the US. One woman mentioned going to a cultural orientation class about the US in her refugee camp and one thing she took away from it that in America you were not to steal another woman's husband.

Acculturation Experiences

Family. Experiences the women had related to their families in the US were both heart-breaking and a source of strength. The experience that dominated the lives of most of the women was leaving children in Africa. Six of the women had to leave children in Liberia or a neighboring country. This was usually because they were separated from the children during the war and subsequent flight and not reunited before they were given the chance to come to the US. This means they had to make the difficult choice of leaving, not knowing if they would ever find their children. Some of the older women reported they have adult children remaining in Africa, and others said they had young children

who were being kept by friends or family members. All the women who left children behind now know where they are and are in contact with them. All these women are at various stages of petitioning to bring their children to the US. Two have been successful in bringing one more child to the US. Separation from their children was extremely difficult for the women, emotionally and practically, particularly because the quality of life for their children left behind was poor. One woman described how her school aged child would call and say there was no food left in the house and beg her mother to send more money so they could buy something to eat. This experience of being a financial support was typical both for women who left children behind as well as three other women who have extended family members remaining in Africa. Nine of the women have been sending money back to family and friends who remain in Ivory Coast, Ghana, or elsewhere. The women were caught between meeting their obligations here in the US, trying to make a better life for their children here, and meeting the expectations of their family members remaining in Africa to provide resources.

The importance of having family together was exemplified by the experiences of one young woman who was the first in her extended family to come. She reported being distraught over the separation, and when asked about times she has been happy in the US, she talked about when more of her family, including her mother-figure (actually an aunt) came to the US. Family was described as being an emotional support but also as important in practical ways. One woman was living with two of her adult daughters who supported her financially while she provided childcare for her grandchildren. She talked about the fear that her daughters would want to go off and get married and she was

unsure how she would take care of herself if that happened. Because of this, she was even more invested in getting her other adult children to the US so she could be taken care of as she got older. Another woman who came with only her young children and had no extended family in the US discussed how she really had to rely on herself and be strong because there was no one here who would help her. Clearly, the women's experiences with family had been an important part of their overall experience adjusting to life in the US. Only one woman mentioned a problem or conflict with a family member, her teenage son, who was getting in trouble in school and created some bills for her by buying things online with the computer she gave him. She described this experience as giving her the same kind of worry as thinking about her children remaining in Africa.

Only one of the nine single women discussed dating relationships or having a relationship with a man. This was the woman who came as an adolescent and she reported ending the relationships with the two fathers of her children. Both men were Liberians. However, many of the women appeared to be in some sort of partnership, as evidenced by men living in their homes. These men were not introduced to the interviewer and were not mentioned in the interviews. The women explicitly defined themselves as single or not married. One woman recently had had a child but did not discuss being in a relationship. The interviewer did not explicitly ask about romantic relationships but there certainly were opportunities when it might have been appropriate for the women to mention their significant others. Even when asked "Who lives in your home?" one woman only listed her children, when clearly there was an adult male living there as well. The experiences of the married woman were not significantly different than

that of the single women. The married woman and her husband did say they shared responsibilities of childcare and working, which may have made things somewhat easier for her although she did not specifically identify her husband as a main source of support.

Friends/Liberians. Friends and other Liberians did not figure as prominently in the women's stories as did family. However, friends, particularly Liberian friends, appeared to be a strong presence in their lives. During almost all the interviews the participants had friends stop by their homes at some point. Like family, the friends provided both practical and emotional support. Three of the women mentioned that Liberian friends had helped them acquire employment. Other practical help offered by friends included helping to learn English, get into government housing, and file immigration paperwork for children. Two of the women who were interviewed together described themselves as "best friends." One of those women said that she had to rely on her friend because she had no family in the US. Friends often appeared to take on similar roles as family when there was a need. Even the labels given to friends like "Auntie" (for an older woman) suggested a familial role for someone not biologically related. Friends also provided emotional support and were a comfort, especially in the difficult first few months after the women arrived. One woman did say she was afraid to ask for help from Liberian friends because she felt it would make them uncomfortable.

Americans. The women's encounters with American citizens varied. One type of experience that was discussed by half of the women was being harassed by their neighbors in the government housing where four of them continued to live and one had lived previously. The women referred to their neighbors as "Black Americans." Their

encounters with these neighbors included verbal harassment, such as being called “African bitches.” They and their children were also physically attacked or threatened. One woman was chased by a man with a knife, another woman’s child had her clothes ripped off by an adult woman, and another’s son was beaten by a group of adolescent males. Two women reported leaving their clothes out back to dry and having them torn up or burned. One woman described being repeatedly harassed by a man at a convenience store near the housing community; she said she ended the harassment by physically attacking the man. The women did report some of these incidents to the police but did not feel the police did anything to address the problem. The women also reported these problems to housing community staff and they said their problems were addressed as much as possible by the staff. Perhaps as a caveat to their description of these neighbors using the general term black Americans, a couple of the women noted that there are also “good” black Americans. The same woman who attacked the man at the convenience store discussed her experiences with people begging for money outside the store. She was surprised when she realized one man was using the money to buy alcohol and disguise it in a soda can. But she also encountered a boy she felt was truly hungry because when she gave him money she saw him buy bread and eat it immediately. A couple of the women reported difficulty communicating with Americans because of the differences in the English they spoke.

The women did report positive experiences with citizens as well. Three of the women reported being helped by Americans who brought them clothes for their children or provided other material support. One of those women said these Americans were from

a church. The woman who came as a minor reported that an American teacher had been very encouraging and helpful. Another woman reported that Americans had helped her children in school.

Navigating systems. The women's experiences with American citizens were closely linked with their experiences navigating American systems such as the immigration/resettlement system, the employment and education systems, and the social services system (public health, Medicaid, food assistance, housing assistance).

The first system the women encountered was the immigration system in the form of contact with the resettlement agencies that receive government money to assist refugees upon arriving in the US. All of the women, except for the one who arrived as a child, reported receiving some type of help from these agencies. Five of the women noted that they got help initially from resettlement workers but then the help stopped. Resettlement agencies generally have a six month time frame in which to provide refugees with help in housing, employment, enrollment of children in school, and medical care. Two of the women reported having a family or group that sponsored them as volunteers. These are sometimes called co-sponsors because they work with the resettlement agencies to assist refugees. Two of the women said they did not have co-sponsors but observed their friends receiving help from volunteer sponsors. Two of the women reported that their resettlement agency did not help them get a job and one woman said they did. Another woman noted an interesting disappointment in the resettlement agency's help; she said they only provided her one pot for cooking when she

moved into her apartment. She explained that Liberians cook with two pots, one meal for now and one for tomorrow.

All of the women had received some sort of government assistance including housing, food stamps, Medicaid, day care vouchers, cash support. A couple of the women noted that their government assistance had been cut off or reduced as their household income increased. Another reported having a hard time with the paperwork to get her food stamps.

Six of the ten women were employed at the time of the interview, 5 part-time and one full-time. Of the unemployed women, one woman was keeping her grandchildren but said she wanted to work. One had recently had a baby and had not returned to work yet (but did not have a specific job to return to). The other two unemployed women were looking for work. A number of the women reported problems dealing with the US employment system. Applying for and getting a job was difficult because it required knowing about jobs, getting transportation to the potential place of employment, and being able to fill out an application. The women reported difficulties with all of these steps in the process. Once employed, the women reported difficulties like getting the shift they wanted and figuring out how to access the benefits they were eligible for.

Attitudes/Desired Outcomes

Overall attitude. There was significant overlap in the attitudes expressed by the participants about the process of adjusting to life in the US. All the women expressed a positive attitude about living in the US. And, in fact, all but one of the women said they were happy to be living here. The participant who did not express this viewpoint stated

she felt life was better in the US (compared to Liberia), but she could not be happy because her mind was occupied with her worries. The worries she discussed were being without a job and having children still in Africa who she was trying to support until they were allowed to come to the US. A couple of the women stated that they had no worries or problems. However, these women did go on to identify some problems. The women's satisfaction with being in US was expressed as a comparison with their lives in Africa, particularly since the war. It is important to remember that the women had a very tenuous existence for many years living in and out of refugee camps, and they did not feel they could ever go back to Liberia. Even if they preferred living in Liberia in comparison to the US, as one participant said, Liberia was "spoiled" for them.

Gratitude. Along with feeling happy about being here, many of the women expressed gratitude for being chosen to come to the US and for various aspects of life in the US. They expressed thankfulness to the US government for bringing them and for government support (housing, food stamps, etc.), but more often they expressed thankfulness to God. Some of the specific things the women expressed gratitude to God for were medical care, free education for children, opportunities to work, family members being brought to the US, and the ability to provide for their families. The women credited God for much of what they saw as positive in their lives, saying things like "God gave me a job." When asked who helped her once she came to the US, one woman replied that she did not have any help except from God. Also expressed was the expectation that God would continue to provide. One woman said God had helped her and he would not let her suffer (in the future). She said that her success was due to God and herself. God was

portrayed as a provider and also a deliverer. One of the women stated that it was God who kept them alive in Africa, and four of the women said that God was the one responsible for them being able to come to the US. None of the women stated that God was responsible for any of the negative aspects of their lives.

Opportunity. One of the main advantages to living in the US, as expressed by the women, was more opportunity, particularly the opportunities for work and education. Four of the women stated they liked that a person could find employment even if you did not have an education. They compared this to Africa where they said men with graduate degrees could not find work. Half of the women expressed the belief that there were good job opportunities in the US. All but three of the women mentioned educational opportunities in the US. Some discussed how education for children was not free in Liberia, so they were glad to have free education for their children here. Two of the women expressed surprise and disapproval that American citizens did not all take advantage of the opportunities to work and get an education. One woman said she was shocked when she observed there were homeless and poor people in the US. Not only did the women feel there were the opportunities to learn and work; they expressed this as a necessity or an obligation. As one woman put it, “In America yeah you be working.” Most of the women expressed the belief that life is very difficult in the US unless you are working, and you must work to survive. One woman mentioned that government assistance is not enough, and you must have a job to get what you need. One woman summarized, “They say in America a lot of money but if not work you can’t get money.”

Responsibility. The desire to work was closely related to the women's strong sense of responsibility as the provider of the family. All of the women felt that it was up to them to pay bills and provide necessities (food, clothing, housing) for their children. Most of the women also felt it was their duty to support family members remaining in Africa. Two of the women used the term "seriousness" to describe what was required of them to meet all of their obligations. Seriousness meant working hard and using money to provide as opposed to "partying" or getting in to trouble. One woman explained that the hardships Liberian women had endured had made them more serious about their responsibilities and taking advantage of the opportunities in the US. The women knew a life without the option of providing for their families, so they wanted to take advantage of that chance now that it was before them. Some of the women also conveyed a sense of aloneness in their struggle to provide for their families. Two of the women mentioned specifically that they did not rely on men to take care of their families, in contrast to Africa where they felt that men were needed to get access to resources. When asked who helped them in America, a number of the women said that no one helped them and it was up to them alone to get what they needed. Three of the women mentioned having to choose among working, taking care of their children, and going to school. These women choose working and taking care of their children, although they would have like to get further education.

Expectations. Five of the women said they did not know anything about the US at the point they were selected for resettlement. One woman discussed getting one day of cultural orientation to the US in her refugee camp. The lessons she took away from her

orientation were that in America you should not steal someone else's husband and if you report someone for doing something bad you will go to jail yourself. Understandably, she said she felt afraid to come to the US but that it turned out to be a nice place. Three of the women mentioned their expectation that life in the US would be easy. One thought she would be given a car and that other things in her life would be "ready-made," another thought money would grow on trees, and the other simply thought her life would be easy.

Thoughts about Americans. The women's opinions about American people understandably were affected by their contact and experiences with those people. They did tend to conceptualize Americans in terms of their gender, race, or socio-economic status. In particular, the women who were living or had lived in government housing voiced some strong attitudes about their neighbors. Some of the Liberian women in subsidized housing referred to their neighbors as "Black Americans" and seemed to form their opinions of this American racial group based on the predominantly black residents in Greensboro's government housing. One woman said that Black Americans treat people badly and white Americans are okay. Another woman simply said that people who live in government housing are not good and that most Americans are nice, but some ugly people spoil it. One young mother said that children should not be raised in government housing because they would be influenced by the people living there and would become disrespectful and out of control. This same woman acknowledged variance among "Black Americans," saying that some of them don't like Africans but that some are good. One woman echoed the belief that children she met in government housing were not raised properly because they did not respect their elders and had too many "rights." The same

women felt that the other single mothers (non-Liberian) should not have access to child support because it allowed them to have children with multiple fathers. She used the strongest language regarding the conflicts in government housing, saying that “black people” hate Africans.

Along with the negative opinions the women voiced about the Americans they lived near in the housing projects, the women made statements distinguishing themselves and African women from their neighbors. The woman who expressed the strongest beliefs about the poor behavior of her neighbors said that if she had been born in the US (as opposed to being an immigrant) she would not be living in government housing. She saw her need to live there as a direct result of the disadvantages she experienced as a Liberian woman. Another woman expressed a similar view, saying that the way people acted in the government housing is not the way people act in Africa. Somewhat ironically, the Liberian women who themselves could be the targets of racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia, seemed to display their own biases and tendencies to assume homogeneity among groups based on their experiences with a small sample. The women discussed more cultural divisiveness than gender issues, even when specifically asked about the differences between men and women’s experiences in the US. One woman did express the belief that women control America and women have more freedom from men. Another woman voiced the belief that men in the US are monogamous as compared to men in Africa. Most of the women said they did not think there were any differences for men and women (Liberian or otherwise) in the US.

Some women did express positive attitudes about American people, primarily about the professionals and volunteers they came into contact with through various institutions: refugee resettlement agencies, churches, and schools. Based on the experiences and attitudes they expressed regarding Americans, it seemed that they did not come into contact with a very wide variety of American people. Their main contacts were with neighbors and service-providers. Only one woman mentioned having friendships with her co-workers.

Returning to Africa. Two women said that they would like to go back to Africa or Liberia to live. One said this was because of how people were treated and cared for in the US. She disapproved of families putting older family members in nursing homes and felt she would be taken care of if she returned to Africa to die. The other woman just wanted to go back because Liberia was home. The latter woman was the one who came to the US as a child. Some of the women said that they would like to visit family, but not in Liberia because it was still unsafe there. In particular, women who were part of the Kran ethnic group expressed the belief there were still people in Liberia who wanted to harm Kran people. One motivation to go visit was so children would know more about their cultural heritage.

Desired outcomes. The outcomes the women hoped for in their adjustment process were largely pragmatic ones. They hoped for jobs if they were unemployed or better jobs if they were employed. They hoped to have their families reunified in the US and have their children acquire education and employment. A number of the women expressed the belief that their lives would get better. They expressed this hopefulness

both in spiritual and pragmatic terms. One woman said, “God will make a way for us” and another said, “If we work hard we will be successful.” Some of the women had specific skills they hoped to learn like reading and driving. Three of the women mentioned a desire to move out of government housing. Some of the women also expressed visiting family in Africa as a priority for their futures.

The researcher made contact with the women about a year after their initial interviews. Perhaps unfortunately, not a lot had changed for the women. Of the four women living in government housing, only one woman had moved out, and this was because the housing authority placed her elsewhere because the harassment was so bad. Employment status had only changed for two women, one of whom had a job but lost it and the other had been unemployed but was now working. All the rest either remained employed or unemployed, the same as at the time of the initial interview. One woman had been reunited with some of her children.

Behaviors/Coping

Although the women did report taking action to adjust to life in the US, they did not emphasize their own role in the adjustment process. Their view of themselves in the adjustment process seemed to be a passive one in the sense they attributed some things that happened to God and others to people they saw as helpful. However, woven into their stories were reports of their efforts to learn to survive and improve their lives in the US. Much of what they reported they did was stated in contrast to what they could or could not do in Liberia.

New skills. The women reported that they were glad to have the chance to learn new skills, and they were proud of what they had learned to do for themselves. For one woman this was learning to write her name; for another it was using her food stamp card. The woman from Sierra Leone had learned to speak English, and two of the women mentioned being proud that they had been able to learn “American English” and communicate better with Americans. Other skills they reported learning were driving a car and taking the bus. One woman simply said she had learned to do many new things in the US. Two women discussed learning the American custom of calling ahead before you go to visit someone’s house. All of these new skills were viewed as things they would not have done in Africa, either because they were not necessary or not possible (or both).

Maintaining cultural identity. All of the women spoke about the differences between the way things were for them in Africa and their lives in the US. Sometimes in the interviews they referred to the “African way” of doing things. Some made statements about how they were retaining the “African way” in the US. On one end of the spectrum, one woman was involved in a Liberian-American association, had been to conferences for the association, and kept a map of Liberia on her wall. She was very explicit in distinguishing her parenting style from her American neighbors who she viewed as overly permissive. She was also the one who wanted to return to Liberia and live as an older person. For other women, maintaining their cultural identities or customs meant cooking African food, telling their children about Liberia, minimizing their children’s contact with American neighbors, or wearing African dress. When asked how they had changed since coming to the US, three of the women said they had not changed. Two

women said their appearances were different: weigh more, wear pants, and do hair differently. One of those women and another women also felt they were different because they were able to work (other than trading things in a market) and were able to buy things for themselves and their children. Two of the women felt they were different because they had new skills like writing down numbers, using a food stamp card, and understanding American English. None of the women mentioned feeling or thinking differently.

Utilizing systems. The women took advantage of many of the resources that were available to them. Four of them reported using refugee resettlement agencies for assistance with the paperwork to request their children join them in the US. They also used these agencies with help filing for their permanent resident cards (“green cards”). Another system that they utilized was the social services system, including food assistance, Medicaid, housing assistance, cash assistance. One of the women reported filing for child support because the child’s father was in the US. Obtaining and keeping a job was another task they put a lot of effort into. One woman who did not have a job at the time of the interview talked about going to numerous places and filling out job applications and not hearing back from employers. Two women discussed changing jobs because they did not like the type of the work they were doing or their supervisors. In general the women viewed working as a very important activity for accomplishing what they wanted in the US. The other systems the women discussed utilizing were the health care system and the education system. These were emphasized because they typically did not have access to either in Liberia or in their refugee situation, or they were unable to

access them due to cost. They discussed getting their children vaccinated in the US and taking children to the doctor when they were sick. One woman discussed how she was able to get medical care here in the US and recover so well that her resettlement case manager did not recognize her when she saw her after her treatment.

There were other things the women reported doing to make life comfortable for themselves and their children. One woman moved from a New England town to North Carolina because she did not like the cold weather and it exacerbated her joint problems. A couple of the women moved out of government housing because they were experiencing so much harassment. Those remaining in the housing projects would report problems to the housing authority staff and they did feel this was helpful in some circumstances. Most of the women talked about feeling glad that they could buy food and clothing for their children, and they contrasted this to the inconsistency in their ability to access these resources in Africa. Not only did they take responsibility for meeting their family's needs in the US; as discussed previously, all of the women were sending money back to Africa to friends and family. One woman said she sent money back home before paying her own bills.

Asking/giving help. Asking for help seemed to be something the women felt comfortable with in certain circumstances. They all seemed to feel comfortable seeking help from government agencies. Three of the women did say that Liberian women help other Liberian women, but it seemed that this type of help was not something they asked for. One woman said she would be embarrassed to do so. Another said she would only go to her best friend because she was new to the area and did not know many other Liberian

women, although she thought those other women probably helped each other. One thing two women mentioned that they asked for help with from Americans was reading important letters they got in the mail.

Dealing with emotions. Coping with emotions was not something all of the women talked about. Six of the women mentioned prayer as a way to deal with worry or accomplish a goal (pray to come to the US). In addition, trusting God seemed to be a strategy the women used. For example one woman said that when family members called asking for things she could not provide she would remind herself that “God is making a way for them.” One woman said she would pray and fast when worried. Two women said they got emotional comfort from other Liberian women they were friends with. Other ways they mentioned coping with feelings were beating on something, sitting by themselves, staying up at night, and crying.

Summary

The participants shared some very difficult experiences both before and after their immigration. Perhaps in response to the difficulties they had overcome, their attitudes about the adjustment process in the US were hopeful and grateful. They focused on meeting basic needs for themselves and their children and made use of the resources available to them, even when these resources were not perfect.

Establishing Themes

To determine the broader themes of the women’s stories, the reflecting team (other than the researcher) reviewed again the three manuscripts they had originally read and made notes about potential themes and overall impressions. The researcher then met

with the team members individually and in small groups and conducted discussions about the potential themes. Based on these discussions, the researcher created an initial list of twelve themes and wrote descriptions of each theme. These themes were: Responsibility/Seriousness, Survival/Focus on basic needs, Cultural maintenance, Relationships/Community/Family, Isolation/Self-sufficiency/Fear of being alone, Spirituality, Gratitude, Disappointment/Surprise, Opportunity, Power/Control, Bureaucracy, and Progress. See Appendix E for a description of these themes.

These themes with descriptions were submitted to the reflecting team and each team member read three additional transcripts, different from the first three they read, in order to verify, modify, and consolidate the themes. The team members also identified which transcripts reflected which themes, so dominant and variant themes could be established. The researcher then met individually with each reflecting team member. Based on discussions, the themes were consolidated and modified to five dominant themes and two variant themes. These themes with descriptions were submitted to the reflecting team for a final validation. The researcher also reviewed these themes with two Liberian refugee women who are in the targeted cohort but did not participate in the study. Their comments and adjustments are noted below.

Dominant Themes

1. Opportunity & Progress

All ten women believed there were opportunities for themselves and for their children in the US. The opportunities to get an education and to work were stressed because these were not things the women had access to after the war displaced them (and

sometimes before, in the case of education). Also, these opportunities were seen as means to getting what they desired, both specific things like enough money to move out of government housing and also the more vague idea of a “better” life. As one woman said, “By working hard I know that in the future I will be successful, I know I will be better, my children are trying in school. I’m sure God will make a way for me. Things will be better.” The women were grateful for the chances now afforded them and their families and they were future oriented. For example, one woman sought medical care which made her well enough to work; she planned to use her income to bring her sons to the US so when she was older they could support her if her daughters left to be married. The women acknowledged the opportunities they believed they had and they wanted their children to take advantage of the opportunities, particularly free education. The opportunities and resources that they believed were open to them in the US were in contrast to what was lacking before they immigrated. They could not get their children educated in camps or other countries, but they could here, they could not get jobs in Africa, but they could here, there was no government assistance in Africa, but there was here. In a sense, their beliefs reflect the classic “American dream”: if you go to school you can get a job and your life will be better. One woman explained the difference between her life prior to coming to the US and now that she is here:

I like America. First time I was in refugee life, I cutting wood, selling it before eat. When I cutting wood and carry wood to the market, they not buy it, me and my children we sleep, not eat. When they buy it I buy one cup of rice before we eat. But I come here America, everybody like me. They like my children. They can do anything for them. They going to school, free school! ...The place is nice. Yah. Me I not know how to write, when I was serious I was coming to write, they put me in school too! Yah. America is nice. When you not get money you not go

to school, but in America government say you will go to school free so you will know something. The place nice. They can buy clothes for me, shoes, everything, they can do it for me. In Ivory Coast, in Liberia you able to see living in free house? No! ...But in America, it nice.”

Another woman’s view of the opportunity in America is reflected in her surprise that there were illiterate and homeless people in the US:

Got young people standing in the street, they say they homeless, but what make you homeless? You had over 20 years to go to school, you didn’t pay no school fees, tuition, like in Africa we pay school fees from kindergarten up to college. But here, and they got people with grants, loans, so you can go to school. Some of them I was surprised that some Americans not even know how to read and write. So that is one thing that surprised me. But it’s okay. They was born here so maybe they don’t care, some of them maybe they don’t care. They didn’t go through struggle, they were born easy and their parents give them almost everything so they are just lazy they don’t want to do anything. But in Africa even if you want to go to school but no way, there is no money. Their parent cannot sponsor them. Where they gonna get money from even to eat before they go to school?

It was particularly important for the women that their children take advantage of the opportunities available to them in the US, both because they were getting an earlier start and their success could benefit their families in the long run.

2. Responsibility

The second theme that was voiced by all but one of the women was the importance of their role as primary provider for families, both those here and those remaining in Africa. The participants felt a great sense of responsibility to take care of their children, and they felt somewhat alone in this responsibility. The double burden of taking care of their children in the US as well as sending resources back to family remaining in Africa was at times overwhelming and impossible, but it pushed them to

continue seeking opportunities. Just as some of the women had unrealistic expectations prior to immigration about access to resources in the US, their families still in Africa had similar expectations for them and would request money, unaware of the difficulties the women were facing here. The interviewer asked one woman “What about you L? What made you strong and want to be successful?” She responded:

Because I alone, I don't have anybody to help me and also I'm not a little child, I'm 37 years old so I supposed to do everything on my own. I'm responsible to do everything myself. To take care of my kids. Because here if I'm not working, I'm not doing anything, I lazy to do anything, how my children survive in Africa? Because if anybody say to them your ma in America then what she doing? More people can do that.

The women expressed a value system regarding their duties as single mothers. Laziness was seen to be shameful, but the proper attitude was described as “seriousness.” As one woman said when asked what advice she might give to a newly arrived Liberian refugee woman, “I would advise her you got to be strong, you got to work hard to pay bills. You got to be serious. That's the only thing in America, you got to apply seriousness.” The two friends interviewed together also discussed the importance of “seriousness.”

#1: Like the serious one, you got the serious men and the serious women. So they got some that are not serious. Some of the girls are not serious. They just want to hang around...

#2: Like some of us who have more expenses to do, we have people, children, family back home.

#1: Some of them got experience, I mean, how to call it, umm, how to call it, expenses, some of them got it but they don't want to do it

#2: They don't want to do it.

#1: they want to stay with.... Some of them like me got parents here, but because they say my parents got a home and I want to go live with them, I don't want to work, I don't want to go to school.

But responsibility, seriousness, and duty were not necessarily seen as unwanted burdens.

The women expressed pride at being able to care for their families on their own. In a particularly moving way, one woman shared:

America make people eyes open. We have eyes closed. It make people eyes open. America tell you what you to do, it telling that you what to do for yourself. But in time we to Africa you not know what to do by ourself. We come here, we know how to do by ourself. Because what? They open people eyes. They open people's eyes. You see. For first time, our eyes be closed. But America, they cleanse our eyes.

Later in the interview the same woman said:

We know how to take care of ourselves. Now, we know how to take care of our children. But first time, we not know. But now we know. I been here one year, I talking about myself, I not know nothing. First time I come you see me?! I not know how to speak, I not know. Hmm. The place where I at now, I will know book, I able to drive, because my heart is strong. Yes! When somebody teach me for drive, I will drive. But how will manage to get a license? {laughing} Now that all, for to drive, but you show me, now. I will do it.

The interviewer asked another participant "Do you think you are different than when you were in Ivory Coast and Liberia?" and she responded:

Yeah, because in Ivory Coast you not working. And then you don't have money, where are you going to take food from, where are you going to take money to buy soap, buy clothes, all the stuff. Here you working, you get a chance to buy clothes for you, for your kids, buy things they need too. Because you not have the money in Africa. And the child say oh mommy I need this here. But where are you going to take money from? And no clothes. Sometime they will take shirt like this and they will sell it like ten dollars in Africa, but here you can go to Wal-mart, go to

the any of the shopping center you can get clothes there for you and your children. America is good, I like it.

Although the women felt that they alone were responsible for their families, being a part of a community of Liberian refugee women set norms and values as well as held the women accountable to the “right” way to handle their responsibilities. Although none of the women said it explicitly, it was inferred that a woman who did not to deal with her responsibilities would be viewed negatively.

3. Family reunification

Part of the aftermath of the women’s chaotic pre-migration experiences was that they often had to leave Liberia and then Africa without knowing where family members were and if they were alive. Six of the women left children behind and all of them were in some stage of trying to get the children to the US. Eight of the women discussed their focus on family reunification. One woman shared that she sent food and rent money to her three grown children in Africa before she would pay her bills. Sadly, one of her grown sons died after she left, a death she attributes to his being poisoned by those involved in the civil war. When asked what worries she had in the US, she described the stress of thinking about her children left behind:

I lay down. I can’t sleep. My heart just doing the thing again, for my children. But I come here America, everything was finish in my heart. But then my children business, it hurting me, hurting me. I don’t know what to do. I not get good job. Somebody they call, ma we don’t eat, we don’t eat. When they can give me food stuff for me to eat it can’t go in my stomach. Now it worry me now too much. But, nothing else, just that my children be here with me.

Part of the stress the above participant described involved the difficulty and confusion in the process of filing papers for her children to be sent over. A DNA test is required and the children are interviewed where they are. She was working with a refugee resettlement agency locally which helped her file the paperwork, but she has little power over the bureaucracy on the other side of the ocean.

A different participant also brought up her struggle to have her children come to the US when asked what worries she had.

Me my own I got whole worry on me because my children. I want for them to come. But each time I can call them they can be asking, mama what time we come now. And since I did the paperwork after the time, I can't hear from...[refugee resettlement agency]. At first I came here 2004 I was two months in United States and I fighting for my son. My other two children at that time I didn't know where they at. So I fighting for my son. He went for interview, everything. Time for the result, then immigration say my son fail. ...They say that while my son he supposed to know much about Liberia, our war, and he not born in Liberia but on the camp. I born him on the camp. So he not know much about the civil war and stuff. They say he supposed to explain...so they fail him. I went to Lutheran Family Service I took the paper there and they got it. And the woman say they not supposed to fail the boy because he wasn't born in Liberia, he was born in Ghana, so he not know much about the war. So she told me I should file it again, and I did the paperwork, I pray...The refugee program say it close. I don't really know if my children will be coming, they won't come I not know.

The four other women with children remaining in African countries echoed similar worries and struggles. One woman was reunited with her mother and extended family after she came which she reported made being in the US bearable.

The stress of being separated from family is part of the refugee story and not unique to the Liberians. Perhaps what is particular in their case is their feeling of being alone in trying to help their children and loved ones left behind while also trying to adjust

to life here. As one woman described it, “And it very hard for me too because I alone paying bills. And I am sometimes sending money to Africa, I have family too back home.”

4. Relationships as resources

The participants emphasized the importance of relationships in adjusting to life in the US. Relationships were seen as a means and a tool for achieving their goals. The women depended on relationships with professional and volunteer service providers as well as friends and family. Nine of the ten participants portrayed relationships as resources. Because the women saw relationships as important to their success in the US, they expressed disappointment or confusion when relationships ended or did not meet their expectations. A participant described her relationship with her refugee resettlement worker very simply, “I came first the people do everything for me. Food, the children, everything. Three months, I not see her again.” The same participant also described the difficulty of being in a minority ethnic group (among Liberians) and not having a case worker:

We got no people, me and my children, we not got no program. My tribe, my tribe, my women, but all the people there they can talk, I can't hear it. Its not my dialect. I can speak my dialect.

Relationships with professionals and volunteers were important for helping the women navigate bureaucracies, get access to employment, and find out about social services. One woman said that she continued to need help from Americans to read her mail to her so she would not miss deadlines if a response was required. Relationships with friends also

helped the women be aware of resources or jobs. Family relationships provided moral support and financial support. Two of the women with grown children said that it was important for their children to be working in the US so they could “sit down” or stop working and be supported by their children. One of these women explained why it was important for her adult sons to be allowed to come to the US:

They say my children there come, so I won't suffer. You see? But right now, the two kids that living with me, sometimes they get the boyfriend, they go, they get a boyfriend, they go, a man want them to marry, they follow the man, then [by] my self, I sitting down. But they send the other two and three people here [her sons], now I get place to sleep.

This theme was also exemplified by the way some of the participants interacted with the interviewer, asking her to help them with things like getting health insurance for their children, filling out job applications, or talking to immigration agencies about the status of their children's requests. Perhaps because of their awareness that the interviewer had been in a helping role with other Liberian women, the interviewer herself was at times seen as a resource for information, advocacy, or intervention.

5. Spirituality

The reflecting team identified seven transcripts which reflected how the women viewed their life circumstances in spiritual terms and utilized prayer. All of the women identified themselves as Christian but seven of them shared the role their religiosity and spirituality played in their acculturation process. Most commonly, the women expressed gratitude to God for bringing them to the US and providing for their needs here. A participant said simply, “Now I see its good. I'm working. I buy food. I pay the bills. We

buy food to eat. When I lie down I'm not thinking its not a good house, not a good bed.

Now we thank God." Even simple needs being met were seen as God's provision:

First time, when you see me I were black. First time when you see me I black! No soap for you to take black way. Soap. Nothing. You just take the water, you wash it on you, finish. But I come here America I not know what place my baby soap can coming from, but everything got in my hand. Yeah. Then I say God thank you.

Implicit in their thanking God was the belief that God was an agent in their lives affecting change, something that was stated explicitly in statements like the comments, "The job where I doing now say, that just God give it to me" and another woman saying, "Okay my coming here. It was just by the grace of God." Future events are also in God's hands according to one woman, "Yeah you need job. Because here sometimes you get good place to sleep, got good thing to do to your home, and then if God says you will go visit (Liberia), you can go visit." God seemed an especially important resource when the women felt alone:

No sponsor. They (resettlement agency) didn't give me no help. My other friends had sponsors. They didn't help anyone with a job. After three months they finish with me. God cannot leave anyone in suffering. God was helping me with my children...I did not have a sponsor but through God and myself, God gave me work to do, I was able to get things for myself. When I didn't have a sponsor, through God I was working so its alright. My children will grow, they will work and it will be good. My boy who is 20, he has a car now. When we got here we had nothing, now we have a car. God gave us long life, we have plenty.

One woman shared that after arrival she became isolated because of her medical conditions. She said "I stayed inside or I stay far off in one chairs and just sit and begin to pray that God should carry me through." Another aspect of the spirituality theme was the

women's use of prayer. The women used prayer, and in one case, fasting, to cope with emotional distress and they also saw it as a tool for achieving their goals. A participant used prayer to address a work situation:

I working second shift now, but I will pray to God I will still find something else to do because I want to be with my girl on time. When she go to school by 7 o'clock, if I got a job to be there at 8 or 9 o'clock, then by 3:30 or 4:30 I will come, somebody will just keep her for one hour while I make my bus. I'm really jammed but I don't know what to do about it. I will pray to God.

Her other statements provided a connection between the spirituality theme and the relationships as resources themes, both seemed necessary to the women for thriving in the US:

When God helping you, you got a job, leave on your feet to help yourself, because some of them, some of these agencies, when they bring you, they drop you, they drop you, like now I don't know what I have whosoever to take care of me, I don't know, I only live by the grace of God, the only person I know right now that helping me that Ms. S*** (resettlement agency case worker), if any letter I don't understand whatsoever I don't know, I go to her and she help me, but I don't have any other person...Really, Really, I thank God for white and black (people) in America because the fact is when I got here I was very, very sick. I was sick. If that back in Africa maybe I could die and today, God so have it, I'm alive, so really I thank God. Because when I got here they find a solution to all the things that happening to me and today I'm moving strong.

Variant Themes

The two variant themes were expressed by four women each and are connected to each other. Although less than half of the women interviewed touched on these two themes, they were central to the stories of the women who did discuss them. The first variant theme was the experience of conflict with African Americans in the government

housing projects where some of the women lived. The women used the term “Black Americans” to refer to their neighbors and residents of the subsidized housing complexes. Obviously, this is a broad term used to describe a small sample of people. Four of the women reported experiences with “Black Americans” that included being physically assaulted, having their children be physically assaulted, being verbally harassed, and having clothing destroyed or burned. The women felt that they and their children were being targeted specifically for being African, and in some cases this was indeed expressed by the person harassing them. The four women described these past experiences and the ongoing feeling of being unwelcome and unsafe as a main worry, on par with the stress of worrying about their children in Africa. A couple of the women did acknowledge that not all “Black Americans” were unkind and reported some positive experiences. One woman summarized about her feelings about living in government housing:

When I sit down eating here...when there are no children here, I can't go outside, I sit down over there now I when I be low down, the other person come, 'You African bitch'...some people can spoil America. America is nice, but some ugly people where I living...they spoiling it. If it were few day when I getting money, I coming to move, because I fear.

One of the ways the women dealt with the conflict they experienced with their neighbors was to entrench themselves in a stronger Liberian identity, as if to make themselves distinct from the people they saw as behaving wrongly. The second variant theme is something the researcher came to call cultural maintenance, or the efforts the women took to keep themselves and their families doing things the “Liberian way” or

sometimes referred to as the “African way.” Four women expressed this theme, for two women their cultural maintenance efforts seemed in response to conflict with their neighbors, but for the two others cultural maintenance was important for different reasons. A participant who lived in government housing, expressed this theme very strongly in discussing the differences she perceived in how her American neighbors interacted with their children and how Liberians viewed child rearing. In particular she felt American children had too much power and were not properly respectful of adults because their parents were too permissive. She said, “You can’t let me for my child to rule me because I in America, oh no, if the child don’t come up well, when you die you lose.” She also had concerns about Americans “putting” their elderly parents in nursing homes, to the extent that she wished to return to Liberia as an older person so she could avoid this fate. This participant separated herself from Americans in her parenting practices and she also felt that her reasons for living in government housing (being a refugee) were different than those of Americans who did not take advantage of opportunities they had from birth. She and another participant shared a strong desire for their children to know Liberian ways of doing things. Another participant’s daughter told her “I’m not from Africa, I’m from Maryland” as indeed she was born there, but the participant still felt that Liberia was home and hoped her daughter would see it one day. None of the women mentioned feeling a pressure on themselves to assimilate into American culture, but did express concern that their children had to be protected from negative things that they believed were a part of American culture. Maintaining the “Liberian way” in their homes was a way of providing this protection.

Audit of Themes

The themes were audited by two Liberian women who served as cultural brokers during various stages of the study. They had previously given input on the creation of the interview protocol and helped recruit participants. The women fit in the cohort of the research participants but did not participate in the main study. They are very well known to the researcher, which could be considered a positive because they were more likely to be forthright with their thoughts on the final data.

In order to conduct the audit the researcher met with two women separately. As neither of them could read beyond a very basic level, the audit was conducted orally. With each woman, the researcher described the themes, let the women give some initial reactions, and then asked them if they thought this theme did reflect an important part of Liberian refugee women's experiences. They both affirmed all themes as important and did not express surprise or uncertainty about any of the themes. Some of what they said in giving their initial reactions to the theme paralleled comments made by the participants in the main study. The auditors also shed some new light on the themes.

They affirmed theme #1, saying that Liberian women would see opportunities for working and getting an education as main benefits to being in the US, particularly because these opportunities had been so scarce in Africa. One auditor stressed that when a woman is able to work she then has access to whatever resources she wants or needs. The auditor compared this to Africa where a woman might do domestic work for someone and be paid in rice. They both highlighted the difference between existing in a formal economic system in the US and an informal one in Africa, the former giving a lot

more autonomy but requiring more responsibility. In the US the Liberian women have jobs for companies and get paychecks which they use to pay bills and buy things for their families, both here and abroad. In Africa they would do trading or labor/domestic work and be paid various ways, as there were no paper bills sent by mail. Both women obviously agreed that there was more opportunity in the US, but I also asked them if they felt Liberian women have been able to access those opportunities. One of them felt it was harder to gain employment without an education. This confirmed that one of the barriers to desired outcomes was the aftermath of pre-immigration experiences, including disrupted educations.

The auditors felt theme #2 was a reflection of a way of doing things in Africa: that a Liberian woman is responsible for taking care of both their children and their elders (especially parents). They both felt that most Liberian women's responsibilities extended to family both in the US and in Africa. I asked them if a sense of responsibility might fall more to Liberian women rather than men. They both responded that it depended on the person, that there were some men who took care of their families and some that were not "serious."

Both auditors felt that family reunification (theme #3) was mentioned by the participants because of a combination of factors: the women's awareness of how hard life was for the refugees left behind and the expectation that those who made it to the US will take care of those left behind. One of the auditors explained that while things continued to be difficult in Liberia, it was especially hard for the Liberian refugees who were living outside of Liberia in Ivory Coast or Ghana. She explained this was because as refugees

their opportunities in the host country were very limited and there was not a government or fellow countrymen who felt responsible for the refugees. She said some of the Liberian women living as refugees in Africa had to resort to prostitution and the men to stealing. The other auditor also explained that family reunification was important economically to Liberian women in the US: if their families came here the women would no longer feel obligated to support them. I asked one of the auditors if she ever wondered why God chose to bring her (how she phrased it) and not someone else. She responded that it was the plan that God had made for her since she was born and that He had other plans for other people.

Knowing a variety of people in the US was seen as helpful to both auditors (theme #4). One auditor said it was good for Liberian women to free themselves to be friends with different types of people because friends might tell you things you do not know and if you do not have family in the US your friends can be like your brothers and sisters. The researcher asked the auditors to what extent they felt Liberians help Liberians in the US. One felt that there was some mutual support but it was limited because most people were focused on helping (financially) friends and family remaining in Africa. The other auditor affirmed more strongly that there was help in the Liberian-American community and gave the example that if a Liberian died, the community would get together funds for the bereaved family, attend the funeral, and offer emotional support to the family. One of the auditors felt that Liberian women benefited more from knowing “white” people more than “black” people, but the identity of the researcher could have had an influence on this comment.

I asked the auditors about the spirituality of Liberian women (theme #5). They both thought it would be typical that the women would credit God for the good things in their life. I asked one of the auditors if God was ever responsible for the bad things in life. She said that God only gave good things and the bad things were attributable to the devil.

The auditors shed some interesting insight on the variant themes. When the researcher brought up the conflict with African American neighbors, one auditor said that this was particularly difficult for Liberian women because the episodes of harassment or conflict would cause the women to remember their traumatic experiences from Liberia. She gave an example of hearing a loud noise and having a strong startle reflex due to what she saw during the civil war. The other auditor felt that the conflict was due to the problems within the African American community that resulted from them “not knowing where they came from” as opposed to the Liberians who did know where they came from. This echoed the cultural maintenance theme - the idea that the Liberian women have strong behavioral codes for themselves and their children because it is the “African way.” The logical extension of this belief is that if you did not know where you came from, you might not know how to behave, an opinion some of the women held of their African American neighbors.

The auditors did not feel that Liberian women did anything in particular to maintain their cultural identities. When I described the cultural maintenance theme, they both brought up Liberian beliefs about child rearing and how the Liberian women tried to protect their children from people or things that would influence them in a way not fitting

with Liberian behavioral norms for children. This seemed to affirm that the variant theme of cultural maintenance was more of a reactive coping mechanism than a proactive decision the women made. One of the auditors felt that Liberian ways of child rearing were hampered by the feeling that if you beat your child you could get in trouble with the police, as opposed to in Africa where she believed a parent had the right to beat even an adult child. She said that a child could threaten to call 911 on a parent and this hindered proper child raising and might be a reason that some African American children behaved badly. It was unclear if this auditor felt this was a common belief among Liberian women, although some of the study participants did talk about too much freedom for children in the US.

Conclusion

Although there was variation in the depth of the interviews, some strong themes emerged in the women's stories and provided rich material for addressing the research questions.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

Ten refugee women shared their acculturation experiences, attitudes, and behaviors with the researcher. Created from those discussions was the story of Liberian women's adjustment to the US *as told to* a white American researcher known in the Liberian community. The results of the study yield not only information about Liberian women; they also point to the centrality of relationship in this type of research process. As much can be learned from what the women said as what they withheld and how they interacted with the researcher. The goals of the study were achieved in that the researcher was able to assess *what* has happened to the participants in their efforts to adjust to life in the US as well as *how* they perceived and navigated this adjustment. It was the researcher's hope to better understand how Liberian women simultaneously coped with traumatic pasts and challenging presents. Although the word "coping" is not one the women ever used for themselves and did not seem familiar with, they did describe the ways they have been dealing with situations and moving forward. This is how coping will be defined for the purposes of this discussion to honor the participants' perspective and at the same time use language that is useful to counseling.

The women's pre-migration experiences, including sudden flight, deaths of family members, and loss of home and property, were very similar to those of other refugee

groups (Bemak, Chung, & Pedersen, 2003). Two things that make the Liberian women's experiences distinct were their protracted displacement in countries bordering Liberia prior to being resettled in the US and their status as single mothers. Their adjustment experiences also paralleled those of other refugee groups in that they worked to navigate new systems and focused on helping their children take advantage of opportunities they did not have (Black, 2001). These Liberian women framed their acculturation not as something they did themselves but as a response to people and forces that acted on them, both American and Liberian, and as the work of God who they saw as the director of the process. What the women shared and how they shared it has produced a body of information that is useful to refugee service providers, counselors working with like populations, and researchers seeking to gain information about the acculturation of refugee women from an African country.

Discussion of Results

Research Questions

Current research (Barnes, 2001) on refugee adjustment has suggested that a refugee's attitudes and beliefs about the adjustment process will have an effect on her emotional well-being and "success" in acculturation. Thus, the first two research questions were the following: What are Liberian refugee women's attitudes about acculturation in the US and how do these attitudes relate to their acculturation behaviors? The attitudes revealed in the participants' narratives (as detailed in Chapter Four) include a strong feeling of responsibility for taking care of their families at home and abroad, a sense of gratitude for what they have in the US, a belief that there are opportunities in the

US not available to them in Africa, a belief that God is the one who gives them the things they need, and a desire for help in the acculturation process. Markedly absent was an attitude explicitly about culture change. The women did not say they had to change themselves to fit into American culture. In fact, many of them felt they had not changed culturally since migrating. The only context in which they mentioned dealing with cultural conflict was in wanting to raise their children the “African” way as opposed to what they perceived to be an overly permissive American way of raising children.

These attitudes directed the women in how they would navigate the acculturation process. The women’s sense of responsibility and duty to family, combined with the belief that opportunities to work and be educated were available to them in the US, focused their energy on finding employment. Being employed allowed them to buy things their children needed as well as send money to friends and family remaining in Africa. All of the women were either working or looking for work at the time of the initial interview. They did believe there were some barriers to finding work, including not being able to fill out a job application due to level of literacy, not having transportation to go look for a job, and not having enough job-seeking support from resettlement agencies. Their ways of addressing these barriers generally were to utilize any relational resources that might help them, like asking friends about employment opportunities, or having a church sponsor drive them to a job interview. Their acknowledgement that they did desire help in the acculturation process led them to seek out the help that was formally available to them through various social service organizations and resettlement agencies. Although navigating these bureaucracies was sometimes frustrating for them, they were thankful to

have some safety nets. Their desire to utilize relationships as resources also led to disappointment when those helping them did not meet expectations. In particular, the participants felt let down when resettlement workers stopped making contact or did not provide desired resources. Although the women felt the need to get assistance from the people they had access to, they expressed that God was the giver of good things and the director of their fates. This belief led them to utilize prayer and fasting as a means of achieving their desired outcomes.

The women's desire to raise their children the "African way" related to a number of different behaviors. Some women attempted to control with whom their children had contact outside of school. Other women used an authoritarian parenting style that prioritized the child respecting the adult. The women felt this parenting style was different than that of the Americans around them, which they saw as affording the children too many "rights."

The third research question was: How have their attitudes helped Liberian women cope with resettlement? When the researcher attempted to ask the women directly how they "coped" with their memories and their present struggles, they did not appear to be familiar with the word "cope." Attempts to use other words to express the idea of coping also seemed to fail. The researcher would propose that the women did not see themselves as "coping" in the sense that they did not talk about ways they intentionally dealt their emotions. However, the women, as they presented themselves to the researcher, were not debilitated by their pasts or held captive by memories and emotions. They were very future oriented. They were indeed coping, even if it was not on a conscious/intentional

level, and their coping looked different than what is typically discussed in a counseling realm.

The women's sense of responsibility, and the efforts they made to honor their perceived sense of duty to their families and friends, could be described as a way of coping. Their focus on finding and keeping employment so they could provide for their families, send money back to Africa, and bring others to the US, provided a lot of structure and meaning to their lives. As one woman said, they did not have a choice about whether or not to be "serious." What they perceived as their duty demanded a lot from them and it forced them to move forward.

The women expressed their feelings of gratitude for being brought to the US in terms of comparison: concrete advantages they had in the US that they did not have in Africa. This seemed to be a way of dealing with homesickness or feelings of displacement. When asked about what they hoped for in the future, the first response from many of the women was that they wanted to return to Africa, at least for a visit. Although none of the women came out and stated they were homesick or that they felt continually out of place, their longing to go back betrayed these feelings. The women could list all the things they liked about America: the education system, the social services, and opportunities to work and provide for oneself. Yet when asked what they hoped for in the future it was almost always to go home. One of the cultural brokers suggested that the women would not have wanted to appear ungrateful to an American (the researcher) and this may be in part why they presented the US in such a positive light. But it is also possible that focusing on all that is good about the US is also a way of

managing feelings of loss for a way of life and a sense of belonging. Minimizing feelings of homesickness might have a protective function from more significant emotional problems. Buseh, McElmurry, and Fox (2000) correlated high levels of depression among Liberian men with the men's thoughts of homesickness.

Another way that the women have coped is by utilizing all the systems that are available to them. Becoming savvy in dealing with bureaucracies requires one to acknowledge that help is needed. The women's belief that relationships are important for getting things done and getting access to resources seemed to motivate them to utilize whatever formal and informal contacts they had. The willingness to ask for and receive help from whoever is willing to give it seems a strength among the Liberian women.

In talking about their resettlement experiences the women portrayed themselves as having an external locus of control. They did not say how they struggled to get themselves and their families to the US. They talked about simply doing interviews that other people told them to do, not knowing what the outcome would be. In the end they felt that it was God and the US government who brought them here; they did not credit their own efforts or strength. Although it is true that they did have to rely on a foreign government to choose them for resettlement, the women did have to use a lot of perseverance and strength to survive in the camps and it took a lot of courage to go somewhere they knew almost nothing about. But an external locus of control could be a way of dealing with any survival guilt. Because resettlement was not something they did but something that was done to them, they are in a sense not responsible for it. The researcher asked one of the cultural brokers if she ever thought about why God brought

her and not someone else. She simply said that people have different paths in God's plans. The women also could use their spirituality to make sense of being the chosen ones.

The way the women portrayed themselves in terms of the control they had over their lives echoed Sue's (1978) theory that locus of control and locus of responsibility are distinct cognitive constructs that make up a person's world view. Sue proposed that different cultural groups would fall differently along continuums of locus of control and locus of responsibility, thereby creating 4 quadrants that would match a type of world view. Sue proposed that locus of control is a person's belief in their individual ability to affect change in their life. Locus of responsibility is a person's view of their position in the larger system and the extent to which they are confined by those systems. The Liberian women would appear to fall in the internal locus of control/external locus of responsibility (IC-ER) quadrant. They believed they are able to act to accomplish their goals in terms of meeting the needs of their families (IC), but they also believed they are part of greater systems- spiritual, governmental, and societal-which shape the outcomes of their efforts (ER). The current study would appear to support Sue's theory that locus of control and locus of responsibility are distinct constructs and that they can define a cultural group's shared way of looking at the world. Sue suggested that counselors working with clients who hold an IC-ER world view be aware that clients may locate problems outside of themselves and may benefit from an action oriented approach that validates their perception of the systems in which they live. He also cautioned that IC-ER clients may be less trusting of counselors who represent the dominant culture.

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003), writing about refugees in Australia, proposed that gaining a sense of control was a positive cognitive coping mechanism that refugees could use in the acculturation process and would benefit their emotional well-being. They provided another paradigm with which to view Liberian women's experiences. They proposed that there were active and passive resettlement styles. They broke down the two styles into two subsets each: the active style would encompass "consumers" and "achievers" and the passive style would include "endurers" and "victims." The behaviors and attitudes of Liberian women were somewhat of a mixed bag when it came to active vs. passive styles. Their rhetoric was more passive: they talked about God being in control of their lives and providing for them, as well as needing assistance from people with more knowledge and resources. But their behaviors were proactive: they actively sought employment, they navigated the immigration system to have their families brought over, and they did everything they could to help their children benefit from opportunities in the US. It could be that presenting oneself as grateful and passive is culturally ascribed. Their external locus of control also may provide some comfort because they did not feel alone and felt a part of something greater than themselves. A broader feeling of control over their lives did not appear to be a desired outcome for the women. They did report a desire to be in control of their financial situation.

The resettlement style that most closely resembles the Liberian women's attitudes is the "consumer" style which Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) described:

Consumers take a...goal oriented approach. They tend to be ethnic community oriented and live close to their co-nationals, focusing their resettlement on conforming to community expectations. Consumers perceive Australia as the land

of plenty and the goal of resettlement is to reach a higher consumption level than before migration and to obtain status symbols valued in their community. Reaching these goals can partly redeem the stress and loss involved in the forced migration. (p. 70)

This description resonates closely with the Liberian women's stories. The researcher is reminded of an encounter early in her volunteer work with Liberian women in which the mother and her two young children were visiting the researcher's house. The researcher wanted to take some pictures of the woman and her family so that the mother could send back pictures to relatives in the Ivory Coast. The picture that the Liberian mother most wanted taken was that of her alone leaning on the researcher's car. It seems that if they cannot have their true homes the Liberian women will make up for it by taking advantage of what their new homes do have to offer.

Identifying Liberian women's desired outcomes of the acculturation process (research question four) was important because the success of refugee acculturation has always been defined in terms of the priorities of the people conducting the research (e.g., financial stability, lack of mental health problems). What was missing was the refugees' own perspective on what they felt they were striving toward. The desired outcomes of Liberian women are discussed in depth in Chapter 4, but they include family reunification, the ability to provide material resources for family through employment, a desire to live in or visit Liberia or Africa, raising their children are well, being taken care of in their old age, and their children taking advantage of opportunities in the US. It is difficult to know if these desired outcomes are particular to Liberian women or are shared by other refugee groups because there has been very little research which addressed

refugees' own desires for themselves. Other than wanting their children to be respectful, the women did not have goals related to culture change in terms of becoming more or less like Americans, nor did they have any stated goals regarding their emotional well-being.

Other researchers have demonstrated that there might be some acculturation pathways that are guided by the refugee's gender and/or culture (Keys & Kane, 2004; Khan & Watson, 2005). The current researcher hoped to learn to what extent gender and culture guided Liberian women's acculturation strategies (research question 5). When asked specifically about how being a woman or being a Liberian (as opposed to being a Liberian man or a woman from another country) had affected their acculturation experience, all the women said there either was no difference or they did not know if there was a difference. Some of the women said they did not know women who had immigrated from other countries. It is possible that gender was truly not a guiding force in shaping how they approached the acculturation process. It is also possible that the way gender affects any behavior is at an unconscious level and to ask about it explicitly is not an adequate way of assessing the effect of gender on acculturation. Overall, the women seemed to downplay any differences within the Liberian community in terms of gender or age. The researcher asked the cultural brokers if the women's sense of responsibility to family might be stronger than it would be for a man from Liberia, but they did not think this was true; they thought it would simply depend on the person.

The effects of culture on a person's thoughts and behaviors may also be something that is difficult for that person to identify and explain. If gender and cultural identities begin to form at an early age, they would be so deeply imbedded in a person's

way of being it is understandable the Liberian women did not talk about them explicitly. Although the women could not explicitly describe how being a Liberian affected their acculturation process, it is a bit easier for an outsider to hypothesize the effects that their culture did have. Certainly their belief in the importance of “seriousness” could be a culturally ascribed value, given that they had a word to describe this way of approaching the world. Their spirituality and religious practices could be seen as an aspect of culture. The tendency to want to appear grateful and not complain about hardships is a cultural norm, according to one cultural broker. The strong sense of responsibility to family also was identified as a cultural norm by both cultural brokers. Without an in-depth comparative study of refugees from different cultures it is only possible to hypothesize how particular these values are to Liberians. To a very small degree there was a comparative aspect to this study in that one of the women who participated was originally from Sierra Leone. Her narrative was very similar to all the other women and there was nothing that stood out about how she was navigating the acculturation process in a way that was different from the other women. This sample is obviously too small to make any definitive conclusions from the comparison. But it does lead to the question of whether there might be regional values that would be shared by refugees coming from multiple countries in West Africa. If so, the results of this study may be more broadly applied than just to refugees from Liberia.

The researcher also was interested in what experiences have influenced Liberian women’s acculturation attitudes and strategies. It appeared both pre-migration and post-migration experiences were important to shaping how the women handled their

adjustment. The chaotic way that the women had to flee Liberia meant that families were scattered and information about what had happened to loved ones was hard to obtain. The women are still living with the consequences of this in that they are “fighting” (the word they used) for their family members to be brought over and they are sending money back to those left behind. The women who left children behind are fighting particularly hard. Some of the women did disclose experiencing trauma during their civil war. None of them revealed that they were the victims of gender based violence, although it is still very likely that they were victimized (Swiss et al., 1998). Only one woman disclosed that at times she thought about what she had seen. One of the cultural brokers felt that the women’s difficulties living in public housing were in part triggered by their memories of experiences in the war because they were similar (e.g., hearing gunshots, being physically beaten).

The women did not explain it this way, but in hearing the women’s stories the researcher noted how much of their lives was interrupted by their refugee experiences, especially with the protracted displacement. Some of the women essentially went from being children to adults in the refugee camps. Some were taken from an extended family structure that could provide support or modeling of values and norms. They missed educational experiences, opportunities to participate in community events like marriages, and other than trading they could not develop any occupational or agricultural skills. It is also possible that to some extent cultural norms and systems were recreated in the refugee communities outside Liberia which imparted to the young refugees the “Liberian way.”

The women's contacts with Americans also proved to be defining experiences once they arrived in the US. Their conflict with African American neighbors caused a lot of worry and stress. It is possible that these encounters were especially stressful because it was so unexpected. Dunn-Marcos, Kollahlon, Ngovo, and Russ (2005) found that Liberians expected Americans to be knowledgeable about Liberian history and recognize the unique bond between Liberia and the US due to the hand the US played in Liberia's origination. To come hoping for a special bond with African Americans and instead be met with what they perceived to be as hostility and contempt would be very disappointing. On the other side of that coin, the women were *pleasantly* surprised in their encounters with certain American citizens. They seemed to feel that overall Americans were friendly and helpful, which surprised some of them. These positive experiences may have contributed to their willingness to ask for help and utilize important services.

Refugee Studies

Because of its exploratory nature, there were no formal hypotheses to be proved or disproved in this study. However, it is helpful to examine how the results of the current study fit in refugee studies research. Some of the conclusions in the wider body of refugee studies would have led the researcher to expect certain results in the current study, but many of the findings were surprising and not congruent with some of the literature.

Refugee Mental Health

Research involving refugees has focused on their mental health because of the expected aftermath of the traumas and difficulties related to adjustment experienced by many refugees. Certainly the Liberian participants experienced multi-dimensional trauma. Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, and Steel (2004) identified four trauma dimensions experienced by Bosnian refugees: human rights violations, dispossession and eviction, life threat, and traumatic loss. The Liberian women reported all of these experiences. Large-scale studies of Southeast Asian refugee mental health have painted a picture of a population with more symptomatology of depression, PTSD, and anxiety disorders than the general American population (Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1994). The women in the present study did not reveal a lot about their emotional lives. There were small hints at strong underlying feelings but no themes emerged regarding the women's emotional well-being. One woman said she could not sleep and would pace at night due to worry over her children remaining in Africa. Another woman became tearful in talking about her children left behind. One participant said she had memories of her parents being killed and this made her feel bad, and another became tearful in recounting the death of her husband. Because the women did not spontaneously disclose much about their emotions, it would be necessary to do a more pointed assessment in order to determine any symptomatology of depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress. The participants did not reveal mental health problems nor did they reveal physical health problems, with the exception of one woman who reported knee problems. When asked about their worries and concerns, the women did not discuss their own mental or physical

health. Instead they expressed concerns about being able to support and reunite their families.

Social Adjustment

Interestingly, some of the social adjustment issues that have been noted in other refugee groups were not shared as an issue with the Liberian women because they are single mothers. Changes in gender role expectations within marriage is one of the issues other refugee groups have faced (Dolo & Gilgun, 2002), but the participants in the current study did not discuss any gender role problems. Domestic violence was also not cited as an issue for the women. However, it appeared that some of the women were not forthcoming about their current partnership status. If they were not going to disclose that their boyfriend was living with them, it is also unlikely they would disclose any violence or relationship problems.

Social capital, or the depth and breadth of one's social network, has been proposed to be something that could be an important factor in refugee adjustment (McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Certainly the current study would seem to support that idea, given that almost all the women expressed the belief that their relationships were important in helping them gain access to resources. Although intuitively it makes sense, previous research has not always supported the link between social capital and emotional well-being or economic success among refugees. Young's (2001) findings that social support moderated the effect of life events on life satisfaction among established refugees are congruent with the current findings. Young's study shows it is important how social capital and the benefits of social capital are measured. The number of contacts in a

refugee's network may not lead to higher earning power, but it may improve their perception of their lives. The later appeared to be true of the Liberian women.

Economic Adjustment

By some standards the Liberian participants would not be considered economically successful. Most were receiving public assistance of some type including Medicaid, food stamps, day care vouchers, and housing. Some were unemployed and except for the woman who came as a child, none had received any further education than what they had when they came to the US. However, if refugee economic success is defined as “a standard of living which is acceptable in their own cultural context” (Kuhlman, 1991, p. 7), the picture of these women changes. It was the women's outlook on their economic situations, as opposed to their actual situations, that surprised the researcher. Based on research like that from Potoki-Tripodi (2003, 2004), the Liberian refugee women would be economically crippled by their education level, gender, and household composition, and by quantifiable measures this research would be accurate. However, the women themselves felt more powerful and secure economically than they ever had in their lives. To say “everything is relative” is a cliché, but appropriate in these circumstances. The women had gone a long time without access to any economic opportunity or power to obtain resources, so in comparison the chance to earn a wage at a job that did not require a degree was seen as a gift from God. This is not to say the women did not acknowledge economic hardships; the term “bills” was used frequently to describe their difficulties. But the attitude they presented to the researcher overall was positive, grateful, and hopeful.

Cultural Adjustment

One of the variant themes identified from the Liberian women's narratives was cultural maintenance, or the desire to continue behaving in a way that they perceived to be in line with their cultural values. Only some of the women expressed this theme, and the rest of the women said very little about cultural issues in their adjustment process. The emphasis on cultural maintenance coupled with the importance placed on relationships as resources (a dominant theme) comes very close to the acculturation strategy that Berry (2006) called integration. Integration is one of the four acculturation strategies proposed by Berry and it is defined by high levels of maintaining cultural identity and heritage coupled with high seeking of relationships outside their ethnic group. The acculturating person is *integrating* their culture of origin with new communities. The women did report seeking relationships outside the Liberian community, at work and with those they viewed as helpful. However, the women who emphasized cultural maintenance also talked about isolating themselves and their children from the Americans they viewed as immoral or bad influences. Berry would call this acculturation strategy separation: high levels of cultural maintenance and low levels of seeking contact outside the ethnic group. Berry did not address whether a refugee might use more than one of the four acculturation strategies depending on the refugee's situation. However, he did propose that the choice of strategy might be a response to the environment where the acculturation was taking place. This certainly seems true of the Liberian participants, particularly those living in government housing projects. They appeared to utilize a separation strategy when seeking contact with the host culture would

feel unsafe or incongruent with Liberian values. Berry's model does appear to be a useful construct in understanding the women's experiences, if the strategies can be seen as fluid rather than exclusive. Dona and Berry (1997) found in a study with Central American refugees that the integration strategy was related to lower acculturative stress in comparison to the other strategies. If this was also true for the current sample, it would explain why the women did not talk about acculturation as a primary stressor.

Methodological Implications & Limitations

Stories do not exist in a vacuum. They are told to someone. Stories exist in relationships. The data yielded from the current study must be considered in that light. The relationship that the researcher had with the participants, albeit a brief one in most cases, affected the data (Suzuki et al., 2007). This is both a benefit and a detriment to the study. To the extent that the researcher is seeking the truth about what happened to the women, how they have responded, and how they viewed their lives, she only was able to hear the truth as the women chose to present it to her. There are a number of factors that may have caused the women to alter their stories based on their thoughts about the researcher/interviewer and the research process.

The researcher asked her Liberian cultural brokers why some women disclosed more in the interviews than others. One of the brokers thought that the women might hold back if they did not really understand what the purpose of the interview was, despite the informed consent procedures. She also thought that it was possible the women would hold back negative thoughts or feelings about being in the US because they did not want to appear ungrateful to an American. The other cultural broker felt that if the women did

in fact do the interview that meant they wanted to share. She said that if they did not really want to do the interview they would find ways to put off the interviewer, saying they were too busy or never finding a good time. The interviewer did have this experience with some Liberian women who initially agreed to do the interview but never actually completed it. The participants' interactions with the researcher also indicated that some of them saw her as a potential resource for help or hoped to get some sort of payment for the interview. All of these factors could have affected the data. The stories might have been different had they been told to someone else or if the research process had been different. But this "skew" is actually information in itself. It is helpful for counselors and researchers to know that a Liberian woman might want to appear grateful or that saying yes is sometimes just a way of being polite.

The small sample size does limit the generalizability of the data. However, there was consistency across the data as evidenced by the dominant themes that were established by four separate people reviewing the narratives. Based on the reflecting team's consensus along with the cultural brokers' validation of the themes, we can conclude that nine Liberian participants was an adequate sample of the target population (which would number in the thousands) to achieve the goals of the study.

Phenomenological data is useful for understanding the possible rather than the probable (Arminio, 2001). In other words, the data have given us one impression of refugee mothers' adjustment, not a definitive and universal truth about the process. This impression has generated a number of new questions about Liberian women and refugees

in general and pointed to new variables to be studied, both of which are goals of exploratory research.

The use of categories at the beginning of the data analysis process could have imposed too much structure on the data and limited novel or surprising ideas from emerging. This is unlikely given that the categories had to be consolidated rather than expanded after the first review by the reflecting team. In addition, the semi-structured nature of an interview also may circumscribe the nature of the information that is shared. The researcher/interviewer did deviate from the scripted interview guide as needed to allow the participant to fully describe her unique experience.

There may be some biases in the data due to the sampling techniques. The researcher used her network in the Liberian community and this may have limited the sample to smaller circles of Liberian women who may have things in common as the basis of their friendships. These commonalities may have created more consensus in the data. But some of the women were invited to participate in the research after chance encounters with the researcher and said they did not associate much with the Liberian women known to the researcher. Thus, there may have been more diversity in the sample than had originally been expected. The sample also may have been skewed by differences in those who chose to participate and those who did not. Those who did not participate may have had a more negative view of their circumstances or the US and thus did not want to discuss this with an American and appear ungrateful or disrespectful.

The process of analyzing and interpreting the data had its own limitations. Even when transcribing the taped interviews verbatim, there is much that is lost when turning a

dynamic relational process into a written document. In reviewing the transcripts and interpreting what the women said, the reflecting team could not consider nonverbal communication or how the women said what they said in the interview. Additionally, it was impossible for the researcher and reflecting team to keep their biases out of the data analysis. One of the themes identified was responsibility, which was a value shared by some of the reflecting team. The researcher's goal going into the study was to obtain results that would be useful to the counseling community. This may have caused her to interpret the results in a way that fits within current counseling paradigms, such as the idea of coping, instead of letting the data create new paradigms.

None of these limitations seriously undermined the usefulness of the study, and there were no serious limitations that were uncovered in the course of the study. The limitations were generally known and planned for. The limitations should be considered, however, when the data are used as a starting place for future studies or in supporting findings in similar studies. If researchers want to involve Liberian women in future studies, the above limitations and lessons should be considered. Gaining informed consent is a very important part of the research process with this population due to lack of previous experiences with research. As much as is possible, participants should understand the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits (or lack thereof), and the role of the researcher. The current study was aided by the researcher's involvement in the Liberian community. The women who disclosed the most had the most previous knowledge of the researcher as a helpful person. Although prohibited with other types of

research, it may actually be beneficial if the researcher has a dual-relationship with the participants, as researcher and service provider.

Counseling & Service Implications

The tendency to see refugees' lives as problem-ridden (Black, 2001) was evident in the researcher's surprise at how positive the Liberian women were about their circumstances. Counselors should be conscious that there may be different ideas about what constitutes "successful" resettlement, and as much as is possible, let the refugee client define that success.

Young (2001) concluded that the refugees' degree of overall life satisfaction was not tied to how they rated the quality of various aspects of their life (family, income etc.). This may be because they feel they are better off overall as compared to their circumstances in the first country of exile, even if their lives are not ideal after resettlement. Barnes (2001) and McMichael and Manderson (2004) found that the two different refugee groups they studied viewed their social context in comparison to what it was in their home country. Particularly for Liberian women, counselors may want to gain some knowledge of the circumstances in which the women lived prior to resettlement because that information may provide some context about how they feel about life in the US.

In the researcher's experience working with Liberian women as a volunteer and as a researcher, it took time to gain the women's trust, but once that was established a more open and balanced dialogue seemed to emerge. Counselors should be aware that it will take time to build trusting relationships with clients who are Liberian refugee women. It is also important for counselors to be aware that it might be difficult for Liberian women

clients to be completely forthright about their disappointments and struggles, due to their desire to appear grateful in the presence of an American counselor. If possible within the confines of the ethical codes regarding dual relationships, counselors should find ways to become a friend and resource to the local Liberian community as a whole. Being known in the community and being referred to a client by another Liberian woman are good starting places for building trust.

Counselors also should be aware that Liberian clients may not be familiar with the parameters of a professional helping relationship, particularly the ending of the relationship. The Liberian women participating in this study expressed surprise and disappointment when relationships with service providers at resettlement agencies ended on a timetable. Because of their lack of familiarity with the Western mental health and education systems, just as they were unfamiliar with the research process, Liberian women might be unclear about the counselor's role and the ways in which a counselor can help. In as much is possible, considering ethical guidelines, counselors should consider ways their role can be flexible in working with Liberian women. Emotionally therapeutic activities could be combined with activities that address the practical concerns of the women, such as filling out job applications.

Counselors might also want to consider that the desired outcomes of the resettlement process for Liberian women will be more focused on practical issues rather than emotional issues. A woman may be having a lot of emotional distress about her children remaining in Africa and she may see it as more useful for the counselor to help her get an appointment with an immigration agency rather than discuss her feelings. The

willingness to work with systems and ask for help is a strength among Liberian women. Counselors can build on this strength by becoming knowledgeable about community resources for refugees and making referrals. This also would build trust in the counseling relationship because the Liberian woman would come to see the counselor as an important relational resource. Counselors should learn about family reunification policies and support in their communities because this was such a pressing issue for Liberian women.

Most of the Liberian women did not talk directly about the ongoing effects of their traumatic experiences, although most of them acknowledged some such experiences. The effects of the trauma were indicated by the women's fears about returning to Liberia and their fears for family members remaining in countries outside of Liberia. Their responses to experiences in the US (e.g., violence, harassment) that may trigger memories of the war also can provide clues as to their level of traumatic stress. It is safe for counselors to assume that Liberian women have experienced some trauma, including traumatic losses, but counselors should not assume that the aftermath of these traumas is necessarily mental health problems. Assessment for signs of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress should be done on an individual basis and not ascribed to the population of refugee women from Liberia as a whole.

One of the main findings of this study was the high level of responsibility and duty the women felt to their families in the US and in Africa. Helping Liberian clients make decisions about how to care for themselves and family members is a potential role for professional counselors. Counselors should keep in mind that the women may have

some strong community pressure to prioritize helping those remaining in Africa, even before they meet their own needs. The counselor will have to consider how the women might be using the material help sent to Africa as a way of dealing with their emotions about what happened during and after the war. A counselor also might want to support Liberian women in putting their responsibility in a spiritual context, helping them examine how they can release their sometimes impossible obligations and give them over to their higher power.

Emerging Variables & Future Research

The exploratory and open-ended nature of this study has provided a useful starting place for further inquiry involving refugee women. Historically, variables of interest in refugee studies were determined by the policy priorities of service providers. When Liberian women define the parameters of the refugee resettlement phenomenon, they direct us toward new variables to examine and new ways to examine previously studied variables.

One of the interesting aspects of how the women described their resettlement experiences was their view that they had both an internal locus of control and external locus of responsibility (Sue, 1978). If a standardized instrument was used to measure locus of control and responsibility, as has been done with other refugee groups (Young, 2001), a clearer picture of Liberian women's beliefs about control of their lives might emerge. Because there appeared to be links among their feelings of control, spiritual beliefs, and employment status, these variables could be researched together.

The importance of social capital once again has emerged in this study as important in the refugee experience. Previous researchers have been unsuccessful in linking social capital with outward signs of refugee “success” (Potocky-Tripodi, 2004), so future researchers should examine other impacts of social capital, such as variations in help-seeking behaviors and life satisfaction.

One of the refugee experiences particular to the Liberian refugee women was that of protracted displacements (Schmidt, n. d.). The younger women spent important developmental years living outside their country of origin, forming their families in refugee camps, often times away from their larger family groups. Yet the younger women did not seem to feel their cultural identity was different than that of the older women. Their unique situation provides fertile ground for investigating how cultural identity does develop, because for the Liberian women it seemed independent from geographic location or age at which the country of origin is left.

Because the participants did not do much spontaneous disclosure about their emotional well-being and possible mental health concerns, we cannot know whether there was actually a lack of emotional problems or just a lack of disclosure. More focused assessment would have to be done to determine this. If indeed Liberian refugee women prove to be emotionally well compared to other refugee groups or American-born single mothers, further study should focus on what protective factors foster this well-being. One of the possible protective factors might actually be the women’s roles as single mothers. Their acts of mothering and their sense of responsibility to their children provided focus to their lives and caused them to be future-oriented. Another protective factor from

acculturation stress actually might be the trauma the women experienced in their flight and displacement. Anecdotally, the more trauma the Liberian women described the less eager they were to return to Liberia itself, although they may have desired to visit their family still displaced elsewhere. As one woman put it, Liberia was “spoiled” for them. Thus, the trauma may protect against homesickness or a focus on Liberia and from there protect against mental health problems after resettlement. With a large enough sample the relationships among those variables could be determined.

Conclusion

The stories of Liberian women echo the common themes of the refugee experience, and their variations on the theme broaden and refocus our understanding of refugee adjustment. Based on the conclusions of previous research with refugees, Liberian women should be vulnerable to emotional, economic, and social difficulties upon resettlement. Indeed, they have very real struggles. Yet they have not chosen to see themselves as marginalized and victimized. They have chosen to see themselves as blessed by God and they have “applied seriousness” to take advantage of those blessings.

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APPENDIX A

Pilot Study Interview Protocol

I would like to learn more about you and your life.

What is your age?

Where were you born?

Who are your people (ethnic group)?

What is your religion?

How much school did you finish?

When did you first leave Liberia?

Where were you living before you came to America?

When did you arrive in America?

Who in your family is living here in the US?

Number of children:

Marital/partnered status:

Household composition:

Who in your family is in Africa?

I want to learn more about what life is like for Liberian women who have come to live in the United States.

Tell me about how you moved from Liberia to _____ to America?

When you were living in the camp, what did you know about America?

What is your life like here? What is life like for your children?

When are some times you have been surprised since coming to America?

When are some times you have been worried since coming to America?

When are some times you have felt happy since coming to America?

How have Liberian women learned to survive in the US?

Is this different than Liberian men?

Is this different than other refugee women?

What do you imagine will happen to you and your children in the future?

What would you send to Liberia to show them what life is really like here?

What would you tell new refugees about learning to live here?

APPENDIX B
Pilot Study Script for Obtaining Informed Consent

Read by Leah Clarke on _____

Thank you for agreeing to hear about the study I am conducting and thank you for considering being a part of it. The overall purpose of this study is to understand how Liberian women adjust to life in America. This study will help me make sure that when I am talking with other Liberian women I am doing it in a way that helps them say what they want to say. When I talk to more Liberian women, I hope to understand what their lives have been like so that we can improve some of the services they receive in America. I am inviting you to participate because you recently came from Liberia as a single mother and you know what helps Liberian women talk in a comfortable way.

You will not get any money for talking to me but you may be helping other Liberian women who get help from Americans. You will also help all people living in America understand each other better.

When answering the questions I will ask you might start to feel difficult emotions like sadness or anger. These feelings might be the bad part of participating in this study. If your feelings become very great and you need help with these feelings, I can help you find someone to talk to.

You do not have to be a part of this activity and if you start answering questions you can stop at any time. If you do not want to do the activity or you want to stop the activity nothing bad will happen and I will not be upset with you. You can also ask me about this activity at any time. Do you have any questions now?

If you choose to be a part of this study, we will decide when you want to spend time talking to me. When we meet to talk, I will ask you to do two things. The first thing is to answer questions about your life when you were living in the refugee camp and about your life in America. The second thing is to tell me what you think about the questions that I ask. For example, if a question is confusing you can tell me it is confusing and we can talk about a better way to make the question. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not an examination or test. I just want to know what you think. I think this talking time will take from one to two hours.

I will not tell anybody the things that you say to me except for two people. The two people are my teacher and a Liberian lady from another city who is helping me to understand Liberian English. They will not know your name. They have both signed a paper saying that they will not tell anyone what you say. I want to record what you are saying so that I can remember what you said. You do not have to say your name on the recording. Nobody besides me and the two people I mentioned will hear what you say. When you put your name on the paper I will give you, I will lock the paper in a cabinet at my house. I will lock the recording in a different cabinet at my house. I will keep these papers and the recording for three years after I finish the study. Then I will destroy them both.

Do you have any questions? If you think of a question later, you may call me, Leah Clarke, at (336) 508-6593. You can also call my teacher DiAnne Borders at (336) 334-3425. If you have questions or want to know more about your rights in this study you may call Eric Allen, Research Compliance Officer, at UNCG at 336-256-1482. If you now wish to participate I will ask that you sign this paper which means I have explained this activity to you and you wish to be a part of the activity. Remember, it is okay to say no. If you sign it, I will give you a copy of it.

{To the witness} I am asking you to say if you think (participant) understood what I said. If you believe that she understood what I said and agree to be a part of the study you will also sign this paper.

This study and all papers here today were approved by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. They make sure I follow all the rules and laws in doing this activity.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

**CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT:
SHORT FORM WITH ORAL PRESENTATION**

Project Title: Pilot Study: Liberian Women's Adjustment Attitudes and Strategies

Project Director: Leah K. Clarke

Participant's Name: _____

Leah Clarke has explained in the preceding oral presentation the procedures involved in this research project including the purpose and what will be required of you. Any benefits and risks were also described. Leah Clarke has answered all of your current questions regarding your participation in this project. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by DiAnne Borders by calling (336) 334-3425 or Leah Clarke by calling (336) 508-6593. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are affirming that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Leah Clarke.

Participant's Signature

Date

Witness to Oral Presentation and Participant's Signature

Signature of person obtaining consent on behalf of

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Date

APPENDIX C
Main Study Interview Guide

I would like to learn more about you and your life.

What is your age?

Where were you born?

Who are your people (ethnic group)?

What is your religion?

When did you first leave Liberia?

Where were you living before you came to America?

When did you arrive in America?

Who in your family is living here in the US?

Number of children:

Marital/partnered status:

Household composition:

Where else do you have family?

What agency sponsored you when you came to Greensboro?

Did you have a sponsor?

I want to learn more about what life is like for Liberian women who have come to live in the United States.

Tell me about your journey from Liberia to America.

When you were living in _____, what did you know about America?

Tell me about the life you and your children have here.

(As needed)

When are some times you have been surprised/disappointed since coming to America?

When are some times you have been worried since coming to America?

When are some times you have felt happy since coming to America?

How have Liberian women learned to survive in the US?

Is this different than Liberian men?

Is this different than other refugee women?

What do you do differently since coming to America?

What do you imagine will happen to you and your children in the future?

What would you tell new Liberian women about living here?

Is there anything else that seems important for me to know about your life in America?

Were you able to say everything you wanted even though I don't speak Liberian English?

Did you change what you said because of your children being in the room?

APPENDIX D
Main Study Informed Consent Script & Signature Page

Read by Leah Clarke on _____

Thank you for agreeing to hear about the study I am conducting and thank you for considering being a part of it. The overall purpose of this study is to understand how Liberian women adjust to life in America. When I talk to more Liberian women, I hope to understand what their lives have been like so that we can improve some of the services they receive in America. I am inviting you to participate because you recently came from Liberia as a single mother and you know about learning to live in America. I do not work for the government or for a refugee resettlement agency.

You will not get any money for talking to me but you may be helping other Liberian women who get help from Americans. You will also help all people living in America understand each other better. When answering the questions I will ask you might start to feel difficult emotions like sadness or anger. These feelings might be the bad part of participating in this study. If your feelings become very great and you need help with these feelings, I can help you find someone to talk to. You do not have to be a part of this activity and if you start answering questions you can stop at any time. If you do not want to do the activity or you want to stop the activity nothing bad will happen and I will not be upset with you. You can also ask me about this activity at any time. Do you have any questions now?

If you choose to be a part of this study, we will decide when you want to spend time talking to me. When we meet to talk, I will ask you to answer questions about your life before you arrived in America and about your life in America. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not an examination or test. I just want to know more about your life. I think this talking time will take from one to two hours. I will come back to meet with you one other time after that to see if there is anything else you want to say. That should also take one to two hours.

I want to record what you are saying so that I can remember what you said. You do not have to say your name on the recording. I will listen to the recording and write down what you said. I will give you a copy of this recording if you want one and a written copy of what you have said. I am the only one who will know your name. When you put your name on the paper I will give you, I will lock the paper in a cabinet at my house. I will lock the recording and the writing of what you said in a different cabinet at my house. I will keep these papers and the recording for three years after I finish the study. Then I will destroy them both.

There are people helping me with my writing who will read what you have said. The people that are helping me are my teacher, another teacher at my university, and two other students at my university. They will not know your name. They have signed a paper that says they cannot reveal to anyone what you have said. After I have talked to other Liberian women I will write a paper about what the Liberian women told me about life in America. Some of the things you said might be in this paper but no one will know that you said them. Anybody can read this paper. Do you have any questions?

If you think of a question later, you may call me, Leah Clarke, at (336) 508-6593. You can also call my teacher DiAnne Borders at (336) 334-3425. If you have questions or want to know more about your rights in this study you may call Eric Allen, Research Compliance Officer, at UNCG at 336-256-1482. If you now wish to participate I will ask that you sign this paper which means I have explained this activity to you and you wish to be a part of the activity. Remember, it is okay to say no. If you sign it, I will give you a copy of it. {To the witness} I am asking you to say if you think (participant) understood what I said. If you believe that she understood what I said and agreed to be a part of the study you will also sign this paper.

This study and all papers here today were approved by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. They make sure I follow all the rules and laws in doing this activity

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

**CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT:
SHORT FORM WITH ORAL PRESENTATION**

Project Title: Making meaning of refugee resettlement experiences: The acculturation attitudes of Liberian women.

Project Director: Leah K. Clarke

Participant's Name: _____

Leah Clarke has explained in the preceding oral presentation the procedures involved in this research project including the purpose and what will be required of you. Any benefits and risks were also described. Leah Clarke has answered all of your current questions regarding your participation in this project. You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research involving people follows federal regulations, has approved the research and this consent form. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this project can be answered by calling Mr. Eric Allen at (336) 256-1482. Questions regarding the research itself will be answered by DiAnne Borders by calling (336) 334-3425 or Leah Clarke by calling (336) 508-6593. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to you if the information might affect your willingness to continue participation in the project.

By signing this form, you are affirming that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in the project described to you by Leah Clarke.

Participant's Signature

Date

Witness to Oral Presentation and Participant's Signature

Signature of person obtaining consent on behalf of

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Date

APPENDIX E

Initial Themes

Responsibility/ Seriousness: The women felt that in order to survive and be successful in the US it was important to take your responsibilities seriously. Responsibilities were foremost taking care of your children and family, both those here and those remaining in Africa. In order to do this you have to work hard and not spend time partying, being lazy, or depending too much on others to take care of you. One very important responsibility the women emphasized was providing financially for family members remaining in Africa.

Survival/Focus on basic needs: The women expressed satisfaction at being able to provide the basics for their family: food, shelter, clothes. They contrasted this to their lives in Africa once they had to flee where they often went without these basics.

Cultural maintenance: It is important to maintain an “African” or “Liberian” identity and the women also want their children to have this identity. They make distinctions about American ways of doing things and African way of doing things and they generally feel that the African way is better. The women would like to visit Liberia or Africa with their children for various reasons, one of which is that their children “know where they came from.” Negative encounters with American people seemed to entrench the women further in the belief that African ways of relating to others are better.

Relationships/Community/Family: Others play a crucial role in providing support and access to resources. The women wanted their families to be together in the US both for emotional reasons and because family could provide financial and other practical support. They expressed appreciation for the help they have gotten from workers at resettlement agencies and the volunteers they met through those agencies. Some expressed surprise at how friendly and helpful Americans were. They expressed disappointment, disapproval, and horror when they were treated poorly (from simple disrespect to actual physical violence) by neighbors in the government housing complexes where over half the women have lived at one point.

Isolation/Self-sufficiency/Fear of being alone: The women expressed paradoxical sentiments that friends, family, and professionals are needed in the adjustment process but that you are also on your own to take care of things. They expressed disappointment when relationships with professionals ended (like refugee resettlement case managers) or they were cut off from family. Some of the older women expressed fears about how they would be taken care of as they grew older.

Spirituality: The women attribute much of what they have in their life to God’s intervention. They express gratefulness to God for brining them to US, keeping them alive, giving them jobs etc. They also reference prayer as a coping method.

Gratitude: Linked closely with the spirituality theme, the women expressed gratefulness, usually to God, for the good things in their life. But they also expressed gratitude to the US government for bringing them to the US and to various people who have helped them along the way. There are positive feelings expressed about the opportunity to be in the US.

Disappointment/Surprise: The women mentioned knowing very little about the US prior to coming and some of what was told to them before hand turned out to be wrong in their opinion. The things that disappointed and surprised them varied but a number mentioned either feeling surprised at how nice and helpful certain Americans were or how unkind/hostile other Americans were.

Opportunity: The women felt that one of the main advantages to being in the US was the opportunities they have here that they did not have in Africa. The two main opportunities are working and education. They were pleasantly surprised that a woman could find a job even without much education and they were glad for the chance to learn some new things. They were especially glad for the opportunity for their children to go to school for free. Some of the younger women also mentioned aspirations for themselves to go to school but felt this was limited by their need to work and take care of their children.

Power/Control: Power was discussed in terms of their ability to make things happen for themselves, as opposed to relying on someone else. God is viewed as powerful in terms of being able to provide things they need. Professionals and volunteers associated with systems (DSS, refugee resettlement) are seen as having control over withholding or granting access to resources. Some of the women talked about women being more powerful in the US and not having to depend on men. For some of the women there seemed to be a sense of powerlessness in terms of being at the mercy of others or the limits of certain systems to accomplish their goals.

Bureaucracy: The women discussed a number of systems they were trying to navigate in their new culture. These systems included the immigration system which they were trying to use to get family members brought to the US, the social services system which could provide food stamps, income, Medicaid, day care vouchers, subsidized housing, the education system which would provide the means for their children to be successful in the US, their employment system in which they were trying to get jobs, stay employed and take advantage of any benefits. They were both thankful for the systems, most of which they did not have in Africa, and also frustrated with the systems which often did not seem user-friendly and were difficult to use as tools to accomplish their goals.

Progress: There was a desire for their lives to continue to improve in terms of their financial stability, access to resources and peace of mind. There was also a desire for their children to take advantage of all the opportunities they viewed as present in the US and make better lives for themselves.

Aftermath of pre-migration experiences: There were both tangible and emotional consequences of what the women had experienced prior to coming to the US. Some of the women had to leave children behind because they could not be located prior to their immigration. There were medical problems and injuries as a result of the war and poor medical care in the refugee camps. Their educations and the education of their children was interrupted. For the younger women, they transitioned from teenagers to adults while living in refugee camps. This meant they were less likely to follow a more traditional path of marriage and children partly due to separation from parents or family who would have coordinated a marriage. The women also have traumatic memories of family members being killed in front of them. One of the women mentioned being beaten herself at the beginning of the war and it is suspected other women probably also sustained attacks at some point in their flight and time in the camps.