

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH REFUGEE WOMEN: PRINCIPLES FOR RECOGNIZING AND RE-CENTERING THE MULTIPLY MARGINALIZED

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Many recent efforts in the field of community psychology have been dedicated to moving from values to action in incorporating diversity into our work. An essential aspect of this goal is designing research that provides opportunities for underrepresented perspectives to be heard. The voices of refugee women, in particular, are not typically incorporated in research, planning for service provision, and policy design. This article explores methodological challenges involved in conducting research with refugee women who are marginalized both within broader U.S. contexts and within their own communities. Six guiding principles are presented: 1) develop strategies for involving marginalized refugee women; 2) consider the advantages and limitations of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and be innovative about combining them; 3) prepare for extensive time and effort for quantitative measure construction; 4) consider gendered decision-making structures in the lives of refugee women and their potential impact on the research process; 5) plan for refugee women's common triple burden of working outside of the home, managing their households, and adjusting to life in a new country; and 6) attend to refugee women's cultural norms about and unfamiliarity with the interview process. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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The United States has provided a safe haven of resettlement for more refugees than any other country, approximately 70,000 each year (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002).¹ In addition, approximately one million other immigrants resettle in the United States each year (Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, 2003).² These newcomers to the United States represent a multitude of cultures, ethnicities, and experiences. Refugees share certain similar circumstances—overcoming past traumas, dealing with difficulties of life in refugee camps, and facing the challenges of adjusting to life in a new place. However, their experiences also differ widely, based not only upon the particular refugee group and their culture, but also on the different social locations of individuals within refugee groups. As the US becomes increasingly diverse, it is essential to conduct research that is truly inclusive of the cultural and racial plurality present within our communities. Although this is a widely expressed sentiment, few candid discussions exist regarding the challenges of engaging in this kind of work and of methods and approaches that have proven to be successful. To move effectively from values to action in incorporating diversity into our work, it is important to design research that provides opportunities for multiple perspectives to be represented. This can only be accomplished by re-conceptualizing our definitions of rigorous research in order to include cultural awareness and competence at a more integral level rather than simply viewing related methodological challenges as problems that diminish scientific rigor or obstacles to overcome.

Many researchers have worked towards reframing scientific rigor, both in terms of more emphasis on using qualitative methodologies to explore participants' experiences (e.g., Hughes & DuMont, 1993; Suzuki, Prendes-Intel, Wertlieb, & Stallings, 1999; Yelland & Gifford, 1995) and improvement of quantitative methods to more accurately take cultural and linguistic differences into account (e.g., Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998; Cavusgil & Das, 1997; Lyons & Chrysochoou, 2000; McGorry, 2000). In addition, recent research has emphasized cultural competency (e.g., Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993; Pernice, 1994; Sasao & Sue, 1993), participant involvement (e.g., Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993), and the adequate methodological and analytical representation of cultural differences (e.g., Greenfield, 1997; Takooshian, Mrinal, & Mrinal, 2001; Van der Vijver & Leung, 1997; Zea, Reisen, & Diaz, 2003).

One important advance has been the recognition of the importance of using methods that do not assume that individuals from different cultural backgrounds share linguistic and conceptual meanings and understandings. Thus, qualitative methods have been used to cast light on the ways in which meaning is constructed within various cultural contexts (e.g., Suzuki et al., 1999). This information either can stand

¹Since September 11, 2001, the United States has accepted very few refugees for resettlement. In 2002, the United States admitted only 27,000 refugees, which is less than half the number it admitted in 2001 and the fewest in more than 30 years (United States Committee for Refugees, 2003). This has left thousands of refugees who had been approved for resettlement before September 11 in dangerous situations (Springer, 2002).

²Social scientists and the U.S. government usually discuss refugees and immigrants as distinct social groups. Immigrants are considered to be people who cross borders for economic reasons, whereas refugees are people who leave their country because of a "well founded fear of persecution" based on religious, ethnic, political, or family reasons. However, consideration of particular situations (e.g., Haitians fleeing secret police in inner tubes and rafts who were turned away from Florida because they were not considered refugees) and U.S. policy since the Cold War demonstrate that the determination of status is in large part ideological and, furthermore, that "the difference between immigrants and refugees is a matter of continuum rather than simple categorization" (Gold, 1992, p. ix). Most immigrants leave their country because of multiple factors, which may include personal, economic, political, and religious reasons.

alone or may be used in the construction of culturally relevant quantitative measures (e.g., Hughes & DuMont, 1993). In addition, an awareness of the importance of understanding the various ways in which meaning is created and the ways in which language represents more than literal meaning has led researchers to attend to the ways in which language is significant to research, including the construction of quantitative measures (Cauce et al., 1998; Yelland & Gifford, 1995; Rogler, 1999). For example, recent research has emphasized the importance of avoiding uncritical transference of concepts across cultures (e.g., Rogler, 1999), the importance of establishing thorough measurement equivalence when conducting cross-cultural research (e.g., Cauce et al., 1998), the ways in which cultural norms may render a given method ineffective (e.g., Gifford, 1995), the importance of the accurate translation of bilingual measures, and the benefits of including members of the target population in the measurement construction phase of a research study (Coll et al., 1999).

In this article, we explore one specific dimension of the larger project of conducting research that genuinely takes diversity into account, namely the methodological challenges encountered when working with individuals and groups who are multiply marginalized with regard to language, culture, nationality, race, and gender. In particular, we focus on our work with two groups of refugee women of color who recently have been resettled in the United States and the lessons we have learned while engaging in this research.

In efforts to include refugees' perspectives in research and the design of policies and services, a particular "refugee community" often is considered a homogenous group in which a specific representative or representatives can speak for all members. However, formal leaders in many refugee communities are men who often do not represent the views and interests of women and people with varying social status (Bays, 1998; Cha & Small, 1994). Thus, it is necessary to be aware of this fact and to work towards ensuring the maximal representation of all perspectives present within a given community. However, researchers who strive to be genuinely inclusive of all refugee voices face numerous challenges to conventional social science methodology, and therefore it is important to highlight relevant considerations involved in accessing and working with marginalized individuals within already marginalized groups. This article draws upon experience from two studies of refugee well-being, both of which were aimed at understanding the needs and perspectives of the most marginalized members within two refugee communities: Hmong women from Laos and Muslim women from Afghanistan, Iraq, and countries in Africa.

REFUGEE WOMEN

Extensive research has documented some of the unique challenges refugee women often face as a result of their resettlement experiences, including limited transferable occupational skills, multiple and conflicting roles, the double burden of work inside and outside of the home, shifting gender and power dynamics, and sexism both within their communities and larger society. Specifically, many refugee women are resettled in the United States from countries in which their access to education was limited, and consequently, they are often unlikely to have been employed outside their homes prior to resettlement. However, even women who were previously employed frequently lack skills that transfer well to industrialized nations such as the United States (DeVoe, 1989; Spero, 1985). Refugee women therefore often do not possess the kinds of language and vocational skills that would facilitate their adjustment to their nation

of resettlement (Donna & Berry, 1999) and often lack resources such as transportation and access to English as a Second Language classes that would assist in alleviating this situation (Ha & Mesfin, 1990). In addition, women who were not previously employed, but whose economic circumstances necessitate their employment in resettlement, may find it difficult to balance their new role as breadwinner with their usually undiminished domestic duties (Ha & Mesfin, 1990; Lipson & Miller, 1994; Lovell, Tran, & Nguyen, 1987).

Refugee women who resettle in industrialized nations thus face a host of challenges to their daily well-being. They often are triply marginalized due to their economic, racial/ethnic, and gender status. However, although refugee women encounter numerous significant obstacles to their well-being in resettlement and frequently have needs that differ radically from those of refugee men, they often are not represented adequately when research with refugees is conducted (Callamard, 1999; Ferris, 1993) or when policy and services are designed and implemented (Bays, 1998). It is important to take into consideration the experiences and needs of refugee women not only for their own sake, but also because they are integral to their families' successful adjustment and overall well-being in resettlement (Rumbaut, 1989). Thus, it is essential that research with refugees focuses on the specific experiences and needs of refugee women. However, within this context, it is important to be aware of the methodological challenges inherent in working with refugee women and to engage in and discuss efforts to address these challenges effectively in order to ensure that these women's voices are represented both fully and adequately.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE RESEARCH

Research and interventions that are not culturally appropriate often fail or have unintended negative consequences. For example, individuals are less likely to participate in community interventions and projects that are not culturally relevant or appropriate (Marin, 1993; Strawn, 1994). In addition, interventions developed and implemented without cultural awareness often fail and can even result in the disempowerment of individuals or communities that researchers intended to empower. For instance, Strawn (1994) discussed a perinatal outreach and education program whose goal was to empower low-income women from diverse backgrounds by providing them with access to resources and a social support network. Although the intervention was structured with careful attention to superficial cultural and linguistic issues (i.e., use of bilingual case workers, translation of materials), the researchers inadvertently imposed individual constructs of empowerment on communities that had strengths (strong social-support networks and collective ideologies) that should have been incorporated into any effort to enable the women to meet their needs and exercise control over their lives.

Many researchers work towards developing accurate cultural understandings, creating guidelines for the construction of valid cross-cultural measures, obtaining accurate translation, achieving representative sampling, and conducting appropriate data analyses (e.g., Cauce et al., 1998; Cavusgil & Das, 1997; Hughes et al., 1993; Lyons & Chrysoschoou, 2000; McGorry, 2000; Peregrine et al., 1993; Pernice, 1994; Rogler, 1999; Sasao & Sue, 1993; Suzuki et al., 1999; Takooshian et al., 2001; Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997; Yelland & Gifford, 1995; Zea et al., 2003). Although these efforts to conduct culturally appropriate research have varied in their success, issues of gender in this research rarely have been sufficiently addressed. Specifically, gender often is treated in a cursory manner that does not adequately acknowledge the complex role

it plays in research with marginalized populations. For example, Lyons and Chrysochoou (2000) noted that cultural norms regarding gender might affect respondents' answers to certain items, and that such gender differences might affect the types of items to which respondents would respond well. While these are important issues to consider, they do not adequately capture the complex task of ensuring that women's voices are represented adequately.

Finally, while both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to elucidate the experiences of refugee women from different national and cultural backgrounds, this usually is done in the absence of a discussion regarding gender-specific challenges encountered during the course of the research (e.g., Boone, 1994; Ha & Mesfin, 1990; Krulfeld, 1994; Lipson & Miller, 1994; Lovell et al., 1987; Omidian, 1994). While it is almost certain that these authors encountered methodological challenges in the course of their research, these are not addressed, most likely because most empirical articles typically do not include these types of issues. A discussion of such challenges may serve to assist future investigators in conducting maximally inclusive research when working with refugee women.

A desire to understand the experiences and needs of refugee women was the basis for each of our research projects, which were conducted with two different communities of refugee women facing similar challenges. Both refugee communities struggled with issues of adjustment such as language barriers, economic hardship, and cultural marginalization. As refugee women constitute linguistic, cultural, and sometimes racial minorities, these women faced numerous challenges to their adjustment and were multiply marginalized because of their status both as women and as refugees in resettlement. Below, we each describe our research with refugee women, the reasons why we chose to conduct this research, the challenges we encountered, and specific concrete strategies for addressing these challenges when conducting research that is ethical and valid with multiply marginalized people. We frame our discussion around six central methodological principles that we believe can help guide research with refugee women.

STUDY 1: PROMOTING HMONG WOMEN'S WELL-BEING (JESSICA R. GOODKIND)

From 1996 to 2002, my research focused on Hmong refugee women and the challenges they faced in adjusting to life in the United States and being able to live the kind of lives they chose. I became involved in this work after spending two years working with Hmong refugees in a refugee camp in Thailand, helping them prepare to resettle in the United States. The Hmong are a distinct ethnic group from the mountains of Laos, who became refugees because of their recruitment by the CIA to fight the Communists in Laos during the Vietnam Conflict. When the war ended, many Hmong sought refuge in Thailand, where they were placed in refugee camps. The United States accepted most of these Hmong refugees for resettlement from 1975 to 1996.

Upon returning to the US from Thailand, I visited many of the refugees I had helped prepare for resettlement and observed their continued struggles. I thought carefully about my place in doing research and working with the Hmong community, and I decided that I had acquired certain understanding and knowledge in Thailand that was important to use to promote the well-being of Hmong refugees in the US. However, I also believed that it was important to be aware of my privilege and the

differences among us and the implications they had for my work. My involvement in the US has been with Hmong women, in part because I had a connection with participants as a woman, which was an identity salient to all of us. On the other hand, as a white, English-speaking, educated, and middle-class U.S. citizen, I was privileged. Given this disparity, I tried to be conscious about how differences in power affected my interactions with Hmong women. In addition, I felt strongly that part of my role was to engage with other white, middle-class, educated people. For this reason, I decided to work toward creating social change by raising the awareness of other U.S. citizens, particularly undergraduate students who were primarily white and middle class.

I began my research by interviewing 54 Hmong residents of public housing developments in the Midwestern city where I lived, which revealed that the Hmong refugees were marginalized and not able to understand and make use of the resources in their communities. A lack of understanding and ability to navigate the system, feelings of powerlessness, and a lack of access to resources are some of the most fundamental and important exile-related stressors that can exacerbate the distress of refugees (Rumbaut, 1991). Given the salience of these factors, I began to spend four hours each week with a small group of Hmong women who lived in one of the housing developments. Over a period of four years, the Hmong women and I developed the idea for the Refugee Well-Being Project and I wrote a grant to the National Institute of Mental Health to fund this research, with the dual goals of developing and evaluating an intervention designed to enhance refugees' psychological well-being and of furthering our understanding of the processes that contribute to it.

The Refugee Well-Being Project was based in part on a well-researched and effective advocacy model in which trained undergraduate advocates work with disenfranchised individuals or families to mobilize community resources and transfer advocacy skills (e.g., Davidson, Redner, Blakely, Mitchell, & Emshoff, 1987; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). It is unlikely, however, that applying this individual level model would have been successful in the Hmong community. Instead, taking into account the collective orientation of Hmong culture (which values the well-being of the group above that of the individual) and their particular needs as refugees (i.e., English proficiency, improved understanding of the system and their environment, increased social support, development of more valued social roles), I created an advocacy and learning project that was structured around a group learning component—Learning Circles. These twice-weekly meetings involved two components: group cultural exchange and discussion, and one-on-one learning time for each Hmong adult and her undergraduate advocate. The group-learning component was important both in making the intervention culturally appropriate and in enabling Hmong refugees to build upon the skills and strengths they already had in order to develop new skills and knowledge. Furthermore, rather than emphasizing only what newcomers to the United States needed to learn to survive here (which is important), the project focused on mutual learning, through which refugees and undergraduates learned from each other.

The project involved 28 Hmong participants who ranged in age from 22 to 77. Most (79%) were married, and they had an average of six children (range 0 to 11). Fifty-four percent were employed (all in low-paying jobs with limited or no benefits), 82% had no previous education, none of the participants had a high school degree from the United States (one woman graduated from high school in Laos), and 33% were not literate in any language. They had been in the US an average of 12 years (range 6 months to 22 years), but most had very limited English proficiency. Half were residents of public housing and the majority were among the second wave of Hmong

refugees to arrive in the United States (Yang & Murphy, 1993), possessing less education and other resources and being less equipped for life here than those who came in the first wave. Within the local Hmong community, they were among those struggling the most. For additional information on the Refugee Well-Being Project, see Goodkind, Hang, & Yang (2004).

STUDY 2: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF MUSLIM WOMEN (ZERMARIE DEACON)

As a foreign national living in the United States, I have developed a particular interest in the experiences of others who share this status. At the end of 2000, I had the opportunity to work with a program specifically aimed at serving recently resettled Muslim refugee women from countries in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and some nations in Africa. I assisted service providers with the organization of a sewing group, where these refugee women, who often were socially isolated, could meet weekly in a social setting while practicing their English and making clothing for their families. As a White, middle-class woman, this extensive contact with refugee women resettled in the United States gave me some insight into the struggles they were facing, as well as some of the problems that service providers were encountering in their attempts to assist these women with the resettlement process. It appeared to me that a needs assessment conducted with Muslim refugee women resettled in the Midwest would assist service providers to address better the needs of these women, and thus to facilitate the process of resettlement they were negotiating. As a result, I chose to get to know these refugee women better and to develop a deeper understanding of their needs and concerns.

I began this process by informally speaking to Muslim refugee women, members of the local Muslim community, and services providers at agencies that worked with the refugee community. I learned that while the Muslim refugee women in question did not all share the same national or linguistic backgrounds, they all had similar interpretations of their faith and shared many comparable, culturally mediated conceptions of their gender roles. In addition, while these women came from a variety of national and cultural backgrounds, local service providers tended to perceive them and their needs as a unit.

The first significant insight that I obtained from the above-mentioned conversations was the importance of considering the differential needs of married and single women. As was found by Ha and Mesfin (1990), Lipson and Miller (1994), and Lovell et al. (1987), the majority of married refugee women struggled to adjust to the requirement that they obtain employment in order to remain eligible for government assistance. Not only did this prove difficult for women who had never before been employed, but formal employment also added an additional load to their already plentiful domestic responsibilities. In addition, many women experienced pressure from their family members not to become employed, further complicating the above role conflicts. Finally, the majority of women had not been employed prior to their resettlement, and consequently, they did not possess the kind of experience needed to obtain well-paying employment that would sufficiently supplement their meager family incomes.

A large number of women were also single heads of household, the majority of whom had at least one child living with them in resettlement. In addition to the financial strain of being sole breadwinners for and caretakers of their families, single women also were forced to negotiate new roles in which they were expected to fulfill

duties that previously were taken on by their husbands (e.g., negotiating financial transactions).

Whether married or single, all Muslim refugee women who had been resettled in the two years prior the start of this research experienced numerous needs. These included lack of English proficiency, obstacles to learning English [e.g., inability to attend English as a Second Language (ESL) classes], lack of knowledge about and access to services and resources available in the community, lack of access to important resources such as transportation, and significant economic need. Service providers, refugee women, and other members of the local Muslim community with whom I spoke agreed that a better understanding of the needs of recently resettled Muslim refugee women would improve service provision to this population. A review of the literature quickly revealed that very little research had been done with refugee women resettled from predominantly Muslim nations, highlighting the importance of conducting this kind of inquiry. The needs assessment I subsequently conducted not only elucidated the needs of Muslim refugee women, but also clarified the ways in which differences such as marital status and pre-resettlement experiences unique to their nations of origin were significant to these women's needs in resettlement.

With the assistance of bilingual and bicultural Muslim refugee women, I conducted structured interviews with 31 women between the ages of 19 and 63 who were resettled between 1997 and 2002. Fifteen were Afghan, 11 were from Iraq, three were Sudanese, and two were Somali and Syrian, respectively. Forty-eight percent of the women were living with their husbands in resettlement, whereas 52% were either single or widowed. Women had an average of four children (range 0 to 12). Participants had attended an average of 10 years of school; 23% had completed high school and 7% had completed college in their nation of origin. Overall, 58% of participants were unemployed, and those who were employed held jobs in the low-paying service industry. No participants were fluent or literate in English, and all interactions with participants were conducted through translators.

PRINCIPLES FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH REFUGEE WOMEN

Although the parameters and goals of each of our studies were different, we faced many similar methodological challenges in conducting research with marginalized refugee women. Here we present an overview of some of the issues we encountered in conducting research with multiply marginalized refugee women and our attempts to address these challenges. We organize this discussion around some guiding principles that emerged from our efforts. Although there are no simple solutions, our experiences suggest that refugee women's voices can be effectively included and methodological obstacles can be minimized if investigators have an upfront understanding of the particular challenges inherent in this work and are willing and able to invest the time and effort needed to reduce these prior to the start of the research project. Based upon these challenges and our successes and failures in addressing them, we propose six principles to consider in conducting research with refugee women:

1. develop strategies for involving marginalized refugee women in research;
2. consider the advantages and limitations of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and be innovative about combining them;

3. prepare for extensive time and effort for quantitative measure construction;
4. consider gendered decision-making structures in the lives of refugee women and their potential impact on the research process;
5. plan for refugee women's common triple burden of working outside of the home, managing their households, and adjusting to life in a new country; and
6. attend to refugee women's cultural norms and unfamiliarity with the idea of interviewing.

Develop Strategies for Involving Marginalized Refugee Women

The initial methodological challenge we faced in our respective studies was involving refugee women in the research process. Many refugee women are somewhat invisible, not only in their new resettlement communities, but also within their particular refugee communities. Frequently, refugee women may be considered “hard-to-reach,” and it often may seem easier to consult with leaders of refugee communities, who are typically men. However, as Zea and colleagues (2003) pointed out, “‘hard-to-reach’ refers not as much to objective characteristics of the target population, but rather to researchers’ distance from that population” (p. 287). The first people we met in the refugee communities we worked with were refugee men and non-refugee service providers. It is much more difficult to connect with the more marginalized members of the community—particularly women who tend to be home-bound or busy working several jobs and taking care of their families, and who speak the least English and may be struggling most in the United States. However, these are the women who participated in our studies.

It is important to consider how we connected with the multiply marginalized women with whom we worked, particularly given that most had very limited English proficiency. Jessica first made contact with the male leader of the local Hmong mutual assistance association, who in turn introduced her to several other men. After meeting some of the male Hmong leaders, Jessica learned about the housing developments where many Hmong families lived and decided to go to the community center at one of the housing developments. There, Jessica met a Hmong woman who agreed to take her to several women's houses to talk informally about what it was like living in their community and any issues they faced. Jessica shared her background and ability to speak a little Hmong with the women. This was important, but the most essential aspect of Jessica's approach was that she demonstrated to the Hmong women that she wanted to hear about their problems so that she could help them figure out how to solve them. Within a few weeks, one of the Hmong women who spoke English most fluently and seemed to be an informal leader informed Jessica that the Hmong women residents had asked her to tell Jessica that what they really needed was the opportunity to study English. They knew that Jessica had experience in this area and were hoping she could start a class in their community center, where they would not need transportation, and where they would not have to leave their children completely alone. From this point forward (for the next four years), Jessica began spending two nights per week working with a small group of Hmong women. The design of the Refugee Well-Being Project emerged from this process. The progression of Jessica's research illustrates several important considerations when initiating and conducting valid ethical research with multiply marginalized refugee women: it takes an *extensive time*

commitment in order to develop *genuine relationships* that are based on a *commitment to contributing to the community*. This ultimately led to building trust.

Another important aspect of developing a strategy for involving refugee women centers on bridging potential cultural and/or language differences. This requires that researchers spend time in the targeted community in order to establish connections with key stakeholders and potential participants and to build a research team that includes community members with whom participants will be comfortable. For instance, Zermarie purposely recruited female interviewers who were well known and active within their communities and therefore were likely to be known to women and their husbands and trusted to enter their homes in order to conduct interviews. This was important because the Muslim refugee women who participated in Zermarie's research were not necessarily familiar with the concept of participating in a research study. Due to their unfamiliarity with the concept of research, women often had various concerns regarding participation and it was necessary to ensure that someone whom they trusted answered their questions and to assure them that all work would be done with someone whom they and their husbands were comfortable. It was essential that all interviewers were familiar members of the local community.³

Be Innovative in Decisions About Quantitative and/or Qualitative Methodologies

A second important consideration involves decisions about the methodologies to employ in a study with refugee women. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have advantages and limitations. Quantitative methodologies can be useful when collecting certain types of data from large groups of people (e.g., demographics of a particular refugee community). However, quantitative methods often are difficult to use effectively and accurately with individuals with limited literacy. In addition, some participants, particularly those from cultures in which interpersonal relationships are emphasized, may experience forced-choice surveys as silencing (Zea et al., 2003), and many refugee women are not accustomed to the formality and structured nature of these processes. This lack of familiarity with research and discomfort with the concept of forced-response choices may render it difficult to obtain the highest level of validity from such methods alone. Furthermore, quantitative methodologies may offer fewer opportunities for researchers to examine their assumptions about their participants.

Qualitative methodologies often enable participants to express themselves in a more natural way, allowing for exploration of participants' experiences and meanings and providing more opportunities for their voices and perspectives to emerge. However, they can be time intensive and can present additional challenges when multiple languages are involved. Thus, it is necessary to take additional steps to ensure the rigor of such methods. Specifically, refugees may not always be comfortable having their responses tape recorded, a significant concern when conducting qualitative interviews, and in such cases, it would be necessary for interviewers to be particularly well

³It is important to note that it often is challenging to find bilingual and bicultural research team members. Furthermore, this process often is complicated by the desire to ensure that research participants feel comfortable with such individuals. The double-edged sword inherent in this situation is the tension between employing familiar members of the community whom participants trust, but to whom they may not always be comfortable disclosing more intimate facts about their lives, or employing a third party with whom participants may not be comfortable and whom they may not trust enough to respond fully and honestly to all questions. There is no simple way to handle this, but it is important to be aware of these potential issues.

trained in order to be able to take detailed notes. Language and translation issues also may complicate open-ended interviews. In particular, if all members of the research team do not speak the language of the participants (which is likely when conducting research with refugees), analyzing the interviews will require translation at some point, which can easily alter meanings or nuances in the interviews. Furthermore, if an interviewer relies on a translator during the interview process, this will affect the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and the course of the interview. This is not necessarily problematic, but it is important to be aware of and to analyze the dynamics that consequently are created.

In sum, when considering the strengths and limitations of different methodologies, it is important to take into account particular issues involved in conducting research with refugee women, including language/translation issues, the impact of the research on the marginalized participants and their communities, cultural appropriateness, and the purpose of the research. In addition, it is important to consider innovative ways of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Based on our experiences, we think that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches are usually optimal for dealing with the challenges of conducting research with refugee women.

For example, in determining how to evaluate the effectiveness of the Refugee Well-Being Project, Jessica was aware of the strong emphasis within psychology on the use of quantitative methodologies and true experimental designs to test the efficacy of interventions. However, an experimental design was not feasible for this study for several reasons. First, as opposed to a large, unacquainted population, the Hmong community in the area was relatively small and members were well aware of events affecting each other. Furthermore, Hmong who lived at the public housing developments comprised a smaller and even more closely acquainted community. Therefore, it would not only have been difficult, but also culturally inappropriate to offer some Hmong residents the opportunity to participate in the intervention while excluding others, especially given Hmong culture's collective orientation, which places concern for community well-being above that of individuals. Instead, Jessica assessed the fidelity of the intervention and measured its impact on participants through a comprehensive, multi-method strategy that included both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative component involved a within-group longitudinal design with four data-collection points over a period of nine months. The qualitative component included in-depth qualitative recruitment and post-intervention interviews, as well as participant observation. Thus, participants in the intervention were interviewed six times. Methodologically, the combined methods allowed for a thorough exploration of participants' experiences in the intervention, including processes and outcomes, as well as an examination of changes in participants over time.

Although the quantitative analyses demonstrated significant positive impacts of participation in the project (see Goodkind et al., 2004), it also was essential to provide opportunities for the Hmong women to speak in their own words about their involvement in the project. Fundamentally, it was important that the evaluation methods were consistent with the principles of the intervention—which was intended to be emancipatory, participant focused, and reciprocal. Furthermore, because this was a new project involving refugee women from a non-dominant culture, it was important to understand their experiences in the intervention, as well as how their participation may have impacted their lives. Therefore, each Hmong participant participated in two open-ended interviews: one before the project began and one at the end.

The main challenge with the qualitative aspects of the design was language. Jessica conducted each pre-interview with the help of a translator. Jessica speaks and understands some Hmong, which was very helpful because she could understand and discuss translation issues with the translators, but she is not fluent in Hmong. The pre-interviews were not tape recorded because Jessica did not think that most Hmong women would be comfortable with this before they knew and trusted her. This resulted in the additional challenge and limitation of trying to record accurately the data from the initial interviews. However, the post-interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and all participants were comfortable with this.

Each of the post-interviews was conducted with four people: the Hmong participant, her undergraduate partner, a translator (one of the co-facilitators of the project), and Jessica. It could easily have become a cumbersome process because everything had to be translated into either Hmong or English, but instead the interviews were lively conversations. All four people participated, and it became clear that it was very important for the Hmong and undergraduate participants to have the opportunity to express to each other what the project had meant to them and the experiences that they had. In addition, the qualitative data provided support for the quantitative findings and revealed unexpected processes and impacts.

Prepare for Extensive Time and Effort for Quantitative Measure Construction

To varying extents, both studies involved the use of some fixed-response, quantitative measures. We believe that quantitative measures can provide valuable information if used in conjunction with more open-ended methods that inform the interpretation of quantitative results and if they are structured in ways that facilitate participants' comfort and understanding. However, we faced numerous challenges in constructing quantitative measures, many of which we were able to address by investing time and effort in the processes. In terms of construction, Jessica located some relevant measures that had been used with other Southeast Asian refugees. Other measures were developed or adapted specifically for her study. Zermarie developed her needs assessment measure based upon her conversations with various community stakeholders, including prominent members of the local Muslim community and service providers, and her experiences working with members of the local Muslim refugee community. We both asked bilingual and bicultural members of the local communities to review our interview protocols and give us feedback regarding the appropriateness of items, as well as suggestions for new items.

Translation of the interview protocols was a more complicated process. In Zermarie's study, the interview had to be translated into the two languages spoken by the women who were to be recruited into the study, Arabic and Farsi. During the process of translation, translators provided feedback regarding items that did not translate well and necessary modifications to the document were made. After translation was complete, different translators back translated it into English in order to confirm the accuracy of the translation. The interview for Jessica's study was translated through a similar process. However, an additional complication occurred when it was impossible to find Hmong women interviewers who were fluent in both English and Hmong and who could also read Hmong. It seemed important to have women conduct the interviews to maximize the comfort and disclosure of the Hmong participants; therefore, it was necessary to print the interview in English and review it as a group (with the

Hmong bilingual, bicultural project co-facilitators and the interviewers) during interviewer training to ensure that all interviewers would translate the questions consistently.

In order to ensure that response categories were easy for participants to understand, Zermarie created response cards graphically depicting all response options. Unfortunately, these proved to be unsuccessful. Less-educated women had a particularly difficult time grasping the nuances of response options, and the response cards served to confuse them further as illiterate women encountered difficulties making sense of the graphically depicted options. The fact that refugee women are often less educated than refugee men (Chung, Bemark, & Kagwa-Singer 1998) proved to be a significant consideration in conducting structured interviews with these women. Therefore, it was necessary to take additional time during interviews in order to provide participants with detailed explanations of response options and to allow them to complete multi-staged responses to most items (e.g., participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a statement and then were provided with narrower options, such as a lot, or a little, within this overarching response category). In addition, participants were not always comfortable with the need to confine their answers to the fixed choices provided to them and rather preferred to be able to elaborate and explain the context of their responses. As much as was feasible within the constraints of the interview, interviewers allowed participants to elaborate upon their responses in order ensure that they were comfortable with the process. However, it quickly became apparent that the women would have been far more comfortable with open-ended, qualitative interviews conducted in a more conversational style.

Although the Hmong women also had limited education and were not accustomed to forced-choice questions, Jessica's interviewers used picture response cards successfully. In addition, the response choices for some scales were simplified during interview construction to address this issue. Despite these efforts, many women were puzzled and frustrated by the quantitative interview process. If trust and relationships had not been established, it is likely that many of the Hmong women would not have been willing to complete the interviews. However, out of 108 potential quantitative interviews (four for each of the 28 participants), 103 were completed.

Consider Gendered Decision-Making Structures in the Lives of Refugee Women

An important aspect of many refugee women's lives that often is neglected is the necessity for many refugee women of involving their husbands in decision making about their participation in research or other related activities. It is important to be sensitive to participants' familial contexts and to include family members in the process to the largest degree possible, thus ensuring their comfort with the research process. However, at the same time, attempts should be made to structure interviews and interventions in ways that allow refugee women to make decisions about their families' involvement in the process and to provide alternatives to remaining in the presence of their husband or other family members during interviews. In Zermarie's study, husbands and/or other family members often wanted to be included in at least some part of the interview process. Many husbands were satisfied to allow their wives to participate because they knew the interviewer; however, some men insisted on being present for part of the interview. This could not be prevented, as refusing husbands this kind of access would have ensured that they would not have allowed their wives to participate. Thus, it was necessary to remove items regarding women's

husbands from the protocol, and it was recognized that women's responses might have been influenced by the presence of their husbands. In addition, out of politeness and because of collectivistic cultural norms, participants' family members often expected to remain in the room with the participant being interviewed and, at times, they did not understand why the opinions of only one family member were required.

Among Hmong participants in Jessica's study, some women needed their husband's consent to participate in the project. This was not necessarily problematic, and Jessica is not aware of any women who were denied permission from their husbands to participate in the project, but it was important to be aware of this dynamic. In contrast to Zermarie's research, however, confidentiality during the interviews was not typically compromised because husbands did not want to monitor what their wives were disclosing during interviews. Instead, because the interviewers were women, many husbands perceived whatever the interviewers were doing with their wives as "women's business" and did not express much interest or concern. On the other hand, Hmong women did experience certain significant life constraints based upon gendered hierarchies. For instance, there were a few women who were studying for the U.S. citizenship test but whose husbands would not allow them to send in their citizenship applications. In addition, it was evident from the qualitative interviews that several women experienced a great deal of pressure from their husbands or in-laws not to study. There was one Hmong woman who missed two Learning Circles in a row. When one of the co-facilitators called her, she said she did not have a ride. Jessica offered to pick her up and the Hmong woman told Jessica in the car that her husband had said he would kill her if she took the car that morning to go to the Learning Circle. Based on this information, we tried to offer the woman support and assistance within the Hmong community and the larger community of services. As Rumbaut (1989) pointed out, the opportunities for elevation of women's status that often emerge for refugees who resettle in the US frequently occur at a significant cost because shifting power dynamics may be accompanied by marital and family conflict.

Attend to Refugee Women's Triple Burden

Refugee women often face the double burden experienced by many other women in the United States: balancing work outside of the home and household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their children. However, this double burden often is exacerbated because refugee women usually need to exert substantial time and energy to learning English and dealing with the other demands of beginning their lives in a new, unfamiliar place. Furthermore, refugee women frequently do not have access to transportation. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that researchers pay particular attention to the context of refugee women's lives when a research project is planned and when making decisions about times and settings of interviews and program activities. Supportive services such as childcare provisions with which women are comfortable also need to be given serious consideration.

In Zermarie's study, it was necessary to conduct interviews at women's homes, as they often were not comfortable leaving their homes without their husbands or other family members, did not have access to transportation, or needed to take care of household responsibilities that necessitated their presence at home. However, the numerous responsibilities that women needed to take care of during the interviews were not necessarily foreseen. This was in spite of the fact that interviews were scheduled at times convenient to participants. In addition to various childcare needs, women

sometimes had to prepare meals for their families during the interview, and it was necessary to build time into interviews to allow for these interruptions. Similarly, in Jessica's study, most interviews were conducted in women's homes, both because the women felt most comfortable there and because many of the women did not drive or have access to transportation. However, it often was not possible for the setting to be free of children or other people. This potentially compromised confidentiality and also could be distracting for some women, particularly if they needed to be taking care of their children or attending to other issues. Although interviewers tried to schedule interviews when women would be alone and free from other responsibilities, it was not always possible. One solution was to schedule some of the interviews in the community centers of the housing developments where the women lived. These settings usually allowed for more privacy and fewer distractions, and most women felt comfortable in the community centers. Furthermore, this was a convenient location for women and did not require transportation.

*Attend to Cultural Norms or Unfamiliarity
With the Interview Process*

Another important issue to consider involves ensuring that refugee women feel comfortable with the idea and process of being interviewed and with their interviewers. For instance, in the Hmong language, there is not an exact word for "interview." Interviewers often used a Hmong word that meant "to talk with," but it was also important to explain the purpose of what we were doing, and most importantly, to structure data collection in ways that were congruent with women's cultures. For instance, because many women were socially isolated, in response to cultural norms regarding hospitality, and to ensure that participants were maximally comfortable with the interview process, interviewers in both studies often spent additional time at women's homes engaging in small talk and partaking in refreshments. This served to place participants at ease and, in Zermarie's case, provided her with the opportunity to improve her cultural competence by becoming more familiar with the various cultural norms of members of differing Muslim refugee communities.

In Jessica's study, many Hmong women felt nervous about being "tested" during the English-proficiency section of the interview, despite assurances that the project was being tested, not them. Several women wanted to be interviewed by one of the Hmong co-facilitators of the Learning Circles, and it was challenging to explain to them why it was important for them to be interviewed by someone whom they did not know and who was not involved in the project. In this case, women's comfort was compromised because it was essential to have Hmong interviewers who did not have expectations or interest in demonstrating the efficacy of the intervention. However, the Hmong interviewers always spent time with the participants before the interviews, whether they were talking, eating, or in one case, singing Hmong songs.

CONCLUSION

While we believe that our studies provided valuable information and understanding about the adjustment processes of refugee women and factors that promote their well-being, numerous methodological concerns complicated the research processes. As researchers, we became aware of the complexity involved in conducting culturally competent research that is truly inclusive of the voices of multiply marginalized members

of refugee communities. We found that it was necessary to take extra steps in order to reach refugee women, who often are marginalized and underrepresented members of their communities. Not only was it essential to negotiate appropriate entry into the community, but it was also often important to negotiate the consent of some women's husbands in order to ensure their ability to participate. Additionally, it was not possible to interview many refugee women without certain confines, such as the presence of family members and women's numerous household responsibilities, which most likely influenced the overall quality of the data that was obtained. Lack of cultural congruence presented an additional challenge when using quantitative measures. These various methodological considerations highlight not only the difficulty of ensuring that women's voices are heard during data collection, but also the importance of guaranteeing that they have the opportunities to genuinely represent themselves.

In addition to the information collected about the processes of adjustment among refugee women in both studies, the Refugee Well-Being Project was important because it created a setting for Hmong women in which they could control and direct what happened. They made decisions about what they wanted to learn and which resource issues they wanted to address. In a narrative analysis of three Hmong women's life stories, Monzel (1993) emphasized the lack of control and marginality they felt over their lives and attributed it to several conditions:

1. limited control over their personal lives as women in a patriarchal society,
2. experiences as refugees (e.g., living through war, being forced to flee their homes), and
3. marginality as an ethnic minority without a homeland.

Thus, it is particularly important for refugee women to have opportunities to gain or regain a sense of agency and control.

As Cha and Small (1994) stated, "Refugee women, who are concerned with the well-being of their families now and in the future, participate in programs based on their own careful assessment of the benefits of the program" (p.1050). They found that service providers in the refugee camps in Thailand did not try to understand why women did not participate in the programs that the service providers thought were most important. Rather than considering that the Hmong women might have rational reasons for their decisions, "they tended to attribute refugee behavior to the characteristics of women refugees and of Hmong culture, often general stereotypes including traits such as 'backward,' 'rigid,' and 'ignorant'" (p.1051). Thus, this project demonstrates that it is important to question the structure of programs that may be ineffective or have low participation rates rather than to shift responsibility to the supposed deficits or problems of individuals. This is particularly relevant for refugee women, whose ideas and interests often are overlooked because of their multiply marginalized positions.

Although the Refugee Well-Being Project began to create spaces and opportunities for Hmong women to direct their own learning, focus on their own interests, and transform their traditional ideas about gender and gender roles, it is important to note that the Hmong women participants did not become totally independent of the larger gendered contexts in which they lived. In addition to the examples discussed previously, the constraints experienced by many of the Hmong women became even more evident when the project ended. At one of the final Learning Circles, one student suggested that the Hmong women continue to meet on their own—to study

and maintain connections to one another, but most of the Hmong women felt that their husbands would be suspicious of a group of Hmong women meeting by themselves. There are certainly Hmong women in the United States who have formed women's organizations and become active participants in policy and decision-making (e.g., Bays, 1998), but there are also women who continue to be marginalized by language barriers, class, race, and gender. Thus, efforts to reach these marginalized women, to understand their experiences and goals, and to create spaces in which they can amplify their voices and ideas remain essential.

Given that refugee women often bear not only the double burden of gender inequality in their own culture and in their host country, but also the constraints of being a refugee, it is important to continually pose questions that disentangle the circumstances and interests of different refugees based upon their social location. While this focus must include gender, we also must pay attention to differences among refugees based upon class, race/ethnicity, and other axes of inequality. It is essential to recognize these issues of power present both within refugee communities and within our larger communities and to work to create settings that take into account the diverse individuals with different interests and needs that make up these communities. For all of these reasons, it is particularly important for researchers and practitioners to continually be aware that refugee communities are comprised of individuals with different interests and needs and to develop policies, programs, and services with this in mind.

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