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## Community Assistance for Refugees and Gender Roles: What Could Make this C.A.R. run Better?

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## **COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEES AND GENDER ROLES: WHAT COULD MAKE THIS C.A.R. RUN BETTER?**

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Community Assistance for Refugees is a non-profit service organization in downtown Mankato, Minnesota. Secondary migration to southern Minnesota has increased the refugee population as well as the need for research assessing the needs and concerns of refugees. The purpose of this project was two-fold: first to analyze how C.A.R. is able to meet the needs of its clients and second, to investigate ways in which C.A.R. could improve its services. Traditionally female refugees are less educated and less mainstreamed into American society. This research was designed to help all clients, but special attention was paid to the specific needs of female refugees. By conducting participant observations (volunteering at C.A.R. and recording observations) and ethnographic interviews (semi-structured, open-ended interviews) qualitative data was collected from clients and staff. The majority of clients interviewed were from East Africa and were fleeing violence. Paperwork issues (usually green card or citizenship applications) were the most common reason for client visits to C.A.R. Other client concerns included: language difficulties, discrimination, time management and weather. Staff interviews yielded a glimpse into the struggle of running a successful non-profit service organization. The difficulties and challenges of cross-gender/cross-cultural communication are discussed, as well as suggestions for more effective communication strategies. Finally, conclusions are offered that center on future research options, recommendations to C.A.R. and the Mankato community, and how gender roles have changed for refugees who have come to America.

**Minnesota State University – Mankato**

**Community Assistance for Refugees (C.A.R.) and Gender Roles:  
What Could Make this C.A.R. Run Better?**

**An Undergraduate Research Project Article Submitted to  
The Journal of Undergraduate Research**

**Anthropology Department**

**By  
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Mankato, MN  
May 23, 2006**

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## **Abstract**

Community Assistance for Refugees (C.A.R.) is a non-profit service organization in Mankato, Minnesota. Secondary migration to southern Minnesota has increased the refugee population as well as the need for research assessing the needs and concerns of refugees. The purpose of this project was two-fold: first, to analyze if C.A.R. is able to meet the needs of its clients and second, to investigate ways C.A.R. could improve the services provided. Traditionally, female refugees are less educated and less mainstreamed into American society. This research was designed to help all clients, but special attention was paid to the specific needs of female refugees. By conducting participant observations (volunteering at C.A.R. and recording observations) and ethnographic interviews (semi-structured, open-ended interviews) qualitative data was collected from clients and staff. The majority of clients interviewed were from East Africa and were fleeing violence. Paperwork issues (usually green card or citizenship applications) were the most common reason for client visits to C.A.R. Other client concerns included: language difficulties, discrimination, time management and weather. Staff interviews yielded a glimpse into the struggle of running a successful non-profit service organization. The difficulties and challenges of cross-gender/cross-cultural communication are discussed, as well as suggestions for more effective communication strategies. Conclusions are offered that center on future research options, recommendations to C.A.R. and the Mankato community, and how gender roles have changed for refugees who have come to America.

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The Anthropology Department has an established partnership with Community Assistance for Refugees so it did not take long to have this project approved. This partnership will be discussed in greater detail in the introduction; however it is important to recognize that the existence of this partnership benefited the project in and of itself. Dr. Susan Schalge has been working closely with C.A.R. for a few years and the researcher was very fortunate to have her as an advisor on this project. She is an endless source of guidance, knowledge, and support. The executive director of Community Assistance for Refugees, Kent Cova-Suarez was also an incredible help throughout this entire project. He provided me with space as well as advice, participated in multiple interviews, helped me obtain interviews from clients, and also had a genuine concern for this scholarship. Without Dr. Schalge and Mr. Cova-Suarez, this project would have never been completed. The student investigator is most grateful to have had the opportunity to work closely with such caring individuals.

This research project was also fortunate enough to receive a grant for research supplies from Undergraduate Research Conference Project Support. This assistance helped the researcher accomplish more than could have been accomplished without it. Because of this funding: more literature was accessed, compensation for informants' time was provided, and the project as a whole proceeded without the additional burden of financial stressors.

Most importantly, this researcher would like to acknowledge and thank all the individuals willing to participate in the research. For a beginning ethnographer, just having informants who were willing to be interviewed is a huge accomplishment. The author is incredibly grateful for the time so many individuals spent answering questions about their experiences. Not only was the student investigator fortunate enough to collect a large enough sample of data, he was more importantly fortunate enough to meet many new individuals who ready and willing to teach a native Mankatoan about their unique cultural heritages.

## **Introduction**

Community Assistance for Refugees, or C.A.R., is a non-profit service agency in downtown Mankato, Minnesota. The mission of C.A.R. is to assist refugees and immigrants overcome barriers to self-sufficiency. The staff does this by offering: a transportation program, access to INS services, educational opportunities (such as learning English or specific job skills), and assistance for other miscellaneous problems and concerns. The C.A.R. office itself is a suite on the third floor of the Mankato Place Mall. Clients come to the office for a variety of reasons, which will be described later.

The relationship between Community Assistance for Refugees and the Anthropology department at Minnesota State University - Mankato (MSU-M) is best described as a partnership. Because of the nature of this relationship, researchers view the community organization and its clients as equal partners, as opposed to research “subjects.” This helps students gain a deeper understanding of human needs, instead of only focusing on their personal research goals. This unique and dually beneficial relationship also functions to, “evaluate the progress of disciplinary knowledge through its ability to change human lives as well as theoretical paradigms” (Pinsker & Lieber, 2005: 108). Both staff at C.A.R. and staff at MSU have discussed the many reinforcing benefits of this relationship. Hopefully this article will be able to demonstrate that when university students leave the classroom and conduct research within the community, positive, real-world changes can be achieved.

The purpose of this research project was two-fold. This first was to evaluate the services delivered by C.A.R. to make sure that client needs are adequately met. In order to make this assessment, clients and staff were asked about their reasons for coming to C.A.R., how effective the help provided from C.A.R. staff is, and other things they wish C.A.R. could do. The second purpose was to compile a list of recommendations in order to make adjustments to life in America easier for refugees and other displaced persons.

One significant change for many refugees relates to changes in gender roles. For clients who come from cultures with gender roles that are more clearly defined than they are in American culture, the transition can be very difficult. To investigate this change I asked clients how their home life was different in America, if their responsibilities as a family member had changed, and if they did things now in America that they did not do before. Special attention was paid to the often-underrepresented voices of refugee women and a feminist perspective was incorporated throughout the research process. This feminist perspective helped to identify things can be overlooked when attempting to conduct an objective scientific inquiry. Often, refugee women are silenced during their migration from their nation of origin to a new location. Because of cultural and linguistic differences, as well as an under-appreciation for the essential labor they provide, women have historically been ignored in migration research, as described by Pratt and Yeoh:

...little attention is paid to the divisions of childcare or housekeeping labor that structured gendered migration possibilities, because in most nonfeminist research on migration such 'private' work is assumed to be less important than formal sector wage-work in shaping mobility (Silvey, 2004: 6).

Because of the lack of emphasis of previous researchers and the unique changes in gender roles occurring at this very moment, the researcher took a special interest in the concerns of female clients.

This article will go on to examine some background about the service agency. Later some information about refugees and displaced persons will be examined. Methodologies used in data collection and analysis will be described before discussion of the findings. This article will conclude with recommendations for C.A.R., the United States Federal Government, the Mankato community, and cultural anthropologists and ethnographers.

## II. Background Information

The United States, as well as the United Nations, defines a refugee as, "any person who, with a well-founded fear of persecution of physical harm, crosses an international border (Willis and Hitchcock, 2003: 4). Community Assistance for Refugees does not restrict their clientele to individuals who fit this description, instead this organization helps all new arrivals to America in any way that it can. As a result, the author determined that instead of defining the remainder of the terms used by the Federal Government to categorize displaced persons it would be more beneficial to use client's own words to explain why they had to leave their countries of origin. Common responses to the question are: "Where were you before you came to America? And, if you feel comfortable will you please tell my why you left this country?" included: "Need work to help family," "South Africa farm killings," "Communists persecute Vietnamese," and "In 96 Saddam Hussein said whoever was working for them he would kill them and his family."

However, the primary reason for clients to leave their country of origin was war. Over eighty percent of clients cited war, political unrest, or lack of safety as their reason for leaving their country of origin. This correlates directly with which countries clients were originally from. Eighty-five percent of clients were from Somalia, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and all of these clients (with only one exception) cited war as their primary reason for leaving. So, the majority of displaced persons in this study were individuals fleeing civil war or violence perpetrated by their government. The clients who did not originate from countries in East Africa came from: South Africa, Iraq, and Vietnam. Each of these clients was fleeing violence or the threat of violence as well.

When refugees, immigrants, asylees, and other new arrivals to America first arrive in this country the United States Federal Government resettles them. In other words, these individuals are told where to live by the government.

Decisions about where to send refugees are made using several criteria, including the potential capacity of local settlement and social service agencies to carry out the process, the ability of the community to absorb newcomers, and the availability of basic needs, from housing to jobs to training opportunities. (Willis and Hitchcock, 2003: 4).

However, refugees are not required to stay in this original location and often move within a few years of arriving in the U.S. This is known as secondary migration. When asked how they ended up in southern MN the most common responses from clients included: education, family, pursuit of employment, and avoiding the problems of large cities. Holtzman, another individual who

conducted research with East African refugees in Minnesota had similar findings with regard to the reasons refugees came to Minnesota after being resettled elsewhere (2000).

New arrivals to America face many challenges when they finally make it here. Often families and individuals show up to the C.A.R. office with no place to stay, no job, and little to no English skills. The staff at C.A.R. helps these people find temporary residence and eventually permanent homes, find jobs, get cash and food assistance from the government, apply for green cards and citizenship, and enroll in classes to learn English. Not only is it a challenge for clients to adapt to life in a new country, it is also a challenge for the staff to make sure their clients have what they need to get by. Furthermore, members of the Mankato community can make these transitions much easier or much more difficult for new arrivals to the area. Accepting new neighbors for who they are, instead of discriminating against them can make a huge difference.

### **Literature Review**

This section serves multiple purposes. First, it provides information on specific refugee groups; second, it defines and explains the anthropological methods used in evaluation research; and finally, it examines literature on the experiences of female refugees and their specific needs. The majority of this literature supports the idea that refugees' specific cultural, gender, and ethnic needs must be met and understood in order to conduct accurate research and deliver effective services. Below is a description of each work reviewed.

Bauer's (2000) article begins with the narratives of two Iranian refugee/immigrant women, which explains how their views of gender roles and expectations changed as they arrived in western nations. Both of the women ended up becoming politically conscious and worked on women's issues in different refugee organizations. The text goes on to describe the challenges they faced in "making communities" as well as adapting to the non-Iranian communities they were now living in. Basically, this article gives insight into how female refugees struggle with maintaining both a sense of self-identity and a sense of community in a foreign land. This literature will help the researcher understand the changes that women experience from their own perspective.

Butler (2005) not only translates evaluation anthropology, she also provides a working definition. She explains how anthropological theory and training brings a valuable perspective into the field of evaluation. Butler provides justification for this as she explains how anthropologists are able to treat values as social facts, unlike traditional evaluators who do their best to ignore these values. She concludes by discussing how many of the methods used in evaluation are already part of the anthropologist's "tool kit" and how their training makes anthropologists credible evaluators.

The introduction to the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology (or NAPA) Bulletin is a collaborative work by Copeland-Carson and Butler (2005). This explains evaluation anthropology as a transdiscipline, a sort of combination of evaluation and anthropology, which is a new movement in both fields. Evaluation anthropology is a relatively new subfield and has been increasing over the last 20 years. This article serves to introduce the other works in the NAPA Bulletin and also explains how the bulletin is meant to serve its readers. It has helped to establish the context of how evaluation anthropology came to be and how its synergy can positively influence evaluation methods.

Copeland-Carson and Butler also authored a second insightful article entitled, "Theory Building." This article is basically a more in-depth description of evaluation anthropology and its emergence as "the ultimate transdiscipline." The authors explain how evaluators are often doing

ethnography and do not realize it, as evaluation is the systematic study of a cultural system to tell and translate its story. However, evaluators work within a shorter timeframe than ethnographers, so their research has more direction as well as a more deliberate approach. Finally, Copeland-Carson and Butler conclude by explaining that scholarship and practice exist on a continuum, they are not distinct and should not be viewed as such. The two collaborative works by Copeland-Carson and Butler, as well as the article written by Butler alone, help the researcher distinguish evaluation anthropology from ethnography. This is an important distinction to be made in my research because my research project is not a typical ethnography because I study more than one culture. As a result, these descriptions of evaluation anthropology assist in defining my research methods and questions.

Crain and Tashima, begin their article in the NAPA Bulletin by explaining how evaluation anthropology functions in relation to its subjects/clients. They state that this is how the stories of programs are told and where they are “deemed successes or failures” (2005: 42). This is probably why the authors later explain that good anthropological work requires discipline, because of the responsibilities that evaluators take on. This provides important context for the involvement of anthropology in the field of evaluation and explains why it is essential to evaluation. The difference that anthropological methods and theory make in evaluation is significant because it strengthens and clarifies focus, as well as engages all participants.

Demko’s (2006) article chronicles the Hmong refugee experience after arriving in America, (Minnesota, specifically). It details the needs of refugees as well as the challenges they face in a new land. With firsthand testimony from Hmong refugees, Demko illustrates how difficult the transition to life in America can be. The article also discusses the challenges faced by service organizations and the government in assisting refugees. Resources are spread very thin in Minnesota and until refugees are able to learn enough English to enter the workforce, they are dependent on others. The challenges faced by the organizations mentioned in this article are not very different from the challenges faced by Community Assistance for Refugees in Mankato. This parallel indicates that the problems faced by C.A.R. are not unique, other service organizations face similar challenges.

As we live in a patriarchal and male-dominated society, the norm is assumed to be male. Devault (1990) created a work that explains how to talk and listen as a woman, and how their language (verbal and non-verbal) is different from the norm (male language). If interviewers do not take gender differences into account during their interviews they are missing much of what women communicate because of the obstacles to expression that women face when speaking in a male-dominated language. It is also important to analyze what is unsaid, as well as pauses and other facets of communication. Devault discusses the deficiencies in labeling and in language itself, as Standard English does not tell the whole story. Language must be used as a resource but interviewers must also understand other parts of communication that are often overlooked in a patriarchal society. The techniques outlined by Devault were relied upon heavily in narrative analysis of female client interviews.

One chapter in a textbook authored by Ervin (2000) focuses on needs assessments and how they are used in anthropology. Ervin discusses the different types of needs (normative, felt, expressed, and comparative), how to identify needs, and how needs must be described in their fullest context as well as ranked. Also, the types of needs assessments are examined (marketing model, decision-making model, and participatory action model) and methods and sources of data are also discussed. A second chapter is specific to program evaluation and reiterates the value of training in the social sciences before conducting evaluation. Ervin discusses different ways to



collect data in evaluations, the power of qualitative data, and how evaluations should function. Although only two chapters apply directly to my research, Ervin provides a detailed overview of anthropological evaluations and needs assessments, which helps define and outline my research in anthropological terms. This textbook assists in providing significant background information on how to conduct a needs assessment and a program evaluation.

Evans-Pritchard wrote many books on the Nuer people during the middle of the nineteenth century. Including all of Evans-Pritchard's ethnographic works on the Nuer in the literature review would be unnecessary and redundant. As a result only *The Nuer: A description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people* (1940) was included. This book will assist in comparing traditional ways of life with the current situation in Sudan as well as in discussions of how life for the Nuer is different in America. Evans-Pritchard devotes a significant portion of this text to discussions of the importance of cattle in traditional Nuer society. Although this is no longer true of Nuer people today, it will be interesting to attempt to identify parallels to and remnants from this once important center of Nuer life. Furthermore, even though Nuer culture has changed significantly from when Evans-Pritchard visited Sudan, it will be argued that some cultural survivals still remain.

Franz's (2000) article is about female Bosnian refugees who lived in Vienna after the spring of 1992. By looking at the identities of women and men, as well as their motivations she comes to different conclusions than previous migration researchers. She argues that women are able to maintain a sense of identity as they do not depend on their previous lives, jobs, and memories – while men struggle because their identities do depend more on their past lives. Although the trials that every refugee endure are beyond difficult, the exodus from their past lives can emancipate women as they learn to become more independent and understand themselves better. Basically, this article explains the strength of women and their ability to endure and focus on the future during these difficult times of their lives.

Gilliland (1995) begins by explaining how refugees are confronted with hostility in new lands because of the special privileges and services they receive upon arrival. She also discusses the three tiers of discrimination that female refugees face: discrimination as women, because of their nation of origin/ethnicity, and as refugees (as explained above). The difference in the attitudes of male and female refugees is discussed, and like Franz's article, Gilliland explains that the attitudes of female refugees are more positive. This is understandable when Gilliland explains that it is easier for female refugees to find work (this is true at least in the case of the eastern European refugees that she interviewed). She also discusses how men act (angry, aggressive, and childish) and that women remain glad that they are around. This is because in other ways the men help with emotional loss and loss of identity, especially if part of a long-term pair bond. It will be very interesting to examine comparisons along gender lines between my research and the findings of Franz and Gilliland.

Holtzman (2000) begins his book by briefly explaining the history of the Nuer and the history of their contributions to anthropological research. The traditional Nuer society is based on cattle, which is quite interesting as Holtzman compares it to the Nuer's new lives in America with the phrase, "cars are bad cows." Without Holtzman's description of traditional Nuer culture, understanding of the difficulties that the Nuer endure as refugees would be impossible. He continues to explain the traumatic experiences refugees must deal with such as landlord-tenant relationships, cooking and grocery shopping. One important aspect of Holtzman's work is when he explains that the people who help refugees are also helped by the refugees themselves. His detailed and positive descriptions of the culture are incredibly valuable as well as his descriptions

of the refugee experience in Minnesota. This text serves as a model for my research, as I hope to conduct meaningful research in the same way that Holtzman was able to do.

Hutchinson's (1980) article discusses Nuer gender relations in the traditional homeland of Sudan. This article will be beneficial in helping the author understand just how significant changes can be for refugees. Hutchinson is incredibly specific in how gender roles impact traditional Nuer culture, as well as how traditional Nuer culture impacts gender roles. She goes on to describe the sexual division of tasks, which is not as common in the United States. Although, the time period in which Hutchinson lived with and studied the Nuer is considered post-contact, it is assumed that some traditions remained from pre-contact times, because Nuer still practiced traditional subsistence methods at this time.

Feminist evaluation research is defined and justified at the start of the article, entitled, "Developments in Evaluation Research." Joyce (1980) explains why the traditional paradigm in evaluation research, which focuses on "scientific rigor and methodological purity", is inadequate. The anthropological approach is favored; although it is less clear-cut, it is more realistic because the researcher lives with the community she or he is studying. Joyce advocates stepping away from the establishment and using democratic evaluation to put the community being evaluated first, before the needs of the decision-makers. One very persuasive argument for incorporating values into evaluation research instead of ignoring them is that people act on their values, not on a rational natural science model. Finally, Joyce explains that the most important issues in evaluation research are those that are taken for granted. As a result, I will do my best to not take anything for granted and incorporate a feminist perspective into my research.

Patton's (2005) description of the comparative method (pioneered by Margaret Mead) of contrasting, "the values, norms, and behaviors of two or more cultures," is discussed early in this work. Culture is a part of every program that is evaluated, the culture created by the program as well as the cultures that make up the members of the program. Patton goes on to discuss participant observation as a method on the evaluation continuum, but it is important to avoid the delusion of full participation. An evaluator is never fully participatory in any program, because they are evaluating at the same time. By looking at the insider-outsider perspectives (and respecting both) evaluation anthropologists can increase cross-cultural understanding. Finally Patton comments on the future of evaluation anthropology as a transdiscipline and how it can continue to benefit cross-cultural understanding. This article is a direct parallel to Community Assistance for Refugees, as my research agrees with the basic tenet that one must understand the people involved at C.A.R. before evaluation can take place. Patton's literature helped me to realize the need to observe for an extended period of time before beginning to evaluate.

A textbook by Peters-Golden (2006) devotes an entire chapter to the Nuer. The chapter follows the cultural evolution (albeit partly forced cultural evolution) of the Nuer over the last two hundred years. Peters-Golden clearly explains aspects of Nuer culture, such as political organization, religion, and ecology within the realm of anthropological jargon. This chapter also discusses the challenges faced by the Nuer today. Peters-Golden cites both Evans-Pritchard and Holtzman in this text, which demonstrates credibility.

According to Pinsker and Lieber (2005), in university-community partnerships one of the most important things to remember is that the community is a partner, not a subject. Both sides must be equally valued for a true partnership to form and function effectively. The type of systematic thinking that is required to equally value both sides is part of the anthropologist's tool kit. The authors go on to discuss partnerships and how they function. Also it is pointed out that ethnographers have the advantage in evaluating relationships between the university and the

community because contextual differences and similarities do not always fit traditional evaluation analysis. This literature will increase my understanding of the dynamic between the Minnesota State University – Mankato Anthropology department and Community Assistance for Refugees.

Shapiro (1988) demands that a new social science model is needed where personal and direct experiences are recognized. The detached and male-dominated view of research and evaluation has been *on* women rather than *for* women. To evaluate a feminist project researchers must not impose their own or the traditional male definition of reality on those being researched. Although difficult to do and perhaps more difficult to prove as unbiased, this model does not hide behind the value-free “mask of objectivity” which only decreases understanding, empathy, and rapport. Trust must be built between evaluators and those who are being evaluated. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods illuminates the subject. This illuminative evaluation is flexible and highly participatory, although not objective. However, by acknowledging the bias of the evaluator (the concept of “conscious subjectivity”) this model can accomplish research goals without silencing and oppressing the research subjects. As discussed in the introduction, conducting meaningful research without silencing the voices of women or refugees is a primary goal of my research project. Shapiro’s literature helps me to avoid these mistakes and create a more realistic project (realistic in the sense that I will not pretend to be objective).

Silvey (2004) uses a geographical approach to feminist migration research. She discusses four themes of feminist geography, “specifically, questions about the politics of scale, mobility as political process, place and space, and subjectivity/identity” (2004: 2). Masculine assumptions are inscribed on the nature of political and economic change because men’s work (wage-work) is more visible and viewed as more important than women’s work (private-work). Silvey advocates interrogating these political constructions because they influence the meanings of identity, place, space, scale, etc. By using the feminist definition of identity (as not fixed and different for each individual) research can more adequately address women’s issues that are traditionally ignored. A more critical and progressive feminist model of migration and the geography of mobility is necessary to deconstruct masculine assumptions and help understand the experiences of women.

An insightful article by Simon and Christman (2005) explains the many roles that evaluation anthropologists play, as well as the atmosphere in which their research is conducted. First of all, other than researcher, evaluation anthropologists also often play one or more of these additional roles: consultant, negotiator, project manager, and knowledge promoter. Also, the authors explain how evaluation data must be used to solve social problems. The legitimacy of one’s research is based on the perception of others, their power relationship, and the program’s organizational structure. The contractual relationship of evaluator and client is also discussed, as well as the diversity of methodologies used by evaluation anthropologists. Simon and Christman cite two empirical examples of evaluation anthropology and how all the roles can be played in addition to the role of researcher. This article was helpful in increasing my understanding as my role of evaluator and anthropologist, and how to avoid the mistake of allowing power relations to dominate interview discourse.

The Ethnographic Interview by Spradley (1979) explains how ethnography is the antithesis to ethnocentrism. Instead of studying people, ethnographers learn from them about their culture. Spradley explains how language is a huge part of ethnography and it enters into every step of the research process. Interpreting language is the “handicap” to discovering culture, and ethnography is a translation. Spradley explains how to locate good informants, establish

rapport, and how to phrase questions. By establishing a friendly conversation and slowly and delicately asking ethnographic questions, ethnographic interviews can proceed smoothly. Spradley also continues his explanation of the interview as he states how to do everything up to and including writing ethnography itself.

Spradley's (1980) book titled, Participant Observation, is incredibly beneficial to the beginning ethnographer. He details the research process, step by step from the beginning observations to writing an ethnography. The dual purpose of participant observation involves doing the activity as well as being aware of each step in the activity and the process. Three important principles are discussed and explained as essential to create an accurate ethnography, these are: language identification, verbatim principle, and using concrete language. After descriptive observations Spradley explains how to get more specific and conduct focused observations. He continues with detailed explanations of how to complete writing one's ethnography. Spradley's texts are essential to the beginning ethnographer. His step-by-step approach to conducting research helped me to understand what must be done in order to turn my project proposal into a finished project.

Willis and Hitchcock (2003) recently wrote an incredibly relevant article on refugee populations in a Midwest City. Lincoln, Nebraska has long been a popular refugee resettlement site and is now home to many of the Nuer people of southern Sudan. Often refugees are resettled in a different area of the United States and through secondary migration they come to Nebraska to live near family and friends. This article goes on to detail applied anthropological work with Sudanese refugees throughout history and the current research going on today in America. The diversity of Sudanese refugees is explained; although they share a nation of origin there are many ethnic and cultural differences among the sub-groups of Sudanese refugees. The benefit of grants for anthropologists' research is discussed, as giving a monetary gift to Nuer informants is appreciated and reasonable. This article discusses how students can help refugees in their daily lives and in learning English, childcare and transportation, mentoring, and with other specific cultural needs. There are certainly many parallels that can be drawn between Lincoln and Mankato and this timely article will help me to identify why people come to the city, and why they choose to stay.

## **Methods and Limitations**

### **Participant Observation**

Learning the methods of cultural anthropology was one of the most significant learning experiences involved in this project. James P. Spradley wrote two books on these methods that helped guide this beginning ethnographer through the research process. Participant observation was the first method utilized. Its two-tiered approach requires ethnographers: "... (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation" (Spradley, 1980: 54). After spending countless hours in the C.A.R. office watching the staff assist clients and recording observations, opportunities emerged to become more participatory. This participation as a C.A.R. staff member included answering phone calls, taking messages, welcoming clients and keeping them company while waiting for a staff member. However, overall the researcher likely did much more observing than participating. To actually participate as a staff member at C.A.R. one needs extensive knowledge of immigration and naturalization issues in order to explain to the clients what needs to be done to meet their needs.

Something that all participant observers must be aware of is their own bias as well as their impact on those being studied. Especially when conducting an evaluation, those being evaluated may be affected simply by the presence of the evaluator. As a result, it is crucial for evaluators to be “purposefully participatory and collaborative” (Patton, 2005: 38). Furthermore, “...the removed, “objective” evaluator, who lacked understanding and empathy for the social change goals inherent in most feminist projects, was likely to carry an unintentional bias in to the evaluation” (Shapiro, 1988: 193). As a result, I did not distance myself from my goals and intentions to do research that may make life adjustments easier for refugees and increase sensitivity to changes in gender roles. It is incredibly important to recognize and admit one’s bias when conducting such research, claiming to be entirely objective only re-entrenches bias. By exposing bias within one’s work, it can be recognized, deconstructed, and the end result can be taken for what it is worth. Claiming to be objective only covers up hidden motivations, all ethnographers and evaluators must be self-reflective in order to produce the most accurate and interpretable research possible.

### Ethnographic Interviews

After a few months of observation the second research method, the ethnographic interview was added. “Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity aims to understand another way of life from the native point of view,” (Spradley, 1979: 3). Sometimes the best way to understand the informant’s point of view is simply to ask. What is unique about ethnographic interviews is that they can resemble a friendly conversation more than a formal interview. All questions are open-ended and can lead in different directions depending on what the informant chooses to discuss.

Once sufficient background knowledge of the processes at C.A.R. and about displaced persons in general was obtained, semi-structured interview schedules for clients and staff were created (see appendices). After asking permission for an interview and going over the informed consent form, clients were interviewed before or after they met with staff members in the C.A.R. office. A few clients refused to be interviewed because they were in a hurry and others did not give a reason. In sum: twenty client interviews, three staff interviews, and one follow-up interview with C.A.R.’s executive director were compiled. Clients were asked whether or not they were willing to have the interview recorded. Those who agreed were recorded. Notes were taken for both recorded and unrecorded interviews.

Although grant funds were budgeted to hire interpreters, this opportunity never arose. Each interview was unscheduled and each informant did not know they would be interviewed until they were asked shortly before the interview began. In one instance, a niece interpreted for her aunt who spoke very little English. Clients often come to C.A.R. with family and friends who are more familiar with life in the U.S. as well as the English language. These individuals who come with clients help them understand what C.A.R. staff is saying and what they need to do to have their issues resolved. Cross-cultural communication was a significant challenge, but in the end all interviews were conducted in English and followed a similar schedule. An ethnographer with more time and resources would have conducted interviews that were more open-ended and probably would have conducted them in the informant’s native language. However, because one of the goals of this research was to evaluate Community Assistance for Refugees, the investigator determined that it was more important to use a uniform set of questions so the evaluation was as reliable as possible. “Out of necessity, evaluation ethnographers must have a more deliberate approach to the research process. Our clients have neither the time nor the

financial resources for completely open-ended project ethnography” (Copeland-Carson & Butler, 2005: 11).

As clients were simply asked for interviews before or after their appointment or meeting with C.A.R. staff there was little time to build rapport. Most rapport building occurred when I reviewed the informed consent form with clients. Here, I explained my intentions to improve the functioning of the service organization and to learn more about the informant’s culture and how it has changed. At first this was a major concern, “How much information would clients reveal to a college student they had only known for five minutes?” However, this concern was alleviated when the differences between ethnography and evaluation anthropology were realized. Ethnographers typically spend a year or more living closely with the population they study. Because of time and budget limitations, evaluation research usually occurs in a much shorter timeframe (Copeland-Carson & Butler, 2005). It is simply not logistically possible to accomplish everything one wants to.

After interviews were completed clients received a \$10 gift card to use at a local grocery store. Instead of offering the compensation before the interview, fearing that it may impact the relationship between researcher and informant, it was offered after the interview was completed. It felt good to be able to compensate individuals who were willing to help with the research. Two different clients, a male and a female, refused the gift cards. Although neither gave a detailed explanation of why they chose not to accept the gift, it may have had something to do with the paperwork. In order to distribute the grant funds correctly, the researcher was required to record the name, address, social security number, and signature of each recipient.

#### Narrative Analysis

The third research method utilized was narrative analysis. Although interviews with clients may not be considered narratives in the most traditional sense, it was important to go back over the information presented from clients. Using feminist research methods described by Devault, this researcher attempted to listen beyond what was being said.

...since words available often do not fit, women learn to “translate” when they talk about their experiences. As they do so, parts of their lives “disappear” because they are not included in the language of the account. In order to “recover” these parts of women’s lives, researchers must develop methods for listening around and beyond words (1990: 101).

It was a significant challenge to “listen around and between words” throughout this project. Sometimes informants could not answer questions because they could not find the terms to express their ideas, or struggled to find English equivalents to terms in their native language. The researcher interpreted this as the “disappearance” discussed above by Devault, caused by the limitations of language and the difficulties of speaking in one’s non-native tongue. As a result, special attention was paid to non-verbal communication cues such as pauses, facial expressions, and tone. When communication in English (the only language spoken by the interviewer) was difficult, focusing on the unsaid was an important part of this analysis. Thus, in making determinations of whether a response was positive, negative, or neutral all communication (verbal and non-verbal) was incorporated into the analysis. A standard objective evaluation of only the transcripts of the interviews would have revealed much less about the nature of language. By only examining the words themselves and not how they were said one could easily misinterpret data. It is important to examine all parts of the interview experience, not only the transcript. The interpretations of the researcher clearly add an element of subjectivity to the data collected, but because of language difficulties, the lack of rapport, and the cultural gender

differences between researcher and client, it soon became apparent that female clients were unable or unwilling to express everything the researcher hoped to hear. Unfortunately, when conducting interviews the use of language cannot be escaped. "In spite of obstacles to women's expression, language is a resource to be used, and in use, there are many possibilities" (Devault, 1990: 112).

Thus, the data collected is a beginning ethnographer/evaluator's best attempt to compile the most relevant data possible. By considering both the spoken words and what is "unsaid" but still communicated, a true qualitative perspective is utilized as well as a quantitative approach (though analysis of transcripts) to achieve findings. It is not contended that more practice as an ethnographer, evaluator, interviewer, and feminist researcher would have increased the reliability of this data. Furthermore, at certain points in the research process the student investigator was beyond nervous or apprehensive, and actually terrified to ask strangers for interviews. The researcher was careful when speaking with female clients, especially those older than him to not be too inquisitive, overbearing or rude. However, overcoming these challenges will only benefit the researcher as he continues to grow as a scholar. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the primary investigator is a student conducting his first ethnographic/evaluative research project. Although both the executive director of C.A.R. and the faculty investigator provided essential oversight, unfortunately this work cannot be considered fully professional. "Students must not be bid as professionals, and their work being equated to professionals, without being fully trained" (Crain & Tashima, 2005: 43).

However, the nature of student scholarship, as opposed to professionally conducted evaluation does offer one significant benefit. Simon and Christman discuss the terms of traditional evaluation research:

Unlike academic research, evaluation research does not emerge from the curiosity of the researcher...Evaluation research occurs in the context of a formal contractual relationship and ongoing informal interactions with a client. Clients can vary greatly – a government agency, a school district, a university, a nonprofit organization. Whatever the client, the evaluator establishes an economic relationship with specified obligations and expectations (2005: 141).

This project *was* conducted at the curiosity of the researcher and designed almost entirely by the researcher as well. The economic/contractual relationship discussed by Simon and Christman was nonexistent. The primary motivations behind this research were related to scholarship, a desire to help a population that may be in need, and to improve the functioning of a valuable community asset. However, the anthropology department that the researcher is a part of does have a contractual relationship with C.A.R. and the executive director was at least partially involved in defining the research. Thus, comparatively this nature of student scholarship versus professional evaluation offers is beneficial in some aspects, and hardly different in others.

#### Qualitative vs. Quantitative

Because of the nature of ethnographic information the researcher chose to rely primarily on qualitative data collection techniques. The emphasis on qualitative data allowed the researcher to view informants as distinct individuals and incorporate their cultural background into the analysis. Reliance on primarily quantitative techniques may have yielded the same results, but they would not have been as detailed. However, quantitative analysis was used to evaluate C.A.R. and to show basic demographic data and background information.

The inherent subjectivity of qualitative data collection techniques, especially when a feminist perspective is included, must be acknowledged. Because of the interpretative nature of

listening to the “unsaid” as well as the feminist social agenda in general, this data should not be viewed as entirely objective. The conclusions about changes in gender roles and the opinions of the informants about these changes are based on the researcher’s interpretation of a conversation with an individual. In no way should this data speak for refugees and displaced persons in general. Any further extrapolation of an inaccurate homogenous categorization such as “Sudanese or Somali people believe...” or “People from less-industrialized societies think...” is incredibly inappropriate.

On the other hand, the evaluation of the services provided by Community Assistance for Refugees was conducted in an entirely different fashion. Utilizing the process approach to evaluation “is more appropriate for human service delivery.” The process approach assesses programs on a broader level, instead of focusing specifically on certain areas (Ervin, 2000: 85). Ervin continues, “The task of measuring success in a multitude of separate and overlapping circumstances in an immigrant population is infinitely complex and it cannot be easily measured by a fixed set of outcome criteria” (2000: 85). Despite these complexities, the evaluation of C.A.R. was conducted as objectively as possible in order to gain the most accurate picture of the effectiveness of this organization at meeting client needs. This data was analyzed almost exclusively on a quantitative level; the evaluative questions focused more on what occurred at C.A.R. and if clients felt comfortable and satisfied with their experiences at this agency. Although most interview questions were open-ended, the evaluative questions were less open-ended than others. The recommendations at the conclusion of this article reflect the researcher’s opinions of what actions may be helpful based both on qualitative and quantitative data.

### **Findings on Gender**

Only one interview question focused on gender roles, but it often was followed up by several more specific questions based on client responses. Clients would first be asked to think about family life in their home country and discuss how that was different from family or home life in America. Follow-up questions included: “Have your responsibilities as a family member changed?” “Do you have other responsibilities that you did not have before coming to America?” “Has women’s work changed?” “Has men’s work changed?” Usually all of these questions would not be asked each time.

Client responses were coded as positive, negative, or neutral. A positive response usually involved an affirmative answer a follow up question such as, “What do you think of these changes?” or “Is it a good change?” Some clients were too young to work jobs outside the home while living in their nation of origin so family life in general was sometimes discussed. An interview segment that was coded as a positive response to the gender question is below.

Interviewer: Do you know if she liked working, or liked it before when she didn’t work, or don’t you know?

Client: I think she liked working.

Interviewer: She liked having the chance to work?

Client: Yup, because she would learn of the world going on, the outside, and have her own money than wait for my dad to bring money.

Unfortunately the above example cannot describe everything entailed in decisions to code client responses. Non-verbal communication cues such as: nods, smiles, how quickly one answered the question, and pauses also helped in determining whether a response was positive or not. These non-verbal cues were not the sole factor in these determinations but instead functioned to reinforce the discourse. Most clients stated that life was much different in their American



home/family life than it was in their native country. Here in America, females were able to (or perhaps financially compelled to) work jobs outside of the home. What is uniquely interesting is that most clients welcomed the changes in gender roles. Female clients commonly stated that they liked having the opportunity to work outside of the home and the financial independence that comes with it. For female clients, there were six responses coded as positive, one as negative and one neutral.

Responses were coded as neutral for different reasons. If the client did not understand the interviewer's question or if the interviewer could not interpret the client's answer, the response was coded as neutral. Unfortunately sometimes notes were jotted too quickly or recordings were interrupted and some responses simply could not be placed into positive or negative categories. Some clients stated that they did not feel like the changes in gender roles were either good or bad or that they saw no change in gender roles at all. These answers were also included as a neutral response. The only negative female client response reflected frustration with the difficulties of paying bills and hassles with credit cards.

Male clients generally did not directly state how they felt about the change in gender roles, only that they recognized it and saw it as both good and bad. Altogether there were four positive responses from males, one negative, and seven neutral. The positive responses from males centered on the view that there are more opportunities here in America than there were in their countries of origin. The only negative response came from a man who stated that he was financially better off in Africa than his neighbors.

In order to understand the implications of the changes in gender roles, it is useful to examine what life was like before coming to America. The following example explains the traditional gender roles in Nuer society, a population originally from Sudan. In order to understand traditional Nuer gender roles, one must first understand how the Nuer view cattle. Traditional Nuer society is based on a cattle economy. According to Evans-Pritchard, "A man knows each animal of his herd and of the herds of his neighbours and kinsmen: its colour, the shape of its horns, its peculiarities, the number of its teats, the amount of milk it gives, its history, its ancestry and its progeny" (1940: 37). It is not difficult to see how important cattle are to the Nuer; in fact, they depend on each other for survival (Evans-Pritchard, 1940).

Although all Nuer are dependant on cattle, traditionally men and women had very different responsibilities to the animals. Men were primarily "herdsman" and women were "dairy-maids," according to the language of Evans-Pritchard (1940: 40). Cattle also play an important role in marriage as men retain ownership of their herd when married, while women leave their family herd to care for her husband's family's herd (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Other distinctions between male and female in traditional Nuer culture are less directly related to cattle. For instance, in general women are viewed as givers and nurturers of life, while men are viewed as takers and protectors of life (Hutchinson, 1980). Also, traditionally Nuer men were not supposed to view Nuer women (with the exception of close relatives) while they were consuming food. The inverse of the above statement is also true of traditional Nuer society. Without going into tedious and detailed descriptions (see Evans-Pritchard, 1940 and Hutchinson, 1980) it easy to see that traditional Nuer gender roles were strictly defined in their country of origin at previous points in history.

Of course the Nuer individuals who have arrived in Mankato as refugees and immigrants did not grow up under the same conditions as their ancestors (who were studied by Evans-Pritchard and Hutchinson). As globalization has increased and western influence has spread throughout the world, it is unlikely many Nuer, even those in Africa, still live the same as their

ancestors. However, it is not unreasonable to posit that some aspects of this culture have survived and that contemporary Nuer society still has more clearly defined gender roles than contemporary American society. Furthermore, not all clients interviewed were Nuer, the examples presented above are just meant to show how extreme changes in gender roles can be for displaced persons.

Regardless, the implications of the change in gender roles can be potentially very far-reaching. As women who traditionally worked only inside the home are gaining independence, conflicts can develop between husband and wife. One informant specifically discussed how he has witnessed marriages break up because men are unwilling to compromise. In America men and women share many responsibilities in the household, especially when both male and female adults work jobs outside of the home. He also stated that this made things more complicated, but that he saw both good and bad in the change. However, women clearly expressed that they liked working a job with a wage outside of the home and the financial independence that comes with that. This conclusion was supported by Franz's research on Bosnian refugees living in Austria. Below is a quotation from a female refugee:

...In former times, down [in Bosnia] women had difficulties finding jobs; they stayed at home and thus were less emancipated. Now in Austria, women are more emancipated and he has to listen to what I have to say. This is also I reason why I do not want to return home (Franz, 2000: vol. 1).

Although Franz's researched detailed more negative attitudes of male refugees about female's newfound independence, this research project did not find the same result. Perhaps male informants were unwilling to express their discontent at the risk of sounding sexist, or perhaps male informants simply had less discontent than Franz's informants.

### **Findings on C.A.R. Based on Client Interviews**

Nearly all client reasons for visiting C.A.R. involved filling out forms, applications, or some other sort of paperwork. Applications are required for citizenship, green cards, permanent resident status, to travel to one's home country, and even to call family members in refugee camps abroad. Clients also visited C.A.R. to correct bureaucratic mistakes on these applications and to collect supplemental paperwork required for them, such as proof of physical examinations and vaccinations. It is amazing how difficult the federal government makes these processes. A green card can take as long as five years to obtain, and the process can be delayed if the applicant of the federal government makes an error. Some clients come to C.A.R. for assistance with housing issues. In the first years of C.A.R.'s existence and up until about two years ago Community Assistance for Refugees was primarily a resettlement agency for new arrivals. Now, C.A.R. does less resettlement work and instead focuses on specific client needs and requests. Other reasons cited by the staff for client visits include: transportation issues, paying bills, problems with landlords or police, legal issues, need for winter clothing, and finding jobs.

Clients were also asked if they felt comfortable coming to C.A.R. and asking for help. Of the twenty clients interviewed, sixteen gave affirmative answers, three did not answer this question and one gave an inconclusive answer. Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of clients felt comfortable going to C.A.R. and asking for help. This may well be one of the most important aspects of a service agency. Fortunately C.A.R. is viewed as a welcome place with good people

who are ready to help. The only inconclusive answer came from a client who reported apprehension about whether or not he should bother the executive director of C.A.R. with his problems because he realizes how busy C.A.R. is most of the time. Of the three individuals who did answer this question, two were not interviewed at C.A.R. and the other had come to help a friend.

When asked if everything was resolved as best as it could be, of the 20 clients: eleven gave affirmative answers, seven did not answer this question, and one gave a negative answer. This was more of a close-ended question and most clients simply answered yes or no. However, some more detailed responses give more insight into how clients view C.A.R. A segment from an interview with a male client is below:

Interviewer: And the help you receive here, is it effective, is it getting you what you need to get?

Client: Yeah, I think definitely.

Client's Fiancée: It helps that you can talk to a person and not a computer or an answering machine.

Client: Yeah, that too. That's a lot better. And he explains it in a ....way that you can understand more you know?

Another client stated that although her issues were not completely resolved she felt that they would be resolved eventually. When asked if everything was resolved as best as it could be the client responded, "Not really, I'm trying to talk to people about getting my children the citizenship, but not yet right now." A follow up question asked if she was getting closer to achieving this. The client responded, "Yes, getting closer." Although this question was more difficult for many informants to answer, those that did answer it usually stated that C.A.R. had successfully helped them meet their needs. There were more "non-answers" to this question because of language difficulties and the fact that some clients had not yet met with staff members at the time of the interview.

Clients were also asked if there was anything else they wished C.A.R. could do if the organization had unlimited resources and staff. This question was often preceded by a statement such as, "If this was the perfect service organization in the perfect world, with as many people working here and as much funds as they needed..." Of the 20 clients: ten could not think of anything else they need help with, two stated they needed more help learning English, two stated that they need more money for college, two stated that they needed help finding a job, one stated that C.A.R. needed to follow-up with clients, one stated that she/he needed help getting a Driver's License, one stated that she/he wanted initiatives to preserve native culture and language, and one stated that she/he desired staff members that share their ethnicity.

What is interesting about two of the above responses is that there are currently services offered to meet these needs. The four clients who stated that they desired services which helped with English skills and finding jobs may not have known that C.A.R. has a job board and that C.A.R.'s executive director teaches English classes at a local community center. This suggests that Community Assistance for Refugees could better inform their clientele of the services they offer.

It is unfortunate that post-secondary education is so expensive in the United States. It is also unfortunate that C.A.R. simply does not have the financial resources to help individuals pay for college. Staff members at C.A.R. help individuals apply for college and financial aid, but the financial burden falls solely on the clients themselves. When American society as a whole puts

such a huge emphasis on obtaining a college education (it seems to be almost a prerequisite to success in this country) it seems almost contradictory how expensive it is.

C.A.R. employs a driver who transports clients in a van to places they need to get to in the Mankato area. This transportation program helps many refugees get across town quickly and safely. The public mass transit system in Mankato is incredibly inefficient. One client expressed a clear desire for more assistance with transportation issues when she/he stated that they desired help obtaining a driver's license. Individuals who have lived their entire lives in societies dominated by automobiles usually learn to drive from their parents. However, individuals who have not lived in cultures dominated by automobiles need to learn to drive somewhere. One cannot pass their driver's license without practice.

Another client stated that he wished C.A.R. could help with initiatives to preserve native language and culture. This client was specifically concerned with teaching refugee children traditions from their native culture. Since the birth of America there has been massive pressure to assimilate into the mainstream, contemporary culture. It is understandable that a client would want actions to be taken to preserve their heritage. Furthermore, it is also easy to understand why a client would desire a staff member of the same ethnicity. Of course it would not be possible to have a staff member representing every ethnicity at Community Assistance for Refugees, it is not surprising that clients would desire to discuss their problems and concerns with someone who understands their unique culture.

This question functioned as a needs assessment, which, according to Ervin, "...must be ranked to generate actions following recommendations" (2000: 67). Because only half of the informants expressed that there was a need that was not currently being met, one can conclude that roughly 50% of clients are having all their needs met. It is also important to note that this question was phrased in a fundamentally different manner than the previous questions discussed above. When asking about other services, the interviewer stated that if C.A.R. was the ideal service organization with unlimited resources, would there be anything else that clients wished C.A.R. could do for them. It is remarkable that ten respondents stated that they could ask nothing more of Community Assistance for Refugees, even if the agency had infinite resources. The ranking suggested by Ervin occurred later in the data analysis process, after the perspectives of the staff were included as well. The results of this ranking are reflected in the recommendations section of this article.

### **Findings on C.A.R. Based on Staff Interviews**

The executive director of C.A.R. was interviewed on two occasions, a faculty member from Minnesota State University-Mankato, and an intern from the same institution but a different department was interviewed once. The researcher placed each of these interviews in the staff category. The executive director had worked at C.A.R. for nearly five years at the time of the interview, the MSU-Mankato faculty member had been involved with the organization for over two years but is not actually a staff member, and the intern had been dedicating time for approximately seven months. It is important to note that the executive director was the employee paid by C.A.R.; the university of course employed the faculty member and the intern worked for course credit. For the purposes of convenience all three individuals will be referred to from now on as "staff." After discussing some background information about the organization, such as its purpose, why clients come to C.A.R., and things that the staff like about working there; these interviews focused on how C.A.R. can be improved. This information emerged along three trends: specific ways C.A.R. can improve their delivery of services, things that can be done to

make the staff's tasks more manageable, and client concerns. The second, follow-up interview with the executive director of Community Assistance for Refugees will be discussed separately from the others because the other three (non-follow-up interviews) all followed the same schedule.

When discussing specific ways to improve C.A.R.'s services, two responses occurred more than once. The first response centered on the difficulties of keeping a small non-profit organization afloat financially. So much time is spent on grant writing and compliance, as well as accounting that other goals cannot be accomplished. Unfortunately this was described as "a permanent problem" by the staff, but could be partly alleviated with "greater structure and organization." The second reoccurring response was with regard to staffing. The intern and faculty member from MSU-Mankato are far from full-time employees, leaving the executive director to tend to most of the daily requirements of operating this agency on his own. Their contributions are certainly essential to the improved functioning of this organization, but what is truly needed is another staff member employed by Community Assistance for Refugees, such as a case manager. A case manager could concentrate on following up on clients, as well as meeting with them in the C.A.R. office, leaving the executive director to be able to concentrate on logistical objectives, such as grant compliance and other finances. Since there is often only one staff member in the office at a time, when a client comes in the staff member has to stop working on the task at hand and help the client with their concern. This is a mixed blessing, as clients appreciate how welcoming and nice the staff is, but it is also an inefficient way to accomplish tasks. The majority of the staff at C.A.R. also demonstrated a desire to make the organization more proactive and preventative and less reactive. Other suggestions to improve the services delivered by C.A.R. included: better follow-up (which could occur with the hiring of a case manager); better technology (including networking existing computers, acquiring more computers in general, and the creation of a webpage); establishing set hours for walk-in clients; ability to understand other languages (a challenging but noble goal); and speeding up the application processes through the federal government. Improving the delivery of C.A.R.'s services will be discussed in greater detail below when all suggestions from staff, clients, and the researcher are compiled in the Recommendations section.

When asked what would make his or her role at C.A.R. easier, each staff member had a very different response. One stated that being able to dedicate their attention to one task at a time would be very helpful. However, this staff member also mentioned that this is part of the nature of working at for a small non-profit because there are few employees and a variety of tasks to be accomplished. Another staff member reiterated the need for structure and organization. When there are so many tasks to be done it is difficult to effectively schedule times to use C.A.R.'s limited resources, such as the only high functioning computer. Also, staff members have many responsibilities outside of C.A.R. as well, so it is sometimes difficult to locate someone when they are needed. A final staff suggestion centered on the communication difficulties. These are incredibly difficult for staff members to overcome because clients come from all over the world and speak numerous different languages. However, this staff member did state a desire to improve cross-cultural communication skills.

Staff members were also asked to discuss client concerns that had been voiced to them. One concern involved perception. A staff member stated that some clients felt that clients of other ethnicities or from other nations of origin were given preferential treatment. Another concern was with regard to class issues, and that clients have mentioned that they felt "judged or put down." One thing to keep in mind about both these concerns is that they are issues of

perception. Sometimes cultural barriers can result in the unintentional transmission of misinformation. However, the fact that the staff felt the need to discuss these issues with the researcher does indicate a need to recognize and alleviate these concerns. Whether or not preferential treatment was given (the researcher never witnessed anything to indicate this) or some other sort of unnecessary judgment ever occurred, it is always important to be aware of how others may perceive things. One staff member elaborated on this concern by describing how sometimes having different priorities can influence these perceptions. If a client feels that one thing is uniquely urgent and a staff member has a systematic (and perhaps a proven successful) method to approach the same problem, it may not appear that way to the client. To the client it may seem as if the staff is unwilling to help with their problem.

Other client concerns were a result of wanting C.A.R. to provide things that is not part of their mission. For instance, C.A.R. is a service organization, not an advocacy organization so clients can become frustrated when C.A.R. cannot help them with advocacy issues. However, staff is always willing to point clients in the right direction to find other individuals or organizations that can help them with their problems if C.A.R. cannot help. Some clients have asked C.A.R. to help with paying rent, but they simply do not have the financial resources to provide this sort of help. Instead, the staff at Community Assistance for Refugees can help clients apply for Section 8 Housing, cash, and food assistance. Finally, clients also expressed a concern over the citizenship test and all application processes in general. It is not hard to imagine how frustrating it could be to not know how long it will take to become a citizen, receive a green card or permanent resident status, or know if you can visit your family in your home country. Unfortunately, this concern is something C.A.R. has no control over.

I realized the need for a follow-up interview with the executive director of C.A.R. after understanding just how many responsibilities this position entails. This interview focused on these responsibilities, how C.A.R. functions, and the possibility of hiring more staff. Not only is the executive director the only employee at C.A.R. who deals with client concerns on a daily basis, he also sits on multiple related committees in the Mankato area and serves as a court interpreter. Apart from time spent with clients, other responsibilities to C.A.R. include: communication with the board of directors, development of an operating budget, fundraising, contact with the community, education, and other public relations activities. It is not necessary to go into greater detail with regard to the responsibilities of the executive director, by now it is clear to see that there are more things to be done than time to do them. The need for additional staff is apparent and the executive director stated that the current pace could only be continued for so long. Often individuals who work in small non-profit organizations suffer from burnout and exhaustion because of the large number of tasks to be accomplished and relatively few people to do them.

Regarding the prospect of hiring more staff, the executive director stated that finances were a primary concern for the board of directors. But the executive director also stated clearly that C.A.R. needs more staff regardless. The ideal employee for C.A.R., according the executive director, “has to be one that is disciplined, that is able to work with people, and a person who is interested in learning about people, listening to what they say, has to be a good listener, and somebody who is not afraid to make decisions...” The executive director continued by stating that a social service background is not necessary but does help. If nothing else, an employee at C.A.R. must, “have sensitivity to issues that are involved in this kind of situation.”

Unfortunately, until sufficient financial resources are gathered, the hiring of more staff is on hold for Community Assistance for Refugees.

## **Evaluation of C.A.R.**

When examining the questions, which focus on client evaluation of Community Assistance for Refugees, the findings clearly demonstrate many needs for C.A.R. and their ability to almost always successfully meet these needs. C.A.R. helps refugees and immigrants with paperwork and is the only organization that exists for this purpose. People need this assistance because many refugees and immigrants do not have an understanding of the English language, which makes navigation through U.S. bureaucracy nearly impossible, especially in the post 9-11 United States. This organization functions as a mediator between displaced persons who have recently arrived in the United States and the government of this country.

If the reader expects to see a letter grade or percentage score for C.A.R.'s efficiency they will be disappointed. Because of the nature of anthropological evaluation research these "black and white" statements are not possible. Although the anthropological perspective in evaluation is not "clear-cut," the data that it does yield are more "realistic," (Joyce, 1980: 183). The bottom line is that most clients were satisfied with the assistance they received from this organization, stated that the staff was approachable, and demonstrated a significant need for the agency. If clients were not coming to the organization and the staff had plenty of time to focus on finances, grant compliance, and follow up with clients this would reflect less of a need for C.A.R. Instead, because the staff members have more work to do than time to do it, it is obvious that C.A.R. is providing essential services to a population in need. To conclude, this evaluation should be considered entirely positive, as C.A.R. is doing everything they can with all the financial resources, time, and energy possessed by the organization and its staff.

## **Recommendations**

### To Community Assistance for Refugees

C.A.R. is undoubtedly providing an essential service to a population that is in need. But, there is always more that can be done. Through staff and client interviews as well as through participant observation, recommendations for the organization have been compiled. First and most importantly, more staff is needed. C.A.R. is understaffed the executive director is the only employee who is at the office everyday and is incredibly overworked. Not only is this individual in charge of C.A.R.'s finances, grant compliance, and daily operations but he is also the only one qualified enough to deal with most of the clients' issues. With more staff C.A.R. would be able to follow up on clients after they come into the office. The executive director simply does not have the chance to follow-up because as soon as one client is helped there are often two or three waiting for help immediately afterwards. Also, with more staff C.A.R. can focus on being preventative rather than reactive.

Furthermore, adding more structure and organization to C.A.R. itself may help the agency become more efficient. Having set hours for walk-ins and requiring appointments may increase the efficiency of C.A.R. Instead of jumping from project to project the staff would be able to have a set amount of time for clients and a set amount of time to focus on other responsibilities (rather than dealing with a potential client when trying to dedicate time to a potential grantor, for instance).

Although C.A.R. is doing an amazing job, sensitivity to cultural, gender, and language differences can always be increased. Community Assistance for Refugees is most certainly a leader in the community and members of the Mankato community may model their actions after this agency. Furthermore, individuals who have recently arrived to America would likely have a

more negative view of this society in general if they had a negative view of the individuals who are there to help them. As a result, it is uniquely important that C.A.R. continues its positive relationship with the refugee community and sets an example for how Mankatoans should treat and view their new neighbors.

#### To the United States Federal Government

If the federal government were willing to translate all their paperwork into native languages many of the burdens on C.A.R. and the populations they serve would be lifted immediately. The reason why so many people walk-in to C.A.R. at random times is because they receive a letter from the government and need someone to interpret it. Furthermore, waiting 3-5 years for a green card is simply absurd and it is also a tragedy that some clients spend more than 10 years waiting in refugee camps to come to America. The United States Federal Government needs to decrease the bureaucratic delays and focus on meeting the needs of all peoples within its borders, regardless of where they are from. One can imagine how frustrated someone would be if after waiting for 5 years they still cannot use their green card because some careless worker made a typing error and the wrong name is on their card. The bottom line is that the government has made it very difficult for refugees and immigrants to function in America – they should be trying to make it easier for these individuals.

#### To the Community of Mankato

Often these “others” are blamed for their own plight, even when they are the victims of the war. Migrants and refugees are stigmatized as burdens on the local economy, as potential competitors for jobs, as socially and culturally disruptive or undesirable, and in other ways as threats to a nation or community’s well being. Sometimes they are even resented as people who receive special treatment because of their refugee status (Gilliland, 1995: vol. 13).

The Mankato community can also help the transition of refugees and immigrants to America. The first and most important thing to keep in mind is that people who come to the United States should not be referred to as “aliens.” This is a dehumanizing term; all refugees and immigrants are human beings and should be referred to as such. Secondly, Americans must not assume that the refugees and immigrants who come here are choosing to leave their homeland in order to “live off the government.” These individuals and families are fleeing horrific violence that Americans probably do not understand. These people need compassion, not jealous thoughts about them “using up all the tax dollars.” Finally, members of the Mankato and the global community must recognize the violence and war all over the world that breaks up families, friends, neighborhoods, and the like. Most Americans are fortunate and privileged enough to live in peace and not have their families spread out over the globe living in refugee camps and war-torn regions. This privilege must be recognized, but more importantly must be given up to help our new neighbors in any way possible.

#### To Ethnographers and Anthropologists for future research

This project is only a starting point for research into Mankato’s refugee population. Because of limitations on time the interviews conducted have only yielded a glimpse into refugee life. In order to increase understanding of cultural change and the needs of refugees this project must be continued. More detailed questions can be asked regarding gender roles and how they are changing. Certainly as clients live in the U.S. for an extended period of time these roles will continue to change. Furthermore, as the refugee population continues to grow, so will Community Assistance for Refugees. It will be helpful in another year or two to conduct another evaluation of C.A.R. to ensure that client needs are still being met.



Finally, perhaps a female/male two-person team of ethnographers would allow for better data collection. Often female informants may feel less comfortable speaking with male anthropologists, and vice versa – especially about gender roles. Although this did not significantly impede this research, it is believed that a female anthropologist would have had access to information that a male researcher would have trouble obtaining. A better communication strategy for future research would involve a gender-balanced team of researchers. It is believed that a female researcher could interpret the “unsaid” in a more illuminative light than a male researcher (when speaking with female informants) Devault explains how woman-to-woman talk can sometimes reveal deeper meanings:

...because women speakers are more likely to listen seriously to each other- and that it affords opportunities to women to speak more fully about their experiences. She argues, in fact, that consciousness-raising, which might be understood as woman-to-woman talk systemized, is at the heart of feminist theorizing (Devault, 1990: 98).

Although this researcher certainly did not take interviews with female informants less seriously (if anything the researcher was guilty of the opposite), as mentioned above, a feeling was present that there was more going on than what was said. Taking more time to build rapport and getting to know clients, as individuals perhaps would result in more revealing interviews.

## X. Appendices

### A. Informed Consent Form

#### **Informed Consent**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this interview is to collect data that examines how Community Assistance for Refugees (C.A.R.) operates now and what could be done to improve the services that it provides. I am also interested in how services for C.A.R.'s clients are affected by gender.

**Project Description:** I want to learn about your experiences as a refugee/immigrant. I would like to know how a refugee/immigrant sees C.A.R., how a refugee/immigrant sees life in America, and how a refugee/immigrant thinks gender roles have changed. Along with this interview I am recording observations and analyzing and interpreting the data in hopes of learning more about the needs of refugees/immigrants and how to best meet these needs.

**Recording:** I would like to take notes during the interview, as well as record it so I can go over it later, if that is acceptable to you. These recordings will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the Ethnology Lab at Minnesota State University-Mankato and will be erased/deleted in April 2009.

**Native Language:** I want you to talk to me just like you would talk to someone in your family or a friend. Please just tell me what you think and how you feel, there are no wrong answers to my questions, I simply want to hear your views. I know very little about the experiences of refugees/immigrants and hope you can tell me more. If necessary, I will provide an interpreter so we can understand each other better.

**Voluntary Participation:** This interview is completely voluntary, if you do not want to answer any of my questions you do not have to. You may also decide to stop the interview at any time.

**Confidentiality:** If you so choose, all your personal information will remain confidential. If the data collected from you is referenced in the presentation of this research your name will not be used, nor will any identifiable information. Furthermore, no persons not associated with this study will have access to the data or any identifiable information.

**Risks and Benefits:** There is no identifiable physical risk to you, and the only possible emotional or mental risks involve the sharing of your past. You do not have to share anything that you choose not to and once again you can end the interview at any time. Possible benefits to you include improvement of the services and functioning of C.A.R.

**Consent Statement:** I understand the risks associated with this project, as well as the benefits. I understand the description of this project and my signature denotes my consent to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

I wish that my identity be kept confidential. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Initial here)

**Contact Information:** If you have any questions regarding your participation in this research please contact the Responsible Principal Investigator (RPI) or the Principal Investigator (PI).

Dr. Susan Schalge, Department of Anthropology at Minnesota State University – Mankato, Trafton Hall North 331. 507.389.5337. susan.schalge@mnsu.edu - RPI

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Mankato. 507.382.0806. nate\_meyer1@yahoo.com – PI

If you have any rights concerning your participation as a research subject, please contact the  
Minnesota State University-Mankato Institutional Review Board.

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## B. Client Interview

Schedule Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Translator:

Age:

Language:

Gender:

Relationship to Client:

Nation of Origin:

Status: Refugee/Immigrant/Citizen/Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- Where were you before you came to America? And, if you feel comfortable will you please tell me why you left this country?
- How did you end up in southern Minnesota? Has your status as a refugee/immigrant changed as a result of coming to live in Minnesota?
- Have your responsibilities as a family member changed? Do you have other responsibilities that you did not before coming to America? Has women's work changed? Has men's work changed?
- What frustrates you (or what is difficult) about life in America, in general, what obstacles do you face?
- What do you do when you need help? Where do you go? Who helps you?
- How effective is the help you receive?
- What would make your life easier in general?
- Why did you come to C.A.R. today?
- Has C.A.R. helped you in the past, if so, how?
- Are you comfortable asking the people at C.A.R. for help? If not, what would make you more comfortable?
- Were all your questions answered? Was everything resolved as best as it could be?
- In a perfect world, what do you wish C.A.R. could do for you? What else do you need help with?
- What should I remember to keep in mind as I study C.A.R. and the people who come to C.A.R. for help?
- Do you have anything else to add?

### C. Staff Interview Schedules

#### 1. Schedule used for 1<sup>st</sup> interview with all three staff members

##### Staff Interview Schedule

Date:

Time:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Age:

Gender:

Nation of Origin:

Job Title:

- How long have you worked at C.A.R.?
- What do you like about working at C.A.R.?
- Why do people come to C.A.R. and how do you help them?
- In your opinion, what are the goals of C.A.R.- what does it try to accomplish?
- Could C.A.R.'s services be improved, if so, how?
- In an ideal world, what changes could be made at C.A.R. to meet every need that exists?
- What would make your job at C.A.R. easier?
- What concerns do your clients have that have been voiced to you or that you have perceived?
- Do you have anything else to add?

#### 2. Interview schedule used for follow-up interview with C.A.R.'s executive director

- What responsibilities do you have to C.A.R. outside of helping clients?
- Do you sit on any committees in the Mankato community? If so, what additional responsibilities do these obligations entail?
- What responsibilities do you have outside of C.A.R. (i.e. family, religious, other job) and how are these affected by your C.A.R. responsibilities?
- Can you tell me about the board of directors and how it functions?
- Would you rather play a larger administrative role, a larger service role, both, or does it not really matter and why?
- Are you looking to hire more staff now? What is your image of the ideal person to work at C.A.R.?
- Can you tell me about the service-learning partnership with the anthropology department at MSU? How does that help C.A.R. and how significant is that help (or is it more of a hassle)?

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### **Author's biography**

Nathan Edward Meyer is a native of Mankato, Minnesota. He graduated from Mankato West High School in 2002 with honors. After graduating he represented his high school at the National Forensic League Policy Debate Tournament in Charlotte, N.C., finishing 9<sup>th</sup> in the nation. After deciding not to pursue debate at the college level and because of his strong emotional attachment to Mankato he has focused his academic career on making meaningful changes in this community. As an Ethnic Studies and Anthropology double major at Minnesota State University – Mankato from 2000 to 2006, Nate was fortunate to learn from caring and socially conscious faculty. In the fall of 2006 Nate will continue his education at Minnesota State University – Mankato as a graduate assistant in the anthropology department. Ultimately Nate hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in anthropology and become a professor.

Currently Nate focuses his studies on the needs of refugees and immigrants in the Mankato area as well as how gender roles can change as people are displaced. Through his research and experiences as a service-learner at different community organizations as an undergraduate Nate became aware of the need for students become involved in the community. As a graduate student Nate will work to provide more opportunities for anthropology students to learn, “outside of the classroom.” He also is interested in evolutionary psychology and human behavioral ecology. More specifically Nate often focuses his studies in gender/women's issues as well as the needs of others who endure discrimination and oppression.

### **Faculty mentor's biography**

Dr. Susan Schalge is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Minnesota State University. Her areas of specialization include socio-cultural anthropology, urban and applied anthropology, gender, household economics, culture change, and development studies. East Africa and the U.S. are her geographic areas of specialization. Her dissertation research focused on women's informal sector labor and household organization in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

While continuing her work in Urban Africa, she has recently expanded her research interests to include African immigrants and refugees in the US. She is also developing a community-based research and service-learning program for the department in collaboration with Community Assistance for Refugees and the Open Door Health Center.