

Searching for Refuge: How psychologists make meaning of their work with asylum seekers in a turbulent sociopolitical climate

Hanna R. Schwartzbaum

Rutgers University, Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology

Proposal

As of 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had identified 70.8 million current, forcibly displaced people (“UNHCR,” 2019). Once displaced, these migrants often seek refuge in a host country by means of an asylum process necessitating a legal case, and at times, a psychological evaluation to support their claim. This dissertation is an exploratory, qualitative investigation that examines psychologists’ experiences conducting asylum evaluations across the following domains: their autobiographical connections to this field, the factors that contribute to their continued drive to serve in this social justice role, and their ability to make meaning of the stories they hear. I utilized a semi-structured interview with licensed psychologists who have completed at least five psychological evaluations with asylum seekers. I then used a qualitative study methodology and analyzed data through grounded theory and thematic analysis to identify salient themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Braun & Clark, 2012). Among other themes, this study seeks to identify a ‘meaning making’ model and explore ways in which psychologists *vicariously* make meaning of the traumatic and resilient narratives of asylum seekers (Frankl, 1946; Park, 2010). Additionally, this study will explore ways in which psychologists and professionals become engaged in social justice work, as well as the potential for burnout. I proposed this study in the Fall of 2018 and seek to complete it in the Spring of 2020. I accrued the following expenses: travel (around \$300), editor (\$350), and time to conduct the study.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, 2*. doi: 10.1037/13620-004
- Frankl, V.E. (1946). *Man's search for meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: an integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(2), 257.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- UNHCR. (2019, June). Statistical Yearbooks; Figures at a Glance. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.