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Refugee and Immigrant Services

Refugee and Immigrant Services:

An Investigation of Social Service Organization's Mission and Intercultural Interactions

By

Bethany J. Wenell

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

In

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Mankato, Minnesota

May 2012

Refugee and Immigrant Services:
An Investigation of Social Service Organization's Mission and Intercultural Interactions

Bethany J. Wenell

This thesis paper has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis committee.

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Abstract

Wenell, B. J., M.A. Department of Communications, College of Arts and Humanities, Minnesota State University, Mankato. May 2012, Refugee and Immigrant Services: An Investigation of Social Service Organization's Mission and Intercultural Interactions. Thesis Advisor: Dr. Deepa Oommen.

While previous research has looked at the impact of acculturation processes from immigrants and refugee's point of view, little research has focused on the functionality of the organizations devoted to assisting them. The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the mission of social service organizations and how organizational members interact with immigrants and refugees experiencing the acculturation process. Eleven members of a social service organization from a Midwest City were interviewed and a grounded theory approach was applied to identify themes pertaining to member's perceived mission of the organization and the way organizational members interact and relate to immigrants and refugees. Results showed perceptions of the mission differed depending on organizational position and influenced interactions with immigrants and refugees. Implications for a more holistic perception of organizational mission's are proposed.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	I
Acknowledgments	II
Table of Contents	III
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Problem Statement.....	1
<i>Contribution to existing research</i>	4
Précis of Chapters.....	5
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature	7
Social Service Organizations.....	7
<i>Types of social service agencies</i>	7
Organizational Mission Statements.....	9
<i>Mission statement ambiguity</i>	9
Communication Acculturation Theory.....	10
Acculturation Strategies.....	14
<i>Assimilation</i>	14
<i>Separation</i>	15
<i>Marginalization</i>	16
<i>Integration</i>	16
<i>Acculturation strategy preferences</i>	17
Acculturation stress.....	18
Adaptation.....	19
Conclusion.....	20
<i>Research Questions</i>	21
Chapter 3: Methodology	23
Participants.....	23
Organization Initiatives.....	23

Procedure	25
Method of Analysis.....	26
<i>Grounded Theory</i>	26
<i>Coding</i>	27
Chapter 4: Findings	29
Research Question One.....	29
Research Question Two.....	38
Chapter 5: Discussion	47
Implications.....	47
Limitations.....	52
Directions for Future Research.....	53
Conclusion.....	55
References	56
List of Appendices	
Appendix A: Interview Consent Form.....	62
Appendix B: Institutional Review Board Approval.....	64
Appendix C: Interview Script.....	65

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

A growing percentage of the United States population consists of foreign-born individuals who have migrated to America for a variety of different reasons. In 2009 alone, nearly 1,131,000 immigrants were given legal residency within the US with roughly 463,000 of those being new arrivals (Monger, 2010). These numbers, however, do not include the 74,602 persons who were admitted as refugees (Martin, 2010). As immigrants and refugees enter into their new life within the American borders, they are often faced with a number of challenges while trying to navigate through the many cultural differences they face.

Various social service and community organizations throughout the United States have dedicated themselves to assisting immigrants and refugees through the complex process of acculturating into American culture. Services they provide include but are not limited to helping them apply for immigrant status, assisting them with housing, job search support, help filling out health care applications, as well as cash assistance. While different organizations offer different services, one thing they have in common is their passion and desire to assist refugees and immigrants as they maneuver the many challenges that living in a new culture can present. This desire is often emphasized within the organization's mission statement.

According to Bryson (1988) an organization's mission statement provides social justification for why it exists. Social service organizations (non-profit organizations) are aware of how important formulating a well-defined mission statement is considering the

impact mission statements may have on the success of their organization. A common strategy used when developing mission statements is to maintain a degree of ambiguity in order to accomplish organizational goals (Blair-Loy, Wharton, & Goodstein, 2011).

Therefore, it seems appropriate to question how various social service organizations and their members perceive their mission and the ways that perception manifests within their organization's practices. Does the strategic ambiguity of mission statements affect the way organizational members attempt to interact with refugees and immigrants as they assist them with acculturation?

Acculturation, according to the classical definition, "comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). There are a number of different acculturation processes (i.e. strategies) that have been known to manifest within social service organizations. A mistake made in some societies, and between some researchers, is unintentionally overlooking the importance of making clear distinctions between various acculturation strategies (Berry, 2005). For example, two acculturation strategies include integration and assimilation. These two concepts are often used interchangeably, when in reality they hold two completely different meanings. Failing to understand the difference between acculturation strategies could lead individuals to assume they are supporting one cultural strategy when in reality, they are practicing another.

Traditionally, cultural assimilation has meant "shedding one's cultural identity and blending into that of an American" (Urban & Orbe, 2010). In other words,

immigrants and refugees involved in the assimilation process no longer wish to maintain their original cultural identity but rather, begin to be absorbed into the dominant culture (Berry, 2005; Maloof, Rubin & Miller, 2006). Integration, on the other hand, is when individuals show interest in both maintaining their original culture while interacting with the host culture (Berry, 2005). Integration allows immigrants and refugees to maintain “some degree of cultural integrity... while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network” (Berry, 1997, p. 9). Other acculturation strategies include marginalization (showing little interest in maintaining one’s original culture or having relations with others) and separation (maintaining one’s original culture while avoiding interactions with others) (Berry, 2005). Due to the different implications each strategy has on the acculturating individual, it is imperative those serving them understand the distinction between each acculturation strategy.

A concern that arises is whether the ambiguity of service organizations’ mission statements influences organizational members to promote differing acculturation strategies when they interact with refugees and immigrants. A number of existing studies have addressed that host culture populations tend to express a preference for assimilation strategies (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Maisonneuve & Teste, 2007) believing it “most positively [facilitates] immigrants’ adjustment” (Kosic, Mannetti, & Sam, 2005, p. 283). Because organizational members often interpret the mission of the organization differently, it is possible some members may unintentionally express a desire for assimilation in an attempt to meet societal expectations. If immigrants and refugees desire integration and want to maintain aspects of their original cultural identity but are, in fact, faced with conflicting acculturation strategies (e.g.

assimilation, separation, marginalization, est.) promoted by the organizations they depend on, problems could result.

According to Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., (2003) when discrepancies between the preferred acculturation strategy of the host culture and the minority group differ, “intergroup relations may take the form of intergroup discrimination, mostly directed towards minority group members, and lowered psychological well-being” (p.81). Furthermore, Berry (2005) states that inconsistencies in the acculturative preferences held by the host culture and those desired by immigrants and refugees are likely to result in acculturative stress. Hence, it is necessary to examine the operations of social services organizations, as they are one of immigrants and refugees first points of contact when beginning the stages of acculturation. Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to investigate the functionality of these organizations by investigating the perception organizational members have regarding the mission of their organization and the way that impacts their interactions with refugees and immigrants.

Contribution to existing research. While previous researchers have looked at the impact of acculturation processes from the perspective of immigrants and refugees (Berry, 1997; Urban & Orbe, 2010), little research has been done focusing primarily on the organizations devoted to assisting them. Therefore, this research study will add to previous research by providing insight into the mission of social service organizations and ways they aim to assist immigrants and refugees through the acculturation process. Furthermore, this study will attempt to shed light on the way an organization’s mission statement may shape organizational member’s interactions with those they serve.

Précis of Chapters

Chapter one identifies the research study's general topic and provides a context for the review of the literature. Trends running throughout previous research are indicated, establishing the problem statement and rationale for why the research study's topic is important to investigate. Furthermore, the first chapter sheds light on gaps existing within the scholarship and suggests ways this research study will aid in filling those holes.

Chapter two addresses previous literature surrounding the topics of acculturation and social service organizations. By using existing research and knowledge, this section aims to formulate an argument, which leads up to the study's overall research questions. The topics that are covered in the literature review include a) social service organizations, b) organizational mission statements, c) communication acculturation theory, d) acculturation strategies, e) acculturation stress, and f) adaptation.

The third chapter of the study provides a detailed description of the methodological approach taken to collect and analyze data. The study's participants, procedure, and method of analysis will all be addressed in order to provide a clear map of how the study was conducted. Also, this chapter provides an explanation of how the raw data was compiled and analyzed in order to develop the results obtained.

Chapter four narrates the study's findings by providing interpretation of the codes and categories developed from applying the grounded theory. Codes and categories are explained using examples from the data in order to answer the study's research questions.

The final chapter, chapter five, provides an explanation of the links and correlations that are apparent in the results. It is in this chapter the researcher will draw

conclusions about the study's findings and offer ways the results can be applied.

Connections will be portrayed between the study's findings and those presented in previous literature. Chapter five will also address limitations apparent in how the study was conducted as well as suggest areas of future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This study will be researching the functionality of social service organizations by investigating individual perceptions of the mission of the organization and how those perceptions influence their interactions with refugees and immigrants. It is important to examine previous literature in order to develop a proper viewpoint in which to approach these topics. The following section will address: a) social service organizations, b) organizational mission statements, c) communication acculturation theory, d) acculturation strategies, e) acculturation stress, and f) adaptation.

Social Service Organizations

Social service organizations serve immigrants and refugees from a variety of different countries and cultures. Organizations in Minnesota alone provide assistance for individuals from over 30 different countries with the largest populations consisting of Hmong, Vietnamese, Somali, and Laotian (The Facts: Immigration in Minnesota, 2006). Over the years, as the population of immigrants and refugees continued to expand throughout the country, the need for organizations designed specifically to assist them in their transition process also increased. Therefore, various social service organizations were developed in order to support immigrants and refugees as they begin the process of adjusting to America for the first time.

Types of social service agencies. As immigrants and refugees enter America, one of their first contacts is often a non-governmental, social service organization (Nawyn, 2010). Most refugee-affiliated organizations are non-profit based and supported through federal grants and community donations. However, a number of different types of service

organizations exist. Two examples include: voluntary agencies (Newyn, 2010; Oster, 1995) and mutual assistance associations (Rutledge, 1992).

Voluntary agencies (Volags) are social service agencies specializing in refugee resettlement (Newyn, 2010). These agencies are responsible for providing new arrivals with sponsorship and initial resettlement services such as cultural orientation, employment training, limited financial assistance, and more (Fact Sheet, 2010). Currently, eleven voluntary agencies exist in the United States. Six are religiously affiliated and five classify themselves as non-sectarian— not affiliated with or limited to a specific religious denomination (Wright, 1981). These are national organizations with programs funded primarily through the federal government. According to Wright (1981), “each has its own method of resettlement and represents a different constituency. However, they share the basic goal of helping all refugees, regardless of ethnic and religious background, to achieve self-sufficiency in American society as quickly as possible” (p. 158).

Mutual assistance associations (MAA) are traditionally ethnic organizations that serve a specific immigrant group (Newyn, 2010, Oster, 1995). According to Oster, (1995), “these nonprofit ethnic associations were set up with encouragement from the government to help refugees work together as a community.” MAAs tend to be highly successful considering new arriving immigrants and refugees prefer seeking out assistance from other refugees/immigrants who have the capacity and resources to assist them (Rutledge, 1992). However, not all mutual assistance associations make it their mission to serve refugees (Newyn, 2010). Some focus their attention on providing a broader range of services to immigrants within their community. Such services include

but are not limited to: job development, language training, transportation services, and referral services (Oster, 1995).

Organizational Mission Statements

One of the first steps taken when developing a not-for-profit organization is developing the mission statement they will operate under (Drucker, 1992). A mission statement must be operational while encompassing the purpose and intentions of the organization. This one, simple statement aims to answer the questions: “why do we exist, what is our real purpose and what are we trying to accomplish?” (Blair-Loy, Wharton, & Goodstein, 2011, p.429). A well-constructed mission statement has the potential to significantly enhance an organization’s chance for achieving its objectives, directing and focusing employees and volunteers, as well as inspiring high levels of performance.

Mission statement ambiguity. While the purpose of a mission statement is to establish an organization’s mission and goals, often the statement is strategically structured in an ambiguous way. Mission ambiguity refers to the interpretive freedom organizational members are allowed when “comprehending, explaining, and communicating the organizational mission” (Chun & Rainey, 2005, p. 532). According to Eisenberg (1984), “it is often preferable to omit purposefully contextual cues and allow for multiple interpretations on the part of receiver” (p. 7). Therefore, members within the organization may develop multiple interpretations of the same statement (Eisenberg, 1984). While organizations appear to promote unified diversity by influencing members to believe they agree on what it means to fulfill the organization’s mission, individual interpretations of that mission may vary (Eisenberg, 1984). Members then choose communication strategies they feel accomplishes their individual interpretation of the

ambiguous mission statement they are operating under and enact them on those they interact with. In other words, individual perceptions of the organizational mission statement impacts the way organizational members interact with those they serve.

Although ambiguous communication has been known to increase members' creativity and flexibility, it seems reasonable to question whether such strategies should be used by social service organizations working with immigrants and refugees. Upon arriving to the United States, immigrants and refugees begin the process of adapting to their new surroundings. Inconsistent interpretations of an organization's mission by organization members could prove to be problematic when assisting immigrants and refugees through the acculturation process.

Communication Acculturation Theory

When immigrants and refugees enter America, they are faced with the challenge of adjusting to an entirely new culture. Researchers argue that the study of acculturation aims to understand the phenomena that take place when different culture groups come into contact with one another, resulting in changes within the cultural and psychological patterns of either or both groups (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005). Acculturation has also been defined as "the process by which individuals acquire some (but not all) aspects of the host culture" (Kim, 2002, p.260). According to Berry (2005), "at the group level, [acculturation] involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices" while at the individual level, changes to individual behaviors are involved (Berry, 2005, p. 698-699).

Young Yun Kim developed the communication acculturation theory out of the necessity for formalized communication theories relating to immigrant and refugee

adaptation (Kim, 2001). The theory consists of three assumptions stemming from the open-systems theory, 10 axioms, and 21 theorems (Gudykunst, 2002). Kim (1995) aims to portray “cross-cultural adaptation as a collaborative effort, in which a stranger and the receiving environment are engaged in a joint effort” (p. 192).

According to Kim (2001), “given the focus on individual strangers and the broad domain of cross-cultural adaptation, the present theory is predicted on three basic assumptions” (p. 35). These assumptions argue: 1) humans have an innate self-organizing drive and capacity to adapt to changes in the environment, 2) individual adaptation to a given culture occurs in and through communication, and 3) adaptation is complex and dynamic process which qualitatively transforms individuals.

Communication is described as a primary aspect of facilitating stages of transition from one culture to the next. The ability to communicate serves “as an instrumental, interpretive, and expressive means of coming to terms with our environment” (Kim, 2001, p. 47). In other words, communication provides the means for gaining insight into one’s new environment (Kim, 1977).

One communication channel, individuals use to increase their understanding of a new culture is interpersonal communication. Harvey (2007) suggests interpersonal communication and interactions with members of the host culture “is used to learn host cultural practices, engage in corrective exchanges, confirm or reject presumed meanings on communication behavior of natives, and provide emotional support” (pp. 7-8). Implied within the acculturation theory is the assumption that interpersonal communication with individuals from the host culture will increase one’s level of acculturation.

As the third assumption suggests, adaptation is a continuous give-and-take involving both internal (intrapersonal) and external (social) factors (Kim, 2001). Additionally, the adaptation process is multifaceted, “in that various parts of the individual’s internal system and the environment are engaged simultaneously and interactively, mutually influencing one another” (Kim, 2001, p. 37). The complex nature of adaptation causes individuals to continually try to make sense of and organize the internal and external factors influencing their adaptation process. Kim (2001) argues that adaptation is an ongoing process allowing individuals to continually “grow”, “adapt,” and “mature” within the framework of their new culture.

With the previous assumptions acting as a framework, a number of axioms relating to cross-cultural adaptation were determined (Kim, 2001). In Kim’s (2001) words, “these axioms are generalizable statements that identify patterns of interaction between constructs” (p. 42). Broad principles of cross-cultural adaptation were expressed within the first five axioms (Gudykunst, 2002). Outlined by Gudykunst (2001), the axioms state:

A1) Acculturation and deculturation are part of the cross-cultural adaptation process, A2) the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic underlies the adaptation process, A3) intercultural transformations are a function of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, A4) the severity of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic decreases as strangers go through intercultural transformations, and A5) functional fitness and psychological health results from intercultural transformations. (p. 197)

Expressed within the theory's axioms is the claim that immigrants and refugees go through a cycle of stress and adaptation that ultimately results in intercultural transformation (Harvey, 2007). Intercultural transformation is defined in terms of one's "increased functional fitness in carrying out daily transactions, improved psychological health in dealing with the environment, and a movement from the original cultural identity to a broader, 'intercultural' identity" (Kim, 2001, p.61). This transformation process is identified as the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. The model places adaptation, stress, and growth over time on a three-pronged continuum depicting the way individuals experience acculturation. Harvey (2007) explains the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic further stating, "the inability to communicate competently results in stress which increases the motivation to adapt, this is followed by growth and further experimentation leading to more stress and the cycle repeats itself" (p.4). As the figure suggests, "large and sudden adaptive changes are most likely to occur during the initial phase of exposure to a new culture" (Kim, 2001, p. 59). However, the fluctuation of stress and adaptation are likely to decrease as time passes resulting in an overall "calming" effect among individuals' internal conditions (Kim, 2001).

The communication acculturation theory argues that researchers should not focus their attention on whether or not immigrants and refugees adapt, but rather on the how they adapt (Kim, 2001). Adaptation is considered an inevitable process that takes place when entering a new culture. Therefore, in order to further understand the way immigrants and refugees adapt, it is vital to take a look at various acculturation strategies they may employ when first encountering their new environment.

Acculturation Strategies

While acculturation aims to be an inclusive term (meaning changes could take place in either or both groups), “in practice acculturation tends to induce more change in one of the groups than the other” (Berry, 1997, p. 7). However, it is important to note that not all individuals aim to engage in the acculturation process the same way. These differing acculturation preferences have been termed acculturation strategies (Berry, 1980) and consist of two main components: “attitudes (an individual’s preference about how to acculturate), and behaviors (a person’s actual activities) that are exhibited in day-to-day intercultural encounters” (Berry 2005, p. 704). Individuals are classified along a spectrum of four acculturation strategies depending on the positive or negative orientation they have to the attitude and behavior components (Berry, 2005). These acculturation strategies include: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration.

Assimilation. When individuals decide they no longer want to maintain their original cultural identity and rather seek identification with their host culture, they are said to be displaying an assimilation attitude. Traditionally, cultural assimilation has called for “shedding one’s cultural identity and blending into that of an American” (Urban & Orbe, 2010). Individuals seeking to assimilate often seek daily interactions with the host culture and assume the majority culture’s behaviors, values, beliefs, and language as your own while simultaneously discarding those of their original culture (Dow, 2011).

One of the most widely discussed topics within acculturation is socio-economic assimilation (Walters, Phythian, Anisef, 2007). Immigrant and refugee socio-economical assimilation refers to their achievement of occupational, educational and income success

to the same degree as those within the native majority. When immigrants and refugees enter America, it is common they have little to no educational background or financial support. Therefore, as they try to enter into the work force they receive a substantially lower wage than those from the majority culture. Being “cheap” and “alien” laborers causes more pressure for them to present an assimilated image in order to enhance their job prospects (Shi, 2008).

At times the disparities between immigrants’ and refugees’ cultural customs, values, and attitudes create limitations on their occupational opportunities. Often they begin to notice the ways their cultural differences are holding them back from complete economic participation causing them to socio-culturally assimilate (Walters, Phythian, Anisef, 2007). Socio-cultural assimilation refers to the acceptance of the host-culture’s values, beliefs, and attitudes. In other words, as individuals continually strive for economic achievements, they begin to forgo some of their previously held cultural beliefs (such as social norms or language) that may be holding them back. However, this is not the case for all immigrants and refugees. A number of foreign-born individuals believe that moving to a new country does not mean they have to surrender their old identities and assimilate into mainstream American culture (Urban & Orbe, 2010).

Separation. Individuals maintaining a high degree of emphasis on holding on to their home culture while simultaneously avoiding interactions with the host culture are displaying the strategy of separation (Berry, 2005; Berry 2008). When performing separation, “individuals turn their back on involvement with other cultural groups, and turn inward toward their heritage culture” (Berry, 2005, p.705). However, unless other

members of one's ethnic community desire to maintain one's original culture, separation cannot occur (Berry, 1997).

Marginalization. Marginalization is on the opposite side of the spectrum from separation. When little opportunity or interest in cultural maintenance exists, "often for reasons of enforced cultural loss," individuals are performing the marginalization strategy (Berry, 1997, p.9). In addition, those employing this acculturation strategy often have little interest in building relations with others (Berry, 1997). These feelings are often a result of exclusion from or discrimination within society. Rarely do individuals voluntarily choose marginalization— "rather they usually become marginalized as a result of attempts at forced assimilation... combined with forced exclusion" (Berry, 1997, p. 10). As a result, marginalization fosters the least amount of success in terms of positive adaptation into America.

Integration. Another acculturation strategy, commonly considered the most adequate, performed by both immigrants and refugees is the process of integration. When an individual desires to maintain aspects of their original culture while still interacting with the dominant group, integration is their strategy of choice (Berry, 2005). Integration allows a member to maintain a degree of cultural integrity while still becoming an integral part of the dominant society. The integration approach is considered the most acceptable strategy because it allows individuals to reach a synthesis between their original culture and that of their host culture (Bochner, 1982).

For some immigrants and refugees, becoming a U.S. American means accepting values and behaviors that may conflict with who they believe they are. At the same time, they recognize the opportunities present to those who were willing to learn aspects of

American culture (Urbana & Orde, 2010). It is at this point that integration takes place; when immigrants and refugees see the importance of interacting with the dominant group but still aim to maintain the majority of their identity with their culture of origin (Oudenhoven, Prins, and Buunk, 1998).

Acculturation strategy preferences. Researchers have argued that historically, the United States has preferred the assimilation model to other acculturation strategies (Bennett, 2011). According to Berry (2005), “integration can only be ‘freely’ chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity”(p. 705). In other words, mutual accommodation from both groups is necessary to attain cultural integration, “involving the acceptance by both groups of the right of all groups to live as culturally different peoples” (Berry, 2005, p, 706). If the dominant group is unwilling to modify national institutions (e.g., education, labor, and government) to accommodate immigrants and refugees, successful integration may not be achieved and assimilation strategies may be enforced.

Studies show assimilation strategies tend to be supported not only socially, but also politically by the ‘melting pot’ theory present in the United States (Moghaddam, Taylor, & Lalonde, 1987). With America expressing a partiality for assimilation, there is a chance members of social service organizations reflect this preference, perhaps unintentionally, in the way they interact and relate with refugees and immigrants. Therefore, it stands reason to question whether social service organization members are promoting acculturation strategies differing from those preferred by immigrants and refugees.

Because of the ambiguity reflected within organizational mission statements, it is possible that individual members are expressing inconsistent acculturation preferences. While organizational members may prefer the concept of integration, it is possible that members may advocate or encourage assimilation in order to support the perceived acculturation preference of American culture. These inconsistent acculturation preferences have been known to cause problems as immigrants and refugees attempt to adapt to their new surroundings (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987).

Acculturation Stress

As mentioned previously, when going through the acculturation process it is common for individuals to experience some degree of stress. Along with the previously mentioned stress-adaptation-growth model (Kim, 2001), a number of researchers have brought attention to acculturative stress (Berry, et al., 1987; Dow, 2011; Rhee, Chang, & Rhee, 2003). Acculturative stress refers to the type of stressors that result from the process of acculturation (Berry et al., 1987). Particular behavioral stressors are likely to occur during acculturative stress including: “lowered mental health status –specifically confusion, anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom level, and identity confusion” (Berry et al., 1987, p. 492). The degree to which acculturating individuals experience stress is dependent on a number of different variables. Factors influencing ones level of acculturative stress include the temperament of the host culture, the nature of acculturating group, as well as the mode of acculturation enforced.

The acculturation process becomes stressful due to immigrants and refugees difficulties with language preferences, separation from social networks familiar to them,

as well as the possibility of cultural inconsistencies (Rhee et al., 2003). According to Berry (2005), “there is a clear picture that the pursuit of integration is least stressful” for immigrants and refugees acculturating into America (p. 708). Researchers have also found that societies depicting more integration ideology are associated with higher levels of mental health (Dow, 2011). In contrast, societies with assimilation strategies have reported higher levels of acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987) including increased violence, substance abuse, and suicide (Dow, 2011).

The acculturation process is especially stressful during the initial stages of relocation (Dow, 2011). Immigrants and refugees often make use of social service organizations during this critical stage in their adaptation process. Therefore, the importance of maintaining consistent acculturation preferences when interacting with refugees and immigrants increases due to the impact they have on their mental health.

Adaptation

Adaptation refers to the “dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocation to an unfamiliar cultural environment, establish (or reestablish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2002, p. 260). The adaptation process almost always includes an aspect of compromise (Sohlins, 1964) and “is essentially a communication process that occurs as long as the individual remains in contact with the environment” (Kim, 2002, p. 260).

For acculturation to succeed, various forms of mutual accommodations must be made by both groups. This includes long-term psychological and socio-cultural adaptations (Berry, 2005). In order to understand cultural adaptation in reference to

acculturation, a clear distinction must be made between socio-cultural and psychological adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990).

Psychological adaptation refers to, “a set of internal psychological outcomes including a clear sense of personal and cultural identity, good mental health, and the achievement of personal satisfaction in the new cultural context” (Berry, 1997, p14). It is the individual’s overall physical well-being as they proceed through the acculturation process. Socio-cultural adaptation, on the other hand, refers to how well an individual is able to manage their daily routine in the new culture they are living in. For example, how they handle daily life’s challenges within family, school, and work. Socio-cultural adaptation is typically measured in terms of an individual’s level of success in cultural knowledge, the amount of contact they have with the host culture, as well as their intergroup attitude (Berry, 1997; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Both forms of cultural adaptation (psychological and socio-cultural) typically manifest through the successful pursuit of integration. The term integration is employed here as maintaining “some degree of cultural integrity... while at the same time seeking, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to participate as an integral part of the evolving larger social network” (Berry, 1997, p. 9). In other words, choosing to participate and interact with the host culture. Therefore, it can be assumed if social service organizations emphasize and strive for cultural integration for incoming immigrants and refugees, they can in turn improve their socio-cultural and psychological adaptation.

Conclusion

In summary, social service organizations were established with the intent to assist immigrants and refugees in adapting to their new life in America. An organization’s

mission statement is intended to provide organization members with an understanding of the social service organization's core values and goals. However, due to the ambiguous nature of mission statements, individuals commonly interpret their mission differently. A concern that arises is whether members of immigration and refugee service organizations emphasize differing acculturation strategies when interacting with refugees and immigrants due to their individual perceptions of the organization's mission. If immigrants and refugees prefer integration and maintaining aspects of their original cultural identity, but are in fact faced with other forms of acculturation (e.g. assimilation, separation, marginalization), it could lead to problems. For example, acculturative stress has been known to result from differences in acculturation preferences (Berry et al., 1987; Dow, 2011).

Research questions. In light of the impact acculturation can have on an individual's mental and physical health, we need to examine the functioning of organizations that provide support service to immigrants and refugees, considering the fact that they are often their first point of contact and primary support systems during the initial stages of adaptation. To examine the functions of these organizations, we need to look at what the members of the organizations perceived their mission to be as well as how those perceptions of the mission impact the way they interact with refugees and immigrants. Therefore, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: What do organizational members perceive the mission of the organization to be?

RQ2: How does the perception of the mission of the organization influence the way organization members relate to and interact with immigrants and refugees?

In sum, the acculturation processes for immigrants and refugees are situational and have serious implications for their success within a new country. Voluntary agencies have acknowledged themselves as organizations dedicated to helping immigrants and refugees adapt to their new cultural surroundings. As a result, this research study will investigate the perception voluntary agency members have of the mission of their organization and the way those perceptions impact their interactions with refugees and immigrants.

Chapter 3: Methodology

To answer the study's research questions, the qualitative method of grounded theory was applied. Grounded theory was chosen in order to capture the perception of the mission of social service organizations and how they interact with refugees and immigrants from their perspective. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), the grounded theory allows researchers to not only uncover relevant conditions "but also determine how the actors under investigation actively respond to those conditions, and to the consequences of their actions" (p.419).

Participants

The participants for this study included staff and volunteers at a social service organization from the Midwest region of the United States that make it their mission to assist immigrants and refugees. Eleven individuals who serve immigrants and refugees were interviewed. Of the total sample analyzed three were male and nine were female. The lengths of time participants have been working/volunteering for each organization ranged from 3 months to 36 years. Also, of the total sample analyzed, four individuals identified themselves as directors, five as staff, and two as volunteers.

Organization Initiatives

Many social service organizations are multi-faceted, having several different initiatives in motion at the same time. During the interview process participants were asked what the organization does to help immigrants and refugees (in terms of programs and services offered). The organization participating in this study is classified as a voluntary agency and based on participant responses, has two main initiatives. The first

consists of programs developed by and for the church. One organization member describes this portion of the organization stating, “we have some ministries that are based out of [the organization] that are church-based and the directors or coordinators of those ministries– their sole job is to train and network on behalf of the church within the refugee community.” It is apparent within the previous statement that the main focus of this initiative is to help churches and volunteers interact and connect with refugees and immigrants in order to provide assistance during their adaptation process.

Because the organization is a voluntary agency they are responsible for providing certain government-regulated services to new arriving refugees and immigrants (Newyn, 2010). Therefore, the second initiative focuses on providing direct services to new arriving refugees such as those required by the state (e.g. resettlement, housing, employment services, etc.). When asked what programs the organization has for assisting refugees and immigrants, participants explained a number of governmental programs offered. They include: immigrations services, employment services, refugee cash assistance, and housing assistance. The organization’s staff is responsible for providing these government-funded services to refugee and immigrant communities. Additionally, members discussed how connecting refugees and immigrants to ongoing resources is an important aspect of their services:

We also are responsible for linking them to ongoing services in– most often what we try to do is an ethnic-based social service agency. So an agency that speaks their language and can kind of help them beyond. And most of those agencies are mandated here.

The previous statements outline how the main emphasis of this organizational initiative is to provide direct assistance to immigrants and refugees by meeting individual needs and connecting them to valuable resources.

Procedure

Upon receiving ethical approval (IRB approval), participants were recruited using an electronic recruitment letter. The recruitment letter briefly outlined the purpose of the research study. The executive of the organization was provided a copy of the recruitment letter in which they then forwarded to the organization's employees, volunteers, and board members. Individuals interested in participating in the research study responded to the recruitment letter to set up a time to conduct a face-to-face interview.

Participants who agreed to participate in the face-to-face interviews were asked to meet in a private office or conference room of their choice. Interviews ranged in length from 15- 60 minutes with a mean length of 31.43 minutes. Before conducting interviews, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and that their identity would be concealed. Participants were allowed to refuse to answer any question and withdraw their participation at any time. In order to ensure proper analysis, each interview was audio recorded and the researcher, using SlowMP3 Software, transcribed 90 pages of text verbatim.

While the interview script remained primarily open, a number of standard questions were asked in order to keep a level of consistency throughout each discussion. The semi-structured interview guide focused on topics including: the organization's mission statement, their opinion on the ways they influence the acculturation processes, as well as their approach to how immigrants and refugees can successfully survive within American

culture (See Appendix C). According to Reinard (2008), conducting unstructured/ semi-structured interviews allows participants to react to general issues without feeling guided by detailed questioning. For example, one question that was asked focused on the mission of the organization. Another question asked participants to express their perspective on how immigrants and refugees can successfully survive within American culture. The interview format used helped ensure certain questions and topics were addressed to maintain a degree of consistency; however, participants were also able to expand on ideas and topics they felt relevant to the discussion.

Method of Analysis

Qualitative methods of analysis tend to try to understand human conditions by using general views of social action (Reinard, 2008). Researchers using this approach try to interpret the meaning of various communication exchanges. For the purpose of this study, grounded theory methodology was used. This method allows the researcher to remain objective and allow the themes and construct to develop out of the interview and analysis process.

Grounded theory. The Grounded Theory Method is an inductive and comparative approach of analysis aiming to construct meaningful theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). Researchers performing this method are constantly interacting with the interview data and subsequent themes that emerge. According to Bryant and Charmaz (2010), "data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously and each informs and streamlines the other" (p.1). The popularity of this method stretches across multiple disciplines and is currently the most widely used of all qualitative research methods

(Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). This provides the method a sense of credibility in terms of its capability to analyze research data effectively and develop meaningful results.

Coding. In accordance with the grounded theory, the transcribed data was analyzed using a line-by-line open coding method. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), “the purpose of open coding is to help the analyst gain new insight into the data by breaking through standard ways of thinking about (interpreting) phenomena reflected in the data” (p. 423). In order to answer the study’s research questions, coding was done in two stages.

Initially a constant comparative method of coding was used in order to establish categories. Complete thoughts and ideas among the participants from the organization were coded pertaining to the perceived mission of the organization and the way organizational members interact and relate to immigrants and refugees. Conceptually similar ideas/interactions/statements were grouped together in order to form thematic categories. For the purpose of this study, thematic categories are referred to as themes. The emergent themes relating to members’ perception of the mission of the organization were used to answer the first research question.

The themes were then used to create a framework for conducting cross-analysis between coding data pertaining to each research question. Themes regarding the perceived mission of the organization were cross-analyzed against themes pertaining to how members interact with refugees and immigrants. Particular focus was placed on the themes emphasized by individual members of the organization in each category. For example, the theme that member A emphasized in terms of their perception of the mission of the organization was compared to the themes emphasized regarding member

A's interactions with refugees and immigrants. Each organizational member was compared in the same fashion. Patterns were identified in order to answer whether the perception of the organizational mission influences the way members interact and relate to refugees/immigrants.

Findings

The purpose of the study was to investigate the way the perceived mission of social service organizations impacts how organizational members interact with refugees and immigrants. The research questions for the study include:

RQ1: What do organizational members perceive the mission of the organization to be?

RQ2: How does the perception of the mission of the organization influence the way organization members relate to and interact with immigrants and refugees?

Research Question One

The first research question asks: What do organizational members perceive the mission of the organization to be? The findings of the study reveal Organizational members perceives the following to be the mission of the organization: helping the church connect with and serve refugees/immigrants, helping refugees/immigrants build relationships and contribute within the community, providing direct services to refugees/immigrants, and empowering refugees/immigrants to be self-sufficient.

Helping the church connect with and serve refugees/immigrants. This theme emphasizes the importance of helping prepare the church and volunteers to serve refugees and immigrants. The following quotes highlights this theme. According to a director within the organization:

First and foremost, we exist to empower the church to transform the lives of the vulnerable, particularly the refugees. We really want to see the church and

Christians coming alongside and we provide some social service types of things, and really the key focus is engaging and empowering the church.

This statement emphasizes the level of importance the organization places on helping the church connect with refugees and immigrants. Furthermore, it shows how the organization sees their existence as a way to empower the institution of the church to understand the organization's mission and serve the most vulnerable. A staff member of the organization stated:

At a headquarters level, [the organization's] mission and goal is to empower the church to serve the most vulnerable – but I think that the way that fleshes out for our staff and our programs is partnering with churches and volunteers in the community to help to integrate new refugee families into the cities and the neighborhood and teach them the things they need to know in order to thrive in [a Midwest state].

Another director in the organization said:

We want to give them the knowledge of what is the cause of refugees, so we want them – to inform them of that cause, and then, one of the main focuses of my position is to be a support system for our volunteers, because it's a very daunting thing to work with someone from a different culture and so I'm there just to give them resources, to support them in any way that I can, whether it's about cultural questions or about questions like 'how do I take a family to apply for social security cards?' ... just try to be a support and encourager, that's a huge thing.

In summary, statements made by directors and staff members of the organization highlight the way the organization aims to help churches and volunteers connect with and

serve the most vulnerable. The previous statements convey a message of partnership. The focus of this theme is equipping others to meet the needs immigrants and refugees have when first entering into America. Rather than trying to assist refugees and immigrants primarily on their own, the organization finds value in building partnerships with the church and volunteers to help refugees and immigrants with the acculturation process.

Providing direct services to refugees/immigrants. Unlike the previous theme, this theme focuses on providing direct services to refugees and immigrants. Those expressing this theme perceived the mission of the organization to be serving the most vulnerable through personal interactions rather than as facilitating other people's interactions. One staff member expressed:

I think that [the organization], in my own words, empowers the church but also, within my department we don't really have a lot of church engagement because you have to be licensed to do immigration legal services. So I think that it is providing competent and professional service to low income immigrants and refugees and asylees.

While the organization has a number of programs that can work directly with the church, others are government funded. Such programs include employment services, immigration services, case management, and housing services. A staff member from one of these departments expresses her perception of the mission stating:

I probably have a different position because I'm through IRP [Immigrants' Rights Project], which is more Government specific; but really living out the life of Christ through welcoming the stranger and working to just improve the lives of individuals and being a support system for them within the first three months.

Similarly, a volunteer for the organization stated:

I think, in my own words, the mission of [the Organization] would be to practice hospitality in our community by reaching out to those who need the most help—being integrated into that community... it's really about people who have a really open and welcoming heart—using that gift to reach out to those who need it the most.

One way that organizational members provide service to refugees and immigrants is by directly connecting them with resources in the community that will meet their individual needs. Both staff and volunteers of the organization highlighted this stating, “I feel like the big thing that we do is utilize community resources to empower refugees.” A similar statement expressed, “Connecting them to different resources in the community. Making sure...they start to understand various different cultural issues in the United States versus their home country.”

While one perceived mission of the organization is to empower others to serve refugees, another is to directly work with immigrants and refugees to help meet their needs. The previous quotes highlight how the organization aims to directly assist immigrants and refugees by being a direct resource to them and discusses how reaching out directly could help with the adaptation process. As the previous statements suggest, using the gifts organizational members have been given to provide “competent and professional services” and directly connecting those in need to community resources will help fulfill this mission.

Helping refugees/immigrants build relationships and contribute within the community. Another theme expressed by organizational members is the importance of

helping refugees and immigrants build relationships and contribute within the community. This theme emphasizes the importance of building relationships, not only with their own ethnic community, but with a more diverse population, as well. A staff member expresses this perspective stating:

And so that happens economically, helping to get them connected to public assistance programs and jobs, and we envision that it also happens spiritually and mutually between volunteers and families.... And one thing that we don't often see but we envision happening is refugees finding meaningful connections, not just within their own ethnic communities, but also within the larger American culture and other families within their neighborhoods that may not be of the same ethnicity.

The previous statement points out the organization's desire to have refugees and immigrants build meaningful connections within the community. While relationships often develop naturally within an individual's own ethnic groups, these statements imply organization members want refugees to go beyond their own ethnic communities and build cross-cultural relationships.

Organizational members also expressed a desire for refugees and immigrants to contribute to the community they are building relations with. When asked what one staff member meant by helping refugees integrate, their response was, "By 'integrate', I mean helping refugee families feel like they belong in their neighborhoods. They both are benefiting from services but they also have things to contribute." This statement implies organizational members see refugees as contributing assets in the community rather than merely individuals benefiting from services.

A volunteer describes how the integration of refugees and immigrants is strengthened through engagement and leadership in the community and the ability to express themselves and their stories in a way they may have been unable to before:

When I see Somalis campaigning for local government or a local government leader or having a community meeting and discussing things, or you know, when I see Hmong artists with exhibits telling their story. To me that's another side of integration because they're expressing themselves in ways that they didn't have the opportunity to in those suppressive situations they came from.

In summary, some organizational members perceive the mission of the organization to be helping refugees build cross-cultural relationships within the community. These meaningful connections in turn may allow refugees and immigrants to become contributing assets within the community.

Empowering refugees/immigrants to be self-sufficient. The final theme, concerning organizational members' perceived mission of the organization, is to empower refugees and immigrants to be self-sufficient. Volunteers of the organization expressed this theme stating, "Well, the mission of [the organization] is to assist new immigrants and refugees to become self-sufficient– to welcome new arrivals." This statement clearly speaks to the perception that helping them obtain self-sufficiency is a perceived mission of the organization. Another volunteer supported this mission when they said, "You know, they are incredibly strong but they just need someone to show them what they need to do. So that's what I think we do here, in many different ways." It is indirectly implied through this statement that, if given proper direction, refugees and immigrants are capable of supporting themselves.

The same individual goes on to discuss the process immigrants and refugees go through to obtain self-sufficiency: “So, there is finding work, going to school, getting to a position where you’re able to take care of yourself and build up the community.” The focus of this theme is empowering refugees to support and assist themselves so they can survive in this new environment long-term.

Organizational position’s influence on perceived mission. To summarize, the results of the study revealed that organizational members perceive the mission of the organization to include: helping the church connect with and serve refugees/immigrants, helping refugees/immigrants build relationships and contribute within the community, providing direct services to refugees/immigrants, and empowering refugees/immigrants to be self-sufficient. While each of these themes appeared within the interview data, a clear pattern emerged when analyzing the way directors perceived the mission of the organization versus the perceptions of organizational staff and volunteers.

Individual members of the organization placed varying degrees of emphasis on the mission themes depending on the organizational position they held. As previously outlined, the organization is multi-faceted and consists of two main initiatives. Some organization members were classified as “directors.” These positions consist of ministry coordinators and leaders within the organization. Other participants were classified as staff and volunteers and held more service-oriented positions such as cash assistance, employment counselor, or immigration counselor.

The findings indicate directors and staff/volunteers perceive the mission of the organization differently. The pattern that emerged indicates that directors tend to place primary emphasis on a single mission theme, helping the church connect with and serve

refugees/immigrants, while staff and volunteers express multiple mission themes. Furthermore, the mission themes appear to relate to the initiatives or programs within the organization. Apparent within the theme expressed by the directors is a focus on the organizational initiative that aims to help churches and volunteers interact and connect with refugees and immigrants.

On the other hand, staff and volunteers expressed various mission themes including: providing direct services to refugees, helping refugees build relationships in the community, as well as helping churches connect with and serve refugees. Apparent within these expressed themes are aspects of both of the organization's initiatives, helping connect the church as well as providing direct services to immigrants and refugees. Therefore findings show that staff and volunteers' perception of the organization's mission takes into account both the organization's initiatives while the directors' perceptions emphasize only one.

This indicates that directors hold a more unitary perception of the mission of the organization while staff and volunteers tend towards a more holistic perception. Through the remainder of this study, "unitary mission" is defined as placing emphasis on a single mission theme and taking into account only one organizational initiative. For example, those holding a "unitary mission" within this particular organization tended to have a more faith based undertone to their perception of the mission of the organization. In other words, the mission of the organization was primarily expressed within the context of the church. On the other hand, having a "holistic mission" is classified as placing importance on a variety of different mission themes that emerged from the data and in turn, recognizing multiple organizational initiatives.

Nine of the eleven participants identified helping churches connect with and serve refugees as an aspect of their organization's mission. However, the degree to which this theme was emphasized varied between directors of the organization, staff members, and organization volunteers. When expressing their perception of the mission of the organization, all individuals within director positions had a unitary understanding of the mission of the organization to be helping churches connect with and serve refugees. This was expressed through statements such as, "First and foremost, we exist to empower the church to transform the lives of the vulnerable, particularly the refugees."

Staff and volunteers of the organization portrayed a more holistic perception. While a significant number of staff members and volunteers identified helping the church connect and serve refugees as an aspect of the mission, they also stressed other mission themes. As previously quoted, one staff member stated, "At a headquarters level, [the organization's] mission and goal is to empower the church to serve the most vulnerable." This quote speaks directly to helping churches connect with and serve refugees. However, the same individual goes on to say:

And one thing that we don't often see but we envision happening is refugees finding meaningful connections, not just within their own ethnic communities, but also within the larger American culture and other families within their neighborhoods that may not be of the same ethnicity.

Rather than perceiving the mission of the organization to be merely helping the church connect with refugees, this staff member shows a more holistic perspective by also expressing a desire to help refugees build relationships within the community.

Another staff member highlights the way his or her position influences the perception they hold on the mission stating, “I think that [the organization], in my own words, empowers the church but also, within my department we don’t really have a lot of church engagement because you have to be licensed to do immigration legal services.” This individual recognizes the organizations desire to help the church serve refugees. At the same time due to his or her position within the organization, more emphasis is placed on providing refugees with direct services by stating, “So I think that it is providing competent and professional service to low income immigrants and refugees and asylees. Yeah, and just assisting them [through the] web of immigration in a way that is affordable for them.”

In summary, the perception individual members had of the organization’s mission varied depending on the organizational position they held. Directors within the organization seemed to have a more unitary perspective, focusing on the mission statement aspect of the organization’s initiatives. In contrast, staff and volunteers expressed a more holistic perception of the mission of the organization and took into account the multi-faceted nature of the organization’s initiatives.

Research Question Two

The second research question asks: how does the perception of the mission of the organization influence the way organization members relate to and interact with immigrants and refugees? In order to effectively answer this research question it is imperative to make connections based on whether they held a unitary or a holistic view of the mission, as well as the emphasis individuals placed on the themes that emerged regarding the mission of the organization. As previously outlined, a participant’s position

in the organization was directly correlated with whether they perceived the mission of the organization in a unitary or holistic way. The findings of this study show that a member's position in the organization also has a correlation with the way they relate to and interact with refugees and immigrants.

Directors within the organization had a unitary view of the mission of the organization. The theme they emphasized was helping the church connect with and serve refugees. When comparing the director's unitary perception of the mission of the organization with the way they relate and interact with immigrants and refugees, findings indicate that often they interact vicariously through the church and other staff members. In other words, they tend to use the church context as a way to stress Christian undertones when interact with refugees and immigrants. One director describes his or her perceived mission of the organization as:

[Empowering] the church to serve the vulnerable and disfranchised and particularly we focus, as the name suggests, more along the lines of refugees and immigrants in this community rather than other vulnerable which might be battered woman or incarcerates or something like that.

The way this perception of the mission translates into action is by serving refugees within the church context. This is depicted when answering how the mission of the organization impacts the way he or she interacts with refugees:

I generally try to [interact] within a church context. So I work with Somalis so I do that within the Somali fellowship context. I'm now working with a church with Bhutanese and I'm doing an Alpha course, so yeah I try to do things personally, on a personal level within the context of the church.

It is apparent when analyzing the previous statements that this individual's perceived mission (to help the church connect with and serve refugees) directly impacted the way he or she interacts and relates with refugees and immigrants (within the church context).

Similarly, when asked to describe the organization's mission in his or her own words another director stated:

I really believe the mission is to be, kind of, to empower the church to serve refugees as well as I see, kind of, the role and mission of my position and the people that work in resettlement and placement to be— kind of, being the hands and feet of Jesus in both word and deed.

This statement emphasizes the importance of empowering others to serve refugees and immigrants as well as suggests that the person's position influences the way he or she live out this mission. When asked how his or her perception of the mission influences the interactions he/she had with refugees and immigrants, partnering with the church to facilitate interactions was emphasized, stating:

The mission statement kind of causes us to have to draw on a broader— to really see the church as a partner in what we're doing in terms of our work. It helps make us strategically think about how [to] truly empower them to be involved and to be actively engaged with refugees.

Instead of focusing on the way the mission influences personal interactions, this individual discussed his or her relations with refugees in terms of helping equip the church. He or she goes on to state:

I supervise like five people and two interns and they do a lot more of the front line work than I do so I really need to be developing systems that work for them;

really getting staff to collaborate together so that the refugees are being met more effectively... So as much as I would like to say that I'm out there doing these wonderful things for refugees I'm doing it, often, vicariously through my staff.

The previous statement provides some context to why directors within the organization may focus more of their attention on equipping others to serve refugees. Given the nature of their position, they may have little direct contact with refugees and immigrants, which limits their interactions. However, when directors have an opportunity to interact directly with refugees and immigrants it seems that they have a tendency to stress faith based initiatives. For example, when discussing a direct interaction one director had with a refugee family he or she stated:

So we're really excited to meet with them... because we're going to talk to them about what they're learning, what they think about Christianity. So just being there for that family has been not only enriching for my life, but I think for them also. They're exploring this new faith.

A similar pattern of relating to immigrants and refugees manifested within the transcripts of the other directors. Therefore, the findings of the study suggest that directors may perceive their role and mission differently than those having direct interactions with refugees and immigrants on a regular basis. While some individuals discussed other ways of interacting with refugees (e.g. building direct relationships), there was significance in the emphasis placed on equipping the church and staff to serve refugees (indirect interactions) rather than on personal interactions. Furthermore, the directors who discussed direct interactions with refugees and immigrants seemed to stress faith based initiatives.

While directors discussed interacting with refugees indirectly through others, neither staff nor volunteers mentioned empowering others as a way they relate to and interact with refugees. Staff and volunteers emphasized building direct relationships with refugees and immigrants and connecting them to resources. Furthermore, present within the way staff and volunteers discussed their relations with refugees and immigrants was a sense of empathy and compassion for their situation and striving to treat them with dignity and respect.

As previously explained, having a holistic perspective of the organization's mission is defined as expressing more than one mission theme. One staff member perceives the mission of the organization to be threefold. He or she perceives the mission to be helping churches connect with and serve refugees and immigrants, helping them build relationships in the community, as well as empowering refugees and immigrants to be self-sufficient and contribute in the community. These themes are shown in the following statements: "At a headquarters level, [the organization's] mission and goal is to empower the church to serve the most vulnerable," "And so that happens economically, helping to get them connected to public assistance programs and jobs," "And one thing that we don't often see but we envision happening is refugees finding meaningful connections, not just within their own ethnic communities, but also within the larger American culture," "helping refugee families feel like they belong in their neighborhoods. They both are benefiting from services but they also have things to contribute." These statements depict the holistic perception this particular staff member has of the mission of the organization.

When discussing ways in which he or she relates and interacts with refugees, the same staff member emphasized building direct relationships, connecting refugees and immigrants to resources, as well as showed empathy and compassion for their situation. When asked how the mission of the organization influences their interactions with refugees and immigrants he/she stated:

One thing that sets [the organization] apart is that we envision holistic transformation for these families... I really make an effort to seek them out, ask them what other resources they need, ask them how they are doing, and serve the whole person rather than just addressing one temporary need.

The staff member goes on to state:

A lot of our families are coming from pretty devastating situations that have been marked more by loss and by grief than by achievement. And I really enjoy being here because we get to play a part in the story of writing a different ending for them and being a face and a presence along the way that provides support rather than fear and condemnation and I love that about [the organization].

These statements highlight the staff member's desire to build a direct relationship with immigrants and refugees in order to meet their needs. Value is placed on the role he or she plays in supporting those he/she serves in a positive way. This individual goes on to state ways in which he or she provides services to refugees by connecting them with necessary resources:

I'm most effective in my work when I can be successful in establishing positive relationships with the job counselors and ensuring some integrity within the program. If I can regularly check in with job counselors every month and we

have good communication every month, I think we can create the most positive outcome for a client because we're both working together on their behalf, communicating, both meeting needs.

The perception of the mission this staff member holds emphasizes building relationships with and connecting refugees and immigrants to outside resources. When comparing statements made about the mission of the organization to the way this staff member interacts with refugees and immigrants, it is apparent that the perception of the mission impacts the way he or she interacts with and relates to immigrants and refugees. Importance is placed on building direct relationships with and supporting refugees and immigrants while connecting them to ongoing resources that will assist them as they continue their adaptation process.

Another staff member within the organization also represents the way a holistic perception of the mission of the organization influences interactions with refugees and immigrants. When expressing his or her perspective of the mission of the organization, helping the church connect with and serve refugees and immigrants was mentioned but emphasis was placed on providing direct services. This staff member's perception of the mission of the organization is expressed in the following statements: "So I feel like the big thing that we do is utilize community resources to empower refugees... So all these different facets and even working with DHS on the state level... connecting resources to empower refugees," " And that can be seen through our church involvement with [organization ministries]." The previous statements focus on incorporating the church in assisting refugees and immigrants as well as providing them with direct services and support.

This holistic perspective of the organization's mission translates into interactions and relations that empower refugees to be self-sufficient and connect them to helpful resources; also, it translates to members treating refugees and immigrants with a sense of dignity and respect. When asked how the mission of the organization influences the way he or she interacts with refugees and immigrants, this particular staff member felt "the biggest thing is the empowerment piece and striving for self-sufficiency and a new life in America." He or she continued:

I'm most effective when they start, kind of, doing things on their own. They'll start finding jobs and maybe ask me to help them apply, or help them find out where to apply, or filling out the application. But just to see them doing things on their own—but also knowing that I'm here for support.

Implied within this statement is the interaction this staff member has with immigrants and refugees aims to help them become more self-sufficient. One way that he or she does this is by connecting them to necessary resources. According to the staff member, the organization "doesn't strive to do everything [themselves]. [They] try to connect people with other things around them, which is big."

Similar to the previous staff member, this participant also valued treating immigrants and refugees with respect stating:

One thing that I really value is treating people with dignity and respect even if they come here and have never used a computer or never gone to school a day in their life. Treating them [with dignity]... because they have so much more knowledge in so many areas that I don't have.

The previous message communicates how immigrants and refugees have significant knowledge to contribute to society. Another staff member mirrors this idea when discussing his or her most rewarding experience working with immigrants and refugees stating, “And seeing how much those volunteers are transformed by connecting with these refugees—how much they learn from the refugees and are challenged by the refugees with their stories and their cultural values and all that kind of stuff.”

In summary, due to the impact organizational position had on the perception of the mission of the organization, similar patterns emerged when comparing how staff, volunteers, and directors interact and relate with refugees and immigrants. As the findings suggest, staff and volunteers held a more holistic perception of the organization’s mission in comparison to the directors, taking into account various organizational initiatives. When comparing the way directors and staff interacted and related with immigrants and refugees, a significant pattern emerged. Directors tended to approach interactions through the context of other people (e.g. members of the church) while staff emphasized direct interactions. As a result, staff and volunteers tended to more explicitly recognize each refugee and immigrant as an individual rather than merely someone to provide service to. In other words, refugees and immigrants were seen as an integral part of the organization that holds significant value. This can be seen in the way all volunteers and staff expressed empathy and compassion for refugees and a desire to treat them with dignity and respect. Additionally, staff and volunteer seemed to see refugees and immigrants as contributing assets in the community, from whom they could learn. While the directors of the organization likely hold similar values, this was rarely explicitly expressed during the interviews.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the functionality of social service organizations. This was done by examining organization members' perception of the mission of the organization and comparing those findings to how members interact and relate with immigrants and refugees. Understanding the relationship between mission perceptions and the way individuals interact is imperative due to the impact social service organizations have on immigrants' and refugees' acculturation and adaptation into America.

Implications

Findings from this study reveal that members within a given organization are likely to interpret the mission of their organization differently and this, in turn, impacts the way they interact and relate to others. In addition, the study showed how an individual's position in the organization seems to directly impact their perception of the mission. This was depicted in how the organization's staff and volunteers portrayed a more holistic perception of the mission, taking into account various organizational initiatives, while directors' perceptions tended to be more unitary in nature.

The fact members held differing perspectives of the organization's mission is supported by previous research focusing on the ambiguity of mission statements (Eisenberg, 1984). Mission ambiguity refers to the degree which organizational members develop differing perceptions of the mission of the organization. Eisenberg (1984) argues that strategic ambiguity within an organization's mission is purposeful in order to allow individuals to develop multiple interpretations. Furthermore, researchers have suggested

that establishing complete consensus within individuals' attitudes and goals is neither necessary nor desirable (Weick, 1979) and may limit members' ability to enact flexibility, creativity, and adaptability within an organization's changing environment (Eisenberg, 1984). Therefore, the goal of constructing an ambiguous mission is to bind a group together, while at the same time prevent members from accepting "one standard way of viewing organizational reality" (Eisenberg, 1984, p. 9).

Despite the positive intent behind constructing an ambiguous mission, strategic ambiguity may cause problems when implemented within an organization operating under multiple initiatives. The focus of this study was on an organization that emphasized both Christian and governmental initiatives. Consequently, this may have contributed to the differences present between how directors, staff, and volunteers perceive the mission of the organization. For example, a number of organizational members expressed a conflict of interest when aiming to serve refugees and immigrants. This conflict stemmed from members' attempt to balance fulfilling government contracts while also serving refugees and immigrants holistically, seeing them as individuals. In particular, conflict arose due to the religious underpinnings present within the organization and the need to maintain separation between church-related and government-funded initiatives. Such conflict may have impacted the way staff and volunteers understood the mission of the organization. Directors, on the other hand, typically have less direct contact with those they serve, which was supported by the findings of this study. Therefore, they may not experience the same conflict of initiatives staff and volunteers encounter and consequently place their emphasis on one unitary mission theme.

Previous research has expressed a relationship between the mission of an organization and resulting organizational practices (Blair–Loy et al., 2011). This is supported further by the results of this study. Organizational members' perception of the mission appeared to have a direct impact on how they related to and interacted with refugees and immigrants. Those who felt it was their mission to empower others to serve often related to immigrants and refugees vicariously through other people and confessed to having little direct interaction with those they serve. On the other hand, those holding a more holistic perception of the mission interacted with refugees and immigrants on a more interpersonal level.

The study's findings support the ambiguity of the organization's mission as well as the impact of the perceived organizational mission on how members relate and interact with immigrants and refugees. However, reason stands for questioning whether the ambiguity and varying perceptions of the mission of the organization will have adverse effects on immigrants and refugees due to the impact it has on members' interactions. According to Eisenberg (1984), the ambiguous nature of the mission allows individuals to enact communication strategies in accordance with their individual interpretation of the mission. In the case of refugees and immigrants, there are various acculturation strategies they adopt when adapting to America (assimilation, integration, separation, marginalization) (Berry, 1996). However, while immigrants and refugees may prefer one acculturation strategy over others, organizational members may unknowingly promote alternative strategies. These variances in communication strategies resulting from different interpretations of the mission may have adverse effects due to the stress it can cause on immigrants and refugees experiencing acculturation.

Acculturation stress is a common phenomenon for those entering and maneuvering the adaptation process. Previous research suggests that individuals will experience acculturation stress to differing degrees depending on factors such as the acculturation strategy enforced by the host culture (Berry et al., 1987), or the nature of interpersonal interaction a person has with members of the host culture (Kim, 2001). Likewise, research has shown acculturation stress has a powerful impact on one's mental health and self-esteem (Gil, Vega, and Dimas, 1994). According to Gil et al. (1994) negative self-esteem results from high levels of acculturation stress, often due to isolation from direct host culture interactions where they are able to receive support and knowledge regarding available resources aiming to help them adjusting to their new environment. Therefore, the direct interactions staff and volunteers have with those they serve are likely improving the immigrants and refugees self-esteem and lowering their acculturation stress.

Findings from this study suggest that those holding a more holistic perception of the mission of the organization interacted in a way that gave more agency to immigrants and refugees, seeing each of them as an individual rather than merely another person they are aiming to serve. In addition, individuals with a holistic perspective emphasized a desire to respect and honor the refugees' and immigrants' home culture and saw them as valuable assets to the community. According to Berry (et al., 1987), identity confusion is often a side effect of acculturation stress. Honoring and respecting refugees and immigrants home culture may provide immigrants and refugees with a sense of identity assurance. Additionally, organizational members direct interactions may increase

refugee's and immigrant's mental health (for example, their self-esteem), and ultimately decrease the level of acculturation stress they experience.

The adaptation process is multifaceted and includes both psychological and socio-cultural changes (Berry 2005). According to Berry (2005), a characteristic of those likely to achieve good psychological adaptation is refugees and immigrants who effectively establish a social support system. Individuals who portrayed a holistic perspective expressed a desire for refugees and immigrants to establish a support system both with their own ethnic communities and the larger American culture. By encouraging the development of social support, refugees and immigrants may be more likely to achieve effective psychological adaptation. Predictors of good socio-cultural adaptation include the degree of contact refugees and immigrants have with members of the host culture and positive intergroup attitudes (Berry 2005; Berry, 1997; Ward, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Findings from this study found that staff and volunteers expressed more direct interactions with refugees and immigrants, which emphasized dignity and respect for the individual. Therefore, a holistic perception and the nature of the interactions organizational members had with refugees and immigrants could promote better psychological and socio-cultural adaptation.

Social service organizations, especially those assisting with adaptation, should make an effort towards assessing whether a holistic perception of mission exists in the organization. If one does not exist, the organization should make a conscious effort towards diffusing a holistic perception. This is in large part due to the positive impact a holistic perspective has on members' interactions and the way they understand organizational initiatives. Findings indicate that a more holistic perspective translates into

interactions that recognize refugees and immigrants as individuals and a stronger desire to honor and respect their cultural identity. Interactions such as these are likely to provide identity assurance, promote an increase in mental health (e.g. self-esteem), and, in the case of immigrants and refugees, decrease the level of acculturation stress they experience.

Furthermore, findings indicate those holding a holistic perspective take into account the multi-faceted goals and initiatives present within the organization as a whole. The need for a holistic view of the mission is important whenever there are several diverse initiatives going on within one organization, no matter what type of organization it is. In this case, the organization expressed two diverse initiatives, empowering the church to serve refugees and immigrants and providing direct services. Findings show that a more holistic perspective emphasizes both of these initiatives and takes into account the individual importance of those being served. This is even more critical for organizations directly serving immigrants and refugees, given those individuals require a unique type of care and cultural sensitivity as they go through the difficult process of adaptation.

Limitations

While this research study was thoughtfully and carefully executed, inevitable limitations exist. First, the results and analysis of this study were established merely through content analysis. As a result, the conclusions and implications were based solely of the researchers own interpretations of the data provided. While it was not the researchers intent, it is possible his or her own biases may have misrepresented participants' original intent behind the content shared. Furthermore, no direct

observational data of the organization's practices were included in this study. This in turn may have limited the breath of understanding provided related to the functioning of the organization.

Secondly, previous research identifies multiple types of social service organizations including voluntary agencies and mutual assistance agencies (Newyn, 2010; Oster, 1995). However, this study looked only at the functions of voluntary agencies. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be universally applied to social service organizations as a whole. Each social service organization maintains a unique culture, which should be taken into account when aiming to interpret and apply this study's implications.

Directions for Future Research

Stemming from the findings of this research study, four additional directions for future research are proposed that would likely add to the breadth and depth of literature surrounding social service organizations and their influence on acculturation strategies. First, future research should examine how organizations and their members measure refugee and immigrant success and how those measures influences the way they interact. This study found that members' perception of the organization's mission directly influences the way they interact and relate to immigrants and refugees. It would be interesting to investigate whether the same is true in terms of how members' perception of successful adaptation influences their interactions and relations with acculturating individuals. Future research in this area could provide a better understanding of the acculturation strategies host culture members highlight when aiming to assist immigrants and refugees in achieving what they consider "successful adaptation."

With this study taking an organizational perspective, future research should look at how immigrants and refugees perceive the mission of social service organizations from their perspective. Furthermore, the role these services play in the adaptation process of immigrants and refugees should be addressed. Previous research has focused on immigrants' and refugees' acculturation process (Berry, 1997; Urban & Orbe, 2010), yet more focus should be given to immigrants' and refugees' perception of the social service organizations aiming to assist them with this complex process.

Other avenues of future research include applying the purpose of this research study to social service organizations as a whole. Future research should take into account all different types of social service organizations serving refugees and immigrants and determine whether variations exist in the way they perceive their mission and how those perceptions translates into practice. Both voluntary agencies as well as mutual assistance agencies should be investigated in order to provide a more holistic understanding of the mission of social service organizations and how they serve refugees and immigrants.

Lastly, an interesting avenue of future study came up during the interview process of this study. As previously addressed a conflict of interest was expressed by staff and volunteers stemming from members' attempt to balance government contracts within the context of a faith based organization. Future research should focus on the way organizations such as this balance the need to meet government regulations and maintain funding while operating under a religiously affiliated organization. It should be investigated whether or not this conflict of interest has adverse effects on the immigrants and refugees they aim to serve.

Conclusion

For years, social service organizations have taken it upon themselves to assist immigrants and refugees through the complex and stressful acculturation process. This study builds on previous literature by providing an organizational perspective on the mission of such social service organizations and the way they interact with and relate to the immigrants and refugees they serve. Highlighted was the idea that members perceive the mission of the organization differently depending on the role and position they hold.

The findings of the study point to the need for a more holistic perspective of the mission to be shared by all members – directors, staff, and volunteers alike. Refugees and immigrants require a unique sense of personal connection and cultural sensibility when attempting to adapt into American culture. By enforcing a holistic understanding of organizational goals and initiatives, refugees and immigrants are likely to be treated with a higher degree of dignity and respect. As a result, undesirable side effects, such as acculturation stress, could be minimized.

At the conclusion of this project, questions still remain as to the impact social service organizations as a whole have on the acculturation process. This study was not aiming to generalize about all types of social service organizations and their functionality, but rather, open a door for further investigation. It is possible different types of social service organizations impact refugee and immigrant acculturation differently. For this reason, future research should investigate the impacts of voluntary agencies (consisting of members primarily from the host culture) verses mutual assistance agencies (consisting primarily of former immigrants and refugees) have on acculturation.

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Appendix A

Interview Consent Forms

You are invited to participate in a research study of refugee and immigrant acculturation into American culture. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you met the criteria for our research. Our criteria are individuals working at organizations that serve immigrants and refugees. This research is being done for Minnesota State University- Mankato's Thesis requirement, Spring 2011. No funding agency is involved.

Face-to-face interviews:

If you decide to participate, I, the researcher will follow a semi-structured interview guide that will ask questions focus on topics including: your mission as an organization, ways you assist immigrants and refugees as they enter into America, as well as your approach to how immigrants and refugees can successfully survive within American culture. The interview should take roughly 30- 45 minutes.

This process may be audio recoded in order to ensure proper analysis. Transcriptions of the interviews will be completed by the co-investigator (Bethany Wenell) using voice analysis software. The transcribed documents will be kept on a personal computer for three full years to which only the primary investigator and co-investigator have access. After being stored for three years, the co-investigator will destroy the transcribed documents by permanently deleting them from the secure computer.

Risks and Benefits:

There are less than minimal risks known in this study. The interview should not cause any discomfort, and the main inconvenience would likely be the time it takes participants to complete the interview. There are no direct benefits to participants of this study. Results of this study will be used to expand on the literature surrounding social service organizations and their impact on immigrant and refugee acculturation.

Taking part is voluntary:

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to be in the study you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Participating in this study does not mean that you are giving up any of your legal rights.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Minnesota State University-Mankato in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

Your answers will be confidential:

A portion of the data collection process may be audio recorded in order to ensure proper data analysis. Transcriptions of the interviews will be completed by the co-investigator (Bethany Wenell) using voice analysis software. They will be kept on a personal computer for three full years to which only the primary investigator and co-investigator have access. The transcriptions will be kept separate from the consent forms to help ensure confidentiality. Consent forms will be stored by the Principal Investigator in Armstrong Hall 201R, a secure location at Minnesota State University- Mankato. After

being stored for three years, the co-investigator will destroy the transcribed documents by permanently deleting them from the secure computer. Any report of this research that is available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Minnesota State Universities Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights please contact one of the following:

Deepa Oommen- Principal investigator

201R Armstrong Hall

2010 Minnesota State University ·

Mankato, Minnesota 56001

(507)-389-2367

Bethany Wenell- Co-investigator

Armstrong Hall – 312A

2010 Minnesota State University ·

Mankato, Minnesota 56001

(612) 306-5546

If you wish to report a research-related injury or have concerns about the treatment of human subjects please contact:

Dean Barry Ries- IRB Administrator

2010 Minnesota State University ·

Alumni & Foundations- 115

Mankato, Minnesota 56001

(507)- 389-2321

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study

I agree to the audio taping of this interview session

I would like to be contacted upon completion of this study and sent a copy of the research study via e-mail

I received a copy of this consent

X _____ **Date** _____

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval



February 23, 2012

Dear Deepa Oommen:

Re: IRB Proposal entitled "[304329-3] Refugee and Immigration Services: The Manifestation of Social Service Organization's Mission Statements"
Review Level: Level I

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of February 23, 2012. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year from the approval date. When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

This approval is considered final when the full IRB approves the monthly decisions and active log. The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled. However, under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at patricia.hargrove@mnsu.edu or 507-389-1415.

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining consents in a secure location at MSU for 3 years. If the PI leaves MSU before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Hargrove".

Patricia Hargrove, Ph.D.
IRB Coordinator

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Hadley".

Mary Hadley, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard Auger".

Richard Auger, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

Appendix C

Interview Script

- 1) What is your organization's overall mission (in your own words)?
- 2) How does the mission statement influence the way you interact with refugees and immigrants?
- 3) How were you first introduced to the organization's mission statement?
- 4) Who told you about the mission statement?
- 5) Are there areas or aspects of the organization you would change or feel conflicted about?
- 6) In what ways do you and your organization aim to assist immigrants and refugees as they enter into America? (e.g. programs you offer, courses you provide, etc.)
- 7) Tell me a story of someone who was successful after utilizing your services.
- 8) What are the things your organization trains you to do?
- 9) In what ways do you measure immigrants' and refugees' "success" level within American culture?
- 10) Tell me the most rewarding experience you have had while working/volunteering for the organization.
- 11) Tell me the most difficult experience you have had while working/volunteering for the organization.
- 12) Tell me a story of a time you felt you were being most effective?