The Double-Edged Sword of Empathy: Two Migrant-Serving Organizations in South Texas

Miriam Sobre[1] & Emily Ehmer
University of Texas at San Antonio

Abstract: While Texas has long led other US American states in number of refugees resettled, anti-migrant rhetoric globally and locally creates challenges for nonprofit organizations serving refugees and asylum seekers. This paper represents a portion of an ongoing project focusing on the needs and scope of two organizations serving migrants in San Antonio, Texas: a nonprofit focusing on legal and educational resources for migrants, and a liberal arts university's campus coalition assisting migrants in South Texas. The project reported on here is ongoing. This paper only reports on the work with these organizations and the development and early stages of interventions to assist employees and volunteers in intercultural communication, community outreach, and post-secondary trauma.

<u>Keywords</u>: refugees, migrants, intercultural communication, post-secondary trauma, intercultural training, social justice advocacy.

1. Introduction

Texas leads the nation in the number of refugees resettled: from 2007 through 2015, 54,400 refugees were resettled. With the Trump administration's anti-immigration actions and Texas Governor Greg Abbott's complicity in blocking refugee and migrant rights, it is more salient than ever to understand migrant transitions to new cultures – given the current hostile environment and the impending shift of white US American citizens from majority into minority status.

This project examines two organizations in San Antonio, Texas, working with refugees and asylum issues; this paper presents the initial analysis of these organizations. The first (henceforth referred to as NP for "nonprofit") is a nonprofit that provides legal and educational assistance with rights and citizenship; programs for torture survivors, asylum-seekers, and victims of violent crime; emergency shelter; and legal services. The second (henceforth referred to as CO for "campus organization") is a private, liberal arts university-based program with a mission to raise funds for refugee education, provide tutoring and ESL for migrants, and educate the local community about migrants. People aided by these organizations include those arriving from the Northern Triangle (Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador), as well as refugees and migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Our purpose for the section of the study reported here is to examine current education, training and strategies used by both groups; to propose solutions for intercultural education and training and other needs for those working with migrants; and to discuss some beginning interventions. First, we offer political and theoretical context.

2. Background, context, and theory

2.1 Convention of refugee status treaty

The majority population's perceptions of migrants can drastically affect their transition into their host culture (Halualani, Mendoza & Drewzwiecka 2009); current rhetoric seeks to

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[1] Dept. of Communication, Main Building 2.248.6, College of Liberal and Fine Arts, 1 UTSA Circle, San Antonio, TX 78249 USA. Email: miriam.sobre@utsa.edu.

dehumanize them every way possible (Campoy 2018). Since Trump took office in 2017, he enacted two orders that directly hinder migrants from entering the country (Volz *et al.* 2017): an expansion of detention centers along the border and increased removal of individuals entering the country. Under wildly swinging policy, families are currently kept intact in family detention centers or released with a court date while awaiting a decision. Migrants held in detention have at times been separated from their families and submitted to legal hearings without legal assistance to determine if they should be granted amnesty in the United States (Volz *et al.* 2017). The US State Department lowered the cap for US refugee resettlement in 2018 to 50,000; more recently (2019), Trump slashed the number to 18,000 (Shear & Kanno-Youngs 2019).

    Texas legislation 2017-2018. Texas lawmakers followed the federal government's actions at the state level. The Sanctuary Cities Bill (SB4) gives Texas officers the ability to question the immigration status of anyone they detain (Texas Legislature Online 2017). The law punishes local government heads and officials who don't cooperate with agents' requests to arrest immigrants subject to deportation, and mandates exchanging immigration information.

    The Texas legislature approved $800 million of spending for state-based border security despite Trump's promise to make border security a federal priority (Choi & Logan 2017). Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has been in increasing peril; currently, Congress has been unable to address the issue, despite government shutdowns. Over half of the 2,000-mile US/Mexico border is in Texas. This includes hundreds of miles and 5,000 parcels of property in the path of Trump's proposed wall (Choi & Logan 2017), which he began to construct in 2019. Utilizing intercultural communication theory, we analyze how organizations like NP and CO navigate the often contradictory anti-immigration terrain below.

2.2 Intercultural Communication Theory
2.2.1 Cultural transitions

Cross-cultural adaptation encompasses the process by which individuals learn the roles and customs of a new culture (Ting-Toomey 1999). In this research, culture refers not to a static concept but a dynamic process that communicatively constitutive and incorporates shifting sets of norms, values, and insular and accommodative actions (Bartlett, Mendenhall & Ghaffar-Kucher 2017). Our research examines how locals can aid transition experiences of migrants forced into diaspora due to threats of extreme violence at home. Such migrants are often encouraged to assimilate to dominant host cultures entirely, rather than self-segregate into cultural enclaves (Ting-Toomey 1999).

    Migrants with access to networks (cultural, religious, and familial, including home and host-culture nationals and other migrants) experience an easier cultural transition than those who don't (De La Garza & Ono 2015: 277). Organizational connections can further aid migrant transitions. Studies show organizations working with migrants can help to "facilitate cultural assimilation (e.g., language courses, interventions to limit ethnic enclaves, civic and cultural activities to foster interactions between migrants and natives) [and] may have great potential regarding increasing immigrants' well-being" (Angelini, Casi, & Corazzini 2015: 841). These organizations provide social support, aiding immigrants and reducing their uncertainty and anxiety.

    Sobre-Denton, Carlsen and Greuel (2013) note that intercultural communication competence (knowledge and skills to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultures) may be limited to privileged populations and doesn't reflect shifting demographics and cultural flows. While migrant experiences in new cultures rely on the ability to navigate host cultures, alongside connecting with sympathetic host-cultural members, we do not take

the perspective that intercultural communication competence is the best solution to the refugee crisis. More nuanced approaches must account for postcolonial cultural identities, including critical aspects of power, race, and gender, on both migrants and those who aid them.

2.2.2 Brown bodies and white privilege
As white Americans' majority position in the US is threatened, cross-border migrations by those designated as non-white (particularly those who appear "brown", including Arabs, Muslims, Latinxs, and South Asians) have become increasingly demonized in national (and global) political rhetoric. In South Texas, given the influx of Latinx migrants from the Northern Triangle beginning in 2014, it is beneficial for whiteness scholars and activists to join Latinx activists in the call to re-center whiteness with respect to Latinx identities (Moreman & Calafell 2008). It is challenging to describe whiteness/Latinx constructions of identities without moving towards attempts to "reify Latinas/Latinos as Others through the disciplining and division of Latino masculinity and Latina femininity" (Moreman & Calafell 2008: 310).

In a study of caregivers working with Mexican and Central American refugees, while many were proud of their work, respondents reported symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (Husk & Terrazas 2015). Those (predominantly women of color) working directly with migrants in legal aid and counseling reported feeling horrified by refugees' stories of abuse, helpless at their own inability to change the situation, and suffering from burnout. That said, many were impressed by their clients' strength and courage. Hispanic caregivers exhibited more resilience working with migrants than their white counterparts due to high degrees of compassion satisfaction, self-care management skills, and family and community connections. This relationship invites educational interventions to encourage intercultural dialogue for both migrants and host-locals, particularly caregivers, for migration to move beyond forced assimilation and inevitable prejudice, given the current administration's rhetoric and migration policies.

2.3 Nonprofit organizations, refugees and asylum seekers
Community diversity has led to the formation of nonprofits to meet the specialized needs of particular groups (Grønbjerg & Paarleber 2001). The necessity to bridge cultural differences between host nationals and migrants is particularly important in research on migration to new – and increasingly hostile – host-cultural environments (Croucher, Caetano & Campbell 2018). Nonprofit organizations have evolved to serve migrant populations alongside municipal initiatives to create culturally welcoming environments. Volunteer-based agencies may be faith-based or secular nongovernmental organizations with the goal of supporting the economic and social integration of refugees (Office of Refugee Resettlement 2017). Asylum seekers, traveling to the US and entering at a land border or port, may qualify to receive asylee or refugee status and be served by voluntary agencies after receiving approval (US Citizenship and Immigration Services 2017). Those who do not qualify face deportation.

Heightened emphasis on enforcement actions against asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants increases the need for access to legal counsel to navigate increasingly complex immigration laws (Annobil 2009). These nonprofit organizations offer *pro bono* legal counsel to prevent deportation, increase knowledge of immigrants' rights, and challenge immigration policies and practices impeding the rights of noncitizens facing removal (The Immigration Representation Project 2008). In Texas, dozens of organizations provide *pro bono* legal services; each agency specifies which types of cases it handles.

The organizations participating in the portion of the project reported here represent minority coalitions: they are based off an initiative and have grassroot origins (Germane 2015). Grassroot organizations or coalitions focus on local problems rather than national

legislation (Cable & Benson 1993). The coalitions formed within NP and CO focus on community-level injustices. Community coalitions provide resources for members to identify and solve problems, potentially enabling systemic community change (Zakocs & Edwards 2006). When communities work together towards a shared agenda, this forms kinship and reduces hostility (Torres 2002).

2.4 Research questions
This paper explores processes that people in migrant-serving organizations use to aid these communities and populations. Our research questions include:

> **RQ1:** What needs should organizations in the San Antonio area address to assure safe, educational, and positive transitions to their host communities?

> **RQ2:** What kinds of education and training are needed for assisting refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in the San Antonio area?

3. Methods

This study uses a *participatory action research* (PAR; Reardon 1998) framework, meaning research attempting to understand the site through collaboration with members, creating reflection and change. Researchers bear "moral witness to experiences of disillusionment, disorientation, suffering, and trauma that arise in fragile and volatile post-independence cultures" (Lindlof & Taylor 2011: 62). We explore collective goals of the communities we work within, while ensuring pragmatic and theoretical goals are simultaneously met.

Methods to collect and analyze data include participant observation, formal/informal interviews, and coordinating monthly meetings with a cohort of interested parties including members of NP, CO, faculty and students of three local universities, and additional interested individuals. Interventions were developed in concert with the expressed needs of the organizations. While these interventions are still nascent, they are being developed into trainings and workshops in collaboration with the researchers, interested parties and the two organizations.

3.1 Participants
Participants were recruited through snowball and convenience sampling (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). Site selection arose from the researchers' personal and professional connections, solicited through social-media networking and word-of-mouth calls within local groups with sympathetic interests. Participants included employees, interns and volunteers for NP in San Antonio, as well as university students and others involved with CO. Participants were solicited and approved by gatekeepers of each organization in concert with the researchers. Sixteen participants were interviewed for the study and eighteen interviews transcribed: nine for NP and nine for CO; three participants had worked at both organizations. Participants, five males and 11 females, ranged in age from 18-44 years. Interviewees were predominantly immigrants: eight from Mexico, one each from the Philippians, Columbia, Jordan, Syria, Cyprus, and Palestine. Those originally from the local area were all first- or second-generation immigrants.

We gained access to participants through their ongoing engagement with each site (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). An ever-changing workgroup was formed to develop ideas and interventions for each site, based on interest in the project, meeting monthly March–August 2017. While some participants were formal interviewees, twelve additional people took part in these meetings and other events who were not formally interviewed for the project, reflecting its PAR nature.

3.2 Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted from October 2016 through August 2017. Questions were developed along the literature review's themes, including working with migrants, processes migrants go through, intercultural education, current social and political influences, and organizations and roles participants worked within. Interviews ranged from 25-60 minutes, yielding ~300 pages of transcription. They were conducted by the researchers and both researchers' graduate assistants.

We transcribed the interviews by dividing them equally. We made sure to transcribe interviews we had not conducted and have the researcher who conducted the interview check the transcription for accuracy. Transcription was done via listening to digitally recorded interviews stripped of participant identifiers; digital files were deleted once the transcriptions were completed and checked by the original interviewer. We found it important to transcribe and analyze the research in detail so we could ensure our findings were not what we were searching for, but rather inductively emergent.

3.3 Observations
Observations took place from the fall of 2016 through the fall of 2017 in several venues: CO monthly meetings; a city-wide Cultural Conversations workshop involving educational, governmental and nonprofit organizations working with migrants; SB4 protest rallies; Muslim-ban open forums cosponsored by CO; NP's Refugee Advocate Training programs; Greyhound Station intervention trainings; meetings with educators and refugee parents in local migrant enclaves; naturalization and DACA clinics; local elementary school ESL programs educating migrant students; and monthly meetings between the researchers and key members of CO and NP as described above. We conducted approximately 50 hours of participant observation across venues. Notes were taken using observational frameworks describing the scene, participants, and procedures at events. We conducted several informal informational interviews, which were not recorded or transcribed.

3.4 Analysis
An inductive codebook was developed by three of the researchers (one graduate assistant dropped out of the project). Four interviews were cross-coded, then the codes developed independently based on emergent themes related to the research questions. These were combined and reduced during two codebook development sessions. The final codebook consisted of fifteen open codes (Lindlof & Taylor 2011), which were identified, described, and used across the data. Coding was divided among the three researchers using this codebook, then triple checked for consistency. Member-checking interview data was used extensively as well to ensure that interventions discussed below were what the participants were seeking. This level of coding and analysis was necessary to triangulate data and develop valid findings, rather than reflecting the independent perceptions of the researchers.

After coding all data, we broke it down into line-by-line transcriptions by code and, referring to memos and coding notes, developed themes for each code, ultimately connecting the themes together as patterns emerged. After three months of intensive coding analysis, we found that the data emerged into patterns across four overarching themes.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Political context
During project development, Obama was US president; however, as data collection began, Trump was elected, causing our research to take a sharp turn. San Antonio received immediate backlash reflecting anti-immigration ideologies, as a new bill was gaining traction. SB4, a controversial bill making sanctuary cities in Texas illegal, passed in May 2017. San

Antonio sued, claiming the bill was unconstitutional; however, the bill has since taken hold. Since we started this project, NP has gained traction as an organization, raising over $20 million in a viral Facebook campaign and relying on grassroots and social-media consciousness raising. Narrative and linguistic choices were found at both sites to be common tools in the fight for knowledge and power. These are explored below.

4.2 Narrative and language

We found two linguistic strategies used by participants to influence perception: providing agency to and humanizing migrants. Applying Foucault's (1995) theory on knowledge and power, we propose that through sharing stories and propositioning specific linguistic choices, both NP and CO advocate a juxtaposition to the dehumanizing discursive formation surrounding migrants.

4.2.1 Humanizing language

Migrants are purposefully dehumanized through linguistic strategies like detention center requests to transport "bodies" rather than people. In 2018, the Department of Justice mandated that US officials must use the term "illegal aliens" rather than "undocumented migrants" (Campoy 2018). During a CO meeting, when someone used the term "illegal immigrants", group leaders quickly intervened, noting the imperative to change cognitive categories through language. This point was often reiterated in interviews: refugees/asylees should be called "undocumented migrants", rather than "illegals", "illegal immigrants", or "illegal aliens".

Participants stressed the importance of ensuring proper language when discussing and conversing with migrants. Participant T1 discussed how simply changing the identifier "aliens" to "migrants" or "victims" to "survivors" both humanizes and empowers migrants. These linguistic choices fight the common ideology of migrants as subhuman law-breakers, viewing people not simply as "bodies", as ICE employees are instructed to call them, but as "survivors" of harrowing experiences. When sharing stories, speakers must carefully select the language they are using to avoid further de-humanization. Participant B1 exemplified this by discussing the importance of migrants' titles; they urged awareness of the power that labeling and language have on migrant identities.

4.2.2 Agency, knowledge, and storytelling

Foucault (1995) discusses how power translates through knowledge, occupying individual identities through ritualistic information sessions. For asylum seekers and migrants, these identifiers directly impact how courts judge their stories. Such rhetoric treats individuals as objects by taking away unique aspects of their individual character (Foucault 1995). Participants discussed fighting this objectification through culturally appropriate language use, like addressing migrants as *Usted* ("you", formal) rather than *Tú* ("you", informal), or acknowledging migrants' experiences and listening to their stories, restoring humanity stripped away throughout ordeals. Sharing stories was mentioned by participants in both NP and CO as a way to construct new discursive formations that embody enhanced empathy with others, especially those who may have opposing beliefs about immigration:

> **M1:** For thousands of years people told their stories and I think that it's really powerful… about humanity and one of the humanizing things there is. So I think if I could figure out how to tell these stories and get people to understand these stories, I think that's when you start making a difference.

These narratives out a human face on the "alien" anecdote of immigration. Through sharing stories, members of CO and NP illuminate moments not often seen by the media and battle commonly held stereotypes. This battle also engages consciousness-raising through education.

4.3 Education

At the Cultural Conversations workshop that we observed, we learned that education (and its need/lack) permeates immigration processes. While educational focus is considered important by both CO and NP (as noted in 13 of the 18 interviews and often during observation sessions), types and uses of education vary across contexts.

4.3.1 English as a second language

The most obvious discussion of education involves English as a second language. Much of CO's work involves assisting teachers and ESL programs at local elementary schools serving immigrant enclaves in San Antonio. Two major components emerged: the politics of teaching ESL and the practicalities, finding people who can communicate with the variegated population these schools serve, able to speak not just Spanish or Arabic, but also Portuguese, Burmese, Turkish, Dari, and other languages. Finding instructors who know these languages in South Texas poses challenges, disregarding that ESL programs in Texas teach to the TEKS test, which excludes cultural knowledge. As cultural knowledge is imperative to language acquisition, cultural understanding, and successful adaptation (Schieffelin & Ochs 1986), this is an increasing issue, particularly in an educationally conservative state (Johnson 2015).

4.3.2 Consciousness-raising

As soon as we began to discuss education with participants, its synonymity with consciousness-raising became clear. At the university where CO is housed, education represents a priority, bringing the wider community to campus for forums, panels and lectures about immigration. Participant J1 notes:

> A lot that comes with the education is educating just the student body first, outreaching to the community second. We're doing a lot of stuff through immigration panels and things like that… bringing in professors, outside speakers, and specialists to serve on panels, educating students and others in the community.

Participant A3 agrees:

> CO's main goal with NP could be accessing the interest and energy at [the university] and connecting that to what NP needs. So, we're trying to do that with awareness, like the panel discussion, with practical service things like change of address forms, and to connect the pre-law society with lawyers in the community.

In terms of consciousness-raising, much of NP's educational goals directly involve workshops advising migrants of their rights on US soil. NP-sponsored naturalization and DACA clinics inform migrants of their rights and connect with larger communities to dispel migrant stereotypes. NP has an education and outreach department whose sole purpose is to empower migrants:

> **B1:** The first thing is that education is power. So, what we do is what we do is "know your rights" because a lot of the affected community is scared especially with SB4… having that information empowers them.

4.3.3 Intercultural interventions

Research (Sobre-Denton, Carlsen & Greuel 2014; Landis, Bennet & Bennet 2004) indicates that most individuals working with refugees and migrants have not undergone any formal

intercultural training. We found that most intercultural training happens *in situ*, responding to challenging interactions on the ground. Multiple participants noted that intercultural training is needed at varying levels: for employees and volunteers at NP and CO to be able to work with populations they serve, for migrants needing to connect with members of the dominant culture, and for community members facing local inundation with migrant populations. Several members of CO and NP, during formal and informal interviews, stressed the necessity for intercultural training to work with these populations, and the overwhelming lack of resources.

One way intercultural training occurs *in situ* involves working with migrants who travel through San Antonio from detention centers via the Greyhound bus station. Multiple participants described the necessity of understanding cultural cues to restore dignity to migrant women and children. Nonverbal communication issues arise: according to Participant T1, the largely Latina population of employees and volunteers meeting female migrants and their children may instinctively want to hug them, but since sexual violence is typical on the journey, such contact, while culturally appropriate, isn't always situationally appropriate. As volunteers meet migrants at the station with backpacks of supplies, intercultural sensitivity plays a role in selecting backpack items and filling out administering paperwork. One volunteer mentioned the importance of including sanitary items and beauty items like razors and hairbrushes because it is important that Latina women feel they are taking care of their self-presentation to preserve their dignity. Such cultural knowledge is not readily apparent. Even filling out paperwork needs cultural and contextual consideration. Participant T1 notes:

> It's very cultural; the people that we serve at the bus station have never been given anything for free. Back in their home countries they're running away from very dire situations that ask something in return for whatever they are given… a lot of times we will give them supplies to help them figure out their bus station ticket… they will feel compelled to answer that survey for you because you gave them help. We need to be aware of this so we don't coerce them without meaning to.

Here, cultural knowledge would be highly useful, but is not readily available; one must fill out intake forms to negotiate the asylum process correctly; yet form work was deliberately obfuscated by the Trump administration (Barrett, Dawsey & Miroff 2018). Finally, cultural knowledge is needed to thrive in US society. Migrants have few resources to apply for jobs, find homes and schools, and become involved in their communities, according to Participant Y1:

> Understanding [refugees'] culture… can help a lot in allowing them to assimilate in the US as much as they can. Because a lot of them didn't come here by choice…. So their ability and their willingness to… become part of this society is sometimes hindered by the fact that they don't understand this culture.

Intercultural training is needed but lacking across contexts, hindering opportunities for successful transitions and inclusive communities.

4.3.4 Empathy

Global competency research emphasizes empathy in education, promoting the importance of empathetic educators throughout the pedagogical process (Sobre-Denton, Carlsen & Greuel 2014). Fourteen interviewees explained that they work with migrants due to their own positions as first- or second-generation migrants, several from the same locations that the migrants have escaped. This cultural connection combined with a sense of privilege of legal US citizenship has led participants to a strong desire to give back to communities, often so similar to their own cultural groups. This provides a deep connection to the migrant

communities: "language assistance, understanding and empathy are appreciated by young refugees" (Essomba 2017: 214). Participant G1 describes it this way:

> In the end, we are all here because we are united in one mission, one drive, one passion. So [the migrants] are all people who are very similar to us.

For RQ2, we learned that education is paramount to assisting migrants. While present throughout both sites, education is neither formalized, consistent, nor connected across venues. The need for formal intercultural training was expressed by the majority of participants at both organizations. We similarly found that while intercultural education is being learned and used *in situ*, it is not being shared across venues. This emphasizes needed coalition-building across multiple organizations working with migrants in the greater San Antonio community, discussed in the conclusion.

4.4 Race, gender and burnout

Unexpectedly, the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender and power exists not only in the communities that NP and CO serve, but in the organizations themselves. Data across interviews and participant observation yielded complex hierarchies, particularly at NP. Oftentimes, power imbalances, along with migrants' personal experiences, cause post-secondary trauma and burnout for those working with them. This disconnects with those in higher-up positions, who don't seem to experience such issues, causing high turnover rates for lower-level employees and volunteers at NP and members and leadership at CO.

4.4.1 Race, ethnicity and gender at NP

During observations, particularly at NP, white males occupied positions of power while women of color did most of the on-the-ground interfacing with migrants and community members. Early in our research with NP, we noted high turnover rates of employees. Over the data collection period, our main contacts turned over four times. Many individuals we interviewed are no longer with NP. We found that burnout seemed to lead to tenure of about a year for employees who worked in the education and outreach sector, our main contacts. Multiple factors lead to burnout: stress of post-secondary trauma from working with victims of sexual assault, human trafficking, and other traumas; injustices faced by migrants and the system due to dehumanizing practices encouraged by ICE and the Trump administration; constant uncertainty and continually changing mandates due to rapid increase of anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment; lack of decent paychecks; and lack of environmental and psychological/emotional support combined with long hours and compassion fatigue.

One primary way this was witnessed was as a large discrepancy between white, male, economically-privileged employees in leadership positions at NP and the everyday trauma experienced by primarily women-of-color staff working directly with refugees and migrants. Husk and Terrazas (2017: 258) state that "bi-lingual providers of Hispanic origin almost exclusively serve the client population of refugees". As Participant A1 notes:

> A lot of my peers… don't wanna work at NP 'cause they've left already because of this complete disregard for like our opinions and like who gets the raises, who gets the new title and the new position and it continuously is white people.

Participant B1, who works in education and outreach for NP, states:

> I think a lot of leadership is all white… and it brings up a lot of disconnection…. I think for myself I really want to remind them that a lot of the people that they are working with, there are racial disconnections.

Participant A1 emphasizes:

> What does it do for the leadership in an organization to be all or mostly white that serves a population that is of color and is more vulnerable?

While all involved legitimately want to help refugees and migrants as much as possible, the infrastructure, including compensation and support, lacks follow-through to assist its employees. There is a strong perception from lower-level employees that this disconnect is due to race, ethnicity, and gender. This cements findings on organizational diversity issues in nonprofits by Johansen and Zhu (2017): gender has an active impact on attitudes towards diversity issues in public and private sectors. Although we tried repeatedly to interview individuals in more powerful positions at NP, we were never able to connect with these individuals beyond observations and informal interviews during events.

4.4.2 The double-edged sword of empathy

Another emergent issue involves what we call the double-edged sword of empathy. Eight interview participants were from Mexico; one each hailed from the Philippians, Cypress, Palestine, Columbia, Jordan, and Syria. Remaining participants were from the San Antonio or Austin area from second-generation immigrant families. This is not coincidental. Participant M1 notes:

> It is difficult to create empathy for others if they're never been in a situation like that before.

Educational and outreach programs rely on empathy. Thus, they are staffed by people who empathize with migrants as their own situations are, while not analogous, similar.

Guilt accompanies the privileged legal immigration status due to circumstances, socioeconomic position, and family connections, and is compounded by working with those who have had harrowing experiences trying to gain similar privileges. This leads to high emotional connectedness to migrants' plights, causing burnout, thus contributing to high turnover rates. Participant T1 articulates:

> This passion, it can lead to some problems when people are over-dedicated; when you can't say no to things, burnout is a real thing.

This double-edged sword of empathy paradox is that involvement is imperative, but that with high levels of compassion, the work becomes completely draining, leading to illness, depression, and post-secondary trauma. This can be considered compassion fatigue, what Adams, Boscarino and Figley (2010: 105) define as a "…caregiver's reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or 'bearing the suffering of clients' and is 'the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced or suffered by a person'". Compassion fatigue relates to the com/passion with which folks at NP and CO approach the traumatized populations they connect with, but also creates greater capacity for burnout. That, combined with time and resource restrictions, has led members of both CO and NP to choose to leave their organizations, requiring a break from the emotional labor performed daily as they work with those less fortunate by nothing other than circumstances.

4.4.3 Burnout

Husk and Terrazas (2017: 258) describe the high incidences of violence experienced by migrants from South and Central America as they travel north, and the secondary trauma that nonprofit workers and other caregivers experience through their work with these communities:

> Many of those who have migrated have directly experienced or witnessed traumatic events such as kidnapping, murder, assault, rape, torture, death threats, and extortion. Mental health and non-profit agencies that serve migrants have been swamped with individuals who have the signs and symptoms of acute anxiety disorder, PTSD, panic attacks, and depression.

Our findings overwhelmingly supported this. Nine of 16 interviewees directly mentioned postsecondary trauma; nearly all referred to trauma even if they didn't use the term. Several participants pointed to the disturbing process of credible-fear interviews as directly contributing to severe trauma. Participant B1 noted that these interviews serve as deterrent processes, forcing mothers to describe in detail the violence they are fleeing in front of their children, or to "choose" to return home. The possibility of confronting children with such violence is systematically intended to deter mothers from describing their circumstances, thus disallowing them to justify seeking asylum in the US. These interviews are distressing for asylum-seekers, and hearing their stories often leads to a sense of shared trauma by empathetic helpers. Musalo and Lee (2017: 145) describe the processes where "asylum officers have conducted CFIs of mothers in detention in the presence of their children… [requiring] mothers to testify fully and to reveal traumatizing details such as death threats and sexual assault". The degradation of disenfranchised people gets passed onto those who work with them.

One of the biggest needs of both organizations involves developing strategies to help workers and volunteers mitigate these traumatic effects. At CO, the magnitude of problems to be addressed deters members from participating for longer time periods. Witte's (1992) Extended Parallel Process Model provides a rationale for this: a tipping point exists for dealing with the high levels of stress and trauma experienced by the at-risk communities, after which employees of NP and members of CO will quit. Witte (1992) defines "danger control" as stressful situations dealt with by exercising agency: for instance, perception of the injustices to which migrants are subjected might lead to seeking work with these communities to reduce the injustices perpetrated against them. "Fear control", conversely, is where perceptions of the problem become so overwhelming that the individual seeks to remove themselves from the situation entirely. According to EPPM, the "critical point" is the moment when individuals cannot handle the stress/fear anymore and move from danger control to fear control. This points to reframing and self-care as possible approaches to helping workers feel more in control of their environments. Participant T1, a member of CO who later worked at NP, describes existing approaches to self-care at NP:

> When we got our secondhand trauma training we were like, our bar is not that high, it's like finding a buddy to make sure that you eat lunch, which sounds stupid but on a day like today where I have back-to-back meetings if I didn't have my buddy that brings me lunch today, I wouldn't have eaten today.

We have attempted to intervene through assisting in establishing self-care programs including yoga, guided meditation, and training sessions for intercultural and reframing strategies; time and resources currently prohibit it. While members of both groups repeatedly cited this as a main issue for burnout, busy schedules, overwork, and lack of additional resources led to bypassing opportunities for self-care.

During interviews, we repeatedly asked participants what we, as researchers, could do to help their organizations (RQ1). Next, we use our expertise and findings to provide recommendations for CO, NP, and similar organizations to increase intercultural competence in an increasingly polarized nation. Some of these recommendations are currently being implemented, but it is beyond the scope of this article to follow these longitudinally at this time.

5. Recommendations

Given our PAR framework, at the request of both organizations, we provide below a list of recommendations. This paper focuses primarily on assessing the needs and considerations for each group and the wider community. At the time of writing, one author of this paper has worked with a colleague to develop an intercultural training program that we are waiting to schedule delivering to NP. We are also in talks with NP and CO to integrate yoga, meditation, and support groups for members of both organizations, with the present option of a bi-monthly day of support for volunteers and employees at both organizations. This list of recommendations has been shared with both organizations, and is in the process of being actualized, to be reported on in subsequent papers.

5.1 Intercultural training

Several participants pointed out the lack of intercultural knowledge to adapt to the host community. Members of CO and NP stress the necessity for intercultural education, citing a dearth of resources designated for such training. Participant B1 states that during events, many legal advisors, volunteers, and community organizers lacked understanding of the local culture and the migrant communities they serve. This is salient due to lack of trust in the system most migrants have; "know your rights" outreach needs to be accessible and understandable, which isn't always the case, given the lack of cultural context and information available. Specified intercultural trainings are currently being developed by researchers and other members of interested parties, and will be addressed in future articles.

NP would also benefit greatly from workplace diversity training. This would assist in addressing power differentials (and perceptions thereof) between those at the top and those on the ground. Voicing concerns of the predominantly women-of-color working for the organization has the potential to provide resources to prevent burnout and trauma. Given the influx of funding NP received in summer 2018, being able to hire outside trainers to aid employees could reduce high employee turnover and the concomitant cost of new training, while increasing employment satisfaction. One researcher on this project has developed a diversity training to be carried out at NP, but we haven't heard back from NP to schedule its implementation.

One alternative to intercultural training might involve active listening sessions with vertical members of both associations (those in power listening to those working on the ground), discussing stresses and requirements of the job that are not currently met. We found that many participants, particularly of NP, felt like their struggles weren't being heard or understood by the leadership; a non-disciplinary way of airing grievances in a supportive environment could prove useful. We are still figuring out how this might work in the continually changing structure of NP.

5.2 Reframing

One way to assist individuals dealing with postsecondary trauma and burnout involves helping workers reframe perceptions of traumatic situations they experience. If workers feel that they have increased agency over circumstances, they might be less likely to suffer burnout and engage in fear control. One possibility involves regaining agency through personal narrative and storytelling between migrants and host culture members. Stories de-emphasize political ideologies, and allow migrants and participants to tell their truth and their experiences. Through storytelling and listening, people can reduce stereotypes, because they're exposed to a different "side" of the ideological narrative that has progressed throughout the USA.

Another useful reframing strategy is the *oxygen mask theory*. We found that most people working with migrants are women, from more group-oriented co-cultures, and have

guilt due to perceived privilege of citizenship. Such folks are likely to put others' needs before their own. One useful reframe might involve putting one's own oxygen mask on before assisting those less able. This emphasizes self-care attending to the physical, psychological and emotional health of the self first, thus being better able to assist others in the long term. In concert with a local yoga studio and trauma-informed yoga teacher, we are working to create bi-monthly self-care days involving yoga and meditation with NP, also open to members of CO.

5.3 Coalition building

Unfortunately, we found that there are so many organizations working on these issues in San Antonio, each one trying to reinvent the wheel – yet few are in contact with one another. Regardless of myriad organizations working with these populations, little lasting communication crosses organizational borders. Organizations working with migrants in the San Antonio area include (inexhaustively) Catholic Charities, Center for Refugee Services, Interfaith Welcome Coalition, Migrant Center for Human Rights, Dreamers Resource Center at UTSA, DACA at Alamo Colleges District, CARA Project, Justice for our Neighbors, San Antonio Sanctuary Network, and South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project.

For example, CO is housed at a private university and is attempting to reach out to develop branches at two other universities, one in San Antonio and one 40 miles away. Much of CO's work assists teachers and ESL programs at local elementary schools that serve immigrant enclaves. Researchers at a different university have reached out to another elementary school in an adjacent district that also serves a refugee and migrant community – yet these two programs are not in contact with one another.

After several meetings where we attempted to liaise with folks across organizations, we found most groups don't connect with one another; some are actually at odds with each other. The presence of so many organizations, nonprofits, educational and religious/interfaith groups, but the lack of coalition-building among these groups, indicates a large gap in potential productivity. We recommend a city-wide task force, involving educators (ESL, community, and university), local government, religious/interfaith groups, and nonprofit organizations, similar to the Cultural Conversations workshop mentioned at the beginning of this paper, but meeting on a regular basis like our taskforce. As of the fall of 2019, our principal investigator and a faculty member from another university have been working with the city of San Antonio immigration liaison to attempt more community outreach and coalition building. Results of this work may be reported in a follow-up study.

6. Limitations

This research project represents a portion of a larger study on a small cross-section of work with refugees and migrants in one region of the world. It barely scratches the surface of migration processes and their political, social and cultural implications. Given the at-risk nature of the populations these organizations serve, we were not able to collect useful data from the migrants themselves, only those who worked with them. While CO was very transparent about their organization (not surprising, given its collegiate nature), NP's leadership, though repeatedly contacted for interviews, were never able to connect with our researchers, despite multiple visits to the offices and contact attempts. Thus, this paper reflects the values of the participants we worked with but doesn't present a complete picture of the organizations.

Current administrative changes, such as Governor Greg Abbott's 2020 ending of refugee resettlement in the state of Texas, make it difficult to state whether NP will be able to schedule the intercultural trainings and workshops developed by the principal investigator and colleagues or find other means of assisting employees. We are currently waiting to hear from

NP and CO to schedule interventions, information on which they have already received. The current precarious nature of the state of resettlement necessitates a follow-up study on the implementation and longitudinal outcomes of such interventions, as the current work cannot report on them at this time.

Additional future research will determine whether and how such interventions are applied to NP, and the impacts of these on workplace satisfaction and employee burnout. A follow-up project is currently being developed that attempts to connect more deeply with NP and similar organizations, potentially through a wider variety of gatekeepers at multiple levels.

During the political period of our data collection, the changing administration and constant shifts in border policies threw both organizations into disarray, obfuscating which issues were temporary, which were more permanent, and which were entirely contextual. This paper is limited in terms of the scope of interventions that we can report. In truth, any organizations working with migrants on the southern US border (and across migrant-crossings throughout the world) are so constantly in flux that research might at best only be able to bandage current concerns, as they shift so rapidly. This paper, using a PAR framework, serves to describe parts of the project including conceptualizing the problems and developing interventions that we hope to apply in the future and report the outcomes of within the next two years.

In the face of current trends away from globalism and towards populism, we can only hope that this research provides a jumping-off point to study more organizations, improving communication and connections at the micro, meso and macro levels. Cultural flows will not slow; it is our responsibility as academics, community members, and empathic human beings to continue to work in the face of increasingly reactionary policies. We need to make empathy less of a double-edged sword and more a tool to fight global injustices perpetrated against those in need.

About the authors

Miriam Shoshana Sobre is a lecturer of communication at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She teaches classes on intercultural communication, research methods, language and culture, communication theory, and diversity. She has been working as a professor of intercultural communication for nine years, and has been studying intercultural communication for nineteen. She received her BA in English from the University of Puget Sound, her MA in language and culture from the University of Texas at Austin, and her PhD in intercultural communication from Arizona State University. She has written one other book, *Cultivating Cosmopolitanism for Intercultural Communication*, which won the Best Single Authored Book Award for the International and Intercultural Communication Division of the National Communication Association. She has published articles on intercultural communication, white privilege and intersectionality, language and culture, and intercultural communication pedagogy in journals such as *The International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *The Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *Intercultural Education*, *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, and *Communication Theory*.

Dr. Emily Ehmer grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and earned her BA in arts administration from Butler University, her MA in public relations from Ball State University, and her PhD in mass Communication from Indiana University. Prior to her graduate degrees, she had a career as a newspaper journalist and public-relations director for government and non-profit organizations. Dr. Ehmer's dissertation analyzed conflicting media portrayals of Burmese refugee populations. Her subsequent research continued to focus on the media's role in the framing of immigration issues and citizenship, and their intersection with gender and social

movements. Dr. Ehmer served as associate professor with the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Texas State University in San Marcos until her death in 2019.

Dr. Ehmer is on the left, Dr. Sobre on the right.

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