

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN IDENTITIES: HOW RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS ARE
REFLECTED IN CULTURAL, LANGUAGE, AND TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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VIETNAMESE AMERICAN IDENTITIES: HOW RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS ARE REFLECTED IN CULTURAL, LANGUAGE AND TECHNOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Abstract

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This dissertation examines the intersections of race, gender, class with language, cultural and technological barriers as reflected in the experience of first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese American refugees, immigrant parents, and their children in Seattle Public Schools (SPS) and the surrounding areas. Most Vietnamese interviewees in my study face barriers to upward mobility, racial conflicts outside the home, and are portrayed as “others.” This study adds new knowledge by examining how technological barriers hinder Vietnamese immigrants in their struggles to overcome racial, class, and gender discrimination during acculturation.

Chapter One investigates how post-racial theory is a myth and how “model minority” stereotypes still haunt Asian Americans regardless of their English proficiency and technological skills. Chapter Two analyzes four case studies on how Vietnamese American women juggle work and family under socioeconomic hardships. They are subject to unfair, if not intensely exploitative, treatment in the workplace, and have very limited access to available resources. Chapter Three explores complex interactions concerning generational solidarity and conflicts between first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese immigrant parents and their children in the greater Seattle area. It explores whether the consumption of digital media technology, such as Internet

sites, CDs, DVDs, and video games, creates more parent-child conflicts than harmonious relations for these families. Chapter Four argues the multifaceted relationships between Vietnamese American students, their parents, and teachers, impact each of them as they interact through technology and education. These students experience technology gaps during family-school interaction based on racial, socioeconomic, and parental involvement and educational status. Chapter Five examines complex ways in which the web environment affects father-children communication concerning job and gender reversal roles. My observation shows that while many Vietnamese fathers still uphold traditional gender roles in their families, they tend to encourage daughters to improve technological skills and academic achievement. My findings demonstrate that regardless of socioeconomic hardships, racial and gender inequalities, and technological barriers, many Vietnamese American parents, regardless of marital status, try to overcome these struggles to rebuild their new lives, bridge the digital divide, and be part of the mainstream society.

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since Barack Obama achieved his political dream of becoming president, the mainstream media has been debating the concept of a “post-racial” or color-blind world, in which race is no longer pertinent. A growing body of scholarly work demonstrates that the concept of a color-blind world ignores racial disparities. People of color continue to face racial segregation in daily interactions, housing, employment, education, and family life (e.g., Parks, Hughey, and Jost, 2011; Cassano and Buono, 2010; Lentin 2008). While Bonilla-Silva (2003) acknowledges that non-whites have more chances in contemporary America than in the past, he points out that minority populations still face racial discrimination, thus they experience unequal opportunities for education and career choices compared to their white counterparts, because of “facts hidden by color-blind racism” (p. 26). This provides insight into the deception of colorblindness: since “racelessness is equated with whiteness, colorblindness in practice means seeing everyone as white” (p. 96). In other words, a post-racial framework ignores the complexities of immigration, poverty, and inequality, and thus, also ignores racism itself.

Several studies competently emphasize that intersecting aspects of race, gender, and class continue to lead to discrimination against immigrants, including Asian Americans, through many generations (Fineman 2010; Lund and Colin 2010; Lentin 2008). For instance, in the current economic crisis, racial discrimination imposes harsh effects on many Asian Americans because they are viewed as “model minority” stereotypes¹. This label, from Chou and Feagin’s (2008) perspective, masks “the significant unemployment and poverty rates of numerous Asian groups, especially Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, Bangladeshi, Laotian, and Hmong Americans” (p. 81).

¹ “model minority” stereotype: See Appendix A

While Chou and Feagin emphasize racial discrimination impacts non-white groups, Fineman brings gender inequalities into that analysis: “Women of color have the lowest incomes relative to white men, but men of color and white women also have substantially lower incomes” (p. 187). The authors point out how people of color experience racial and gender disadvantages that construct material inequality during economic crises, especially in the U.S.

Several studies show different outcomes of gender inequality regarding Internet usage. Cooper and Weaver (2003) argue, “The frequent choice of male-oriented, competitive software continues to foster the digital divide” (p. 110). The authors point out gender inequality exists in how men control the computer industry, which widens the digital divide², gaps between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” While Leggon (2006) asserts, “Gender differences in Internet usage have almost disappeared,” he points out that “among Asian Americans, about 5 percent more men than women use the Internet” (p. 102).

The disadvantage of students as working mothers in access to technology illustrates Shade’s (2004) perspective: “Juggling the demands of family and other domestic responsibilities, coupled with work outside of the home and heavy course loads, proved to be onerous for many women;” thus, “the touted benefit of flexible, just-in-time lifelong learning facilitated by networking technologies has proved to be a bust for many women” (p. 66). Shade acknowledges the limitation regarding Internet use of working mothers. Macho (2007) asserts the role of parents “is important in two ways: providing access for themselves (the parent) to participate in the education process, and providing technology in the home for their child to use as a learning tool” (p. 16). In other words, parental involvement in relation to technology fosters children’s

² The “digital divide”: See Appendix A

education. Watkins (2009) argues, “not all digital experiences are created equal” because many parents struggle with racial discrimination, low socioeconomic status and education (p. 33).

Lentin acknowledges that “not all immigrants are faced with racism” (p. 129). Although I agree with Lentin concerning the heterogeneous “ethno-racial” immigrant populations, I argue that many Southeast Asian immigrants face disadvantages in socioeconomic, educational, linguistic, cultural and technological barriers, in part because of the immigrants’ sudden arrival on U.S. soil from war-torn countries including Viet Nam, Lao, Cambodia, and Hmong. One barrier Southeast Asian immigrant parents face is that their children often interact with peers via digital communication. On one hand, many of the children had low academic achievement, and on the other, the interaction created conflicts at home because their parents lack English proficiency and technological skills. As a recent study shows, high percentages of teens in the U.S. use various online media forms: with 53% to 92% using the Internet for fun, email messaging, accessing information, playing or downloading games, researching an item before consuming, listening and downloading music, and using chat rooms. In other words, “three quarters of young people aged twelve to seventeen are online” (Mazzarella 2008, p. 1). While Mazzarella asserts that the cyberspace environment has become part of teens’ socialization and communication, Bell (2001) points out that racial and gender issues affect the cyberspace environment.

The immigrant children, in their parents’ view, are prone to an institution of racism and exploitation from the Internet. Marginalized immigrant parents, including Asian Americans, are more concerned than other U.S. parents with the fact that “the Internet can and does enable new and insidious forms of racism” (p. 147). From Nayar’s (2010) perspective, if non-white inhabitants hurry to culturally assimilate into computer technology to narrow the digital divide,

“they are simply adopting the role of the docile consumer of Microsoft, Intel, and other products, and are not likely to transform the cyberspace they encounter” (p. 147). This highlights the effect of the loss of Vietnamese cultural practices, a source of conflict and sorrow for some of my interviewees. Parental sense of losing beloved cultural features in existence for thousands of years, amid beautiful natural settings, heightens the conflict at home as younger children readily adopt the ways of the Internet, not of the ancestors.

One of such impacts is highlighted where Mazzarella argues that while Internet use has become a norm in the dominant culture, a controversial discourse relates to its usage. I argue that this controversy underscores the cultural conflict embedded in the Internet as used by immigrant youth. For example, while 57% of parents worry about their children meeting online, 60% of teens admit that it is easy for them to contact strangers, and 52% of teens feel confident with online communication regardless of parent and public concerns about girls and boys on the Internet (p. 5). According to Mazzarella, while many parents are concerned with “girls’ potential to be victimized by other Internet users,” others believe that the Internet offers relatively “safe spaces for girls to speak...perform, negotiate and construct their sexual identities” (p. 6). The author emphasizes parental concerns regarding gender inequality among teens in relation to Internet use.

Nayar predicts that people of color will play a passive role and face gender inequality as they try to participate in mainstream technology. “Like feminists who adopt the values of the patriarchy, they may succeed as isolated individuals in ... a privileged white male’s domain – technology and the Internet – but cannot bring about the kind of change that would bring about true equality” (p. 147). Thus, technology helps sustain racial and gender inequality for immigrants, which fosters white males who are privileged with power and class.

This dissertation examines the intersections of race, gender, and class with language, cultural and technological barriers as reflected in the experience of first and 1.5³ generation Vietnamese American refugees, immigrant parents, and their children in SPS and the surrounding areas. Most Vietnamese interviewees in this study faced barriers to upward mobility and racial conflicts outside the home. These experiences determine in part the social, psychological, racial and gender restrictions of these Vietnamese Americans⁴. By analyzing these complex relationships, I explore how post-racial theory is a myth and how “model minority” stereotypes still haunt Asian Americans regardless of their English proficiency and technological skills. These challenges not only affect Vietnamese Americans, but also impact Southeast Asian American communities more generally and other Asian American populations in contemporary U.S. culture.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I synthesize interview results into five chapters. Each chapter analyzes data from smaller subgroups of the 57 total participants, depending on the topic explore. I examine the issues Vietnamese Americans face related to seven research questions: 1) how the consequences of the Viet Nam War and the impact of race on U.S. foreign policies impose on the lives of Vietnamese American families; 2) how the post-racial framework disconnects issues of housing, employment, wages, education, technology, and life expectancy of Vietnamese Americans during acculturation; 3) how female Vietnamese American immigrant workers struggle with language and technological barriers and with unfair treatment in the labor market while juggling family duty and childcare obligations; 4) how Vietnamese American parents and

³ The 1.5 generation: See Appendix A

⁴ Vietnamese Americans: See Appendix A

their children adapt to their dynamic social environments and negotiate their mixed Vietnamese and American identities as they interact with new media consumption; 5) how digital media consumption affects parent-child relationships as Vietnamese American children desire to fit in with their peers at school and the public sphere; 6) how Vietnamese American students negotiate technology and education through a window of socioeconomic hardship to bridge the digital divide in their families; and 7) how Vietnamese American fathers interact with their children regarding access to communication technology.

Based on my interview results, I explore six central interrelated themes regarding the acculturation process⁵: 1) how first generation Vietnamese American parents struggle as a complex group against racial discrimination and cultural conflicts in the transformation of their identities; 2) how Vietnamese American women struggle with linguistic and technological barriers while they juggle work-family balance; 3) how Vietnamese American parents struggle with intergenerational conflict and/or foster intergenerational solidarity through digital media consumption, when interacting with their children; 4) how Vietnamese American children try to bridge the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” and how the technology gap between wealthy and deprived schools institutionalizes disparities between children of poverty and those of prosperity; 5) how technological disadvantages generate difficulties for Vietnamese American fathers attempting to learn computer skills for accessing Internet information resources for numerous activities, including communicating and monitoring their children’s school progress; and 6) how traditional Vietnamese culture adjusts as gender roles shift within first, 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese American families.

⁵ The acculturation process: See Appendix A

As a first-generation Vietnamese American female immigrant living in the U.S. for 19 years, I have been fortunate to receive a privileged education in mainstream society. However, I experienced struggles similar to those the parents face regarding racial discrimination and stereotypes, cultural conflicts and language barriers. My background offers me a broad perspective in understanding the complex cultural identities of students in Seattle Public School (SPS) and their parents. I used my own experiences to make personal connections to my oral history interviewees and to make them as comfortable as possible. I documented and analyzed data that illuminated personal historical events, social changes, and struggles of the underrepresented in mainstream culture. Despite the scope of my study, which focuses on particular Vietnamese American parents and their children, I recognize underrepresented Vietnamese Americans also include gay, lesbian, mixed-heritage, disabled, adopted, and other groups that experience discrimination along these identity vectors.

Wei (1993) argues that Asian Americans “have been ignored because of their small numbers and little-known history of labor exploitation and resistance to oppression” (p. 4). While Wei criticizes the dominant groups that have treated Asian Americans unfairly throughout American history, Trinh (2005) claims, “[c]urrently there is very little literature on Asian Americans, specifically Vietnamese Americans” (p. 75). In the case of Vietnamese Americans in the greater Seattle area, little research is documented in books, community-based studies, or recorded community events. Therefore, my scholarly training and oral historical interviews as well as life and volunteer experiences speak to some of the complexities of Vietnamese Americans during acculturation as I try to connect theories and methods. My oral historical interviews represent voices of Vietnamese Americans, especially Vietnamese American women, and recognize them as a complex minority group struggling in daily life in U.S. culture.

Gender affects individuals' access to technology and work. Gupta and Houtz (2000) report, "Gender differences in attitudes toward computer usage and computer careers are another important issue that should be carefully addressed by educators and employers throughout the country" (p. 2). The authors' analysis demonstrates that women, like my female respondents, are likely to be considered less proficient than their male counterparts in the dominant culture in accessing and using computers and the Internet.

Interview Method

I had an opportunity to share my stories and experiences with other Vietnamese Americans and to create a sense of belonging while conducting this oral history research. Describing the historical narrative, Ritchie (2003) states that, "Oral history derives its value not from resisting the unexpected, but from relishing it. By adding an ever wider range of voices to the story, oral history does not simplify the historical narrative but makes it more complex - and more interesting" (p. 13). Ritchie argues that adding a "wider range of voices" can generate valuable story-telling. Oral history interviews allow me to examine the daily struggles of first and 1.5- generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant parents and their children in the greater Seattle area. My interviewees openly revealed their personal narratives to help me comprehend cultures, feelings, and expressions through their complex experiences.

These personal interviews were recorded in a digital audio format. Twenty-eight interviewees chose to speak Vietnamese, three spoke purely English and another one spoke a mixture of English and Vietnamese to contextualize their testimonies. Vietnamese American parents show an awareness of themselves in a peripheral community. In 2008 and 2009, I interviewed 57 Vietnamese American participants, including 32 first and 1.5 generation refugee and immigrant Vietnamese American parents and their 25 SPS children. Based on these

interviews and observations, along with a literature review, this research addresses how race, class and gender intersect with cultural, linguistic and technological disadvantages to shape Vietnamese American participants' identity. The data was divided into two sets, with one set for parents and one for their children. I developed a ten-question instrument for each group of these participants and gathered oral histories. The questions explored their struggles with cultural differences, language barriers, social and technological isolation, and financial hardship.

Initially, the interview questions came from my research, "Learning Technological Skills Project" (LTSP) in the summer of 2008. The initial goal was to help low-income Vietnamese American parents learn how to access Internet-based resources at Helping Link⁶, a community-based center in Seattle. Technological skills would be used to bridge the gap between the older and the younger generations in the same family units, and between the "haves" and "have-nots."

The goal of LTSP was to bridge gaps in social and cultural skills that Vietnamese-American parents face in mainstream society and to promote strong relationships between families and schools in raising and developing children to be productive, responsible, and inspired citizens. To work for that goal, the most effective means of delivering basic learning technology is to make technological education more accessible, user-friendly, collaborative, and specific to Vietnamese-American parents' learning styles. This project helped some of these parents become more confident in communicating with teachers and overseeing their children's academic progress and homework assignments. LTSP also offered unskilled and unemployed parents the technical competence and cultural skills they needed to secure jobs, and provided opportunities for community-building. The results varied for various participants in the program. Still, LTSP's activities helped build strong social connections among participants to support their

⁶ Helping Link: See Appendix A

establishment of learning communities. LTSP encouraged family and school interactions by providing computer training, support, and guidance.

During the summer of 2008, I conducted interviews with individuals⁷ and groups to explore the technical needs of these parents related to the socio-cultural and language barriers they faced in monitoring their children's progress at school. In asking the same questions to all parent participants, I investigated how these parents, in spite of low fluency levels in English, communicate with schools and teachers, monitor their children's progress at school, and interact with their American-born Vietnamese children, who might not speak Vietnamese. For example, three of the interview questions were: 1) "how do you monitor your children at school if you do not have access to technology?"; 2) "what factors should Seattle Public Schools consider to promote better cross-cultural understanding between parents and teachers?"; and 3) "what are the changes on the Seattle Public Schools' websites that you might want to see in order to bridge the cultural gap between the Vietnamese traditions and the mainstream culture?" The open-ended questions led to many unexpected responses. At the end of the interview, I asked these parents what else they wanted to share. Therefore, even though the project focused on how Vietnamese parents struggle with language and technological barriers to monitor their children's school progress, issues related to race, gender, and other realms came up.

In 2009, I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to interview children under 18 and young adults. My potential young participants were from 7 to 19 years old. I asked my previous parent participants for permission to interview their children who were under 18. As some American-born Vietnamese children did not want to be interviewed, I sent

⁷ Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees from my research in summers 2008 and 2009 in Seattle.

invitation letters to recruit new parents and their children, who were students in SPS in the same age range, and began the interview process with these participants. As I became more involved with the community and connected with Vietnamese parents, they allowed me to interview their children. In all, I interviewed 25 students about their family's function, satisfaction with their family, and the extent of their disagreement with parents over cultural and technological issues. This group of students was mostly comprised of students in SPS and Vietnamese language schools who participated in community activities such as Helping Link, Dac Lo⁸, and Van Lang⁹.

This study features the voices of 32 Vietnamese American and immigrant parents, including 16 women and 16 men, ages 36 to 57, who have been living in the U.S. for two to 33 years. These participants were refugees and immigrants who entered the U.S. in different time periods: among two who left Viet Nam in 1975, one arrived under the Operation Frequent Wind¹⁰, a few days before the fall of Sai Gon, and one arrived by ship right after the Communists took over Viet Nam. Of the rest, 16 were "boat people," who fled Viet Nam in the 1980s; four followed with the Homecoming Act¹¹ from 1987-1993; two under the Humanitarian Operation (HO)¹²; and eight entered through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP)¹³ from 1991-2004. These parents all revealed an appreciation for the U.S., although they came from different educational, political and economic backgrounds. The group includes one Caucasian

⁸ Dac Lo: See Appendix A

⁹ Van Lang: See Appendix A

¹⁰ Operation Frequent Wind: See Appendix A

¹¹ Homecoming Act: See Appendix A

¹² Humanitarian Operation: See Appendix A

¹³ Orderly Departure Program (ODP): See Appendix A

Vietnamese Amerasian¹⁴ male and one black Vietnamese Amerasian female, one Cambodian Vietnamese American female, and one Chinese Vietnamese American male. Oral history interviews of their children were also documented to complete this study.

Although they live in greater Seattle, a high-tech or “global” city, many first-generation refugee and immigrant Vietnamese American parents lack computer skills to access online information and cope with debilitating issues of racial, gender and class inequalities. As I collected data to better understand the lives of these students at school and at home, I observed generational differences. My plan for the interview process was flexible because some participants had to work overtime or had personal issues. Before answering specific questions, each child and young adult participant was asked about his/her name, gender, age at the time of the interview, grade level, and experience with digital technology. I posed different questions to this group than to the parent group. I also made sure that these children and young adults felt free to skip any question that felt uncomfortable to them. The interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions and follow-up probes. Because males and females faced different experiences in their gender identity development, I divided the sample by gender.

The interviews explored the 22 children’s struggles against cultural homogenization, language barriers, cultural and technological isolation, and financial hardships in their daily lives, as well as how these American-born Vietnamese children acculturate into mainstream culture. I examined the children’s impression of the Vietnamese language and culture as well as any difficulty bridging the two-culture gap, and explored how their parents’ communication with the SPS helped their progress at school. For example, four interview questions for the children

¹⁴ Vietnamese Amerasians: See Appendix A

were: 1) “How often do you talk with your parents? Do you speak English or Vietnamese with them?” 2) “Do you feel you fit in your school environment as you are able to access technology and speak proficient English? Why or why not?” 3) “What is your biggest concern regarding generational conflicts that you have encountered in your family? Please give an example.” 4) “How would you improve the communication between yourself and your parents as well as between yourself, parents and teachers--and how can technology be useful?” After completing the interviews, all audio-recordings from parents were transcribed, except for four parents who responded in English, the interviews were translated from Vietnamese into English. Children’s responses were transcribed in English, since all of the children answered in English.

In this work, I contribute to a newer area of research in Asian American studies that examines what it means to be Vietnamese American, and how Vietnamese Americans and other Asian descent groups were lumped together in an umbrella “Asian American” identity with “model minority” stereotyping. Vo (2000) argues that “though included under the rubric of Asian American, it is questionable whether the Vietnamese have internalized this label, and furthermore, whether they consider their interests aligned with other Asian Americans” (p. 302).

Therefore, describing all Asian Americans as a “model minority” in an overarching racial category is inaccurate. Not all subsets of Asian Americans can be lumped together, because each minority group has its varying complexities of linguistic, cultural, educational, social, historical and economic backgrounds. The works by Chang and Au (2008), Chou and Feagin (2008), Hune and Takeuchi (2008), and Min (1995) criticize how the mainstream media created the “model minority” stereotype that misrepresents Asian American success in schools and economic life. The authors assert that due to the model minority myth, teachers and other students expect Asian American students to be well-behaved and quiet, smart, good at math and

science, college-bound and opportunistic. As the scholars point out, the myth of the model minority masks class inequalities and diverse cultures among Asian Americans. This model minority notion sets Asian Americans apart as “Others” and negatively affects Asian American students who are portrayed as “obedient,” “silent,” and “nerds.” These stereotypes remain exotically distinct from attitudes towards whites and other “Americans of color.” Chou and Feagin point out how mainstream writers “developed the model minority myth in order to allege that all Americans of color could achieve the American dream” (p. 13).

Exceptionally, there have been some opportunities for Vietnamese Americans in political and socioeconomic mobility, including Joseph Cao, the nation’s first Vietnamese American member of Congress, a refugee who escaped Viet Nam in 1975 at the age of eight, after the fall of Saigon. Although his personal history is similar to many other Vietnamese American refugees, he believes in the American dream. Hillyer (2008) cited Cao’s statements, “never in my life did I think I could be a future congressman,” and “the American dream is well and alive” (p. 1). His achievement sets him apart from ordinary Vietnamese American respondents in my study.

Chang and Au argue that class hierarchy, through educational and economic background, affects children’s progress at school, and describe how financial security creates more opportunities for children to gain access to educational resources. They note that Southeast Asian Americans experience less academic achievement than other Asian Americans. According to the 2000 census, “53.3 percent of Cambodians, 59.6 percent of Hmong, 49.6 percent of Laotians, and 38.1 percent of Vietnamese over 25 years of age have less than a high school education” and, “13.3 percent of Asian Indians, 12.7 percent of Filipinos, 8.9 percent of Japanese, and 13.7 percent of Koreans over 25 years of age have less than a high school

education” (p. 1). On the same note, Indians, Filipinos, Japanese, and Koreans comparatively achieve higher education and incomes than Cambodian, Lao, and Hmong Americans. The authors conclude that “the model minority myth serves to obscure the struggles of poor or ‘under-educated’ families working to gain a decent education for their children” (p. 1). Along with socioeconomic hardships, underprivileged Southeast Asian students, such as Vietnamese and Laotian Americans, struggle with discrimination and isolation in the school environment. They often need to receive basic resources to help them in the learning process.

Research shows that many Southeast Asians are typically low-wage workers with large families who live in the economically deprived neighborhoods, where “many Asian immigrants and their children, especially those from Southeast Asia and rural backgrounds, have experienced much poverty and other serious economic difficulties over the past few decades” (cited by Chou and Feagin 2008, p. 12). In addition, Southeast Asians also face educational disadvantages. Furthermore, their psychological scars are deep from facing traumas, such as losing loved ones during wartime, suffering in re-education camps, being raped or threatened by pirates during their escape from the communist regime, and waiting long periods to resettle in refugee camps.

Vo (2008) and Rumbaut (1995) argue that despite the fact that Southeast Asian American groups have diverse histories, languages and cultures, they similarly face linguistic isolation and exclusion because they do not speak proficient English. Hune and Takeuchi (2008) report that approximately 40% of Asian Americans in Washington state have limited English proficiency (LEP). Southeast Asian Americans particularly have very high LEP rates, including 65.6% of Vietnamese, 61.5% of Hmong, 51% of Laotians, and 49.5% of Cambodians (p. 24). These students struggle in school and face racial stereotypes as “foreigners” and assumptions that they are bitter because of their refugee and immigrant backgrounds. From Hune and Takeuchi’s

perspective, while school is “a site of alienation, marginalization, pressure to perform, and cultural and physical conflict,” home adds another burden on students because they feel obligated to assist their non-English speaking parents (p. 46).

Several authors criticize how the Seattle School District fails to treat students of color as equal to white pupils. The district also fails in supporting diversity and avoiding racial exclusion (CQ Researcher, 2010; Pollock, 2009; Reynolds, 2007). CQ Researcher notes, “Seattle was already experiencing increasing racial isolation after suspending its previous placement plan, which included race as one ‘tiebreaker’ in pupil assignments” (p. 19). Pollock adds that the district failed “to explain why, in a district composed of a diversity of races, with fewer than half of the students classified as white, it has employed the crude racial categories of ‘white’ and ‘nonwhite’ as the basic for its assignment decisions” (p. 109). Pollock charges that instead of bringing ‘the races together,’ in SPS, “someone gets excluded, and the person excluded suffers an injury solely because of his or her race” (p. 112). Like Pollock, Reynolds asserts that Seattle school personnel’s vision of diversity means drawing more white high school students into the student body. Reynolds notes that SPS’ plan categorizes schools with 30% black, 30% Asian, 20% Latino, and 20% white as ‘racially isolated’ or ‘racially concentrated.’ He goes on to argue that in contrast, schools that include 25% white and 75% percent African American students are not considered racially isolated (p. 84).

This category undercuts the SPS conclusion when we recognize that Asian American students were not included in the percentages listed in the schools considered “not racially isolated.” Perhaps this was because they are often lumped with whites and considered to be a “model minority.” Also, many still understand race in a black/white binary system of race relations. Reynolds condemns cities like Seattle, where school personnel limit the options of

high school students solely based on their race. My study corroborates Reynolds' analysis, and I argue that racial inequality is a current issue for the vast majority of Vietnamese American students in SPS. The SPS use of figures distorts this inequality. This is critical, because minority pupils, including Vietnamese American students, are at risk. These students face institutional racism and are portrayed as "inferior" under white normalization and privilege. At the same time, Vietnamese American students are often not afforded the support that other minorities are given because it is assumed that they are a "model minority."

Assimilating/acculturating¹⁵ by speaking fluent English and understanding the mainstream culture is not a guarantee of equal participation in American society. The scholarship of Chou and Feagin (2008), Vo (2000), and Wu and Song (2000), asserts that Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans, are portrayed as "perpetuated foreigners" in mainstream society. As Vo points out, second-generation Vietnamese Americans and other Asian Americans "still need to contend with their treatment as a racial minority in a country that does not accept them as bona fide Americans" despite the fact that they have acculturated (p. 302). Like Vo, Chou and Feagin conclude that white privilege continues to dominate contemporary America's racial hierarchy, therefore "making it nearly impossible for Asian Americans to integrate in untroubled, nondiscriminatory, and egalitarian ways into U.S. society" (p. x).

Through observation, interaction, networking, and oral interviews, I examine how those and other complex racial issues impact Vietnamese parents' and children's identities, even as they struggle to surmount language and technological disadvantages. I examine how these complex racial issues intersect with gender, class, and nationality to influence Vietnamese

¹⁵ Assimilating/acculturating: See Appendix A

American families. This study may help Vietnamese Americans strengthen their parenting efforts to promote understanding and interaction between parents and children. These efforts include monitoring changes in their children's behavior during different developmental stages while the racial treatment in the SPS impacts them, protecting their children's safety as they access online information, and listening to their children's ideas carefully and respectfully. I explore how these parents demonstrate great efforts to acculturate and gain more recognition from the dominant culture and to increase family and community bonds for Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants in greater Seattle.

The first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese American respondents I interviewed came to the U.S. in different waves from various and dynamic educational, economic, and political backgrounds. While some have become U.S. citizens, have full-time jobs, and have acculturated, others are still financially dependent on governmental assistance, relying on mainstream supports and charity to survive. Some parents served on the side of American forces or fought for the South Vietnamese government, and viewed their best alternative as to come to the United States as refugees. Others, like myself, left Viet Nam legally in the Orderly Departure Program as immigrants. Some Vietnamese Amerasians also left Viet Nam legally in the Amerasian Homecoming Act. Together, we struggle with racial, social class, economic, and cultural conflicts in the mainstream society. Because many first-generation Vietnamese parents speak limited English, their American-born Vietnamese children face difficulties in SPS.

My analysis is based on the premise that the economic and political hegemony¹⁶ of U.S. society influences the institutional experiences of respondents in marginalized Vietnamese American communities. Due to U.S. foreign policy and colonial domination during the Viet

¹⁶ Hegemony: See Appendix A

Nam War, many first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant respondents fall socioeconomically far below the “model minority,” struggle with a severe language barrier, and rely on the limited funding for refugees and immigrants, such as Asian language translation services. An associate of the Educational Equity and Youth Rights Project, Redondo (2008) states, “Asian language interpretation and translation services, bilingual programs, or translated assessments are hardly ever available even though they are essential” (p. 4). When first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese American respondents are left without an English-Vietnamese translator, their voices are often unheard when they need to communicate with teachers. Many of those I interviewed felt excluded and ignorant because of limited English proficiency and technological barriers. My respondents who have limited access to online information also feel tension about communication with teachers at SPS. This work outlines the need for an interconnected analysis of racial, social class, economic, political and historical struggles, involving multifaceted identities of contemporary Vietnamese American parents and children in SPS.

In Chapter One, I examine the responses of 9 parents and 6 children from the original participant group who elucidated how the post-racial framework is problematic. This chapter also examines how first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant parents experience racism and stereotypes in their daily lives due to their skin color and language barriers. Nazli Kibria (1993) reveals that “Vietnamese Americans are widely seen as nonwhite, and more specifically as “Asian,” in their racial status; the option of simply becoming “invisible” by blending in with the majority society is not one that is available to them” (p. 171). As Kibria describes, Vietnamese American parents are continuously depicted as “aliens” in the mainstream culture and history. Most of my respondents had limited education, and only two were college

graduates. Language barriers and heavy accents cause problems for Vietnamese American respondents at work and in public. For example, in the comedy show, “Anjela Johnson, Nail Salon,” racial slurs make fun of Vietnamese American manicurists’ English accents (Comedy TimeDir, 2007). On this note, Chou and Feagin (2008) recall a study by anthropologist Jane Hill showing how “mocking of language links to systemic racism,” and they further explain:

“Language mocking is not just light-hearted commentary of no social importance, because such mocking usually is linked to societal discrimination against the racialized ‘others’” (p. 11).

During my interaction with the Vietnamese American community, I observed that my respondents faced discrimination because of multifaceted problems including their socioeconomic status, language and technological barriers. I am concerned with the emotional and psychological toll that imposes on Vietnamese American people.

In Chapter Two, I investigate the struggles of four Vietnamese American, low-income women from the original participant pool who were first and 1.5 generation and who had had no opportunity for social mobility during their acculturation. These women faced socioeconomic hardships and juggled work-family balance on a daily basis. Some women are trapped in low-mobility jobs and face exclusion at work because of language and technological barriers. These narratives show the generally unexamined struggle of Vietnamese American women in their marginalized communities. Mazzarella (2008) concurs that gender often goes unanalyzed: “New issues with unlimited emancipator potential in a ...post-racial world. This framework practically predetermines a situation in which issues of gender and ethnicity are absent from most popular culture discussions” (p. 87). The author goes on to criticize how public discourse often uses the term “post-racial” society to ignore racial and gender discrimination and instead shows that “the modern subject, the one who engages with the latest technology, lifestyles, and

mobility vehicles has long been configured as the white, Euro-American, male subject” (p. 87). The Vietnamese American women’s underprivileged lifestyles in my research reflect the opposition of white male privilege that supports Mazzarella’s argument about post-racial realities in American culture.

Like many female informants in Seattle, Kibria’s (1993) study points out that many Vietnamese American women in Philadelphia gradually adapt to American culture, find jobs in industrial companies, and economically contribute to the family’s income (p. 109). On the other hand, many mothers are concerned with the loss of interconnectedness with their children by spending long hours at work. The dual responsibilities of work and family challenge these women because reproductive labor detracts from and even conflicts with productive employment.

I also examine whether the lack of basic computer skills adds another layer of difficulty for these mothers when sending their children to SPS. Based on my interviews, many parents do not understand what SPS’ “The Source”¹⁷ websites for parents mean and how to use them. Consequently, many mothers feel lost while keeping an eye on their children’s development when they lack skills in accessing online information. How do these mothers raise their children while they struggle with paid labor, language and technological barriers? How do they monitor their children’s progress in Seattle Public Schools without having basic skills in using computers and accessing the Internet?

In Chapter Three, I analyze responses from 14 of the parents and their six American-born Vietnamese children to examine the reversal of roles of children in many poor refugee and immigrant Vietnamese families as their parents depend on them. I examine intergenerational

¹⁷ The Source: See Appendix A

solidarity and conflict faced by first and 1.5 generation Vietnamese American parents and their children in digital media consumption such as viewing DVD's, listening to music, playing video games, and surfing the Internet. Media consumption acts like a double-edged sword. While a few educated Vietnamese parents view it as a modern tool to effectively interact with their children, others are concerned with the fact that their children will lose their traditional Vietnamese values. These conflicts are more intense in families affected by financial hardships, language, technological and cultural barriers. In examining how first generation Vietnamese American parents face a generation gap with their children, Uba (1994) reports on D. Le's study, noting that Vietnamese parents have lost parental power because of a role reversal in the family due to social and economic hardship. My interview shows that the loss of the parents' power can generate pressure in the families as "Americanized" children acculturate quickly. Likewise, Kibria (1993) points out, "Migration had generated changes in the balance of power in families; men had lost some of their power over women, as had parents over children" (p. 168). This situation is common in many Vietnamese families. While parents seem very concerned about how they can function effectively when they depend so much on their children for daily needs, I argue that there is an opportunity to challenge a traditional patriarchal family structure and male authority. For example, I felt that I gained power when helping my father learn programming languages and create websites for a computer science course to earn a Bachelor's degree in math. Although he was very happy to receive an A for his class, my confidence made him feel that he lost authority over me.

In Chapter Four, I investigate how 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese American children deal with the intersection of racial inequality, language, and technological and cultural barriers between schools and families in SPS. I analyze the responses of 14 children and

teenagers from the original participant group. While at school, refugee and immigrant students faced language and cultural barriers and were less prepared than their peers, at home they received less academic support from their non-English speaking parents. Despite their struggle, “model minority” stereotypes still haunted them because they were lumped in a homogenous, successful Asian American population. Their situation sheds light on the disadvantages of many Vietnamese children participants in my study in terms of their academic progress. I use my oral interviews of Vietnamese American children to examine how they are underprivileged as compared to their mainstream peers in many educational levels. I examine the voices of 1.5 and second generation Vietnamese American children to look at how some female children struggle with a patriarchal hierarchy at home.

In Chapter Five, I explore the voices of 16 first-generation Vietnamese American fathers from my interviews, to make recommendations that could help strengthen education, social inclusion, and access to information and communication technology. As Uba (1994) reports, “Many Vietnamese fathers have lost their ability to be the sole support of their families, as they were in Viet Nam, and may now be dependent on their children – who interpret for them, help them cope with American ways, and so on” (p. 53). While Uba emphasizes role reversal, it is my hope that this oral history research creates new ways to promote family understanding and strengthen interactions between fathers and children. This, in turn, may contribute to a more constructive community in the future for Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant families in greater Seattle. I address the following questions: How little or how much do marginalized Vietnamese fathers access technological information like mainstream fathers to become a part of the SPS community? How do Vietnamese fathers maintain their communicative roles with their children if they live far apart?

I discovered how first and 1.5 generation refugee and immigrant Vietnamese American fathers promoted their traditional heritage while trying to overcome the challenges of learning a new language, culture and basic computer skills. The successful fathers were able to access SPS' "The Source" to monitor their children's progress, attend regular teacher-parent conferences, and understand the school's core curriculum content. This research will offer the first step in advocating for parents in bilingual communication and participation in school activities, and in developing strong relationships between parents, community groups, and SPS. In the process of acculturation, different generations and groups of Vietnamese Americans still face similar external pressures of racial and gender discrimination that complicate the multiple cultural conflicts within the community. Although most male respondents choose to determine their identities and shape their lives in the context of acculturation, they face obstacles to assert a positive self-identity, masculinity, and to be fully accepted in mainstream society.

Conclusion

This dissertation sheds significant light on important issues for Vietnamese American parents and children in SPS with the goal of promoting social changes, such as social and technological development and community-building in the years to come. I determine how race, class and gender intersect with cultural, linguistic and technological disadvantages to impact the Vietnamese American community and how this, in turn, affects relations with other American communities. Vietnamese American Studies remains a highly under-explored cultural studies area. My work adds a much-needed, locally-grounded resource showing how Asian immigrants are situated between two different worlds and cultures, and so still face racial and other conflicts.

Marable and Mullings (2009) raised the question, "Does the emergence of Barack Obama represent the possibility of a 'post-racial America,' a society that transcends its historic racial

divide of structural inequality?” Despite Obama’s achievement in being elected president, the authors are concerned about how and if post-racial society can surpass the racist system under white male domination in U.S. history. I argue that although the possibility of a post-racial world does exist in Obama’s case, it does not exist for the vast majority of people of color. Indeed, the intersection of racial, gender, class with language, cultural, and technological barriers continues to impact the lives of working class non-white populations, including the Vietnamese Americans in my study.

While I argue that the concept of a post-racial society is still a myth, Lentin (2008) confirms, “The problem of wishing for a world without race is not that it is not desirable, but that it is not yet possible” (p. 104). Racial discrimination still goes on in contemporary America, and impacts underprivileged populations, including my participants. My work confirms that Vietnamese American participants face language, cultural and technological barriers as well as socioeconomic hardships. Therefore, I recommend that these poor Southeast Asian American parents and children receive special assistance to access healthcare, financial and educational resources, similar to other struggling, non-white minorities. They neither fit into the “model minority” image, nor the tenets of “post-racial” theory, nor the dream of a colorblind society. My research contributes to Asian American Studies as a story of racial restrictions and socioeconomic disadvantages which intensify familiar tensions in Asian American populations.

CHAPTER ONE

THE VIETNAMESE AMERICANS: RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN ACCULTURATION

Introduction

President Obama's achievement of the U. S. presidential dream captured public discourse around post-racial theory and colorblind society, in which race would be no longer important. The post-racial reality, however, is still a myth. This is even evidenced by the fact that "despite Obama's effort to remain post-racial, he frequently invoked racial symbols during his campaign" (Fineman 2010, p. 188). While Fineman criticizes the fact that Obama failed to prevent colorblindness during his campaign, Lentin (2008) argues, "Taken at face value, the idea that we live in a post-racial age seems to echo the idea that racism is a thing of the past, relegated to particular moments of history" (p. 90). The effects of historical and present-day discrimination are real and hidden by the concept of a colorblind society (Fineman 2010; Lentin 2008; Bonilla-Silva 2003; Oliver 2001). Lentin asserts that the post-racial framework is idealistic and that racial issues are not truly behind us, but rather that the dominant groups usually ignore the demonstrable connection between racism and socioeconomic hardships. Racism has always been intimately connected with multiple facets of American social and economic life. Lentin acknowledges that the discourses of racelessness and post-racism "disconnect issues such as housing, employment, wages, education, healthcare, life expectancy, and transport from racism" (p. 103). In other words, in those erroneous analyses, poverty is disconnected from the discourse of racism: "Poverty is seen as due to bad personal management or as ethno-racially inherent; never the result of racial domination" (p. 103). In concert with Lentin's perspective that post-

racial or colorblind ideology disregards how marginalized populations suffer under the dominant groups in multiple ways, Oliver (2001) argues that “The rhetoric of a color-blind society denies and ignores the affective effects of seeing race in a racist society” (p. 159). My research confirms the authors’ viewpoints, and shows that racial issues continue to be significant factors in contemporary America. My work also adds new knowledge by examining how technological barriers hinder Vietnamese immigrants’ struggle to overcome racial, class, and gender discrimination.

Rather than “post-racial” accurately showing racism is a trend of the past, that term draws attention to its victims as suffering from a new version of colorblindness. Lentin (2008), Giroux (2006), and Ladson-Billings (2003) argue that the colorblind perception falsely purports to erase differences between whites and people of color. It pretends everyone is equal. Bhattacharyya et al. (2008) convincingly assert that racial discrimination and aggression divide different minority populations, as well as create disparity in earnings, jobs, schooling and social relations. From Bhattacharyya et al.’s perspective, women of color continue to face racial stereotypes and are treated unfairly (p. 62). Particularly, Uba (1994) states, “Asian American women face the double jeopardy of being targets of oppression on the basis of both their sex and their race” (p. 177). Uba points out specifically that Asian American women often confront these problems.

From my research and several studies claiming that since 1965, gender roles have shifted in Asian American families, my work adds to the racial discourse by combining positive and negative aspects of gender experiences of women with racial impacts. For example, many Asian women who purportedly have “dainty fingers,” are more likely to find and keep assembly jobs than their male counterparts (Danico and Ng 2004; Fong 1998). Fong (1998) sheds lights on the impact of this result and argues, “Racism, cultural and generational conflicts over independence,

and gender roles are very important stressors confronted by Asian Americans” (p. 220). Many first, 1.5, and second-generation Vietnamese American immigrants face racial, class and gender inequalities in the school environment and work place as well as the public realm. In this study, which examines the voices of Vietnamese parents and their children in the greater Seattle area, I argue that “post-racial” discourse does not reflect the complexity of these issues in their real lives.

Research Questions

This chapter includes personal narratives within the social and cultural context of the Vietnamese American immigrant history. Most Vietnamese interviewees in my study felt discriminated against due to living in residential segregation and facing social isolation. A few still cling to the American dream and view the U.S. as a land of opportunity, despite the fact that they struggle with these inequalities. I pose the following questions: 1) What patterns exist during the acculturation process of Vietnamese American parents and their children?; 2) What challenges do Vietnamese American adolescents face (if any) in order to fit into their school environment, even if they speak proficient English and have good computer skills?; and 3) What racial, class and gender issues act as impediments to Vietnamese American male and female workers in public places?

Along with a background literature review, I conducted oral history interviews of 15 Vietnamese immigrants who had diverse education levels, socioeconomic status, and durations of stay in the U.S. The interviewees included two different groups of Vietnamese American parents and their children. The child participants included four male high school students (16 to 18 years old), one male and one female elementary school student (10 and 11 years old) – this set of interviews was conducted in summer from May to August, 2009 in Seattle and surrounding

areas. The parent interviewees consisted of five women (40 to 48 years old), and four men (45 to 64 years old), who were interviewed in summer 2008 and 2009 in the greater Seattle area. My purpose is to shed light on the voices of this diverse group regarding racial, gender and socioeconomic issues related to familial generational relationships. Their narratives testify to the complex inequalities that they face at work, at school, at home and public places.

My questions concerning sensitive issues were personal, which might have made my respondents feel uncomfortable. It was essential for me to use interpersonal skills with my subjects because, as Kevin Kelly (2006) states, a good qualitative researcher should know how to construct and uphold their roles in the relationships, “to make others feel relaxed and unguarded, to be open and forthright, to tolerate ambiguity and contradiction, and not to be thrown by confusion and apparent chaos” (p. 317). Kelly emphasizes the significance in maintaining positive characteristics and respecting interviewees’ personalities to prevent bias during and after the interviews. My oral history interview experience, including observing and then encouraging my interviewees to share more concerns and feelings before the interviews ended, were in line with Kelly’s model methodology. Part of my methodology was to raise their awareness of racial, class and gender inequalities. This work aims to expose interracial misunderstanding between people of Vietnamese traditions and the dominant culture.

History of Vietnamese Americans

In order for the reader to understand the complex cultural history of Vietnamese Americans, this paper addresses some consequences of U.S. foreign policy during the Viet Nam Conflict, and of the shifting demographics and specific racial issues of Vietnamese Americans, particularly in the greater Seattle area. The consequences of 20 years (1955-1975) of fighting before the end of the U.S. intervention were devastating for both countries and triggered a mass

resettlement of refugees to the United States. According to Sucheng Chan (2006), in 1973, the United States government agreed to withdraw military troops from Viet Nam and “left South Viet Nam to its own fate. Without a pause, the war, now a civil war, resumed” (p.55).

Beyond the scope of this paper is the position of many historians that there never was a South Viet Nam or a North Viet Nam. In that view, Viet Nam was one country invaded first by France, then by America (Colodny and Shachtman, 2009; Churchill, 2003; Young, 1991; Lomperis and Pratt, 1987). Whichever view one holds, by April 30th, 1975, The Southern capital, Saigon, came under the control of forces of the Provisional Revolutionary Government. This resulted in the flight of South Vietnamese refugees to the United States. Research shows that prior to the occupation of Saigon, over 130,000 Vietnamese managed to flee in different ways (Chan, 2006; Lien, Conway and Wong, 2004). At least 73,000 people escaped by boat (Chan, 2006; Min, 1995).

After the war, tens of thousands of Vietnamese boarded rickety boats and continued to escape from a Communist country where life was tough and anyone with wealth or high rank was suspect. My family’s situation was an example of this disaster. During the Viet Nam War, my father was an interpreter for the U.S Army and a principal in an elementary and middle school. My grandparents on both sides were landlords. In the aftermath of the war, my grandparents lost their land, my maternal grandfather did not voluntarily donate all his land to the Communist government, and thus he was kidnapped and later was found imprisoned. While my uncles and a granduncle, Intermediate Grade Junior Officers, were sent to re-educational camps, my father lost his jobs and my parents moved away from me to a small village to begin a difficult life under the Communists’ observation. This left me, a twelve year-old, alone with my fourteen year-old brother in a small town to study. In 1978, soon after my older brother received

a high school diploma, he began to experience discrimination from the Communist government. With the support of my youngest uncle, my brother successfully escaped Viet Nam by boat along with other “boat people” to refugee camps in Thailand.

President Gerald Ford signed the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act, which admitted 130,000 Southeast Asian refugees into the U.S. (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Uba 1994; Chang 1991). At least 120,000 of the refugees were Vietnamese (Zhou and Bankston 1998). The 1990 Census reports that over 600,000 Vietnamese Americans, including those of Chinese origin, resettled on U.S. soil (Min 1995; Chan 1991). These events were not favored by many Americans and caused racial conflicts in subsequent years as a massive exodus from Viet Nam led to resettlement in the U.S. The first wave included individuals who left during and after the fall of Sai Gon and were often well-educated, and from urban areas. The second wave, including those who left after 1978 by boat, were less educated, poorer, and from rural areas. They sought to escape from the terror of deplorable conditions, where they were “re-educated” in Communist ideology and forced into hard labor. As stated by Zhou and Bankston, an estimated 45 percent died at sea; many women were detained by pirates who molested them. These and other refugees were the “boat people” who ended up in camps on their road to immigration to the U.S. Among those were Camp Pendleton in California, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, and Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania (p. 27 - 29). In these camps, many refugees resettled under the sponsorship of non-profit organizations. By 1989, an additional 165,000 Vietnamese had been approved to enter U.S. territory under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), a number that increased to over 200,000 by the mid-1990s and included former South Vietnamese officers, soldiers, and prisoners along with their families (p. 32). Pfeifer (2005) reports that the number resettled in the U.S. has increased from 1,122,528 in 2000 to

1,418,334 in 2005. The Western U.S. has attracted 694,859 Vietnamese immigrants as compared to 425,248 in the South, 162,707 in the Northeast, and 135,520 in the Midwest (p. 1).

The U.S. government distinguished the Vietnamese immigrants from other refugees on the basis of the different political status. Refugees were those forced to leave Viet Nam and relocate because of their previous government affiliation, in particular political, social, religious, or military groups. However, immigrants came by choice, to resettle in the U.S. for better economic, social, and political opportunities. In the 1990s, a large number of Vietnamese migrated from their initial resettlement locations to join friends and family members in metropolitan areas that were expanding to include ethnic Vietnamese communities on U.S. soil. According to Pfeifer (2005), 60,543 Vietnamese inhabit Washington State. The majority live in Seattle (p.1).

After the mass migration of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants to the U.S., The Homecoming Act established easier requirements for Amerasians. The scholarship by Johnston (2007), Chan (2006), Vo (2000), McKelvey (1999), and Nwadoria and McAdoo (1996) note, in 1987, The Amerasian Homecoming Act passed the U.S. Congress, and directed the U.S. government to bring as many of the Amerasian children to the United States as possible. Under the act, the United States cut the documentation requirement for an Amerasian to leave Viet Nam for the U.S. to a minimum. In Viet Nam, prospective immigrants who possess the physical appearance characteristic of Amerasians were cleared for travel to the U.S. Amerasians born in Viet Nam after January 1, 1962, and before January 1, 1976, entered the U.S. with immigrant status and received full refugee benefits (Nwadoria and McAdoo p. 1). The authors confirm the specific time frame of the birth of Vietnamese Amerasians, the product of their Vietnamese mothers and American fathers, in Viet Nam during wartime. On April 13, 1989, The Los

Angeles Times stated, “If you look like an Amerasian, we do not care if you have any documents at all. You do not have to have an identified father to move somebody out” (Zhou and Bankston, p. 34). In this period, some poor Vietnamese Amerasians became commodities of those who would use Amerasians as “golden passports” to enter U.S. territory. Amerasian children suddenly turned out to be valuable in the minds of Vietnamese who desired to leave the country. Many Vietnamese families claimed Amerasian for their households in order to immigrate to the U.S. Because of the lack of documentation for family relatives, Amerasians could take whomever they desired, whether they were really family members or not. Nevertheless, these “family members” had to provide evidence of their familial relationship to the Amerasian. They often acted through false documentation. Chan reports, “An unknown number of genuine Amerasians failed to gain admission into the United States. Still, almost ninety thousand Amerasians and their family members came between 1982 and 1999” (p. 94). Some “fake families,” who immigrated in the U.S. this way discarded the “tickets” after they resettled in American territory (p. 95).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the influx of legal Vietnamese immigrants, including Amerasians and former re-education detainees within the ODP, into the U.S. “varied from 70 to 89 percent of the worldwide total” (Chan p. 95). Chan’s analysis illustrates the failure of Vietnamese and U.S. governments to support their citizens. Under the Homecoming Act, as Robert S. McKelvey (1999) reports, at least 70,000 Amerasians along with their accompanying family members had been resettled in the U.S. While in Viet Nam, many Amerasians lived in poverty and were “discriminated against for their mixed race and obvious connection to the American enemy,” but they also then experienced social rejection and racial discrimination in the American society (p. 4).

The U.S. Census has estimated that over 1.1 million Vietnamese lived in the U.S in 2000 (Johnston 2007; Phan 2010). This number has increased to 1.6 million in 2007 (Phan p. xiv). The Vietnamese American population is the fourth largest Asian ethnic group in the United States after Filipino Americans, Chinese Americans, and Asian Indian Americans. The vast majority of Vietnamese Americans live in metropolitan regions, such as Orange County, San Jose and San Diego (California), Houston (Texas), Fairfax County (Virginia), Seattle (Washington) and Chicago (Illinois) (Phan 2010, p.21). Almost all Vietnamese refugees needed help through some form of government assistance (Kibria p. 83). Thirty five years since the fall of Saigon (1975), a significant and thriving Vietnamese community resides along 12th Avenue in Seattle, which has been renamed “Little Saigon.” Paul Rutledge (1992) argues, “In Seattle, the proliferation of entrepreneurial ventures by Vietnamese has made them more than compatible with local consumers,” and in Dallas, according to Rutledge, “a Vietnamese cultural center is on the drawing board which will represent Vietnamese culture to Americans and provide employment and economic expansion within the region” (p. 142). Rutledge recognizes how Vietnamese Americans rebuild their lives and participate in the cultural and economic development of urban areas during their resettlement.

Despite some successful individual Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the U.S., the vast majority of first-generation Vietnamese Americans face language and technological barriers as well as isolation. In The Seattle Times (2006), Gregory reports that racial restrictions for Asian Americans in the early twentieth century still exist in Seattle: “It lurks in the property deeds of thousands of homeowners living in neighborhoods outside of the Central and International districts.” Gregory continues, “Racial restrictions were routinely added to deeds prior to 1948 and in many neighborhoods prohibited the sale, rental or use of property by Asian Americans”

(p. 1). Gregory describes a long history of Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans, who struggled with racial discrimination. My work aims to explore this history.

Acculturation of Vietnamese American Refugees and Immigrants

My first examination focuses on patterns of acculturation of first-generation Vietnamese refugee and immigrant parents and their children. Vinh Trinh, a 47 year-old male interviewee living in the U.S. for 24 years, currently working on his postdoctoral research at the University of Washington, stated: “In the 1970s, the sensitivity of multicultural backgrounds wasn’t as it is now [such as,] racial tension, racial conflicts, multicultural understanding; obviously our society evolves overtime.” Trinh was aware of the colorblind ideology because “privilege groups are assumed to represent society as a whole, ‘American’ is culturally defined as white, in spite of the diversity of the population” (Johnson 2006, p. 96). From Trinh’s perspective, “Everybody has been saying, and everybody knows a rainbow has seven different colors, but we only see white.” Trinh corroborated Johnson’s argument and suggests that racial issues still exist even though the notion of a colorblind society is very popular in mainstream culture. Trinh’s wife, Jackie Nguyen, acknowledged racial and cultural conflicts despite her high education and middle-class status: “I know that is a funny thing. I’m a dentist, but outside the office they don’t look at me that way, the same way, they only look at me different ways because they’re in my office, but outside the office they could be different.” Nguyen’s narrative illustrates a larger picture of how Asian American women face racial stereotypes as “submissive,” or as the “others.” Living in a white middle class neighborhood, she revealed a feeling of isolation as well as even being monitored by her Caucasian neighbors: “The majority of my neighbors are white Americans and then I would say [they keep] their watchful eyes on Asians.” Nguyen’s statement supports Fong’s (1998) report regarding Asian stereotypes that “one way to get rid of the dogs was to

move in more Vietnamese – a reference to the stereotype that Southeast Asian refugees eat dogs” (p. 144). From Fong’s perspective, negative stereotypes continue to impose on Vietnamese Americans.

In general, the sudden flux of Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants into small rural areas has created tensions between local whites and new asylum-seekers. Many Vietnamese refugees and immigrants face struggles to survive under multifaceted pressures including job loss, underemployment, and poverty. As Fong describes, some Southeast Asian refugees attained economic success, but mobility “is directly related to a number of human capital factors including English language fluency, education, and professional training” (p. 221). Fong emphasizes financial hardships among Southeast Asian refugees caused by language and educational challenges: “Language discrimination is becoming a growing trend and a cause of great concern” (p. 122). For many Vietnamese American parents in my study, social segregation as a result of language isolation confirms Fong’s argument.

The sudden arrival of Vietnamese refugees in great numbers, and the misconception that they were Communists, contributed to an anti-immigrant attitude among some Americans. This caused confrontations between the newcomers and the more narrow-minded members of the dominant population. In general, regardless of the socioeconomic achievements of some exceptional Vietnamese Americans who accomplish the “American dream,” such as Joseph Cao, the first elected Vietnamese American from Louisiana’s 2nd Congressional District, my research shows that many first-generation Vietnamese immigrants struggle with racism because of their physical appearance, cultural conflicts, and language barriers.

Participants in this study related many instances that demonstrate how they faced racial, class and gender discrimination while acculturating. For instance, Hue Luu, 48, a married

mother who has been living in the U.S. for 19 years, attended college and worked, receiving unequal treatment in her work place under white males. She recalled, “My co-worker was a white man, and he did not do his job, I reported this issue to my boss and the director, who were also white; they ignore this issue.” Hue Luu continued, “My female Chinese co-worker and I worked very hard, but the male co-worker received a promotion while my Chinese co-worker lost her job and I was not promoted.” Luu suffered under this discrimination and stated that “there was no judgment for the case.” Luu’s appearance was another reason for her to face isolation and lack of respect at work. She revealed, “I thought that might be my hair is black; I’m Vietnamese, an Asian so they didn’t pay any attention.” Luu did not lump white workers together as a homogenous group because “not all white people are racist. For example, a white woman who worked in Human Resources is a nice one.” Luu noted, “Whenever I had problem or needed help related to my work or my personal life, she had ready helped me with all her efforts.” Despite the fact that Luu received assistance from a white female officer, she acknowledged discrimination existed. Luu’s narrative revealed how a new refugee struggled with racial discrimination, financial survival and juggled multiple gender roles as a female worker, a female college student, and a mother. After graduating with her Bachelor’s degree in Fisheries at the University of Washington in 1999, Luu worked at First Mutual Bank for seven months. She then found another job at the Medical Institute as a research technician to assist senior Ph. D. fellows who focused on fish studies during 2000 – 2005. At the time of interview, Luu had been living in a big house in a nice neighborhood in Shoreline for more than 10 years and worked full-time in her own “Pho” restaurant for several years. She recalled, “I felt that I was just great...we then bought a house for [our] children to live. So, everyone seemed experience the same struggle.” Looking back to the difficult times, Luu viewed the U.S. as the

land to achieve the American dream. “Somebody said that the U.S. is like heaven.” She admitted, “It is true for those who know how to make it like heaven, but it also like go to hell for those who don’t work hard and give themselves [their] own opportunities [to] search for a better life.” While Hue Luu believed in the “American dream” that hard-working people can attain improved financial status, she failed to recognize that many Vietnamese refugees and immigrants still live in poverty and face racial stereotypes, such as being considered lazy, even though they work long hours every day.

Brad Vuong experienced similar struggles. A 45 year-old single father who has been living in the U.S. for 23 years, he believes in the American dream. His first job was a low-paid assembler in an Alaskan fishing ship, where he felt himself like “a fish out of water.” He recalled, “My supervisors were mad [at me] but without English skill, I didn’t understand what they were irritated about...Many times, they were so mad at me up to the degree that they didn’t want to tell me what to do. They ignored me.” Vuong overcame his obstacles to survive, and at the time of interview, he owned a small construction business. Living in a million dollar house facing Lake Washington in a quiet upper class neighborhood in Renton, Vuong supported the concept of colorblind ideology. “For me, [this society] is normal and equal, there is nothing to say whether it is racist or not. If some people think about racism, but that racism based on each individual’s thinking...I don’t know about racial procedure... I don’t experience that.” Vuong failed to acknowledge that the term “equal” is problematic in contemporary America, where many poor people of color are treated unfairly. His narrative is exceptional, and his life also fits in the American dream philosophy. “The important thing is that you have to work hard and don’t be disheartened... you should be patient, and then finally you will be successful.” By believing that “Opportunity is everywhere, but beforehand, we should give ourselves an

opportunity,” Vuong recalled, “When I first came to the U.S., English is my second language, I didn’t know about it much, no friends and no relatives either, I fought to find way for survival.” Like other new immigrants, Vuong said, “I looked for a low paid job and I then learned English from working, and I then went to school, followed people to learn, I then acknowledge [about business,] and I then started a career.”

Despite the fact that Hue Luu faced gender inequality, and both Brad Vuong and Luu faced isolation and socioeconomic hardships in the past, they were examples of the “model minority” stereotype because they believed that if Asian Americans worked hard and studied hard, they could get what they desired. Several scholarly works criticize the “model minority” myth, which ignores racial discrimination and violence against Asian Americans in the past and its impact in contemporary U.S. society (Chou and Feagin 2008; Chang 2000; Do 1999; Palumbo-Liu 1999; Fong 2007, 1998; and Uba 1994). The authors object because the “model minority” myth portrays Asian Americans as “untroubled” and “financially secure.” This stereotype not only disregards the needs of poor Asian Americans and creates negative images and subjugation of other minority groups and deprived whites, but also disproves the perception of all Asian American groups as a homogenous population. In supporting the authors’ argument, I argue that Vuong and Luu were not representative of the vast majority of Vietnamese American parents who still lived in substandard housing, struggled with language, cultural, and racial discrimination.

In contrasting experiences of racial conflicts, Viet Le, a 52 year-old male interviewee living in the U.S. for 30 years, recalled how young Vietnamese Americans confronted racism: “Some high school guy friends hung out on the street of downtown, and then I didn’t clearly know what reason, there was an American [who] yelled: ‘Back to Viet Nam, small little guys go

away!’” The language of racism along with verbal assault, such as “small,” “little,” feminizes Vietnamese American men. In responding to this racial discrimination, “The [Vietnamese] guy yelled back and then two sides yelled at each other. Then the [Vietnamese] guy shouted, ‘your ancestor go away too, back to Europe, don’t come here, this land belongs to Indians.’” Le testified that the confrontation continued: “They yelled each other for few times, they then left. This is racist too.” The incident opposes the myth of the post-racial thesis in contemporary America. In fact, Viet Le’s narrative demonstrates how racial and gender conflicts maintain tensions between Vietnamese and white youth.

Vietnamese Americans in the school context

The family’s socioeconomic conditions and racial features are critical components of the experience of young Vietnamese Americans, who are challenged to fit into their school environment. Growing up in poor, uneducated families living in marginalized neighborhoods, many of them develop their perspective of racism. As Lentin (2008) says, the discourses of racelessness and post-racism “disconnect issues such as housing, employment, wages, education, healthcare, life expectancy, and transport from racism” (p. 103). What might appear as poverty or violence is, to these Vietnamese Americans, a unified reality that includes racism. They are subjected to poverty, poor schools, violence, drugs, and a generally disruptive social environment.

Thomas Nguyen is a 16 year old male interviewee who attended South West Education Center in Seattle. His narrative is a story of the poverty and violence. He voiced his opposition to racial discrimination: “I’m kind of sick and tired of [people] killing each other [due to racial conflicts] instead of just talk it out.” Nguyen described his school environment as “full of Blacks, Mexicans, and one of the gangs of Asians.” He recalled, “So and then in my school are

basically...alcoholics, their base like 16, 17, and 18 years old... the Darry will be the most [dangerous] place” because “Darry has such a bad [neighborhood] like the roads are so bad, and also the neighborhood also gun shots.” Nguyen was aware that the danger could turn into violence despite the fact that “some community centers tried to help out the young generation.” But, he warned, “The people like 18 to at least 25 that walk around down there, I think, if you see them, you better run the other direction.”

Like Thomas Nguyen, Paul Quach, an 11 year-old fifth grader in an elementary school in a poor community in Seattle, is concerned with the fact that he was depicted as the ‘other’ because of his appearance. “Some people don’t treat me really equal; I don’t know why...Some people just hate me...may be because of my skin color or something...my tone is fine right now...I’m Asian.” Despite the fact Asian students occupied the majority within the student body, “not that much white people, they used to be racist.” Quach continued, “I don’t know...Some treat me nice, and [others]...they’re mean...I don’t know why...I’m Vietnamese, I’m not American...my main language is Vietnamese.” Quach was worried with the fact that he was unable to fit in.

In contrast, some Vietnamese American immigrant students from middle class family backgrounds benefit from financial security, live in white neighborhoods, study and fit into affluent schools, and capture their parents’ attention with their progress in daily life. Those children have more opportunities for a positive future in the mainstream culture. For example, interviewee Evans Lam, a sophomore at Aviation High School, who lived in a quiet neighborhood in Southwest Seattle, planned out his goal for the future. His school also planned mentors and partnerships for him at Boeing and EVA, and secured a government grant to support high school students in aviation programs. In recalling his parents’ efforts to support him in

education, Lam recalled that while his mother spoke proficient English to teachers, his father taught him “how to put together a computer and look for a model.” As an IT specialist, his mother donated computers to the school and spent time reformatting each computer in his class. Lam stated: “I remember my mom...my first grade year, she drove a few times with computer monitor index and ... she would stay up late every night [to] reformat [them then she gave them to my school].” During his high school years, Lam’s mother participated in the parent-student interaction program. She donated money to help a club at school for a dinner. He recalled, “She’s really into that club and now [she volunteers as] the school enforces volunteering from parents about ...ten hours a year.”

Coming from a well-supported family like Evans Lam’s, participant Sophia Trinh, a 10-year old fourth grader (female) received high scores on the IQ test while attending Orchid Elementary. Trinh’s father, Vinh Trinh, was a part-time post-doctoral researcher in molecular biology and her mother, Jackie Nguyen, was a dentist. According to Ms. Trinh, her mother was the breadwinner because her father “stay home almost of the time” while her mother “goes to work long hours.” Ms. Trinh revealed that her mother often planned vacation and study time for her: “after our vacation we’re going to study two hours a day, one hour for math, and one hour for Vietnamese [language.]” The Trinh family lives in a white, middle-class neighborhood in Bothell. Trinh stated, “My parents have great effect on my life because they care about me and they love me, they give me food, they all help me on any emergency I have...They want to know what happened every day, and how’s it going.” Trinh’s narrative demonstrates that her parents’ care influences her daily life and activities; particularly, her mother played a major role in the family because she was highly educated and received higher income than her father. Sophia Trinh’s mother provides an example of gender shifting in Vietnamese middle-class families. In

contrast, those who are poor and live in peripheral neighborhoods like Thomas Nguyen have less opportunity to acculturate into mainstream society than their peers like Evans Lam and Sophia Trinh. From accounts about skin color by students in poor neighborhoods, racism and classism are problems. This is significant, due to psychological issues described below.

The work by Zhou and Bankston (1998) illustrates how race and ethnicity affect schools and students' performance. Racial inequality influences the social adaptation of immigrant children in ways closely connected to their family's socioeconomic status. Underprivileged groups face depression and disorientation in schools because of racial stratification, socioeconomic and cultural issues, geographic settlement, language barriers, and the role of community control in interactions between newcomers and established residents. The authors argue, "If a socially defined racial minority group wishes to assimilate but finds that normal paths of integration are blocked because of race, the group's members may be forced to use alternative survival strategies" that allow them to emotionally handle "racial barriers but that do not necessarily encourage school success" (p. 10). Zhou and Bankston (1998) are concerned with the fact that families in poverty have to use other strategies to psychologically cope with their dilemmas. One strategy is to begin a small family business. In order to maintain their family businesses, most Vietnamese parents need their children's assistance, such as in translating business documents, paying bills, or dealing with customers. It is difficult for a student to perform his/her school work and to help with the family business at the same time, which confirms Zhou and Bankston's analysis. Vietnamese American students in middle-class families had more options to access community resources and higher educational opportunities. However, even if they succeed, obtaining an advanced degree does not always guarantee a life free from racial discrimination.

For Vietnamese American youth, growing up into American culture, speaking fluent English, and understanding the mainstream culture does not guarantee a coherent American identity where racism still exists in “post-racial” society. Pat Nguyen (2006), a college student at Washington State University, is a second generation Vietnamese American who does not understand Vietnamese language and culture. He notes that being Vietnamese was an attitude that he could not adopt. However, he believes that as he is getting older, his attitude is changing and that he is beginning to look at others based on their skin color and ethnicity. While attending Washington State, Nguyen lived in a dorm with his roommate, who came from La Center, a very small town in Washington compared to Seattle, not just in terms of size, but also in racial attitudes. Nguyen recalled, “It was here that I encountered racism for the first time. I found that racism is as strong as ever. My roommate turned out to be racist, causing me to move to another dorm.” At first, Nguyen thought he was just misinformed, but as the weeks went on “his attitude was more hostile than that.” Nguyen related, “He made many derogatory comments about the Asian music I listened to, saying it was not music and it sounded dumb; thereafter he would begin to play his own rap music over my own just to drown it out” (p.1). Although Nguyen considers himself an individual who has grown up with both Asian and mainstream cultures, he has struggled to live up to the expectations of the dominant culture. He continued, “Even though the attitude I presented in Seattle was seen as completely Americanized, in Pullman, it was presented as strongly Asian.” Speaking fluent English, understanding the mainstream culture and studying in an American university, Nguyen still is not considered an American because he is of Asian descent. His experiences of racialization are varied based on different communities and social locations.

Likewise, interviewee Thomas Nguyen revealed how people of color are labeled in subhuman terms, “‘No dog, Asians, Negroes’ or something like that...they have sign like that...The United States tries to make people see that racist come more to Asians than to blacks.” At the same time, Nguyen also faced racial stereotypes that in one sense are good, but in another, paint him in to a “different” group: “When they see me, they are like ‘Oh, another Asian guy; he must be good at math.’” Nguyen’s older brother, Allan Nguyen, a 17 year-old male informant, experienced racial stereotypes. He was originally portrayed as “alien,” a typical Asian who cannot speak English, but he revealed: “after they talk to me in a conversation, they learn like, ‘you speak English’...They still stereotype me, but like a fun way like, ‘you’re really smart.’”

Similar to the Nguyen brothers, Patrick Vu, an 18-year-old male participant reports, “In middle school, most definitely so...Oh yeah, like they called me like ‘boater’ you know that term that they use like to make fun of Vietnamese people who used the boats to immigration in this country.” While Vu faced racial slurs, he explained, “that’s where the term ‘boater’ comes from....yeah and ...it’s kinda like...get to my head...elementary too, but high school it’s not so much.” Beyond the attitudes of individual students, as Vu described, he was cast as the “foreigner,” who lacks American values, according to mainstream peers. Many Vietnamese American students like Patrick Vu and the Nguyen brothers were good students, but they felt institutionally excluded at school because they were portrayed as “different” based on their roots and skin color. As Uba (1994) argues, “Racists today often claim that members of other races lack character, American values, or competence in American culture (such as English proficiency)” (p. 21). Vu’s narrative confirms Uba’s analysis.

Indeed, racial discrimination may be manifested in unfair treatment due to people’s skin color. Interviewee Van Huynh, a 40 year-old married mother who has been living in the U.S. for

seven years, reports the following incidents suggesting that institutional racism does exist. Huynh's children were initially denied registration for classes in Seattle public schools despite the fact that they speak proficient English. She recalled, "At first, I face little trouble when registering classes for my children. The administrator told me that my children are not Americans, so they have to study ESL in a different place." Despite the fact that Huynh's children "do not need ESL courses because they have already studied English from another state," the school still wanted them to take ESL tests before they let them register for classes. She claimed, "I have to take my children to the ESL testing center to take the tests. After they pass the test, the officer told me that I have to take my children back to the previous place. So, I have to go back and forth many times." As a working mother, Van Huynh resented the fact that she had to spend a lot of time to merely register for classes for her children.

Like Huynh, Tram Buu, another Vietnamese participant, complained that one day her daughter came home and cried because "at school, other students do not want to play with her since she is Vietnamese. The teacher just ignored that issue instead of [comforting her.]" By ignoring racism, I argue, the teacher failed to recognize racial discrimination in which his student was "being marked in ways that identify [her] as an outsider, as exceptional or 'other' to be excluded, or to be included but always with conditions" (Johnson, p. 33). Buu's daughter's story is an illustration of mislabeled "post-racial" behaviors. Indeed, many Vietnamese children are treated as the "Oriental" in the school environment, which corroborates Johnson's argument.

At school, American children also learn negative stereotypes about Viet Nam from their teachers that could develop into racist attitudes toward Vietnamese Americans. In a classroom incident illustrating that "the third element in blame-dodging by the military is basically racism," Ignacio Ramonet (2000) reports how a U.S. officer showed his impressions of Indochina to a

group of schoolchildren: “‘The Vietnamese,’ he said, ‘are very backward, very primitive. They make a mess of everything. Without them, Viet Nam would be a fine country.’” (p. 1) Such a statement points to a racist view of the overseer, however good his intentions were. He assumes the country would be better off without its own people. As Ramonet points out, these American children, being impressionable, would base their perception of Viet Nam on what they learned from the officer, speaking from what appears to them to be an official position, endorsed by the school. In this case, racism was perpetuated by an educational system where young white children are misinformed by a U.S. military officer.

David A. Neiwert (2004) examined a racial issue on July 4, 2000 that caused a hate crime in the small beach town of Ocean Shores in Washington State. Three young Vietnamese American men were confronted late at night by a group of young skinhead White men shouting racist slogans and epithets, and the white ringleader eventually assaulted the Vietnamese American men. But one of the young Vietnamese Americans fought back, and the young white instigator, Chris Kinison, wound up being stabbed to death. The tragedy of threats and racial slurs led to violence, which culminated in a twist, and a harsh lesson. Neiwert reveals how hate crimes influence the nation’s racial conflicts. He states, “A few days after the arrests, Grays Harbor County Deputy Prosecutor Gerald Fuller announced that Minh Hong was being charged with first-degree manslaughter,” but “that neither Hung Hong nor anyone else involved in the fighting that night would be charged” (p. 17). The Ocean Shores incident exposes racism prevalent in many small towns in the U.S. The white males were not charged; yet Minh Hong was charged. This is one compelling real-life tragedy fueled by racism. These racial problems are compounded in rural areas where small-town police are usually reluctant to arrest perpetrators of race-related crimes (p.6). The layers of distrust between minorities and whites in

rural areas reveal the dishonesty that haunts many small towns regarding hate crimes. McNulty (2004) reports that prior to attacking the Hongs, Kinison and his friends threatened two Filipino families while they were visiting a shopping center in Ocean Shores by “shouting racial epithet and pounding on the families’ car window.” The author complained that “The investigating officer “admonished” the young white men, but made no arrests. If the police officers had arrested Kinison and his friends after the incident with the Filipino family, the incident with the Hongs may never have happened. McNulty points out that it was highly doubtful that the local police were fair in their judgment. This account of racist attacks and attitudes is evidence against the conception of the “post-racial” America. It not only happens in rural areas, but it also often occurs in urban areas, such as Seattle.

Despite the fact that some middle-class interviewees in my study did not recognize racism, most Vietnamese Americans who enter mainstream society from these marginalized communities realize that their racial differences will play a major role in their identities. Like other minority groups, Vietnamese Americans tend to congregate around familiar neighborhoods that they can call their own. They may not all live in the same part of town, but this is the community where they will find foods they like, books in their native language, and their places of worship. A few who integrate into mainstream society tend to have college educations and hold powerful positions in large companies. However, like other marginalized workers, Vietnamese American employees still face discrimination.

Racial conflicts at work, school, and the public sphere

At their workplaces, some Vietnamese Americans are passed over for promotions and pay hikes because of their race. As Pulkkinen (2007) reports, a Seattle judge ruled in favor of two Seattle City Light employees who filed suit against the company, accusing it of racial

discrimination. One of them, Phi Trinh, a Vietnamese American, who graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was employed as a power generation supervisor at City Light's Skagit River dams, experienced discrimination. Upward mobility was made impossible for Trinh because he was transferred to 'dead-end' positions within the company many times. According to a Seattle attorney, "the utility has violated city policy by failing to conduct annual performance reviews of its employees." Such evaluations "would have made it harder for managers to pass over qualified employees of color" (p. 1).

Interviewee Nam Tran, a 64 year-old male participant who has been living in the U.S. for 24 years and who worked as a technician of Tech Aerospace in Seattle, revealed how he faced racial discrimination during his initial contact with Americans: "At first, they discriminated me, but I pretended like I didn't know, I meant that 'one eye closed, another one is open,' considered like I didn't know that they discriminated against me." Tran's experience of racial discrimination demonstrates the disadvantage faced by Vietnamese Americans in the workforce. "When I apply for a job, during the training, they treated me tougher than an American trainee." He said, "They trained for Americans with a lighter attitude, they didn't scold, but when they trained for the Vietnamese, their face show insupportable and they didn't show zeal for training us." Tran's sufferings symbolize the large numbers of Vietnamese Americans who faced discrimination at work.

Like Nam Tran, Hue Luu experienced racial and gender inequalities in her work place. According to Luu, her supervisor was a white man, her co-worker was also a white man, and so was the director. She suffered for her disadvantages as a new Asian female immigrant worker, whose voice was ignored at work. She claimed, "If I was a white woman, they would consider and research the case. It is clearly discrimination." Despite the fact that Luu held a bachelor's

degree, whereas the other male employee did not have any form of certification, he had health insurance and his salary was higher than her salary when she first started her job. Luu revealed, “My first experience with a salary of \$24,000.00 a year, as he worked part-time, without degree, his salary was up to \$27,000.00. I didn’t know what he told the boss, and how he made the boss happy.” After six months, the Chinese co-worker got laid off and her position was reserved for the white male co-worker. Luu revealed, “My Chinese co-worker with black hair, Asian, she didn’t make any mistake and she was very smart. Nevertheless, the white man became a full-time employee. See, obviously, I witness racial and gender discrimination in my workplace.”

Looking whiter does not promise greater recognition in American society either, as is the case with Amerasians. Hien Duc Do (1999) reports a story of a 16 year-old Vietnamese Amerasian, Hoai Nguyen, whose life changed tremendously after resettling in Seattle in May 1985. Since Ms. Nguyen was Vietnamese Amerasian, a product of an American enemy and a Vietnamese woman in the Viet Nam War, the Vietnamese Communist government would not allow her to attend school after 1975, which forced her to peddle in the street market to survive. Do notes, her education was third-grade level, but, “Immediately upon arrival, she was put into the eleventh grade in the local high school. Because of her lack of formal education in Viet Nam, she asked her counselor to transfer her and allow her to take English as a Second Language class” (p. 63). Regardless of her attempts, Ms. Nguyen failed classes, dropped out of school, and became an assembler in a high tech company in Seattle. As Do explains, later, Ms. Nguyen’s boyfriend was charged with illegal behavior. “Although she was found innocent of the same crimes committed by her partner, Hoai was nevertheless sentenced to three years probation” (p. 63). Ms. Nguyen’s narrative illustrates how Vietnamese Amerasians experienced isolation in both Viet Nam and the U.S. The legacy of the Viet Nam War continues to cause

problems to many multiracial or biracial Vietnamese American children in contemporary America, and stands as an example of a failure in U.S. foreign and domestic policy. A vastly unpopular war, parental irresponsibility and governmental indifference abandoned Amerasians to lives of poverty, loneliness and severe racism. Bhattacharyya et al. (2008) point out that hostility, discrimination and racist stereotypes should be acknowledged along with “the broader structural and ideological factors that sustain many of these problems – demography, inequality, stereotypes” (p. 62). Bhattacharyya et al.’s argument is confirmed by Diana Ly, a Vietnamese Amerasian interviewee in my study. She states, “People often thought that I am American until I started talking with broken English, some of them show disrespect toward me since they do not understand.” Ly feels both speechless and isolated in mainstream society.

In both Vietnamese and American societies, the privilege traditionally given to lighter skin is prevalent even today. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese government failed to support Amerasians because the government could not embrace their biracial identity. The lack of love and the abandonment of their biological parents led them to drop out of school, participate in gang life, and in many cases, commit suicide. McKelvey (1999), in 1990, went to Viet Nam and interviewed hundreds of Amerasians to discover what impact their race had on their lives. McKelvey reports the depression of a Vietnamese Amerasian who lived in a poor and isolated residence: “I live with three other Amerasians in a small, dirty apartment. All day long we listen to music, drink beer, and talk of home. We can’t find jobs because we speak English so poorly. We’re afraid to walk around because it’s so dangerous” (p. 5). The author concludes many Vietnamese Amerasians live in impoverished environments in both Viet Nam and U.S. society. Their tragically complex difficulties result from “the neglect of the human by-products of war, the destructiveness of prejudice and racism, the impact of losing one’s mother and father, the

pain of abandonment, and the horrors of life amidst extreme poverty” (p. 4). McKelvey’s study unfolds the loneliness and hardships endured by the Vietnamese Amerasians who face racial discrimination in their homeland. Biologically, Vietnamese Amerasians are Asian descendants as well as American descendants but when trying to assimilate, they face racism. Most Vietnamese Amerasians arrived in the U.S. far too late in life to take advantage of the opportunities that such wealthy societies could potentially offer.

Liang Tien (1990) reports a story of a Vietnamese Amerasian woman in Tacoma, Washington who faced financial insecurity, a language barrier and an unstable life in the United States: “I cannot get a job with my English. My welfare check stops soon. I do not have good English to go to school or to get job. I wish I came to America when I was younger so I have more time in school to learn English” (p. 27). The Vietnamese Amerasian’s inability to come to the States when she was younger shows one impact of the United States’ slow policy decision-making and the Vietnamese government’s regulation. The racial stereotype already causes tremendous dilemmas not only for Vietnamese immigrants but also for Vietnamese Amerasians due to familial circumstances and a lack of education. The U.S. abandonment of its multiracial children for a long period of time caused additional racial inequality in most Amerasians’ lives.

Conclusion

The vast majority of people of color, including Vietnamese Americans, fully understand racial inequality and battle against racism. Many stereotype studies have been carried out by sociologists (e.g., Chou and Feagin 2008; Fong 2007, 1998). On the national level, on his presidential campaign bus in Washington State in 2000, Senator John McCain told reporters that he would hate the “gooks” for the rest of his life. McCain’s racial slurs discriminated against Vietnamese Americans. In an online debate, “Vietnamese Studies Group” (2000), Professor

Christoph Giebel called McCain to task for using the slur “gooks.” McCain, Giebel writes, should desist from using the term. However, Giebel states, “A taboo briefly threatened by the implication that an American leader might ‘owe’ Vietnamese-Americans an apology was restored by McCain’s ‘gooks-as-torturers,’ a transgression undone by the patriotic ending” (p. 1). Giebel critiques McCain for failing to support the vast majority of Asian Americans who suffer from racial discrimination. In an online article, “John McCain’s Racist Remark Very Troubling,” Katie Hong (2000), a Korean American woman who lives in Seattle and works for the Washington State government, argues that by using the racially charged term “gooks,” McCain sends a disturbing message that all Asian Americans are foreigners and remain forever the “other” and the “enemy.” McCain could hurt some individuals in Seattle, where Asian American inhabitants make up about 10 percent of the population in King County (p. 1). “Gook” is a disparaging term applied to Vietnamese. McCain’s slur reveals a personal prejudice; he is part of the system that has institutionalized discrimination. Given such slurs, the hope to live in a post-racial culture is still impractical for the Vietnamese Americans in my study.

Vietnamese Americans in the greater Seattle area should unify and form a strong voice to speak out against racial inequalities. To support low-income residents in Asian American housing communities, their demands could include, as Fong (1998) reports, “the establishment of a bilingual hotline to report emergencies and crimes, the hiring of a civil rights officer to monitor hate-motivated violence, the creation of clear eviction proceedings for hate crimes,” and “cultural sensitivity training for staff” (p. 149). Fong reminds Asian communities to be aware of anti-Asian violence. After exploring racial issues in the Vietnamese American immigrant community in greater Seattle, I recommend the following measures: education about diverse cultures included in school curricula and enforcing existing equal opportunity employment

policies and anti-discrimination laws. Future studies should explore how racial discrimination affects second-generation Vietnamese American immigrants, who are caught between conflicting cultures.

Based on my field work and data collected from Vietnamese American interviewees, I am able to debunk the myth of a post-racial society. Despite the fact that a few Vietnamese American participants are satisfied with the “model minority” stereotype and have found material wealth and success, my study shows that racial, class and gender tensions still exist in Washington State and that a post-racial or colorblind society does not exist in contemporary America. Federal and state legislation, including provisions about the police force, is still biased, leading to discrimination against racial minorities, as evidenced by Minh Hong’s case. People of color, including Vietnamese women, should be treated equally at school, work, and in public space. State policies should recruit more bilingual Asian American police officers, make fair judgments and protect the victims of racial violence. Seattle Public Schools should change their racist attitudes in evaluating students’ ability to speak proficient English. In order to survive economically, young Vietnamese American children should *integrate*, but should not have to *assimilate*, so that they can maintain their Vietnamese cultural identities. One of the most striking means of recognizing one’s identity and identifying racism is through exposure to various cultural systems. A better understanding of how my Vietnamese American participants struggle while acculturating will help raise awareness of personal and institutional racism. This will help to build stronger Vietnamese communities. A post-racial society is still far away.

CHAPTER TWO

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN WOMEN: WORK - LIFE STRUGGLES

Introduction

This chapter focuses on female Vietnamese American immigrant workers, and demonstrates the challenges they face, including technological challenges and unfair treatment in the segregation of the labor market, as well as juggling family duty and childcare obligations in complicated circumstances. This ethnographic exploration also offers grounds for critique of the concepts of the Asian model minority and the American dream. This study examines the lives of four first-generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant women in Seattle, Washington, who arrived in the U.S. between 1990 and 2000 under the Orderly Departure Program of 1979 and the Homecoming Act of 1987. After more than a decade of adjusting to their new lives, these women continue to face personal challenges in preserving and passing traditional culture on to their children. They struggle to acculturate themselves and their families, and face challenges in the economic, cultural, and technological realms, which interact with racial, class and gender inequalities and are all affected by the language barrier. These struggles have remained largely invisible to major media sources, the general public, and public policy makers. These women face stereotypes of Asian females, and are often portrayed in the media as “others.” They also have very limited access to available resources. They are subject to unfair, if not intensely exploitative, treatment in the workplace. My findings highlight the increasing gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” among working Vietnamese women in contemporary American society, and offers new perspectives and information to public policy makers and researchers.

Research Method

Based on my oral history interviews in 2009, this paper sheds light on the work and family struggles of these Vietnamese American women, who grapple not only with household chores, child care, long work days, and gender inequality both at home and at work, but also with feelings of isolation. As my ethnographic study also reveals, these struggles have remained largely invisible to major media sources, the general public, and public policymakers. Facing Asian female stereotypes, these women are often portrayed by media as “others,” have limited access to available resources and have no opportunity for social mobility in the dominant culture.

Immersion in research context

As a first-generation Vietnamese American female immigrant myself, I too have experienced cultural conflicts, language barriers, and technological challenges, as well as racial and gender stereotypes during the 19 years I have been living in the U.S. However, like Joseph Cao, I also fortunately have received a privileged education. My background offers me an insider perspective, allowing me to understand the disadvantages of these women as well as other immigrant women of color in the U.S. This situation drew me to volunteer as an intern at Helping Link, a Vietnamese grassroots non-profit community-based organization in the Seattle International District. In the summer of 2008, as part of the research I conducted for my doctoral dissertation, I networked with and interviewed four first-generation Vietnamese American immigrant, low-income mothers whose children are students in Seattle and surrounding areas. These married women included two Vietnamese Americans, Nhu Ha and Doan Ngo; one White

Vietnamese Amerasian, Diana Ly¹⁸; and one Vietnamese-Chinese American, Lieu Chau. Three are full-time employees and one is a part-time laborer.

Historical and Literature Review

To understand how Vietnamese immigrant women exist in contemporary America, I look back to the fall of Saigon in 1975, where many Vietnamese women along with thousands of Vietnamese people tried to leave the country either illegally or legally to escape the political and economic hardships under the Vietnamese Communist regime. One of these adventurous journeys was by boat. In the same period, a mass Indochinese immigration to the United States occurred, including Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Cambodian immigrants, who joined the labor force for economic survival. The scholarship of Pellow and Park (2002) and Yen Le Espiritu (2007) examines how vast numbers of Asian immigrant workers were treated unfairly, including Vietnamese American women, who faced racial and gender inequalities in unskilled and semiskilled low-wage jobs in the microelectronics industry (Espiritu 89; Pellow and Park 5). These writers emphasize how marginalized female Asian Americans actively served in the U.S. economy's labor force in order to sustain their families. However, other scholars, such as Shirley Hune (2003), point out, "In this long-standing historical framework, Asian/Pacific Islander American women, [particularly, Vietnamese American women,] are omitted or absented in historical writings in spite of their lived realities" (p. 4).

In "Managing Survival Economic Realities for Vietnamese American Women," Vietnamese American scholar Linda Trinh Vo (2003) examines how first-generation Vietnamese women "have managed to survive the ravages of war, resettlement, and adjustment, and [how] they contribute economically to support their families and ethnic communities" (249). As Vo

¹⁸ Diana Ly: See Appendix A

reveals, Vietnamese women challenge themselves to provide financial support for their family's survival after their resettlement in the U.S. Although living and working in a different culture, their family duty, including taking care of their children, is intricately bound by the Vietnamese traditional female role, which strictly assigns the burden of family to women as a gender norm. Like Vo, Espiritu argues that the vast majority of low-income working-class women including Asian American women consider employment as "an opportunity to raise the family's living standard and not as the path to fulfillment or even upward mobility idealized by the white feminist movement" (p. 94). As Espiritu points out, marginalized Asian immigrant women often face more difficulty in upward mobility than do white women. In addition, unlike other working women in the United States, the post-war Vietnamese immigrants in my study experience a feeling of loss because they still carry the emotional and cultural legacy of war.

In addition to traumas from their past lives in Viet Nam, these women experience new struggles in many realms once they arrive in the United States. In recent years, the mass immigration of Asian Americans into mainstream society and the percentage of female Asian Americans who entered the work force can illustrate the struggle of underpaid workers generally in managing their private lives and work. Yen Le Espiritu (2007) argues that since the late 1960s, a large number of Asian immigrant women with insufficient education, job skills, and English proficiency have worked in informal sector occupations (87). Her scholarship focuses on female Asian immigrants' exploited labor and provides evidence to show how marginalized women, especially Indochinese immigrant women, meet the financial challenges to sustain their families while being burdened with high rates of poverty.

Using data from the U.S. Census, Noy Thrupkaew (2002) reports that as compared to the relatively low poverty levels of all Americans and all Asians - respectively 10 and 14 percent in

1990 - the poverty levels for Indochinese Americans are much higher. Poverty rates for these groups include 34% for Vietnamese, 47% for Cambodians, 66% for the Hmong, and 67% for Laotians. In the aftermath of the Viet Nam War, these refugees were forced to leave their homelands to come to the U.S. and were noticeably dissimilar from most Chinese and Indian immigrants who entered U.S. territory in the 1960s as professional workers (p.1). The author criticizes the inaccuracies of policy makers who continue to treat all Asian inhabitants as a homogenous population under the label “model minority” and to ignore the special needs of Southeast Asians. Thrupkaew argues, “Paradoxically, Southeast Asians -- supposedly part of the model minority -- may be suffering most from the resulting public policies” (p. 1). In addition, within each ethnic minority is a complex heterogeneous population based on social status, educational and socioeconomic attainment. Thrupkaew further critiques the notion of the American dream: “The image of boat people escaping the ravages of war and communism to take full advantage of American opportunities is also a myth, in that Southeast Asians actually have the lowest success rate of all Asians” (p. 1). In general, Indochinese refugees and immigrants still endure the legacy of war, the loss of their loved ones during war time, or traumatic memories of imprisonment and escape.

Like Thrupkaew, Kristin Bates and Richelle Swan (2007) argue that, “projections of the Vietnamese American community as a “model minority,” a stereotype that has historically been attached to Asian Americans since the 1960s, are particularly troubling” (p. 179). Bates and Swan emphasize that similar to other Asian Americans, Vietnamese Americans continue to be portrayed as “foreigners,” “outsiders,” and “not fully Americans” (p. 174). In spite of facing disadvantages of war trauma, some exceptional cases fit the “model minority” stereotype among Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants. For example, *The Washington Post* reports that

Joseph Cao, an east New Orleans attorney, achieved the American dream and became the first Vietnamese American in Congress. Cao was a child refugee who was airlifted out of Saigon a few days before the Communists took over the South of Viet Nam in April 1975 (Tucker 2008, 1). Clarifying that Cao still is not representative of the vast population of Vietnamese American laborers, Vo asserts that Vietnamese Americans “are not a homogeneous ‘model minority’ but are internally diverse in their [educational and] economic experiences” (p. 249). Vo’s argument confirms how most Vietnamese refugees and immigrants, despite their dynamic backgrounds, face technological and linguistic barriers coupled with insecure employment statuses that dictate that they have neither the choice, power, nor possibility for upward mobility.

Literature Review

To put the issue of how to manage work and family in contemporary Vietnamese immigrant historical context, Linda Vo reveals her mother’s story, a Vietnamese war bride immigrant, who struggled to make a living in the U.S. labor market since 1979 initially as an assembler “at a factory, operated a mom-and-pop Oriental food market, transported garment pieces between the factories and seamstresses who sewed from their homes, served Chinese fast food at the mall, and became a beautician, an occupation she still maintains” (p. 237). Vo’s mother’s employment illustrates a common history, which explains the hardship that many Vietnamese American women experienced in informal business sectors after their resettlement in the U.S. Vo witnessed how her mother overcame linguistic and educational obstacles as well as exploitation and long hours under vicious conditions. This economic hardship stands as representative of the traumatic experiences generally among the Vietnamese immigrant women, “who survived the turmoil of war, dislocation, and resettlement” (p. 237). The experience of

Vo's mother is an example of the larger picture of Vietnamese women who were, and still are, intensely exploited by the American economic hierarchy.

Moreover, the first-generation Vietnamese American immigrant women in my study, Nhu Ha, Doan Ngo, Lieu Chau, and Diana Ly, face far more complicated issues in managing work and family because of technological barriers. As computer skills become a requisite in the workplace, these women are often pushed farther to the margin of mainstream culture by their lack of education and training. As a result, many Vietnamese American women struggle as domestic workers and take unregulated, low-wage jobs in unfavorable labor conditions and without benefits.

Stories of Four Women

The four women in my ethnography comprise a complex group, ranging in age from 41 to 53 years old, and each has lived in the U.S. for at least ten years. They all had been married and had at least one child before leaving their home country. While Diana Ly immigrated to the U.S. when she was 27 years old by way of the Homecoming Act Program, the other participants immigrated to the U.S. through the Orderly Departure Program when they were at least 30 years old. Their education experiences cover a wide span: Diana Ly had to leave school in the middle of third grade, Doan Ngo completed ninth grade, Lieu Chau completed high school, and Nhu Ha completed college in Viet Nam. Although they come from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, they have been unable to attend an advanced course in English as a Second Language (ESL). During interviews, these mothers voiced their concerns about paid jobs, family duties, and their negotiation between the two. The dual responsibilities of work and family challenged these women because they considered domestic labor as detracting from, and even conflicting with, their concept of being productive. While struggling to sustain family and

job duties, these Vietnamese mothers are especially worried about how to monitor their children's progress at school and how to maintain their cultural heritage in U.S. modern society.

While the women's responses are intricately tied to the issues of time management of work and family responsibilities, immigration to the United States actually has provided better prospects for many of them and their relatives than those on offer in Viet Nam. A marked rise of Indochinese immigration to the United States in past decades meets the demand of the U.S. capitalist system by providing inexpensive, unskilled laborers. In fact, as these women entered the workforce, they faced racial inequality; most work long hours for low wages and no healthcare benefits. As Vo describes, while many Vietnamese women are isolated at work, without opportunities for career mobility and received health care benefit, other women relied on public assistance, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and also medical care for their families through Medicaid. Vo's investigation reveals the limited choices of Vietnamese American mothers, coupled with multiple disadvantages they endure in the work environment. The four women in my study also noted that they had few choices and opportunities in their marginalized communities.

Doan Ngo, for instance, who worked part-time and took care of her household part-time, depended on her husband as the only wage earner in the family. Nonetheless, she was forced by lack of finances to obtain paid work as a janitor to help her husband handle their financial responsibilities. But because paid childcare and domestic labor are expensive, the unpaid household work performed by Ngo and other poor mothers is essential. Philip Cohen argues that, "We need this unpaid work; since the market doesn't provide the care we need at an affordable cost" (1). Cohen would thus argue that Ngo's unpaid household work must be

recognized and valued. Truly, through full-time and part-time mothering and domestic duties, these Vietnamese women support their families and raise their children for the next generation to function in the future mainstream economy.

As they juggled their multiple roles, Nhu Ha, Lieu Chau, and Diana Ly shared struggles in their working environments similar to and different from other full-time working mothers. While Diana Ly had to work eleven hours a day as a manicurist in a nail salon, Nhu Ha felt stressed with switching between day and night shifts every three months, and the threat of being laid off by an American paint company. Likewise, working in an American curtain factory, Lieu Chau felt frustrated because the company did not provide any support for job opportunity services to laborers when the company closed its Seattle facility to move out of state. Like Chau, the rest of this group had few employment choices for financial survival and worked long hours, which meant that they lacked access to education or other opportunities that might improve their job search.

Case One

Although her situation is not exactly the same as other full-time laborers, Doan Ngo's struggle also focused on financial survival as well as work-family issues. At the time of the interview, Ngo was 53, a mother of two daughters, ages 22 and 14. She had been living in the U.S. since 1993 in Burien, southwest of Seattle. She had a full-time job until last year, when a health condition forced her to quit. At the time of the interviews, she worked part-time as a janitor for the city of Burien, and most of her family's expenses relied on her husband's full-time laborer's income.

Ngo's background is representative of psychological and socioeconomic hardships. As an orphan during the Viet Nam War, she had to quit school and become a seamstress to make a

living and raise her younger siblings, even though she was only a child. She worked at a street cart to sustain her family. While carrying the legacy of her past to the U.S., Ngo persistently endured financial, linguistic and technological challenges to support her children through her labor. She said, “It was a much-needed labor that I need to do as I think of my children’s education, I need to be able to survive to support them with all possible conditions for them to reach their educational goals.” As someone impoverished all her life and still struggling, Ngo is worried for her daughters’ future. She states: “If they don’t study well, their lives will end up poorly like the life of their mom and dad.” At the same time, Ngo was also concerned about how her children handle overloaded school work: “It seems like endless school work for them. Many times, I have to force them go to sleep.” Ngo endured psychological stress as she not only dealt with limited financial capital but also faced her inability to support her children’s academic studies. As a coping strategy, Ngo’s oldest daughter helped the younger sister on school work. She stated, “The two sisters have been studying by themselves. The American education is completely different from the Vietnamese one; we don’t know how to help them.” Although she could not assist her children to solve a specific assignment, Ngo monitored her younger daughter by talking with her on the way to and from school every day or taking her wherever she needed to be. She also volunteered at the Vietnamese language school Van Lang¹⁹ as a chief cook so she could be around her daughters in the Vietnamese community. Thinking of herself as an old immigrant, Ngo described limited opportunities for her education: “Perforce, we came to the U.S. as elder adults, could not go to school for any degree. So we have to do labor jobs, which are very troublesome, less earnings.” In fact, Ngo depended completely on translation services and was unable to communicate by email with her daughter’s teachers in English. While Ngo

¹⁹ Van Lang: See Appendix A

was burdened by language and some technological disadvantages, she had very basic computer skills to communicate with her friends in Vietnamese.

Ngo, aware of the immigrant parent's problems, is less strict on her daughter than she might be in Viet Nam. She said, "If we used to be tough [to our children,] they won't be close to us." Ngo encourages both her daughters to preserve their Vietnamese heritage, and showing their enthusiasm to enjoy Vietnamese music, she said, "They also like to watch "cai luong,"²⁰ [a Vietnamese traditional play] (smile.)... In order to encourage them to listen to Vietnamese music, sometime, I bought Vietnamese CDs for them in stores, downtown Seattle." Ngo's experience as a caring mother as well as a part-time worker revealed her great efforts to educate her daughters with the proper values of her traditional culture. However, an unstable, low-paying janitorial position, along with language, technological, and financial disadvantages continually constrained Ngo's ability to support her children's education.

Case Two

Unlike Doan Ngo, Nhu Ha considered herself economically independent, a significant positive feature, to support her children through her full-time job. At the time of the interview, Ha was 50 years old married, had been living in the U.S. for ten years, and had two children, a 22 year-old son and a 12 year-old daughter. Ha learned basic computer skills for six months, but barely practiced them because of her heavy work schedule in a Seattle painting company. As a result, she faced difficulty in managing work and taking care of her Americanized children, as well as totally depending on translation offered by others. She recalled, "There is a meeting, but I depend on those who can speak English to translate for me because I don't understand much."

²⁰ "Cai luong": See Appendix A

As Nhu Ha recalled, language, cultural, and technological barriers not only isolated her from the mainstream public, but also from her own children. She had to learn how to endure cultural conflicts and control her temper when communicating with them. She said, “I have to control my temper whenever I talk to my children, they would be OK. If I yell at them, they don’t listen.” For example, Ha remembered her son’s attitude when he was in high school: “I argue. It doesn’t mean that I am insolent, but parents are not always right, let me talk.” After coming home from a long day at work, she felt frustrated that her son imitated his American peers. She also expressed that she felt she was losing the mother-daughter bond as well as her maternal power over her daughter. For example, when Ha turned on Vietnamese music, her daughter was not interested in listening. She recalled, “When my daughter was small, I bought Xuan Mai’s songs [for her,] but she ignored it. She only watched cartoon from American channels.” Ha suffered because she was aware that her child’s Americanized behavior could create distance in mother-daughter solidarity. She states: “If I turned on any channel in Vietnamese language, she left. I then told her sit closer [to me,] she looked away.” Her daughter’s attitude reflected the psychological and cultural conflict in communication between mother and daughter in Vietnamese American immigrant families. Ha is burdened by facing cultural and emotional disconnection with her daughter; they both may face the consequences of this emerging conflict.

Besides working long hours, changing to a night shift is another issue in Ha’s situation. She stated, “The company would put me on a flexible day-night shift if I remained to work full-time, so that I would spend more time at work in the evening.” Although Ha and her husband had to pay for their home, car and other expenses, she felt it was risky to leave her daughter alone at night without parental supervision. She said: “I ask permission to work part-time so I just work

on day shift because my husband works the night shift. I have to stay home with my daughter.”

At the time of the interview, Ha was still waiting for her boss’s approval for her request.

Nhu Ha not only faced burdens at work, but she also dealt with childcare and educational support at home. She recalled that she pretended to check her daughter’s homework by standing behind her, saying, “Let me see!” as well as “Holding it and looking at it...that’s all...just like I check on her, but I really don’t understand.” She waited for a report card to come home, as she was unable to monitor her child’s progress using the school’s websites. She was also worried that her young daughter would watch movies with adult subject matters on the Internet and hang out with friends who would make poor choices, such as becoming involved in drug or alcohol abuse. She noted: “I am worried that she looks at [adult movies.] I ask her brother for help to block [inappropriate] websites...I’m not sure if she can unblock them... Sometimes, I also watch behind her back.” Ha continued: “If it shows some pictures, I then know, if [there is only text,] I have no clue what she has written [and how these texts change color] on the screen.” Challenged by language, cultural, and technological barriers, Ha felt out of place as she observed her little girl growing up in a different world and becoming Americanized. In addition, she was concerned about her daughter’s study of sex education at a young age: “I am concerned with the fact that she would like to figure out about sex too early...She’s only 12, but she has her menstrual period. She grows up so fast.”

In her role of being a mother and laborer, Ha had been exposed to and influenced less American culture through new media technology, school, and peers than her daughter. As a result, she felt she had to monitor her daughter’s study and personal behavior, which weakened the bond between mother and daughter. She felt a loss of control over her daughter. In order to remind her daughter about her roots and Vietnamese traditional culture, Ha took her to the

Vietnamese New Year Festival in the local Vietnamese community, where “the youth dance and sing on our New Year,” she said. Ha wanted her children to be successful at school, but she also preferred them to understand the Vietnamese language and culture. However, struggling with an intensive work schedule made her goals more difficult. She became caught between family and work responsibilities in the process of acculturation.

Case Three

Like Nhu Ha, Lieu Chau saw a tremendous change in her life when she came to the U.S. that resulted in a long story of juggling employment and family responsibility. At the time of the interview, Lieu Chau was 41 and had two sons, 11 and 18 years old. She had been living in the U.S. for almost 10 years, although she still remembered the legacy of her past. In Viet Nam, she used to be a housewife while her husband was the “breadwinner.” Facing difficulties in daily life, Chau felt depressed juggling work and family duty in her new homeland. She said, “I got terribly cultural shocked. In Viet Nam, once, [my husband] was the owner of a business and we had employees who worked for us.” In contrast, in the U.S., Chau joined the workforce after staying home only for the first few months to take care of her baby son. She used to work long hours in low-paying jobs to help sustain her family’s survival. Working as a seamstress for a short time, she then worked at a laundry, and later at a plastic company, and then as a laborer who made curtains for windows. When that company moved out of state, she received unemployment compensation. While looking for a new job, she began to learn how to use a few basic computer skills from her young son.

Recalling her struggles with language, educational, and technological challenges in managing work and childcare after resettling in the U.S., Lieu Chau stated, “I didn’t have time to take ESL courses. My husband and I took turns to work different shifts in order to share our

household chores and babysit our two sons. We didn't have enough money to pay for babysitters." She lamented that although they had relatives nearby, nobody helped them. In Chau's circumstance, she felt troubled because she came from a place, where her nuclear family had already established a good business, to a strange country where she faced difficult issues both private and public. As she reported: "When I first came to the U.S., I faced racism...I didn't understand the language. As I was often bullied by others, I only cried." In addition, living with her family-in-law, she seemed to endure more intensified issues. She said: "I came here like 'a fish out of water.' I had to live with my family-in-law. If my husband and I had not strongly stayed together, our life would have begun in troubles." Although facing internal conflicts with her in-laws, Chau was lucky to have a good partner who was on her side not only to deal with kin matters, but also to share struggles in their daily life. She stated: "[My husband and I] both are illiterate, we work as laborers, we faced mistreatment and were abused either in heavy or light way." Chau is dependent on her sons to learn how to turn a computer on and off and how to connect to the Internet to chat with her family in Vietnamese and to study in an ESL program online.

As a new immigrant, Chau completely depended on people to translate for her whenever she wanted to interact with English speakers. She revealed, "My older brother-in-law wrote a note in English and gave it to me, I kept it in my pocket, whenever I needed to communicate with teachers, I showed that piece of paper to them." Despite the fact that Chau felt old, and had faced socioeconomic hardships, social and educational disadvantages in her new life in the U.S., she felt obligated to support her extended family in Viet Nam. "We want to study, but we are getting old. We think too much about our family, our children, our relatives in Viet Nam on both sides. There are too many family members in Viet Nam who are poor. We can't ignore them,

but try to help them.” As Chau tried to acculturate, she remained tied to the relationship with her relatives back home.

Chau’s most important concern, however, was that while her two sons learned to speak proficient English, they might forget their native tongue. For example, she reminded her oldest son: “Although you don’t have enough time to study Vietnamese at school, mom and dad are useful sources for you to learn your native tongues that you should never forget.” While she had neither computer skills nor English skills to help her children, she thanked God for his blessing to her children as they studied very well with other people’s assistance. Chau monitored her children’s progress at school by talking with them every evening when she came to school to pick them up. If they had lower grades, she immediately asked for help from her friends and relatives. She claimed, “I feel angry for myself, really fretful as I am unable to speak English, I just feel like I am so hopeless. However, if I go back to school, it is a very big deal for my family situation.” Chau’s articulation of her disadvantage and lack of educational opportunity best conceptualizes how Vietnamese women faced the dual obstacles of work and family obligation.

Case Four

Despite the fact that these women share similar struggles, Diana Ly’s situation as a Vietnamese Amerasian presented a big challenge for her in managing family and work matters. At the time of the interview, Ly, a mother of three children, was 42 years old, and worked in a nail salon as a manicurist. She had been living in the U.S. for 15 years, but had no computer skills. After her husband recovered from a stroke, he hardly managed their children’s behavior and lost his construction job for a couple of years. Ly’s low-waged labor became the only source of income to sustain her family.

Diana Ly recalled that she not only faced financial struggles, but also struggled with her identity in both American and Vietnamese societies. When she lived in Viet Nam, she was considered to be an American because her appearance was that of a white Amerasian, an enemy of the Vietnamese people. She barely finished third grade. She believed that wherever she was, people did not like her. For instance, Ly said, “At school, I was [a target] for friends to make fun at me, I could not study. [At home,] I was unable to live with my parents; I lived with my grandma instead. I had to work on a farm or a rice-field to survive...I lived in poverty.” Facing hostile treatment and living in poor conditions caused sickness that haunted her health through her first five years living in the U.S. She almost died. After she regained her health, two children were born. When the youngest daughter was 3 years old, Ly started working as a manicurist and continued this job for 8 years. She relied on government assistance for low-income families while working long hours in the informal business sector, without receiving health insurance or having opportunity for upward mobility. Facing language, cultural and technological obstacles, she did not feel a sense of belonging in American society. She said, “People often thought that I am an American until I started talking with broken English, they don’t understand...Some of them feel contempt a little towards me.” Although her white appearance fit in the mainstream society, Ly still faced racial and cultural discrimination, as she was unable to speak fluent English. She often felt like she had to close her mouth, but in reality, she was full of pent-up anger. She said, “People continue to think that I am American. I want to argue with them, but I can’t completely finish my argument. It is just like speechless.” In spite of how Ly was perceived by others, she undoubtedly identified herself as Vietnamese American.

As Ly recalled, the most difficult situation for her was that she spoke neither Vietnamese nor English well. As a result, she could barely talk to her two young American-born children.

When she spoke Vietnamese to them, they misunderstood, and when they wanted to talk to her, they spoke solely in English and she got confused. Ly felt frustrated with these weakly connected mother-child relationships.

Ly personally thought that life in American society was more financially sustainable than in Viet Nam. In terms of traditional rules, Ly accepted that women were assigned to take childcare responsibilities. As she came from a background of “the abandoned child,” Ly struggled to live in both conflicted cultures, although she still felt attached to Vietnamese beliefs. Since she was unable to check her children’s school work, she stated, “I look at it, but I don’t understand anything about it, so I can’t monitor them. I don’t have enough time to help them.” Ly is most concerned about whether her youngest son, who was sent to a special school because of his slow learning behavior, would be able to do well in school. She expressed her feelings: “My two children – the oldest and the youngest - are smart, but my second son was very slow, and I am unable to teach him. I do not know how to teach him.” Language and technological issues seemed to blend together to challenge Dianna Ly while she tried to monitor what her children learned. Often, when her children played on a computer, Ly did not know what they were playing and whether it was good or bad. She also worried as they interacted with the Internet environment. She said, “I am unable to read, so I don’t know [who] they chat to. Therefore, I feel difficulty.” When her children accessed the Internet, she was worried that they hid inappropriate websites from her since she was unable to completely control what they did. These disadvantages created psychological distance between Dianna Ly and her children.

Working long hours at a nail salon, Ly left home early and returned home late every day. She said, “I work 12 hours per day. I left home at 8:00 a.m. in the morning and came back home at 8:00 p.m. [Some time] they have already gone to sleep.” She juggled between “go to work,

then go home to cook and do such things for them, then make sure of another day to work.” To Ly, it seemed that the stronger her connection was to Vietnamese culture and people, the more her two young children firmly attached to American mainstream culture and society. She complained that her children were not interested in any kind of Vietnamese entertainment: “I bought [Vietnamese] music and movies, and then I also bought music for youth, but [as I] turn the music on, they don’t like it.” While she enjoyed watching Vietnamese “cai luong” and movies, her children turned on American TV shows or games for entertainment.

Ly also sent her two young children to the Vietnamese school for a couple of years, although they were still unable to speak Vietnamese. This issue created cultural conflict and tension in Ly’s family because she spent long hours at work instead of monitoring her children’s study habits. While Ly’s primary concern focused on her middle son catching up with his lessons in class, she still needed to maintain her job in order to take care of her family expenses. Her earnings were only slightly above the poverty level. Ly struggled with her dependence on translation services, such as her oldest son or the interpreter who was assigned to assist her during a parent-teacher conference. Except in simple cases to inform teachers when her “children are sick, or they take a day off at school,” she mostly struggled to communicate directly with teachers without receiving translation services. Ly hoped that in the future there would be more Vietnamese teachers to help Vietnamese parents who could not speak proficient English. Her desire was that Vietnamese children should positively regard their cultural heritage. She said, “If teachers set up an entertainment for each ethnicity, students from diverse cultures would have a lot of fun to learn about other cultures and be able to recognize their roots.” Because of her long daily working hours, Ly was concerned with the fact that she was

unable to teach her children to remember their roots, a situation which created tension between her job and her cultural traditions.

Conclusion

Like most low-income female Asian Americans, all of the aforementioned women struggled with the way that racial, class, and gender inequalities interact with language, cultural, and technological disadvantages. In critiquing how mainstream media intentionally ignores special needs of this marginalized group, Hien Duc Do (1999) argues, “The final danger of the ‘model minority’ myth is that it deprives individuals of necessary social services and monetary support,” and because “the perception is created by the mass media that Vietnamese Americans are successful and can take care of their own, public policy makers see little need to provide that community with a share of resources” (p. 121). Model minority stereotypes negatively affect most contemporary Vietnamese Americans including Vietnamese women in my study, which confirms Do’s scholarship. These informants would be better off if the mainstream public clarified that only particular *individual* Asians would truly fit in the model minority image, such as Joseph Cao. In fact, the informants in my study faced limited access to essential mainstream resources, such as networking with people from other ethnicities, communicating in English, and utilizing network information in finding employment and childcare programs. Because they had to rely on translation services and government assistance, these women felt isolated and marginalized.

As my research showed, Chau’s psychological and social experience was worse than those of the other three Vietnamese women in my study, because she juggled family and employment issues under a mood of melancholy and isolation. The legacy of her past affluence remains in her mind as she faced struggles in this modern country. She was in shock and felt

depressed in the home of her extended family-in-law and lonely without friends or relatives on her side. She stated, “I was very anxious. It would be impossible if I wanted to share my feeling with my siblings, or make a phone call to Viet Nam. It was not easy in the past, not as easy as now.” Psychologically, Chau’s feeling lingered between two conflicting worlds. On one hand, she had a sense of belonging with relatives back home; on the other, she was worried about supporting her family financially, especially as her oldest son was about to enter college. Although she still received unemployment compensation from being laid off for two weeks, Chau experienced downward mobility by not having educational opportunity. As she noted, “These workers are my age, who have low education and use their labor to make the living, pay bills, and take care of households.” Chau’s circumstances were representative of the vast majority of marginalized women whose struggles were still invisible to the general public.

These women have wider social networks than they had in Viet Nam, but their aspiration of preservation of traditional family formation still remained. Likewise, in supporting Kibria’s study, Espiritu reports, “The traditional family system is valuable to Vietnamese American women because it offers them economic protection and gives them authority, as mothers, over the younger generation” (p. 93). However, both Nhu Ha and Diana Ly felt the loss of maternal power over their children. To address these problems and help meet the needs of these immigrants to reduce their stress in managing work and family responsibilities, I offer several recommendations. These include making a Vietnamese American community-based organization, such as Helping Link, even stronger in serving the Vietnamese American community in Seattle. Because language and technological barriers are primary concerns for many of the women, Helping Link should recruit more English teachers to provide different levels of English as a Second Language for Vietnamese American adults. Similarly, Helping

Link should offer a variety of culturally relevant computer literacy classes. Both language and computer literacy classes should be offered at various times of the day, both during the week and on the weekends, to accommodate the flexible work schedules that many working mothers must maintain.

As a volunteer technology supporter and translator in Helping Link's computer lab, I recognize how hard many of these women work to acquire basic technological skills that would allow them to be a part of their children's learning progress. With better language and technological skills, a few more jobs and social opportunities will become available to them. Language and technological skills help Vietnamese American parents to be more confident in monitoring their children's development, interacting with other people from different ethnic groups, and having a sense of social inclusion. At the same time, ethnic community networks, for instance, churches, temples, and Vietnamese grassroots organizations, should strongly be united to play essential roles in upholding Vietnamese American community identity.

The issues that Vietnamese women face in the United States should be publicized and brought to public attention. Otherwise, their struggles are invisible in the mainstream public as they try to manage work and family duty in their daily lives. These marginalized women face exploitative labor practices, have limited access to education or career choice, and are unable to help with their children's homework. This group needs extra help in order to overcome the legacy of traumatic war experiences, socioeconomic hardship, and psychological isolation while moving forward to their new life and managing family and work. Public policy makers and employers particularly should provide more support to help these female employees and other underprivileged women to meet the demands of managing the double burden between employment and childcare. Because of these facts, both government and non-profit sectors

should provide accommodating work-family policies and agendas. The unheard stories of work-family issues must be brought into the public debate to serve the special needs of this group and other disadvantaged minorities. More scholarships and funding should be provided to encourage women with financial needs to access and participate in educational training programs. Future research and public policy initiatives are vital in understanding and assisting these marginalized Vietnamese women and their process of acculturation. Public policy changes based on qualitative research of working women's realities must be enacted to alleviate the struggle of women of color, and in particular, first-generation Vietnamese American immigrant women in Seattle.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEGOTIATION OF VIETNAMESE AMERICAN IDENTITIES: CONFLICTS AND HARMONIES IN THE DIGITAL CONSUMER CULTURE

Introduction

Marilyn Halter (2000) argues that “consumerism simultaneously disrupts and promotes ethnic community, and can be both subversive and hegemonic. Commercialism may indeed dissipate tradition, community, and meaning, but it can also enhance and reinforce such identification” (p. 14). In other words, consumer culture can be both reinforced and weakened during the process of consumption²¹. Not only does consumer culture affect individuals within ethnic communities by strengthening and weakening different community bonds during the process of consumption, it also affects familial bonds between parents and children. Many first-generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant parents believe that mainstream consumer culture and their children’s desire to fit in with peers create a disruptive social distance from their parents. Other parents think that consumer culture forms a bridge of intergenerational solidarity, where parents and children effectively interact and communicate in a new way. As my research shows, parents and children adapt to their dynamic social environments and negotiate their mixed Vietnamese and American identities through new media consumption in many different ways.

Research Methods

To detail and understand contemporary Vietnamese American families’ exposure to consumer culture, I collected data from a two-summer (2008 and 2009) set of interviews with

²¹ Consumption: See Appendix A

Vietnamese American parents, along with their children. Parents included 14 first-generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrants (5 male and 9 female, ranging from 37 to 61 years of age). The six American-born children interviewed were students in Seattle and the surrounding area, including one female and five males, ranging from age 10 to 18. This study underscores how digital media consumption can affect Vietnamese American families. While most narratives contain the voices of a parent and a child for each family unit, a few consist of either parents' or children's viewpoints as they respond to how digital media consumption affects their lives. Among four bilingual parents who spoke proficient Vietnamese and English, three chose to speak exclusively in English, and one chose both English and Vietnamese during the interviews. The rest of the group was more comfortable to record their voices in Vietnamese.

These individual narratives reveal the tension of Vietnamese parents as their Americanized children use media to connect socioculturally to the dominant society. While maintaining their traditional values and beliefs, the parents are also consumers, and are influenced by American culture as they have been living in the contemporary United States for some time. Residing with their parents, the Vietnamese children in my study reveal a complex identity because they are influenced by two conflicting worlds—their home and school environments. My investigation examines how these children reveal their individualistic values as consumers in various and complex ways.

In contrast to most of the Americanized children in the study, who spoke proficient English, many parent participants still carried both the old-fashioned Confucian ideal of family values and the trauma of the Viet Nam War. Despite facing language barriers, none of these parents speak exclusively Vietnamese, but instead speak a mixed version of English and Vietnamese. While using digital media, most of these parents reported using hand gestures and

pointing to ads as a method of communicating, or they relied on their children for translation and interpretation. Many teenagers reported playing parental roles and expressing their own viewpoints, which created significant issues in parent-child interactions.

Vietnamese American Parent Participant Backgrounds

The difficulty of intergenerational cultural conflict in parent-child relationships becomes even stronger when considering that Vietnamese American parents and their children grew up within different cultures. The parent group has entered the United States in various waves based on their dynamic backgrounds as refugees and immigrants. For example, Kevin Tran flew out of Viet Nam to Guam three days before Saigon fell to the Communist troops in 1975. Timothy Bui, the study's only male Vietnamese Amerasian, and Dianna Ly, its only female Vietnamese Amerasian, left in 1989 and 1993 respectively through the Homecoming Act (1987-1993). Huyen Vu, a Vietnamese American beneficiary, also left in 1993 due to the help of her adopted Vietnamese Amerasian sister, Dianna Ly. Many parents were forced to leave Viet Nam by boat to gain entrance to the United States. For example, one stayed in refugee camps for four years before arriving in U.S. territory. The rest of the parent group came to the United States through the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) of 1979, including one in 1993, and two more in 1999. Additionally, Van Huynh, a Vietnamese Japanese American, resettled on U.S. soil from Japan in 2001.

Among this group of 16 parents, educational background was diverse. Some parents received a higher education, including Vinh Trinh, who became a doctor; Mi Vo and Tom Doan, who became middle school teachers; and Jackie Nguyen and Nhu Ha, who finished their college degrees. While two parents completed high school diplomas, two were unable to complete their elementary school educations. The rest were students in high school and middle school when

they left Viet Nam. Yet, despite their educational history in the U.S., only six parents spoke proficient English. These included Vinh Trinh and Jackie Nguyen, who completed their postdoctoral and doctoral degrees in bioscience and dental studies, and Lisa Hoang and Kevin Tran, who were college graduates. Still other parents attended limited English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.

While I contacted these parents mostly through the community network at Vietnamese language schools, Mi Vo, Tom Doan, and Hoa Nguyen were my students in a basic computer class at Helping Link, a nonprofit community based organization in Seattle, during the summer of 2008. At the time of the interviews, while Vinh Trinh and Kevin Tran had already spent at least eight years in computer programming, other interviewees' skills were more limited. For example, Jackie Nguyen, Lisa Hoang, Van Huynh, and Timothy Bui claimed that their computer skills were at a basic level; that is, they used computers only to check emails and for other personal interests. Four of the parents had only three months of experience with computers. Tom Doan and Brad Vuong only knew how to input data into a computer; Hoa Nguyen just knew a little about typing; and Dianna Ly and Thoa Quach had no computer skills. As a whole, these parents expressed an admiration for the tremendous growth of the media and the benefits of new technologies, while at the same time they struggled with technological challenges. Although Timothy Bui, Huyen Vu, and Brad Vuong admitted that their computer skills are not very good, they nonetheless felt pride as they watched their children play games on the computer. Finally, the remaining parents worried about their children's consumption of various forms of media and the individualism that their consumption promotes.

Literature Review

Through consumption of digital media and Internet technology, these Vietnamese American children are influenced by contemporary American values, such as individualism and independence, which conflict with their parents' traditional family values and add to intergenerational tensions. For example, Nazli Kibria (1995) emphasizes that intergenerational cultural conflict between first and second-generation Vietnamese Americans are related to traditional beliefs about the importance of the social environment. She argues: "The tendency to pinpoint blame for generational conflicts on the cultural environment of the United States was perhaps facilitated by traditional Vietnamese beliefs about the importance of social environment," more willingly than "inherent personality characteristics, in molding personal character" (p. 146). Kibria describes how social circumstances challenge Vietnamese American parents in meeting their children's consumption demands, emphasizing how Vietnamese cultural beliefs focus on social conditions and interactions. She also believes that "[The children] want to do things like ...spend their parents' money," and points out, "One problem often discussed by parents was the increasing demands made by children for ...items that were in vogue among their peers at school" (p. 146-147). As Kibria asserts, Vietnamese American children are influenced by peers' fashion choices in their school environments, and I argue that they are also influenced by peers' technological choices.

Most of the parents in the study face intersecting issues of race, gender, and class and how they are affected by language, cultural, and technological barriers. This limits their technological choices, in contrast with those of their children. However, the main concern for second-generation young Vietnamese Americans is to be fully accepted by American society. Their English proficiency and ability to use computer skills to create social networks, access web resources, play games and download music confirms the engagement of Vietnamese American

children in contemporary media and web technology, and enables them to more fully experience mainstream culture. Unfortunately, however, the more that these children comfortably adapt to new ways of learning with technology at school and interacting with mainstream peers, the more they evoke tensions with their parents at home.

This manifestation of generational contradictions creates a greater gap between Vietnamese children and technologically challenged parents, especially when they endeavor to keep an eye on their children's Internet usage at home. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2007) insists, "As technology becomes more sophisticated and more difficult for adults skilled in (more) rudimentary technologies to navigate, children have emerged as a new class of experts" (p. 19). In her view, this phenomenon becomes apparent as many parents face limited authority and contribution in their children's computer-filled world. Many are unaware of parental control mechanisms that the Internet Service Providers (ISP) offer parents for censoring their children's access. In particular, these Vietnamese parents feel ambivalent regarding new digital media consumption because, on one hand, they are concerned about whether their children consume violent games and adult movies as well as inappropriate websites; on the other hand, they consume Internet services, buy DVDs, music, movies and/or video games for their children's entertainment and family connections. To illustrate this attitude, study participant Van Huynh registered Internet services to download Vietnamese music, email and chat with her family in Viet Nam. Mi Vo and Lisa Hoang bought Vietnamese CDs and DVDs music and movies to encourage their children and grandchildren to understand Vietnamese language and culture, while Kevin Tran, Timothy Bui, and Brad Vuong bought challenging games for their children to practice.

The scholarship of Nazli Kibria (1993), Lisa Sun-Hee Park (2005), and Sarah Banet-Weiser (2007) demonstrated the complexity of intergenerational connections and conflicts affect parent-child relationships in the process of consumption. Mark Wolf (2008) examines how American video games influence media, such as television, computers and the Internet, attract young consumers and increase revenue. Wolf reports: “In 2006 alone, the U.S. video game industry made a record \$12.5 billion,” and emphasizes how mainstream producers succeed in the game business (p. 1). Like Wolf’s work, the work of Charlotte B. Becker (2001), Jon Lewis (2002), and Stephen Vaughn (2006) investigates how capitalist producer corporations take advantage of new technologies to use music, pornography, television, DVDs, computers and the Internet to capture big audiences (p. 166-167). These authors point out how media technology has tremendously influenced the consumer market.

In this context, many Vietnamese American parents are understandably concerned about the impact of these media on their children, especially for girls, because they came from a common Asian family value system that has been influenced by the Confucian philosophy of China long ago. A Vietnamese proverb states: “Virginity is valued as a thousand pieces of gold.” These types of conservative Vietnamese beliefs and values related to sexual behavior are an important factor for family values, such as premarital virginity. In fact, a strict parent like Tom Doan was worried about his ninth-grade daughter, who wanted to be a model so she would make money by performing on the stage or video. Doan states: “It is not right! While doing business, people do not think about [Vietnamese traditional culture,] like American recruiters... select young beautiful girls [to train] them to be models for video performance.” Doan was determined to keep an eye on his daughter: “There would be many guys followed or chased for

her...she then becomes depraved. This is called the beginning of utterly depraved... from our Eastern perspective. Americans do not care or there is nothing to worry about families' values."

Like Tom Doan, some parents worry as their children learn to appreciate new American cultural values of independence and make their own choices through consumerism. For example, a Vietnamese refugee mother, whose private residence I visited, explained to me how she felt ambivalent about consuming media technology. When purchasing a cell phone, she did not realize until she allowed her teenage daughter to borrow it, that it was not only a telecommunication device, but could also function as a computer. The girl then connected her mother's cell phone to an online network from their home computer, downloaded American music from the Internet, played games, and sent English messages and nude photos to her friends. While the mother's desire was to promote the Vietnamese cultural heritage and to use the cell phone to contact her family and friends in the Vietnamese language, her daughter used it as a tool to access multimedia network and communicate with her mainstream peers. In this context, the mother felt like she was losing her maternal power over her teenage daughter.

This sense of lost parental authority has been studied by other researchers. Park (2005) investigates "the experiences of second generation Asian Americans through the lens of consumption," and her work is "not intended as a condemnation nor an endorsement of Asian Americans as consumers, but rather is a contribution toward a critical understanding of the role and significance of consumption in the exertion of social citizenship by children of immigrants in the United States" (p. 4). Park's argument is that second generation Asian Americans' buying habits are important to their identities as they forge social citizenship and stand astride the margins between social belonging and exclusion (p. 6). My findings confirm Park's analysis. While young Vietnamese Americans are indeed influenced by their parents' consumption of

traditional products, such as Vietnamese music DVDs and CDs, they are also affected by other mainstream influences, such as school peers, media technologies, and American products.

Likewise, the scholarship of Nazli Kibria (1993), Raymond Buriel and Terri De Ment (1997) shows that television or popular music, school and peers are influential social agents to Vietnamese American children's individualistic values and manners. As these authors emphasize, while Vietnamese children tend to be 'Americanized,' their consumption behaviors mostly contradict those of their parents. Park argues, "For second generation Asian American consumers, the burden of proving one's 'Americanism' requires that they display affluence in a particular way that displays their desire to be 'American,'" while they still struggle with Asian American stereotypes that they are "inferior" or "aliens" (p. 15). Park's argument asserts that Asian American youth, including Vietnamese American children, are exposed to American consumption behavior on a daily basis. This situation has led to ambivalence and anxiety within parent-child relationships in the contexts of consumption, family, and belonging.

Despite their eager participation in the American culture of consumption, which challenges a long history of Asian American's exclusion, second-generation Asian Americans, including Vietnamese American children, are not fully included in the mainstream culture. Moreover, the model minority status which lumps all Asians together—including the still struggling Vietnamese American community—continues to situate them as exotically distinguished from their white peers as a result of the long history of Asian exclusion. The "American dream," according to Park is "a capitalistic, free market ideology in which only those who can pay the price of admission may enter" (p. 7). Park's analysis points out that the capitalist system dominates the entire market and U.S. consumer culture. Like Park, Banet-Weiser's analysis (2007) illustrates that consumer citizenship or "model citizenship," is

complicated not only in the way capitalists promote marketing strategies to sell products, but also by the way consumers understand the “political rhetoric” of their identities in the process of consumption (p. 11). My research supports Park’s analysis concerning how young Asian Americans, and in this case Vietnamese American children, are both constrained and compelled by consumption as a trait of Americanness. Park emphasizes that Asian Americans feel susceptible to the “change in social boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 12). I agree with Park that the model minority sets Asian Americans at the boundary of social citizenship as the “others,” thus, Asian American children “attempt to re-center themselves as ‘normal’” through ‘Americanized’ consumptive behavior (p. 10). In fact, in many Vietnamese American families, the more children are influenced by individualistic consumptive values, the greater the intergenerational conflicts in parent-child relationships.

In researching how many Vietnamese American children readily adopt the lifestyles and consumption standards of the mainstream society, my observations and oral history interviews allowed me to document parent-child conflicts and bonds through media consumption. My parent group included 10 women and six men from various social classes who came to the U.S. in different periods of time, and have been resettled for eight to 34 years. Many of these Vietnamese parents in my study indicated their ambivalent feelings of both happiness and concern regarding how the consumption of each of these media affects their children’s development, an attitude which supports the validity of Kibria’s and Park’s research.

Interestingly, however, Linda Trang Vo (2008) points out that first-generation Vietnamese Americans promote their native tongues in different forms of media entertainment in the Vietnamese American community. She reports that the “majority foreign-born population ensures that the ethnic language media and entertainment industry is flourishing, including the

CD and DVD market and the television, radio, and print media, along with online media formats” (p. 3). Vo shows that limited proficient English speakers use media and technology as a tool to help preserve their ethnic community, which aims to encourage Vietnamese children to remember their roots and native tongue, and in turn, to promote parent-child solidarity as well as intergenerational connections among the Vietnamese American population.

Music and Games: Parent-child Solidarity

My first round of interviews highlights how Vietnamese parents show intergenerational connections when involved as consumers, such as when consuming popular music and computer games, which reinforce parent-child relationships. As Kibria states, “Videocassette recorders allowed the immigrants to view Vietnamese language movies, an activity that helped to ease feelings of cultural alienation.” In describing a warm feeling through an informant’s narrative, she continues: “I think it’s because they’re sad here, they feel lonely. These things help them feel good. With the VCR they can watch Vietnamese movies, you know, the Chinese movies that are dubbed in Vietnamese” (p. 76). Kibria’s observation shows how Vietnamese American immigrants participate in media consumption as a way to connect to Vietnamese language and culture through creating a sense of belonging in their ethnicity.

Remarkably, many Vietnamese parents try different forms of consumption, such as home entertainment, to interact with their children in a fun atmosphere. For example, Lisa Hoang is 42, married, has two children. She has been living in the U.S. for 26 years and has been self-employed for many years. At the time of the interview, she was also a volunteer at a Vietnamese community based organization. Hoang’s narrative illustrates her psychologically engaged efforts to promote Vietnamese culture in her familial environment. She recalled that once a month, she bought music CDs and DVDs at Lang Van or Asia in the Seattle Vietnamese district for her

family members to enjoy singing Karaoke together each weekend. Hoang was enthusiastic that her children could understand, sing and memorize some popular songs. From her perspective, "...they listen...they memorize little bit because they learn Vietnamese so they can read; they sing with us too, or when watching DVDs music or play show like Paris by Night, they understand and laugh. They like youth shows and music." Hoang encouraged her children to sing by themselves, and she hoped that "if they keep listening to these songs for a long time, they might like it and sing along...help them remember Viet Nam." Using digital media technology as a powerful tool, Lisa Hoang fruitfully connected her children to their Vietnamese cultural heritage. Hoang's son, Jordan Tran, a 17 year-old junior in high school, recalled that besides his mother, his father also played Vietnamese music in a car for him to listen to and explained: "We should listen to [Vietnamese] music in order to respect my dad's culture, because he respects our culture as a generation like pop music and rock and stuff, and we have to listen to the Trinh Cong Son, [a popular Vietnamese musician]." Tran also attended Vietnamese language school, and actively promoted Vietnamese culture. He said, "I do mua lan [lion dance] to make my parents happy." Hoang's and her husband's musical consumption influenced their son's philosophy to become bicultural as he grows.

Like Lisa Hoang, Mi Vo reveals how consumer culture is involved in promoting a cultural solidarity in her family. A single, 57 year-old grandmother who worked as a cook in a nursing home and who has been living in the U.S. for 14 years, Vo is a passionate consumer of Vietnamese songs. She regards these songs as an essential source of cultural identification and a link connecting her to her grandchildren and to her native country. She stated: "When my grandchildren, Thomas Nguyen and Allan Nguyen, were in elementary schools, I used to read stories or sing many [Vietnamese] songs with them from DVDs or CDs." Vo, like other

Vietnamese parents and grandparents, used to check out DVDs, CDs, and movies at Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Chinese video stores in the Seattle International District, the White Center or other locations, so that they could share movies and personal stories with each other.

Sometimes, Vo receives DVDs, CDs, and movies as gifts from family members, relatives and friends from Viet Nam. Bringing this media back to the U.S. during trips to her homeland, Vo demonstrates her great efforts to use media technology to teach her grandsons the Vietnamese language with the hope that her grandchildren can understand her native tongue and remember their roots. “I was really born here, I was probably raised here, but I didn’t learn English until I was like 4 or 5,” Thomas Nguyen recalls, “I used to remember watching videos and running around the house saying [Vietnamese] words. I think I should learn more of how to speak Vietnamese with [my grandma].” Nguyen’s understanding in Vietnamese language was the key to connect with his grandmother. Vo’s story is similar to other narratives of Vietnamese parents enjoying traditional Vietnamese music, movies, CDs and DVDs, live shows on TV and the Internet, a practice that improves family interactions and belonging.

Similar to Vo, Tom Doan recalls that he not only reads news and listens to Vietnamese music and video on the Internet, but he also watches “Paris by Night,” a popular Vietnamese entertainment program, and Vietnamese movies at home to maintain the Vietnamese culture within his family context. Doan said, “If my wife and I are at home, we watch “Paris by Night” and Vietnamese movies.” Although he feels it is difficult for his children because they do not understand Vietnamese, and they are less likely to enjoy watching Vietnamese movies, Doan confirms: “It is hard for them to understand the language, however; they are influenced by the Vietnamese culture too.” Watching the media together allows parents to bring up concerns during family discussions to bridge an intergenerational gap between parents and children.

Promoting the Vietnamese culture was not the only reason for consuming media entertainment between parents and children, as some parents bought media to improve their children's critical thinking abilities or as pure entertainment. Kevin Tran, 50 and - a married father of a ten-year-old son, bought strategy computer games for his son to play. Tran's case is similar to other cases of other Vietnamese fathers who played games with their children at the Helping Link's computer lab. During open lab hours, I observed a Vietnamese American father who purchased a chess game online for his son, and in turn, his teenage son showed him how to play a chess game on the Internet. While the son spoke in English, the father responded to his son in Vietnamese, and sometimes they spoke mixed English-Vietnamese while playing the game together. After winning the game, the boy said to his father, "I'm smarter than you," and they both laughed with pleasure. In this context, the consumer culture enjoyed and experienced by the father and son creates a sense of intergenerational solidarity. Loretta Pecchioni et al. (2005) argue that many video games, like chess, challenge young players to think critically in different ways and levels in a timely manner. These games also encourage children to develop new ways to access worldwide communication and interaction through hyperlinks. This positive influence can be seen in Kevin Tran's narrative. Viewing video games was a new way for his child to interact with the mainstream culture, as he "had certain amount of time after homework, he can use computer whatever, games or video that he wants to see, kid's video of course." Tran bought some computer games that "he can play, most likely strategy games, not like war games or anything, just strategy games to make him think." From Tran's perspective, "If he wants to win something he'd need to think rather than just kill, so that's [how] he's using it right now." Tran's narrative demonstrated that purchasing strategy games is helpful for his son, not only to improve his critical thinking, but also for his entertainment. In influencing his father's attitude

toward video games, Richard Tran, a ten year-old fifth grader, shares his enthusiasm when playing games with his father. He states: “I brainstorm when playing strategy games with my dad...umm...like I try to solve a math puzzle. It is very funny when my dad treats me like a friend... he said ‘hey dude, let’s play again...’” In Tran’s family, playing strategy games not only develops critical thinking, but also creates a connection between father and son to promote family harmony.

Like Kevin Tran, Timothy Bui, 36, is a married father with two children who were born in the U.S. and Americanized. Although Bui did not speak proficient English, he was enthralled by “technological advance because it is good to help everybody, including child development. It is not only the bridge in educational gaps for adults, but also for children.” Bui bought video games for his children “to play [these] games on computers. It encourages them to study in their adolescent period.” Although he does not understand Vietnamese well enough to communicate with his father, Don Bui, an eight year-old fourth grader, is very excited to help his father learn computer skills when they play games together. Don states: “My dad is very cheerful when he plays a game with me on the weekend. We laughed when he tried to speak English and I tried to speak Vietnamese as I show him how to switch to new games on the screen.” Like Kevin Tran, Bui’s consumption includes video games, and demonstrates how intergenerational solidarity in father-son relationships is effectively facilitated through consumer culture.

Brad Vuong has been living in the U.S. since 1988, and is a divorced construction business owner who is able to use basic computer skills. Although he does not live with his sons because he failed to gain custody after a divorce, Vuong recalled that he used to purchase games for them every time he visited them. Games that involve strategy and higher-order thinking, from Vuong’s idea, are good to play because they challenge his children’s minds. “Truthfully,

game is a tool to generate creative mind for the kids. Playing games is not detriment, but only earning benefits.” However, before buying games for his sons, Vuong wanted to know what kinds of game fit his children’s needs. He then “bought the games for them...Every game is totally different. Each game they play has [different teaching functions to the kids,] for instance, one teaches them about psychology, mindset, or education.” According to Vuong, observing his children had showed him each child’s unique mindset and way of thinking. He claimed, “My little son wants this kind of game...he demands...he imitates and want what his peers have, I have to watch him to understand his characteristic, and I then bought that kind of game for him.” Vuong’s strategy to comprehend his children’s consumption behavior and psychology revealed his positive thinking about how new media technology influenced his sons. At the same time, in purchasing games for his sons, Vuong created a strong connection with them, even though they have not lived under the same roof or seen each other for daily activities. In this context, video game consumption not only reinforces the parent-child connection within the Vietnamese American ethnic community in contrast to marketers’ intention or mainstream appeal, but also functions like a bond to enhance the connections between parents and their children.

Parent-Child Conflicts

Paradoxically, although these parents enjoy interacting with their children and the Internet, they also face social disadvantages and have limited contact with mainstream society, which causes difficulty for them when observing their children playing in front of a computer. While Nhu Ha is worried about her daughter’s Americanized behavior, Mi Vo, Tom Doan, and Hoa Nguyen are not only concerned with the complexity of computer games, but also worry about provocative photos on television and the Internet, over which they have little or no control.

My second round of interviews focused on how Vietnamese American parents feel about their children's use of the media and the tensions that are exacerbated by such use, creating intergenerational conflicts in parent-child relationships. Nhu Ha, a 50 year-old married mother with two children, has been living in the U.S. for ten years and working full-time for a painting company, a situation that affords her little time to experience the computer technologies that engaged her daughter. Ha faced mother-daughter disconnections through her daughter's media consumption by the fact that the more she spent long hours at work, the less she was able to understand her daughter's role in consumer culture. Although Ha often bought different Vietnamese music DVDs for her daughter, she notes, "the girl never wanted to listen. When she was small, she ignored Xuan Mai's songs, songs for kids. She only just watched cartoon ...from American channels that she liked." Ha faced cultural and linguistic challenges in her home with her only daughter, since she did not speak English and her daughter did not understand Vietnamese. She recalled, "As a little girl, she didn't know anything...not even had been in school yet, she still didn't want to watch Vietnamese [movie,] only liked to watch American cartoon." Banet-Weiser explains, "that is, the way in which children are constructed as consumers – is more complicated than assuming that kids are either innocent or not" (p. 75). She emphasizes the complexity of social power that every child has a choice as a savvy consumer (p. 76). Ha's daughter choice to watch cartoon characters over Vietnamese movies, confirming Banet-Weiser's analysis. Ha faced the generational divide where she did not belong to her child's consumer culture. She stated, "If I turned on any channel in Vietnamese language, she left...I told her sit closer [to me,] she looked away...Now she is 12 years old." Nhu Ha's narrative reveals her misery at witnessing her daughter's consumption behavior by preferring mainstream cartoon channels to the Vietnamese language, music, and culture. However, in

responding to her mother, Rachel Duong, an 11 year-old 7th grader who is comfortable with the Internet environment and good with computer keyboard typing, said: “I don’t know, [we need to] communicate more often...or...yeah...[when my parents turn on Vietnamese music, I am] confused because I don’t know what they’re listening to.” Duong often talked to her parents in English, although she was intentionally sent to the Vietnamese language school. Facing language barriers in the consumer culture, Duong admitted: “Yeah, I play a few games... because most of the games are in English.” Although her mother, Nhu Ha, is worried about her mother-daughter cultural gap, Duong confidently stated: “Having to show [my parents] like how to do things on the Internet and how to work it, and what to use it for.” Rachel’s comfortable attitude in showing her parents how to interact with the online network environment supports Banet-Weiser’s discussion: “While some interventions certainly are important, effects research is limited in what it can tell us about the nature of children actively participating with the media” (p. 4). Rachel’s story is representative for many Vietnamese American children who are considered to be active agents in digital media consumption.

While noting Nhu Ha’s concerns regarding mother-daughter conflicts, I support the scholarship of Kibria, Park, and Banet-Weiser in their claim that many children are socially savvy and not necessarily corrupted by what they might view through the mainstream media. The Vietnamese traditional belief that the social environment is the most important aspect in generational conflicts oversimplifies the causes and effects of consumption on children’s lives. It is understandable for parents to worry about their children’s consumption of video games, sexual photos, and pornographic movies on television and the Internet. However, children are not as naive as their parents suspect. To Vietnamese parents dealing with the legacy of their

war-torn past, this kind of media can be like another war that is imposed on their children in the American society.

Like most parents today, Vietnamese American parents are most concerned about children's consumption of pornography²². Some Vietnamese parents in my study, such as Mi Vo and Tom Doan, even interpret sexy photos or love scenes from DVDs or video in the Internet as inappropriate for teenagers. Despite the fact that many students receive their parents' permission to watch movies in sex education classes at school, some of these parents consider all of these media to be unsuitable for Vietnamese teenagers' educational experiences. For instance, Tom Doan complains: "I think that the U.S. schools are very liberal because with parents' permission, students are allowed to study sex education during their sixth or seventh grades." Doan asserts, "This is prohibited in Vietnamese culture. I think it is very dangerous for students to learn about that." Like Doan, many other traditional Vietnamese parents perceive sex education negatively, and are concerned about their children's consumption of sexually explicit videos in school sex education classes because they came from a restricted culture, where they could once control their children's viewing.

Notwithstanding their children's agency, many Vietnamese parents are still worried that their children are easily influenced by network characters, as if they are passive agents. Their main concern is whether sexual photos and pornography on the Internet and television will have negative effects on their children's development. Jeordan Legon (2003) reports that a research company in Seattle estimated in late 2003, there were "over 1.3 million sites serving up about 260 million pages of erotic content" (p. 1). Parental concerns about effects resulting from Vietnamese American children's consumption of pornography demonstrate a strict norm of

²² Pornography: See Appendix A

parental power in the Vietnamese traditional background. “A recent University of New Hampshire study found that 4 out of 10 American youths, ages 10 to 17, have seen pornography online, and two-thirds say it was uninvited,” says Charles Cooper (2007). He continues, “there's a very good chance your kids are going to see penises, vaginas, breasts and any combination thereof rubbing against each other, without you even knowing” (Cooper p. 1). Like Cooper, a 1998 Kahn-Egan study shows that “48% of third through eighth graders reported having visited Internet sites with various types of ‘adult’ content. Sexual sites were the most popular of the adult Internet sites” (qtd. Greenfield (2004), p. 6). With evidence, Greenfield demonstrates that Internet pornography captures a vast audience of children through new media technologies and television.

I argue that sex photos and pornography reinforce cultural hegemony and gender patriarchy, where the capitalist system dominates television, computers, and the Internet to use women and teenage girls as “entertaining objects.” Shimizu (2007) critiques the representation of Southeast Asian women in pornography where white male filmmakers center their films on the subjectivity of Asian women’s sexuality (p. 28). Shimizu emphasizes how Southeast Asian women are described as being accessible for sexual favors for men. In general, many women of color are portrayed as exotic sexual objects to the consuming public. My investigation of pornography consumption on television and the Internet confirms Shimizu’s argument and demonstrates that such consumption generates greater intergenerational conflicts between parents and children in contemporary Vietnamese American families. In my study, Mi Vo stated that “They watch sex photos online.” Vo was worried about her grandsons and their friends purchasing sex photos on the Internet, and she critiqued how young girls show off on the camera while young guys shoot provocative pictures and then upload these sex images on the Internet

and send photos for friends to check out. Vo criticizes television that portrays young girls as “entertainment objects” through pornography. She saw on television one evening, a “[pornography-like] program where girls hold their breast up, take a part of their shirt off and they laugh. Why these things were allowed to air on television at 10:00 p.m., why don’t they wait to advertise these sexy showcases until midnight? It is terrible.” Vo opposed commercial programs for failing to protect children from the destructive behavior of consumption. She felt “sorry for the kids. Media [television, computers, and the Internet] keeps showing these things to negatively influence the kids that are why the kids turn to be degenerated.” Mi Vo was also worried that her grandsons might access porn rentals online that their parents would normally censor. She is concerned that the unsuitable content on television and the Internet might affect her grandchildren’s social development.

Like Vo, Tom Doan reports that “while I am at work, my children can turn on the computer at home and browse many porn websites or view porn ads that just pop up on the monitor.” Doan states that he watches his sons closely, but was worried that if his sons were with their friends, they might be influenced by inappropriate behavior. This could lead to porn consumption, and he fears that unexpected things might happen. From Doan’s viewpoint, although he was thrilled with the tremendous growth of the Internet, he admitted that the Internet environment is not safe for the fact that porn ads pop up randomly. He believed that he had to monitor his son very carefully because in general, “it is difficult to teach young teens from 7th to 11th or 12th grade.”

Another parental concern is that exposure to violent games is as dangerous as the explicit sexual aggressions because of a fear that children might become victimized. Hoa Nguyen is worried that some kids might be influenced by evil characters, and that they might act like the

real characters of the games. She said, “They would carry guns to school and shoot people.” Comments on electronic video game consumption on television and the Internet reveal mixed feelings between Vietnamese American parents and their children. To protect children from the unsuitable contents of global commercialization, Banet-Weiser points out that images and narratives should be clearly examined and interpreted to flesh out the complications and inconsistencies in communication technologies (p. 41).

My study shows that some of these parental concerns are exacerbated by language barriers, social isolation, socioeconomic issues and their lack of involvement in the mainstream culture. These problems increase misunderstandings in parent-child relationships in many contemporary Vietnamese American families. Hoa Nguyen worried that her ten-year-old American-born Vietnamese son, Michael Nguyen, who barely understood Vietnamese, will develop individualistic consumption values as he grows up. Hoa Nguyen states that, “Up to this point, [my son] begins to use computer more often to play game, so I am hurried to learn computer in order to monitor him in case he plays bad games as he grows up.” Despite his mother’s concerns, Michael Nguyen states: “I want to learn to hack a game, which I don’t know how to... Yes, I’m too small, [but] I like violent game... bloody... alcohol... sexual things, and that’s it. I don’t know, because... I like shooting.” Hoa Nguyen is also concerned about the aggressive activities in children. Mike Falcon (2001) reports a study of Stanford Medical Center researchers, who found that “aggressive acts by third and fourth-grade students dropped 25% after TV and video game use was cut down or eliminated.” Falcon continues: “Incidents of verbally aggressive behavior — teasing, taunting, threatening — were cut in half” (p. 1). Like Falcon, Elizabeth Larkin et al. (2005) show that “violent themes in video games have negative effects” (p. 82). In agreement with Larkin et al., many Vietnamese American parents such as

Hoa Nguyen are concerned that their children might consume these kinds of products and, as a consequence practice violent actions in their real lives.

In addition to their concerns about the effects of violent media, parents also have concerns about their general loss or lack of control over their children. Kibria reports one informant's story, "I have children and I can't educate them. The films and TV show bad things, things which are not suited for an Asian culture. On TV, they show love couples doing things, and I think that way it directly teaches the children bad behavior" (p. 146). This respondent's narrative emphasizes a lack of parental power and the triumph of mainstream media consumption, as a result of language and cultural conflicts.

Despite their parents' concerns, many Vietnamese American kids are not passively influenced by characters on mainstream shows or TV. For example, Nickelodeon designs programs mostly for mainstream children, and in discussing the principal of individualistic values, Banet-Weiser indicates that on Nickelodeon, children are recognized "and their status as consumer citizens does not indicate that children are somehow victimized and without agency" (p. 4). I agree with Banet-Weiser's argument regarding children's role as active consumer citizens. Some children's games on television channels, such as Nickelodeon, illustrate parents' lost power, as Banet-Weiser states: "part of Nickelodeon's explicit mission is to air programs that kids like to watch, not those that their parents would like them to watch" (p. 20). Nickelodeon recognizes and capitalizes on 'child power' in consumer culture. Many Vietnamese American parents are worried that this dominant capitalist strategy will degrade parent-child relationships as their children 'inherit' mainstream American values. This situation is even more complex as many Vietnamese parents rely on their children's translation and technological skills to help them understand English and access the computer and the Internet. In this context, the

role is reversed and children provide support to their parents. This creates tension for Vietnamese parents, such as Tom Doan. He states that, “I am also afraid that schools in the U.S. will always follow legal regulations where teachers care too much about individualism and the rights of students and parents need to access students’ information.” Doan is concerned with the fact that parents seem to lose power over their children in many ways. Vietnamese parents’ loss of authority is contradictory to Vietnamese traditional culture.

As Park argues, “[f]or second-generation Asian Americans, who find themselves bridging both Asia and America, the consumption of status-laden material goods becomes an important initial step towards establishing one’s social citizenship within the United States” (p. 4). As all of my interviews with parents revealed, young Vietnamese identities develop between the two cultures, where limited household incomes restrict their opportunities for consumption. Current immigration policies show how Asian Americans used the perception of their social class status to claim their rights. “There is a central assumption that the greater one’s wealth, the greater one’s protection from racism and bigotry – that you will become ‘American’ and no longer foreign by establishing yourself as (economically) worthy” (p. 6). At times, parents present their concerns as “cultural,” but the distinction between their children’s alienation from the Vietnamese culture and their alienation from parents is unclear and complex. For example, while some Vietnamese parents believe that their children would prefer to speak English than Vietnamese, and become more Americanized through consumer culture, Kibria observes that “young Vietnamese Americans upheld and affirmed the importance of family ties in their lives and expressed support for preserving the traditional Vietnamese family system in the United States” (p. 145). The parental perception of the influence of media discourses in the lives of the young Vietnamese Americans is intricate, so it is impossible to explain through oversimplifying

the influences of the social environment, or by simple cause and effect. My research supports a scholarly reluctance toward a simple functionalist model. Damon Thompson, Surgeon General Communications Director clarifies that, “the key factor regarding video gaming is that we simply don't have enough research at this point to form conclusions” (Falcon 2001, p. 1). Thompson points out that the issue of video games and their effects on children is complex, and that scholarly work should be done.

Conclusion

My study found that although the legacy of living in a poor, war-torn country creates lingering psychological trauma in many first-generation Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant families, parents continue to preserve their traditional heritage through their attitudes toward the adoption of consumer culture. They demonstrate their concerns about the consumption of video games and pornography on television, computers and the Internet that shape their children's growth. In general, unlike American parents, most Vietnamese parents face language and technological obstacles, and are highly concerned about their children's consumerism, especially during adolescence. These parents brought a common set of Confucian family and cultural values with them to the United States.

In addition, many Vietnamese parents depend on their children's help in translation services as they enable their children to participate in media consumption, such as buying a television or ordering the Internet services. Vietnamese children play an active role as consumers and achieve certain power. In this context, their parents are concerned about how consumer culture affects these children in terms of individualism and Americanization. By involving themselves in the process of consumption, parents create a cross-generational

connection, but also may experience the complexity of intergenerational cultural conflicts when they feel a loss of parental control over their children.

When it comes to media consumption, parent-child relationships are particularly complex, but not completely conflicted. Both Vietnamese American parents and their children do not fully participate in the mainstream culture, due to language, educational, and economic hardships. Banet-Weiser affirms that “[c]hildren, as with other minority groups within a predominately white, male-centered society, have historically lacked access to power,” a statement that is still very realistic in contemporary capitalist society (p. 25). At the same time, my study respondents felt that they must participate in consumer culture to “prove” they belong to the mainstream culture.

Through my research, I learned that while Vietnamese children gain access to mainstream culture through media consumption, this act can be both in cohesion or conflict with their parents. The language in question that the parents worried about was the “vernacular” of consumer culture found in television, computers and the Internet as well as their limited English proficiency. Among these Vietnamese respondents, I conclude that older parents who lack English proficiency and computer skills feel more vulnerable to the influences of media consumption as their teenagers play games, watch videos or pornography on television and the Internet. The parents whose language skills, both literal and symbolic, are more sophisticated fare better. In studies of contemporary consumer culture, little scholarship addresses cross-cultural consumption. More research needs to be developed to study the personal aspirations of Vietnamese parents and their children in maintaining traditional heritage during their cultural adaptation. Although the desire for media consumption could promote or degrade the values of Vietnamese traditional culture, more scholarly work on family dynamics should be conducted to

flesh out our understanding of how Vietnamese Americans struggle to adjust during acculturation.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNDERSTANDING VIETNAMESE AMERICAN STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE LENS OF TECHNOLOGY

Introduction

Technology has already made tremendous progress in the 21st century, but rather than mitigate the gap between “the haves and have-nots,” technological developments have contributed to a “digital divide.”²³ In many marginalized communities where poor families face intersecting barriers of race, language, culture, and socioeconomic hardships, technological barriers now add to their burden. Complicating this issue, many children in these families are educated and learn technological skills in mainstream culture. Their computer usage is mostly during their time at school. While computer use at school seems to bridge the digital divide, Matthew DeBell and Chris Chapman (2006) point out, “Differences in the rates of computer use are smaller at school than they are at home when considering such characteristics as race/ethnicity, family income, and parental education” (p. 38). From the authors’ perspective, the digital divide is growing in poor residential areas, where racial discrimination and socioeconomic hardship challenge school children who need to use computers at home. Nickerson and Zodhiates (1988) argue that, for educational purposes, underprivileged students initially learn technology at school. “Home is unlikely to be an alternative place for access to the technology” for marginalized students (p. 221). The authors contrast that with their more privileged peers in-home access to technology. Their analysis confirms DeBell and Chapman’s

²³ “Digital Divide”: See appendix A

argument, which emphasizes the primacy of computer use in the school environment for underprivileged students.

Despite the fact that schools play an important role in bridging the technological gap, the scholarship of Neal, Smith, and McCormick (2008), Servon (2002), Schon, Sanyal and Mitchell (1999), and Oakes (1988) critique unequal distribution of resources between rich and poor institutions. The authors assert that the technology gap between wealthy and deprived schools institutionalizes disparities between children who live in poverty and those who live in prosperity. “Only about 40 percent of middle schools in low-socioeconomic communities had as many as fifteen microcomputers,” argued Oakes, “In contrast to high-socioeconomic communities where two-thirds of the middle schools had at least this number” (p. 117). He claims that the lack of computers is even worse in poor elementary schools. While school is considered the only place that provides these students the opportunity to use computers, Vrasidas and Glass (2005) report that marginalized children study in poor schools where technology is unaffordable. Many schools have a lack of funds for technology, and a lack of teachers with technological skills. The authors conclude, “Poor and minority children are less likely to have teachers with adequate technology training” (p. 32).

Khatharya Um (2003) claims that many underprivileged Southeast Asian students are treated unequally in schools, and experience a lack of essential support because they do not speak proficient English. They are not only mistakenly referred to inappropriate levels, such as special education programs, but also “are presented with additional obstacles by virtue of being students of color and/or as English-language learners” (p. 3). The author is concerned with the fact that the special needs of Southeast Asian students, including Vietnamese American children, were ignored. These students face incredibly difficult obstacles, as they are considered

“foreigners.” Cultural norms cause extra impediments to these students’ academic accomplishment.

While some Vietnamese American children in educated families receive parental help, their low income counterparts in uneducated households seek assistance from their teachers, relatives, and peers. They also try to teach their parents basic computer skills, such as how to email and surf the Internet, in order to bridge the digital divide within the domestic space. Some children face technological conflicts at home with their illiterate and unskilled parents. Additionally, access to technology does not alone guarantee narrowing the digital divide between underprivileged and privileged students. For instance, another aspect of the digital divide is that there were not enough highly skilled IT teachers in underfunded and minority schools. From Paul DiMaggio et al. (2001) report, marginalized students in underfunded schools face disadvantages because only limited numbers of teachers are well-trained in information technology use in these institutions. Like DiMaggio et al., Davison (2005) argues that “schools in affluent middle-class areas increasingly tend to use computers to support higher-order thinking through creative project work,” while “those in low-income inner city areas still use computers predominantly to reinforce students’ mastery of basic skills through drill and practice activities” (p. 106).

My study sheds light on the ways in which underprivileged Vietnamese American children manage to overcome technological disadvantages. It also endeavors to observe the ways these children bridge the technological divide between themselves and their parents. With tremendous efforts, these students help minimize social exclusion, cultural differences and racial conflicts. Johnson (2006), and Andersen and Taylor (2008) recognize that the issues of race and class are interrelated because these factors are socially constructed and are produced by the same

system. I acknowledge that my analysis will be limited without understanding the intersection of race, class, and socioeconomic status, which support the authors' arguments. In other words, examining class without relating it to race can be misinforming. This study aims to examine three interrelated themes: 1) how racial isolation and stereotypes affect ESL²⁴ Vietnamese American students as they try to overcome language, cultural and technological challenges; 2) how socioeconomic issues contribute to unequal access to technology between affluent and poor public schools, which affects students' academic achievement; 3) how parental education, marriage, and involvement influence children's attitudes about computer usage toward academic success. The narratives of Vietnamese children interviewees will be analyzed concerning their use of computers at school and at home. I argue that the interaction of race and socioeconomic status, along with linguistic, cultural, and technological challenges, shapes the complex relationships between Vietnamese American students, their parents, and teachers, as they interact through technology and education.

Research Methods

I conducted oral history interviews of a group of Vietnamese American adolescents and teenagers in the greater Seattle area. My aim was to look for recurrent themes and patterns as they emerged during the interviews. I investigated whether these students experience the technology gaps based on racial, socioeconomic, and parental involvement and education. I explored these interviewees' ideas by asking open-ended questions, which helped them to freely articulate their feelings, inspirations and viewpoints in their own ways. In this interviewing experience, many elder teenagers contentedly expressed their opinions, while a couple of younger adolescents felt uncomfortable in voicing their concerns. I also observed that a few

²⁴ ESL: See Appendix A

American-born Vietnamese students were no longer willing to participate because they felt uncomfortable talking about how technology affected their personal issues at home and at school. My obligation was to be patient, understanding, and to respect interviewees' points of views and circumstances. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) state, "fieldwork requires patient attention to the routine features of social action" (p. 133). My interview experience confirms the authors' logical assertion. Therefore, I tried to be patient to explain my study carefully to some interviewees who initially hesitated to reveal their personal stories after reading a series of my questions. As Lindlof and Taylor state, the researcher must work "to foster trust, to understand sensitive relationships, and to create a record of discourse that can subsequently be analyzed" (p. 4). My data from summer 2009 interviews with Vietnamese American participants corroborated the authors' analysis.

As a qualitative researcher, I respected my interviewees' perceptions as they revealed their different experiences and backgrounds in response to open-ended questions. While personal history is an incomplete method of learning about the research area, I recognized that the complexity of subjects described in interviewees' narratives offered me essential information. This interviewee group included 14 Vietnamese American students of the 1.5 and second-generation Vietnamese Americans. Among them, there were 11 males and three females, with ages ranging from eight to 19 including three Vietnamese-born and 11 American-born children, all of whom are students in Seattle and the surrounding areas. Their educational background ranked them from fifth to 12th grade. They included four elementary school students (two female and two male), two middle school students (one female and one male), and eight male high school students. Of the high school students, three were 12th graders - two have been accepted by community colleges and one by the University of Washington.

The oral history interviews were conducted in a flexible time frame due to the working hours of interviewees' parents. While many interviews took place in the Vietnamese language schools – Van Lang and Dac Lo – others were at the interviewees' private residences. Some Vietnamese parents allowed me to interview their children before or during the evening class period while their parents voluntarily help Vietnamese language teachers in classes or outdoor activities. Other parents, who work long hours during the day/night shifts, gave me permission to interview their children before or after breakfasts/dinners at their homes.

These narratives present the larger family-school issues of Vietnamese American communities. As a heterogeneous group, these students responded differently regarding their computer access and usage, parental education and involvement, and socioeconomic backgrounds, all of which affected their academic attainment. These main factors created a gap not only between mainstream peers and Vietnamese American students, but also between more affluent and poor Vietnamese participants.

Literature Review

A greater understanding of how Asian Americans face racial stereotypes is furthered by Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou (2004), who analyze how “model minority” stereotypes portray inaccurate images of Asian Americans. As they emphasize, “The new stereotype – the model worker, the overachiever, the math maniac, or the science/computer nerd – carried with it a new set of distorted images of Asian-origin Americans and characterized them as anything but ‘normal’” (p. 1). Lee and Zhou critique practices in which Asian Americans have been misrepresented for a long period of time as successful inhabitants under the term “model minority.” In supporting the scholarship of Lee and Zhou, Hien Duc Do (1999) criticizes the consequences of the “model minority” stereotypes that are inflicted on Asian Pacific American

students and “Vietnamese Americans in particular. They have experienced pressure from teachers, parents, other students, and even from themselves, to conform to this image” (p. 90). These authors point out the negative effects of the “model minority” stereotype particularly imposed on many poor Vietnamese children, who grow up under socioeconomically insecure families trying to overcome disadvantages connected with racism and poverty. As Lee and Zhou argue, Asian American children including Vietnamese American youth, especially those in poverty, were lumped together under “model minority” stereotypes while they were portrayed as “nerds” or “geeks.” According to the authors, these children face an overwhelming school experience, where “they are considered a uniform group and deviant from ‘normal’ teenage Americans” (p. 1). The “model minority” myth ignores their difficulties, including racial inequality, social isolation, language barriers, and weakening educational services.

Racial stereotypes and isolation

My observations during an evening trip to Rachel Duong’s family on July 4th, 2009 for a schedule of interviews confirmed Lee and Zhou’s argument. Duong was an American-born Vietnamese, a native English speaker, and a 12 year-old seventh grader who felt isolated at home and at school. At home, Duong was unable to communicate effectively with her parents because they only spoke Vietnamese. While other teenagers celebrated July 4th, Duong stayed quiet in her own room. She recalled, “The culture in the school, sometimes I join certain events...sometime, I feel left out. Usually American things like the fourth of July or Halloween...I just like stay at home.” Although Duong often received good grades and knew basic computer skills including using word processing and surfing the Internet, Duong stated that she felt disconnected with her parents because of language, cultural and technological barriers. She conveyed, “I think it’s confusing a lot of the time because my parents usually don’t

understand what's happening at school. They thought I might be troubled or done something bad, which negatively affects my life.” Duong’s family, from my observation, was not only isolated from mainstream culture, but also were culturally and linguistically conflicted in the relationships between a daughter and her parents. Both of Duong’s parents struggled to work long hours to keep their low paid jobs as manual laborers. While they faced financial hardships, they were more focused on daily meals to survive than on their child’s emotional feelings. Thus, they often left their daughter alone at home without understanding what was going on in her daily activity, who was influenced by her peers at school. Duong’s situation must be distinguished from other middle-class Asian American children whose parents speak proficient English and earn higher incomes. Rachel Duong’s narrative uncovered ample evidence of such damage from the “model minority” myth, because it devalues the hindrances and complexities that Asian Americans encounter, and ignores the special needs of Southeast Asian American communities, including Vietnamese Americans.

In some exceptional cases, some Vietnamese American children’s conditions match the “model minority” images as “overachiever,” such as Skyler Hoang, Patrick Vu, Evans Lam, and Sophia Trinh. These children came from two-parent refugee and immigrant families. These parents had been living in the U.S. since the 1980s, except Vu’s parents who have lived in the U.S. since 2001. Carl L. Bankston III (1998) argues, “Living in a two-parent home and living in a multiple-generation home both have strong influences on how well Vietnamese students do in school” (p. 180). The narratives of these outstanding Vietnamese student interviewees support Bankston’s analysis. Although their two parents had been through socioeconomic hardships, they finally gained career mobility in mainstream society to support their children’s education and access to technology.

Skyler Hoang's father became a manager in a medical packing company; Evans Lam's mother, a supervisor in an information technology center; and Sophia Trinh's father, a postdoctoral medical researcher. Although Vu's parents worked long hours, were low paid, and still struggled with language, cultural, and technological barriers, they finally overcame their obstacles and owned a nice house in a middle class neighborhood. These parents were influenced by the Vietnamese proverb: "Sacrifice the father's life to rebuild his children's generation."

Despite the cases of Hoang, Vu, Lam and Trinh, the majority of Asian Americans, particularly many young Vietnamese American interviewees who grew up in this modern culture, not only face poor conditions in deprived neighborhoods, but they are subject to scarcity of technological resources, disadvantaged schools, and troublesome social surroundings. In Seattle, Servon (2002) reports that at least 75% of its "residents have a computer in their home as compared with 51 percent of US households. Groups who do not have access tend to be older, low-income, low-education, and African American or Latino" (p. 200-201). My contention supports Servon's account because many Vietnamese American children belong to social disadvantage and low-income families. Bidgoli (2004) reports, although 98% American schools have computers, schools in low-income neighborhoods are nearly 25% less likely to have Internet connectivity, while the ratio of students to computers may be up to 30% higher (p. 469). My findings support Bidgoli's arguments and further show that my Vietnamese participants struggle with the technological gap from their unskilled parents. Khatharya Um (2003) reports from census data that the majority of first-generation Southeast Asian refugee parents face limited educational achievement or are completely illiterate in their native language. While many struggle with their limited English proficiency (LEP), others lack understanding of the

American educational system. Um concludes, “As a result, many Southeast Asian parents can neither relate to the problems that their children face in school nor effectively advocate for them” (p. 2). Um points out difficulties that disadvantaged Southeast Asian students face in academics. For instance, “The school is ended at 2:05 p.m.” Quy Luong stated, “I usually stayed after school until 5:00 p.m. and ask my teacher to come to the library to help. Sometimes some librarians help me search the websites in King County.” Luong worked harder than his peers because of his language and technological challenges.

Like Luong, Frank Ly, an 18 year-old 12th grader, tried to learn computer skills from his peers. He stated, “I learned computer from my friends, I watch them and they teach me some stuff, but I have to try for myself.” Ly felt excited because he recently passed an interview to work part-time in a computer store. He recalled, “I got a job and I start buying some parts and I put them together and I learn from my mistakes, and I get better.” Although he came from a disadvantaged background, Ly’s desire was to improve his computer skills. He stated, “I understand a lot about technology, but there are many things I haven’t known yet, I want to learn those.”

While these children, like Luong and Ly, needed extra help from teachers and friends to do homework and/or learn computer skills, they spend time to teach their parents to use a computer, such as opening and saving files in a word processing program, navigating the Internet and/or checking emails. Frank Ly tried to teach his parents how to turn on/off a computer and surf the Internet in Vietnamese because his parents did not know how to access the school’s websites to check his progress from the school district’s websites, “The Source.” He noted, “Teachers tell them to do it. They don’t understand what teachers say in the conference. I have

to translate for them.” Ly acknowledged that the digital divide, language and cultural barriers, isolated his parents and himself from mainstream education.

Racial Isolation

My first examination focuses on how ESL Vietnamese American students face racial isolation as they try to overcome the obstacles of language and technological barriers. Despite earning good grades, many Vietnamese students are portrayed as “unintelligent” or “incapable” because they are not native English speakers. Patrick Vu, a 17-year old 11th grader in Aviation High School, revealed how he was discriminated against due to his language barrier while taking ESL classes in middle school. He stated, “In my ESL classes for sixth and seventh grades and, like, [mainstream] students think that people hold ESL like stupid, not capable.” Vu demonstrated great efforts to overcome his language barrier. He recalled, “I try to prove them wrong, like, I do way better than them in math and science, but when it comes to English, I’m a little weak, but you know I improve English as I go on.” Although he faced negative racial stereotypes, Vu was able to excel at school through his self-motivation.

A 19 year-old twelfth grader, Quy Luong also experienced racial isolation because of his language and technological barriers. As he has been living in the U.S. for one and a half years, Luong felt isolated in the class settings. He stated, “[my classmates] ignored me...yeah. I have too much trouble in that. Sometimes, if they have fun stories or some stuff like that, they just talk to the other students, not talking with me.” Luong was challenged by his limited vocabulary, which caused him more difficulty to learn computer language. As school work was “not only from the book, but also on the computer,” Luong was stressed about his limitation in technology. Since he lacked opportunity to study computers or technology in Viet Nam, he revealed, “when I came here, I get some troubles on computer. I just know how to open email or

send [emails] to other people.” In U.S. history and science classes, Luong struggled with new vocabulary because “there are about ten words, but about seven new terms.” While Luong was challenged to study subjects in social science, he became more interactive with other students in science class. He recalled, “In math class, I also teach the other student for math and I don’t talk too much in English, but I show them the number and the way how to do the problem.” Despite the fact that Luong was an intelligent ESL student, he felt “alienated” from mainstream students and “Americanized” Vietnamese American peers. Luong recalled, “I took ESL courses...I [do] not really fit in my school environment.” Although in his school, there were many Vietnamese students, Luong “not usually talk with them because they’ve been living in the U.S. for a long time. They wanted to suitable with culture in America so they just [hang out] with other people from other countries.” Luong felt there was a gap not only between him and mainstream classmates, but also between himself and other “Americanized” Vietnamese peers; thus he felt uncomfortable to be around them.

Luong’s personal feeling of exclusion was part of the larger social isolation of underprivileged students within the school context. Um asserts, “Enrollment in the school’s academic programs reflect a marked disparity among the racial groups; a disproportionate number of Southeast Asian students are clustered in remedial courses, which may suggest a pattern of informal tracking” (p. 4). Luong’s statement corroborates Um’s investigation concerning how Southeast Asian students are racially segregated: “I have two or three friends in school, yeah, they just come to the U.S. about five years. They’re very friendly and they help me to use computer.” Luong only could make friendships with new immigrant peers who often helped him. The bond between them demonstrates that many minority students faced racial

isolation at school, which supports Um's analysis. Thus, their isolation is partly imposed by the school in practices such as remedial tracking, but also by social dynamics of peers at the school.

Like his elder brother, Quy Luong, Tung Luong had lived in the U.S. for almost two years. At the time of interview, Tung Luong was a 13 year-old eighth grader. At first, he felt isolated at school because of the language barrier. While he studied ESL, Luong felt shock as American and other Vietnamese peers spoke proficient English. He stated, "Well, it was a shock! I don't know how to speak English and I don't know where to go next...and then I got lost...It was like a mess in my mind." More surprisingly, Luong's efforts to overcome language isolation made him more confident than his older brother. Later, he became an honor student, felt like he fit into the school environment, and easily interacted with Vietnamese and mainstream peers from different ethnic groups. The good friendship among his peers has led to a multicultural ideology. He stated, "They treat me like a real friend. They don't care that I'm Asian." Luong received assistance from his peers and developed his technological skills. He confided, "They help me about my study and technological skills...We make two video that put on YouTube and we make our own websites." Tung Luong and his older brother may experience their technology adaptation differently within the school environment because of the age gap. Although they both faced racial isolation because of the language barrier, the younger one found ways around at least some of it.

As my findings indicate, American-born Vietnamese also face racial isolation because of their Asian appearance. Allan Nguyen, a 17 year-old twelfth grader, although speaking proficient English and having computer skills, was still portrayed as a "foreigner" who could not speak proficient English because of his appearance. Nguyen revealed, "Sometime I hear people just remarking, like people [who] can speak English well make fun of those who can't [speak

proficient English]...At first, when people meet me, they think, you know, a typical Asian can't speak English." Nguyen noted how Asian stereotypes about appearance and the language barrier, caused people to significantly look down on young Asian Americans.

In an interesting contrast with the language stereotype, Nguyen was nevertheless also considered "smart" and was marked as a "model minority." He recalled, "They still stereotype me, but in a fun way like 'you're really smart'...I don't really mind, but at first there was difficulty." Nguyen was aware that "it's still going on, but not as a big scale as in the past." His narrative revealed that racial discrimination still haunts Asian American students.

Thomas Nguyen, Allan Nguyen's younger brother, a 16 year-old student who spoke proficient English, faced racial stereotypes because he looked "Asian," but acted like he was Black. In recalling how he was portrayed as Black rather than Vietnamese American, he explained, "Because the way I talk to them, they look at me like I'm Black in the inside." The Asian racial stereotype depressed him; he thinks his peers perceived him as "Oh, another Asian guy, he must be good at math," and "Oh, he probably helps me with my homework or something like that." Nguyen experienced tension due to his academic ability when mainstream peers embraced the myth of the "model minority."

Despite the fact that many of the poor Vietnamese American children whom I interviewed faced racial stereotypes and social isolation, they tried to achieve their educational goals. For instance, Allan Nguyen was still in high school when he had begun to plan for a future graduate program: "I try to get my high school diploma, and after that I planned to attend South Seattle Community College to get my associate [degree], and might be attend Washington State University to get a Master's degree in Architecture." In dreaming of successfully completing advanced education, Nguyen symbolizes the bigger picture of minority students who

try to fit in and achieve the American dream in the mainstream society under socioeconomic hardship.

My exploration revealed exceptional narratives of American-born Vietnamese American students in middle class families, who felt completely opposite from poor students concerning racial integration in their school environment. Skyler Hoang described his easy home-school surroundings that fostered his study: “My teachers are always there, I ask my parents when I’m at home, and computers...they help out a lot because you have access to the Internet, and you get a lot of information on the Internet.” From Hoang’s perspective, the school environment is very friendly because students get to know one another and they really help each other out. He recalled, “If I have a problem, they just come and ask me about it and they just help out.” Hoang’s ideology reflected a multicultural society where “it’s not only you got fit in with your racial group, you also blending with other racial groups because you can have friends that don’t have to be the same race.” Hoang believed in multicultural interaction where he had a wide variety of friends. In Hoang’s viewpoint, school is a racially interactive environment because “you can be friend with anybody you want at school as long as you’re open to their ideas and beliefs.”

Like Skyler Hoang, interviewee Daniel Vuong was an 11 year old fifth grader. His perspective supports racial interaction in school environments. He stated, “Even though they are Americans, they’re like a family or so, they treat you as a friend, more like a friend, more like a family. I feel really fit in because they treat me as a person and who I am.” Skyler Hoang and Daniel Vuong are examples of privileged Vietnamese children who live in secure socioeconomic conditions and benefit from protective divorced parents, good schools, and safe vicinities, which ensure better opportunities for their educational achievement.

Unequal access to technology

My second investigation, in contrast, focuses on how race and socioeconomic issues interconnect and contribute to unequal access to technology between affluent and poor public schools, which affects students' academic achievement. While racial "discrimination is a third factor that reinforces the digital divide," Servon argues, "schools in low-income areas that overwhelmingly house children of color are much less likely to provide quality access, training, and content than are schools in wealthier districts" (p. 10). In my study, some poor Vietnamese children lived in insecure environments, were ignored by their parents, and/or received only partial support from their teachers. These interviewees lived with parents in low-income neighborhoods, where poor public school communities provided limited technological resources, which affected their academic success.

At the time of the interview, Thomas Nguyen was 16 years old, an American-born Vietnamese high school student in South Community Center, who lived with his single grandmother in a housing apartment for low-income elders in southwest Seattle. Nguyen grew up dealing with an emotional pain because of abandonment by his biological parents when enmeshed in poverty. While his grandmother needed his help in using a computer, Nguyen unhappily stated: "I think negatively is she always asks me about computer and stuff like that...I don't know how to type, I type with three fingers." At school, Nguyen did not fit in and he had a feeling of isolation, which made him regularly skip classes and miss multiple days of school. He recalled, "Since me skipped in school, [nobody] really cares what I do at school because they know it's just kind of...get it worst, and I don't think my parents or guardian actually understand me as well. I can't tell them things because they always think that I'm lie." Nguyen felt depressed as nobody in his family understands who he truly is. This triggers a reaction of

explosive anger that makes him feel like completely a different person. He stated, “My eye color can change color from blue to green...basically instead of just mentally hurt someone, you can actually physically hurt someone...It’s only happen to me once but it almost went too far me against expel from school period.” Nguyen’s anger and violence caused him trouble at school. His anger problems are a consequence of being an abandoned child and of a misunderstanding with his grandmother because she always sees him as a little boy or a “wrong kid.” Zhou and Bankston point out that, “Children with poorly educated and unskilled parents...often find themselves growing up in underprivileged neighborhoods subject to poverty, poor schools, violence, drugs, and a generally disruptive social environment” (p. 7). The authors confirm that substandard socioeconomic status challenges students’ academic success, which leads them to drop out at higher rates in high school, and to form negative attitudes. While Thomas Nguyen’s low performance at school confirms Zhou and Bankston’s argument, his anger additionally demonstrates the circumstances of unfortunate Vietnamese children who were denied by their biological parents.

Although not facing the same situation as Thomas Nguyen, many poor Vietnamese students relied on help from teachers or peers. They, in turn, help by teaching their parents basic computer skills, such as emailing and surfing the Internet, to bridge the digital divide within the domestic space. Many interviewees lived with poorly educated parents in low-income neighborhoods, where poor public school communities provide limited resources that affect their academic success.

As a newcomer, Quy Luong studies in a poor public school in South West Seattle where students only need to learn basic computer skills, such as surfing the Internet, creating PowerPoint slideshows, and using Microsoft Word. For example, his teachers showed him how

to go to Google.com or Yahoo.com to search for online information. He recalled, “Right now I don’t need too much skill for computer. I have to know about [PowerPoint] presentation or Microsoft to type something...so about technology, the requirement for school, we don’t have to know [more than] that.” Luong often stayed late at school to do homework because his parents were unable to help him. While his father was a baker, his mother was a manicurist. Both of them faced language barriers in their low paying jobs where they worked long hours. Luong recalled, “My parents cannot help [me] for school work because they don’t know English.” When his school had a meeting with parents, Luong relied on his grandfather’s assistance. He revealed, “My grandpa does it for me. At least, he knows some more English than my parents.”

Last year, Luong failed the WASL²⁵ because of his barrier in English proficiency. Studying in crowded classes was a disadvantage for him because he did not have a chance to ask the teacher questions during the class period. He said, “If I want to graduate, I have to pass WASL.” Luong retested for the WASL and passed writing and reading tests, but he still remained concerned about other subjects, “I’m not sure about my speaking and listening for English skill.” Unlike most high-school graduates, Luong was still a 12th grader even though he was 19. In The Seattle Times, Trish Dziko, a cofounder of The Technology Access Foundation, discusses her concern about how large class sizes in Seattle Public Schools affected underprivileged students’ learning: “Too many students...have a strong desire to learn but haven’t received important core skills in the classroom” (as cited in Shaw, 2006). Luong’s account is an example that confirms Dziko’s claim.

²⁵ WASL: See Appendix A

Evans Lam is a 17 year-old tenth grader in Aviation High School.²⁶ Lam remembered his middle school where technology was scarce. He remarked, “There was very few tech labs and computers and teachers, classrooms were not be like the whole set of 16 or 24, it would be like two or three, and I notice that a lot of kids also did not receive the help that we would need.” Lam was concerned with the fact that the students’ failure is not only their fault, but also “their parents’ and their teachers’ faults for not helping them.”

Lam also remembered in his elementary school that underprivileged students not only faced problems with technology, but they were also challenged by issues of having teachers who had limited knowledge of technology. As he revealed, “my teacher had problem with computers... the teacher wasn’t that well-trained, but her job wasn’t [specialized in] computer and my mom, she knew computer, so she came in and she helped one day and [helped my teacher] figure out the problems.” Lam’s story reveals that teachers in underfunded schools are often under-trained and overloaded. Likewise, Andrea Tran, a 10 year-old fourth grader, stated, “within technical stuff, one of my teachers, Ms. Belington, she is not very good at it...but, in my class there is one guy who named Ben helps her.” According to Warschauer (2003) and Nickerson and Zodhiates (1988), low income students receive unequal technological resources in their poor schools. Their disadvantage confirms that computer usage in education does not guarantee societal equality because of disproportionate distribution. “In schools with 71% or more of students who are poor, only 39% of classrooms are connected to the Internet,” said Warschauer, “There is differential physical access to computers and the Internet in schools in relation to income and race” (p. 130). The author posits that U.S. school structure always benefits the privileged students to access technological resources and amplifies the separation

²⁶ Aviation High School: See Appendix A

between affluent and deprived students. In other words, school policy fails to support low-socioeconomic schools in bridging the digital divide. This issue causes marginalized students to fall behind in technology within mainstream education.

In contrast to economically disadvantaged and/or underperforming students, Evans Lam had the opportunity to apply and develop his technological proficiency because he is easily “able to access technology. There are computers in all the classrooms.” As a 4.0 student, Lam felt a connection in teacher-student relationships because he even had access to communicate with the principal. Lam’s school environment provided with tremendous support which helped him create a promising future. He recalled, “I plan out my goal and then my school also plans mentors, partnerships so we’re getting mentors like Boeing, EVA, and from the government.” He conveyed that at his school, sophomore students were introduced to a one-day research project, which helped students learn because it made them understand how that project ties into society and how technology influences research and fosters their learning. He stated, “It can really affect me positively in my situation because all of our research is done online.” Lam’s narrative illustrates that his high school environment is incredibly technologically savvy and this would support students in a high socioeconomic status to learn more quickly than their poorer counterparts.

Attending the same Aviation High School with Evans Lam, Patrick Vu was also a 4.0 student. Vu lived with his parents and a younger brother in a middle class residential area in west Seattle while he worked part-time to save money for college. From Vu’s perspective, understanding American culture, English, and technology was the key to easily developing communication between students and teachers. The school was a very small environment, where students captured teachers’ attention, but only high socioeconomic or outstanding students are

admitted. Accessing technological resources, such as learning technical terms – ‘shuttle,’ ‘rocket,’ and ‘the structure of the wind,’ and using computers every day for research, Vu revealed, “I don’t think I would have the same resources in Viet Nam compared to here...there’s numbers of opportunities for me.” But his school set a strict rule for applicants; students had to “write two essays and only about one hundred students have been selected each year...they’re definitely smart people.” Vu reported if he attended a bigger and poorer school, he would have fewer opportunities to have good teachers. Unlike most teachers from other high-schools, Vu’s teachers were aware that not every parent can speak English. He stated, “In other schools, most teachers assumed all parents know English...and know how to use computers like the way teachers expect.” Speaking of his teachers, he stated, “They do their good jobs like they want students to grow up and be successful.” Vu was happy because he has been accepted into the University of Washington and prepared for his college life. He said, “I’m going to live on campus; I have all resources and will go on [to] be independent.” Nevertheless, the numerous interviews reveal that only a few students, such as Evans Lam and Patrick Vu, had the advantage of high socioeconomic status that positively shaped their technological and educational achievements. Indeed, the digital divide has tremendous negative impact on future opportunities available to economically disadvantaged Vietnamese American students.

Parental education and involvement

My third examination focuses on how racial isolation intersects with parental education and involvement influencing their children’s attitude about computer usage for academic success. In contemporary America, racial inequality is “largely a socioeconomic matter,” from Jerald G. Bachman et al.’s perspective (2008), “Parental education is good indicator of overall socioeconomic level, although it also represents other factors that contribute positively to

children's academic success" (p. 68). I agree with this analysis, and would point out that parental involvement in children's use of technology is essential for their children's academic development. As Jenson and De Castell (2008) note, "One of the central questions for education in the 21st century is how best to prepare young people to inhabit complex world constantly remediated by and remediating new and emerging technologies" (Pg. 1). However, many Vietnamese families are of lower socioeconomic status as a result of the parents' lack of schooling, technical skills and financial stability, which renders them incapable of helping their children progress at school. Many Vietnamese parents work long hours; they pay less attention to their children's progress than their high-income, educated counterparts. Parents who have had little or no education usually depend too much on teachers, because they believe the Vietnamese proverb: "Without a teacher, you cannot make anything happen." The scholarship by Noguera (2005), Do (1999) and Kibria (1993) acknowledge the conflicts between school personnel and non-English speaking Vietnamese parents, who were unable to voice their concerns without English-Vietnamese translators or interpreters. My findings supported the authors' analysis and showed that interviewees, such as Rachel Duong, Jordan Phan, and Allan Nguyen felt lonely in their educational journey because they have experienced an incomplete understanding with their parents in communication. This loneliness personally developed in complex ways despite the fact that they live with low income two parents, divorced or single parents.

Interviewee Rachel Duong, a 12 year-old American-born Vietnamese seventh grader, felt lonely because she faced a parent-child language barrier. While Duong was unable to speak fluent Vietnamese, her parents were unable to speak proficient English. A lack of parental involvement made it more difficult for them to develop parent-child and parent-teacher relationships. Although her parents participated at the school's conference without a translator,

they “still don’t know what’s going” with her at school. As Duong said, “My grades like A’s and B’s are OK, my parents think of B’s as bad. Or they might think what I’m doing is different than what they expect.” At home, Duong used to stay in her room to read or watch TV in English, while her parents “stay out in the living room to watch TV in Vietnamese.” As a teenager who needed emotional and mental support from her parents in education, such as being involved in school activities, Duong’s parents, instead, believed “girls should stay home for safety.” Duong felt they discouraged her development of individualism. She recalled, “My parents usually get me to do stuff like I usually wouldn’t do, annoyed or confused most of the time. [They should] understand more about what’s happening to me at school, and what’s conflicting in their minds.” Duong’s narrative illustrates how Vietnamese American children struggle to be well-rounded at school and in after school activities because their non-English speaking parents lack understanding of the mainstream educational system.

Another participant’s story shows his journey of educational loneliness. At the time of interview, Jordan Phan lived with his divorced housewife mother and her boyfriend, who worked in an unstable construction business. He recalled, “My dad can’t get involved since he lives far away...for homework, they [his mom and her boy friend] don’t pay attention to that.” Phan’s parents did not really keep up with his grades from the school online system called “The Source.” He revealed his disadvantaged situation compared to his friends whose parents were really involved in their schooling: “They check every single grade that posted on the website...They also enroll their children to go to the SAT class. They make their children completely ready for college.” He believed that his parents should check on him more often because it would help a lot in keeping him on track. Phan recalled that even when children access technology at home, at least they need parental reminders because they are not always

focused on learning. Phan used to play on the computer for many hours instead of doing his homework. He stated, “When I’m on the computer, my mom said: ‘Jordan, do your homework’ and she walks away.” Without receiving his mother’s reminder, he was off track. He asserted, “If [she doesn’t] check on me, then my grades start slipping.” While Phan had to figure out everything by himself including signing up for the SAT²⁷, he stated, “My parents should take a lot more responsibility than they’re doing right now. I’m doing all of it and I don’t think I should have to do all of it at my age.” Phan’s narrative reveals a low level of parent-child affective relationship in learning, which is one significant issue that Vietnamese American students face in SPS. Like Phan, some underprivileged Vietnamese American students experience a lack of parental involvement, are challenged in how to use computers properly to develop academic success and educational goals.

Allan Nguyen’s narrative also revealed his difficulty while his parents abandoned him and his younger brother, Thomas Nguyen. The brothers lived in substandard housing with their impoverished single grandmother who struggled with language and technological barriers, which led to conflict in family-school interactions. Nguyen hardly communicated with his grandmother in Vietnamese, which made her confused about his explanations because she “did not understand what is going on in class and what online grading system is.” Nguyen stayed after school to work on his architecture project, but the more he tried to explain to his grandmother, the more she was confused. She asked, “Are you doing drugs or something, right?” The language barrier also causes conflicts in parent-teacher communications, Nguyen recalled, “Teachers can’t tell [her] because they speak English and [my grandma] speaks Vietnamese. You have to get a translator, but there is not many of the Vietnamese-English translators around.” Nguyen

²⁷ SAT: See Appendix A

encountered not only socioeconomic hardship, but also emotional turmoil as an unwanted child. At the same time, he had to take care of his younger brother who dealt with a mental disorder. He stated, “It’s hard to learn on my own and I have to...teach the younger brother...not having parents to grow up, not having a role model, and not having them to call mom or dad.” These psychological issues affected Nguyen’s study; as a result, he became a student with attendance problems. He recalled, “I never go to school a lot and I just try to regain my school credits.” Nguyen sometimes tried to catch up on his school work. His situation illustrates the difficulty of an economically disadvantaged and an underperforming student lacking parental support.

Paul Quach’s account is an example of how a divorced, low-income mother with limited education struggled to support her child. At the time of interview, Quach was an 11 year-old fifth grader who was concerned about his mother’s language and technological ineptitude. Quach emphasized that his mother needed to learn technological skills because “she doesn’t know how to use a computer.” He continued, “I’m afraid that my mom doesn’t know how to speak English and when my teachers probably send an email to me and then how can my mom check the computer?” Quach also translated his concern into Vietnamese; to be sure the interviewer understood his view. His spoken English had omitted the important ending, “that’s why I’m worried about which days I can relax, and which days I have to go back to school.” From Quach’s perspective, parental supervision is really important to children’s grades. Although he was aware that his mother was very busy and unable to help him do homework, he still wanted her attention. He stated, “She’s sort of busy. She doesn’t remind me and my scores, each time I do my homework it goes down and down.” Quach faced disadvantages growing up in poverty with an uneducated parent.

In contrast, Min Zhou and Carl Bankston argue, “Immigrant children from middle-class backgrounds benefit from financially secure families, good schools, safe neighborhoods, and supportive formal and informal organizations, which ensure better life chances for them” (p. 7). I agree with the authors’ analysis that good parental education and socioeconomic levels contribute to their children’s opportunities to access mainstream technological resources and foster their academic success. Nevertheless, I argue that regardless of these important factors, the lack of parental involvement does not guarantee students’ academic achievement.

From Lee’s (2005) perspective, “parental monitoring is a key factor in predicting adolescent difficulties across family structure, single mothers’ lack of active monitoring presents notable risks” (p. 507). My results highlighted that Jordan Phan’s narrative confirms Lee’s argument. As an American-born Vietnamese, a 17 year-old twelfth grader, Phan was the oldest son in his family. Before his parents were divorced, they owned a Vietnamese restaurant and paid off their mortgage in a middle class neighborhood in Bellevue, about five miles away from Seattle. According to Phan, after his parents divorced, they don’t pay attention to his performance in school. Phan currently lives with his mother who was an electrical engineer. She worked for her boyfriend’s small construction business. Phan said, “My mom still doesn’t really help much since she’s busy to help doing file work and paper work for her boyfriend’s company.”

He recalled, “[My parents] don’t really monitor my progress as much as they should. They only check my report card at the end of each quarter...My dad can’t get involve [in my study] since he lives far away.” In trying to bridge the technological gap between him and his parents, Phan recalled, “My parents are not very technologically skilled; they have troubled using computers and the Internet.” While he assisted them, he had to learn to solve new

technical problems by himself because his “parents don’t really know how to handle it.” He claimed, “I have to fix the computer, and update the software and other stuff, and they do not pay attention about what I am doing.” He felt responsible to solve family problems, and felt depressed not only because of his parents’ lack of technological skills, but more importantly because of their lack of emotional and psychological support.

In contrast, some fortunate Vietnamese children lived in a secure environment, captured their parents’ attention, and received full support from their teachers. Three exceptional cases including Evans Lam, 17; Skyler Hoang, 17; and Sophia Trinh, 10 years old; each benefitted from their families’ financial support, lived in safe neighborhoods, and attended well-funded schools in the greater Seattle area, such as Aviation High School, West Seattle High School, and Orchid Elementary School. These advantaged students’ narratives support Zhou and Bankston’s analysis regarding how family socioeconomic success affects children’s academic achievement. At the time of interviews, these students gained a Grade Point Average of 4.0 in every subject including math, science, and music. They received parental support as well as accessed computer services and system protection networks easily, either at school or at home.

As a 17 year-old student in West Seattle High School, Skyler Hoang grew up in a happy family with a financially stable condition, and attended a good school environment. At the interview, Hoang confidently stated, “My parents are always there for me. They help me with my homework and whenever I need help.” Hoang emphasized the sense of well-being in his bilingual family where parents and children speak to each other with respect. Living in a secure environment, he benefited from access to technology that positively affected his technological advantages. He recalled, “I don’t see any negative impacts because [my] parents are always there, [my] teachers are always there to help, and there’s a lot of technology around that can help

too... the counselors are also there to help me.” Hoang’s parents regularly access the school’s websites to monitor his academic progress. He stated, “My parents just log on “The Source” to check my grades and attendance whenever they want because they have computers and Internet access.” Hoang’s narrative is an example of some privileged Vietnamese American students, whose parental financial condition benefited their education. Through computer use both at home and at school, Hoang is representative of privileged minority groups in education.

Like Skyler Hoang, another student also succeeded in academic achievement, due to parental financial security and educational support. Evans Lam benefited from many opportunities to access technology for academic success because he lived with his two parents in a well-organized household and safe neighborhood. At the interview, Lam confidently recalled that he was well-supported from his parents in computer technology. While Lam’s father taught him “how to put together a computer and look for model, and understand where they come from,” his mother, an information technology specialist, taught him about computer software. He explained, “She’s kind of teaches me software and how to work with things.” Lam was able to build a computer network as well as format and set computers up for daily use for homework, research, and other miscellaneous uses.

Lam’s mother devoted her time both at home and at school to help her son toward academic achievement. Lam noted, “My parents have their jobs, but sometimes I really need help...my mom is really good at math and she did go through calculus with a lot [explanations to help me solve math problems.]” As his school enforced parent-student-school relationships, his mother was willing to participate in school activities, such as donating money to support a sport team and doing volunteer work. He remarked, “My mom called the teacher and she basically donated money for that dinner. She paid the whole thing.” Lam emphasized that most parents in

his school are hard working middle class, but they can set aside time to support their children's schooling. Lam's advantage confirms that among Vietnamese children, those living in good socioeconomic conditions with financial and psychological support from parents have more opportunities to bridge the digital divide and to develop mainstream academic accomplishment.

Like Evans Lam, Patrick Vu studied in a well-funded school; unlike Lam's family, Patrick Vu's parents are newcomers and still face language, technological, and cultural barriers. At the interview, he was an 18 year-old graduated from Aviation High School and would attend the University of Washington in the coming fall. Patrick Vu was born in Viet Nam and has been living in the U.S. for nine years. He recalled, "my parents don't speak English that well and they [admit] they don't know anything about it...They don't know how to turn on a computer or turn off a computer." He continued, "Like for me being, like, sitting in a school, I don't find it difficult...just stay in school and do what I need to do." He feels it is lucky for him in learning basic functions in technology, receiving help from teachers, and improving from his mistakes around friendly peers. He acknowledged, "If you have any question, you ask and [friends] help you and teachers help you too..., using a computer like a basic you know browsing the Internet, PowerPoint, using Microsoft Office, and Excel." Vu's narrative reflected how a hard working student had achieved academic success with parental financial support, although his parents were less educated.

Sophia Trinh's narrative is a truly exceptional example of children in middle-class families who live with highly educated and high income parents. These benefits, along with opportunities to study in well resourced school environments, contributed to narrow the gap of the digital divide and gender inequality during her early childhood education. At the time of interview, Trinh was a 10 year-old fourth grader in Orchid Elementary School. Trinh's family

was an exceptional case compared to the rest of my interviewees because of her parents' educational status. While her father was a postdoctoral researcher working in molecular biology genetics, where computers were an essential part of modern biology research, her mother was a dentist. Living in a middle class and educated family, Trinh easily accessed technology and captured her parents' attention. I observed that there were four computers for four members in her family, including two laptops for her parents and two desktops - one for Trinh and one for her younger brother. Trinh's mother watched out for her daughter's health, reminding her to take a short break and spend less than two hours a day in front of a computer. Her father always cared about her when she needed help. Trinh stated, "When I was, like, doing in the computer there was such things that I don't know what it was, so I call my dad, and he explains to me, and what happened just click on something, and he told me how to exit it and everything."

Trinh's father wanted to send his daughter to either a private school or an accelerated program for high IQ²⁸ children. Trinh recalled, "My parents have great effect on my life because they care about me and they love me. They give me food; they all help me on any emergency I have." Showing how confident she was because of her father, Trinh said, "I'm not concerned about the culture or the technology because if I have problems then my dad helps me...My dad taught me how to go to visit websites and everything." Trinh recalled the collaboration between her parents and teachers as very significant: "My teachers gave me great ideas; they help me when I'm stuck at school just like my parents do at home." Trinh's dream goes further than to bridge the digital divide. She wishes for a time when "the computer is able to give you advice on how you feeling...Teachers should get advice from the computer on what to do with students on how to get them to behave." Growing up in the technological era and receiving support from

²⁸ IQ: See Appendix A

parents and teachers, Trinh had opportunities to explore a new vision about computer technology that exceeds what modern technology can possibly offer.

Despite these facts, I argue, there is no guarantee for these Vietnamese American students to be successful or be recognized in the dominant society because “the legacy of race is the tendency to naturalize difference, to see it as fundamentally, inextricably, and inherently different, and so not open to change” (Lentin, 2008, p. 95). From Lentin’s perspective, “This is why we cannot skip over race as if it belonged to a bygone era and move unchallenged into the colorblind age” (p. 95). Lentin asserts that racial inequality is still a matter in contemporary America. Like Lentin, Oakes reminds us, “Historically, even well-educated minorities have been unable to market their achievements in the workplace of returns equal to whites” (p. 110). As Oakes emphasizes, high-achieving minorities including Asian Americans face difficulty in finding equal employment or pay rates as compared to their American counterparts.

Conclusion

In 1988, Raymond Nickerson and Philip Zoghates state, “Already we see access to computers very skewed, the affluent parts of society offering them to their children and the poor being left behind” (p. 21). As the authors emphasize, socioeconomic issues contribute to unequal access to technology in contemporary America. DeBell and Chapman argue, “Students living with more highly educated parents are more likely to use these technologies than those living with less well educated parents,” and “those living in households with higher family incomes are more likely to use computers and the Internet than those living in lower income households” (p.4). The authors emphasize the digital divide between students of high and low socioeconomic status regarding opportunity to access and use computer technology. While I agree with their analysis, my findings show that some disadvantaged students, such as Patrick Vu

and Allan Nguyen, productively overcome their poverty in trying to fill the technological gap by teaching their parents basic computer skills. One effort Nguyen made to help narrow the digital divide was that he convinced his grandmother “to learn computer and speak English...so [she] can fit in more, and [she] can get better jobs...and just have a better payment rather than having [her] do dishes all the time or manual labor.”

Previous studies by Marsiglio et al. (2000) and McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that most children from single parent homes face more difficulty in educational achievement, school dropout and behavioral problems than those from two-parent households. In contrast, Coltrane and Adams (2003) and Amato (2000) show that many children from divorced or single-parent families are cheerful, healthy, and productive individuals. My findings highlight the complexity of the outcomes in single parent households. While Daniel Vuong experienced a nurturing and warm relationship from his divorced parents, Thomas Nguyen suffered as an abandoned child, became psychologically ill and dropped out of many classes. Living with his mother, Vuong recalled that he was well-supported by his father and developed a strong father-child relationship: “My dad, he’s really care about me...He teaches me Vietnamese language and greeting styles...sometime he is really busy. My mom, she is OK, she actually plays as a real mom...she gets too care away with work to help out with the bills and the tax rates.” My observation shows that as parents maintain good communication skills after their dissolution of marriage, and show great efforts to support and care about their children’s development, like Daniel Vuong’s parents, their adolescents would grow up well and in high spirits. Vuong’s narrative confirms Adams and Amato’s analysis, while Thomas Nguyen’s story corroborated Marsiglio et al. and McLanahan and Sandefur’s findings. This study highlights great efforts of Vietnamese American interviewees, such as Allan Nguyen, in single-parent families. They tried

hard to overcome these obstacles along with racial stereotypes, socioeconomic, linguistic, cultural and technological challenges in their school environment.

As Lee (2005) and Min Zhou (1997) show, adolescents who live with two biological parents experience more consistency in rules, and are more likely to be monitored by their parents compared to minors in single parent households. Min Zhou reports that immigrant children who live with two biological parents “or from families associated with tightly-knit social networks consistently show better psychological conditions, higher levels of academic achievement, and stronger educational aspirations than those in single-parent or socially isolated families” (p. 80). While it is true that Zhou’s study reveals how parental status affects emotional conditions, which in turn influence the educational achievements of immigrant children, my findings show the complexity of the determining factors for each individual student. A few exceptional cases illustrate the academic achievement of some disadvantaged students who overcame the obstacles of their family background and socioeconomic status. For instance, some underprivileged students in single-parent families, such as Allan Nguyen, and isolated families, such as Patrick Vu and Frank Ly, also encountered academic and technological success. These students are among a few exceptional students who could actually navigate the barriers to get through high school and attend college. However, I argue that even Asian American students who work hard and succeed in school under the “model minority” stereotype face barriers of racism and classism. In other words, academic success is possible, but these students experience many more challenges than their American counterparts because they struggle with racial and class discrimination.

Some Vietnamese children in middle class families, such as Skyler Hoang and Sophia Trinh, have a vision to prepare for their future because their parents offer technological support,

help them do homework, and volunteer in school activities. In contrast, their lower income counterparts, like Thomas Nguyen and Jordan Phan, struggle with progress in school.

“[D]ifferences in outcomes of schooling have historically been linked to residential segregation on the basis of class and race.” Zhou argues, “Minority children have suffered from unequal distribution of economic and educational resources that seriously curtail their chances in life and trap them in isolated ghettos” (p. 77). Zhou’s analysis cites the socioeconomic hardships of minority children including poor Vietnamese children in my study, who live in low-income households where they and their parents face racial and social isolation because of linguistic, technological, and cultural barriers. For example, Frank Ly emphasized how these barriers contributed to the digital divide between his parents and teachers: “There are really gaps between teachers and my parents. They need to learn more about computer technology and then being more involved in school activities.” Like Ly, many Vietnamese American children voice their complex ideas concerning these issues which limited their educational opportunities, as compared to other Vietnamese children in middle class families. Although a few children came from underprivileged backgrounds and faced racial stereotypes, their viewpoints still matched the “model minority” label as they saw themselves fitting into the school environment, improving in English proficiency and technological skill.

Bondy and Ross (2005) state, “Schools and teachers must be better prepared to meet the educational needs of all students, regardless of race or social class” (p. 23). The authors reinforce the values of social change in which poor children will benefit from school and parental resources to build their self-assurance, attain academic successes, and achieve valuable educational goals. In order to improve the learning atmosphere to reduce social tension and distraction, teachers should use efficient techniques to help disadvantaged students of diverse

developmental stages, conditions, and learning behaviors. While many students in my study recognized racial isolation, a few Vietnamese children in high socioeconomic families believed in a truly multicultural American society. More surprisingly, in considering the U.S. multicultural experience, an exceptional honors student and a newcomer Vietnamese student felt that he fit in easier than his older brother, although they both live in a low socioeconomic family.

The last two decades have seen a small quantity of significant research on first and second-generation Vietnamese American communities and families. While the work of Zhou and Bankston (1998) focuses on how socioeconomic conditions affect the Vietnamese American community, the studies by Kibria (1993); Rutledge (1992); Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1991); and Muzny (1989), concentrate more on particular problems of relocation and adaptation in the lives of Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants. By offering significant stories and case studies, these studies mostly examine the role of men and women in family issues of acculturation and the traditional Vietnamese culture of marginalized families and communities. They do not completely investigate how the interaction of race and socioeconomic status with linguistic and cultural barriers impacts the complicated process of adaptation among parents and their children through technology. This work fills the gaps in earlier studies and adds a new dimension to Asian American Studies concerning how underprivileged Vietnamese Americans not only suffer the digital divide in the dominant culture but also grapple within their own families and communities.

Future study should focus on low-income parents including Vietnamese American parents and their use of technology for educational and social purposes. In particular, scholars need to explore perspectives on how Vietnamese American families develop social relations and beliefs and maintain parent-child, parent-teacher, and teacher-student interactions as their

children grow up in mainstream society. Further research on differential degrees of access to technology among advantaged and disadvantaged Vietnamese families will illustrate how circular logic shapes children's educational expectation and success within the domestic space, Vietnamese communities, and public schools. To help narrow the digital divide, Vietnamese communities should recruit more bilingual information technology specialists to help disadvantaged children and their parents learn and enhance their computer skills. Public policy should be aimed at the marginalized Southeast Asian population, particularly the Vietnamese American students. This complex group should be distinguished from other Asian American communities to underline individual characteristics and family traits to help them meet their technological needs while they study at home and at school.

CHAPTER FIVE

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN FATHERS' NARRATIVES OF ACCULTURATION: PARENTING STYLES AND TECHNOLOGY

Introduction

Communication technology affects family interactions in complex ways. Although some argue that technology may degrade the quality of family relationships, many studies show that technology can actually improve them, especially in terms of communication between fathers and their children. Marsiglio, et al. (2005) reveal multifaceted aspects of father-child communication through technology: "Fathers interact with their children regularly over e-mail, cell phones, instant messaging, phone lines, and even Internet sites...access to technology becomes an issue for this aspect of situated fathering" (p. 23). As the authors continue, although many fathers face a digital divide from limited access to computers and/or the Internet, these electronic devices almost certainly provide connection to some fathers who live far away from their children.

Furthermore, communication using Internet technologies involving parents, teachers, and students in an open dialogue contribute to students' academic success. As Cummings and Worley (2008) remark, "Responsibility for child care is now shared by schools, and parenting is as much a focus of conversations between parents and teachers as is academics" (p. 660). While the authors encourage greater communication between parents and teachers, I argue that many Vietnamese fathers still maintain their gender hierarchy in their involvement with their children's progress, whether they live in the same households with their children or not. Many Vietnamese

fathers and their children demonstrate generational solidarities as these adolescents and young adults help them learn computers to foster communicative skills. Nevertheless, digital communication alone does not guarantee that it will promote conversations between teachers and fathers in the case of many fathers who lack resources. I also explore how Vietnamese fathers treat their sons and daughters based on their gender. Regardless of the Vietnamese fathers' concerns, from Spade and Valentine's (2011) perspective, "Despite cultural differences in the ideological justification of patriarchy, gender inequality is the reality in both Asian and mainstream cultural worlds" (p. 80). My outcomes confirm the authors' assertion.

As compared to high-income fathers, Wilcox and Bartkowski's (2005) argue, low-earning fathers usually deal with more stresses because of "financial pressures, poor working conditions, disordered neighborhoods, racial or ethnic discrimination, and difficulties in their interaction with a range of public institutions" (p. 303). According to Oren (2009), "Asian American fathers not only experience societal barriers firsthand, but also witness their children facing the issues of prejudice and discrimination" (p. 114). For example, one father in my study, Tuan Cong, was socially isolated due to this prejudice. He stated, "I look odd at work because none of my co-workers can tolerate the smell of fish sauce that I have for my lunch, and they look at me as if I commit a crime. They all go away." He also noted that he often sees his daughter standing alone on the playground at school. "American kids laughed at her because she dresses differently and spoke Vietnamese," said Cong.

Oren argues that, in mainstream society, Asian American men are subject to a double standard: the "model minority" stereotype as well as "second-class syndrome." My observation corresponds with Oren's statement, as Tuan Cong showed his happiness when he registered for a basic computer class in the Vietnamese community center. "If schools or offices offer extra help

in math, biology, and other subjects, such as Vietnamese language, for my daughter and bilingual computer classes for us, I would feel cheerful,” Cong revealed with a tension. “I must babysit my brother-in-law’s son for him to help my daughter’s home work. I neither understand proper English nor the Internet to communicate with her or teachers via email while I’m out of town.” In other words, many Asian fathers struggle with taking on these typically feminine roles while also interacting with school personnel and passing their traditional culture on to their children. Cong depended on his older brother-in-law for “applying for welfare assistance programs in the first three months, cleaning teeth, and registering ESL classes in the community center,” said Cong. “I never thought that I would wash dishes, clean kitchen or babysit a child when I was in Viet Nam... I feel left behind because I do not have an idea about how to send an email to teachers to ask about my daughter’s progress. I like computer very much but I do not have enough time to study because I have to work to meet the need of my family.”

Despite these issues, Hill and Yeung (2000) point out that very little research has been conducted on relationships between fathers and children compared to that on mothers and children. Furthermore, “research on the relationship between child outcomes and involvement of fathers who do not live with their children is scarce” (p. 34). There is a palpable lack of fatherhood-related research, and particular attention needs to be paid to relationships between fathers and children who do not live together. My work is a step in this direction, because it helps to fill this crucial gap in the literature, and may further our understanding of how father-child and parent-teacher relationships influence children’s development. My aim is to examine the challenges of language, cultural and technological barriers that Vietnamese American refugee and immigrant fathers face within digital communication with their children’s teachers, vis-à-vis the interaction of race, class and gender inequalities. This work sheds light on the complex ways

in which many underprivileged Vietnamese American fathers struggle to prevail over these disadvantages to monitor their children's progress in schools through online systems. It also elucidates how these fathers bridge the technological divide between themselves and their children through digital communication.

I examine four research questions: 1) how do Vietnamese fathers respond to race, class, and gender relations as they monitor their children's progress via the online school system? 2) How do they cope with the language barrier, if at all, as they communicate with teachers via email? 3) How do they feel about depending on their children's help with language and technology during acculturation? 4) How does father-child communication occur when they do not live together? In examining these research questions, I argue that Vietnamese American fathers seek to negotiate parental power through specific communicative roles in order to exert their influence and preserve traditional values and culture, regardless of whether or not they live with their children. Tewari and Alvarez (2009) argue, "The stereotype of Asian American fathers as distant and uninvolved with their children is being challenged as more fathers are actively participating in the daily care of their children" (p. 322). My findings support the authors' analysis and show that many Vietnamese American fathers use their own ways to communicate with their children or teachers through traditional means such as in-person conversations, letters, or phone calls. A few are enthralled by using digital communication, including email and instant messages. However, as email becomes an increasingly popular method for school-family interactions, some Vietnamese fathers do need their children's help to learn technological skills in order to communicate with school authorities.

Research Methods

To explore these research questions, I interviewed a diverse group of 16 first and 1.5-generation Vietnamese American fathers, including one Vietnamese Amerasian and one Chinese Vietnamese American, in the greater Seattle area. Some of them were my students in an evening bilingual computer class²⁹, where I translated lessons into Vietnamese. My endeavor was to tease out recurrent trends as they emerged during the interviews. I investigated whether these Vietnamese fathers faced technological gaps concerning family-school interaction. By using open-ended questionnaires, I examined the participants' experiences as related to their complex backgrounds. For instance, two fathers went through the trauma of the Viet Nam War as Vietnamese veterans and experienced the hardship of living in an education camp under the Communist regime; others experienced difficult lives in refugee camps before entering the U.S. My interviews illustrated while many elder fathers tried to maintain traditional family values, a few younger fathers felt comfortable permitting their children to find their own career paths. I also observed many Vietnamese fathers were willing to express their concerns in a detailed manner about how gender and communicative roles affected their personal lives, although some felt uncomfortable revealing their personal stories.

Immersion in research context

A deep understanding of the Vietnamese language and culture along with my family background of struggling to survive under the Communist regime helped me gain quick acceptance from my Vietnamese study participants. My volunteer services with technological and networking skills also helped me connect with the Vietnamese fathers in the course of my fieldwork. However, as a single Vietnamese American woman in higher education, I may have projected an unusual image to some of these men. Many of them suggested that it would be very

²⁹ Bilingual Computer class: See Appendix A

difficult for me to find a Vietnamese partner because of my higher education. Their perspectives theoretically implicate traditional gender roles in a patriarchal hierarchy.

I acknowledged this difficult circumstance, while still trying to maintain my professional role as a scholar in order to gain their cooperation. Lindlof and Taylor argue that in qualitative research, mutual understanding between researchers and participants is beneficial, because “personal interests are expressed, affections are felt, and trust is shared” (p. 107). The authors emphasize the power of interpersonal relationships, and the fact that they involve time and effort to build trust and courtesy. My study of Vietnamese American fathers was principally ethnographic. According to Peter et al. (2005), “Ethnography is a way of studying the social world that requires researchers to immerse themselves in the community” (p. 237). My volunteer service and involvement in the Vietnamese community support Peter et al.’s definition. Indeed, I was invited to attend several families’ graduation ceremonies, parent group parties, and family and community events. The more I socialized with my participants, the better I understood their personal stories, which I believe positively affected the quality of my interpretation of their narratives.

I aimed to be open-minded and to make my study transparent to those interviewees who were hesitant to allow recording during the personal interviews. I encouraged them to express their different perspectives as they responded to my list of open-ended questions. I used oral history research techniques to discover the Vietnamese fathers’ voices which had long gone unheard. These stories described their difficulties living in a foreign country where linguistic and cultural conflicts isolated them from mainstream society. While a few fathers viewed digital technology as an opportunity for developing communication with their children, others encountered the digital divide. Their narratives also illustrated the tremendous hardships they

faced in interacting with their children and teachers, especially for fathers who lived far from their children with lack of access to technological resources.

Literature Review

The scholarship of Espiritu (2010), Almaguer (2009, 1994), Fong (2007, 1998), and Chan (1991) demonstrates that, prior to World War II, Asian male immigrants had to perform “women’s work” to substitute for female unpaid domestic labor. “Because what Euro-Americans desired was muscle power, the vast majority of the Asians they enticed to the other side of the Pacific were young men in their prime working years, most of whom came without their wives, parents, or children” (Chan, p. 23). Like Chan, Espiritu argues, “racialized and gendered immigration policies and labor conditions emasculated Asian men, forcing them into womanless communities and into ‘feminized’ jobs that had gone unfilled due to the absence of women” (p. 17). The authors also emphasize how Asian American men were portrayed as “asexual” because of the highly imbalanced male to female ratio of Asian immigration on American soil.

The 1965 Immigration Act allowed Asian family reunification; both highly trained and unskilled Asian men immigrated to the U.S. to “join whites in the well-paid, educated, white collar sector of the workforce” and “join Latino immigrants in lower-paying secondary sector jobs” (Espiritu 2010, p. 21). Espiritu criticizes how the American public ignores the complexity of Asian American men’s socioeconomic status. She notes that the model minority stereotype conflicts with the reality that not all Asian American men have college degrees or high-paying jobs. In contemporary America, the blurring of gender roles persists, many Asian American men perform traditional female roles in the face of technological, linguistic and cultural barriers.

Recent studies show the complex nature of socioeconomic status and father involvement with children. For example, Coltrane (2010) argues that most present-day scholars fail to include “the effects of income, race/ethnicity, education, family structure, marriage, employment, work schedules, and other factors on father involvement, though results are often incomplete or contradictory” (p. 438). Sayers and Fox (2005) cite a study showing how many working-class fathers are unable to spend more time and participate in activities with their children at home because they have to deal with heavy workloads to provide financial support for their families as breadwinners (p. 134). Despite these facts, a vast number of immigrant men and men of color including Asian American men “could not fulfill the good-provider role that the cultural ideal implied” because “Many working-class fathers were not able to earn the family wage assumed by the separate-spheres ideal” (Coltrane 2010, p. 435). For many low-income families, argue Martha Hill and Wei-Jun Yeung (2000), “more low skilled fathers are unemployed, real incomes have declined for less educated parents, and more children are living without one (especially the father) or both of their biological parents during their childhood” (p. 21). The authors explain the effects of socioeconomic hardship on less educated and poor fathers as they struggle to parent their children and meet their basic needs. As Espiritu argues, high-income and low-paid labor among Asian Americans proposes that economic regressions and opportunities impact gender relations: “The patriarchal authority of Asian immigrant men, particularly those of the working class, has also been challenged due to the social and economic losses that they suffered in their transition to life in the United States” (p. 17). Espiritu posits that low-income Asian American men struggle more with their unstable patriarchal power than their higher income counterparts.

In response to the limited literature on fathering styles in earlier studies, my work explores whether language and technological challenges affect the communication and gender roles of first-generation Vietnamese American fathers and their children, as well as teachers in social interactions. This paper examines how Vietnamese American fathers, despite their socioeconomic status, perform specific communicative actions through the lens of technology to exert gender privileged and parental control as they pass on traditional values to their children.

In contrast, MacDermid et al. (2005) point out, “For fathers with access to computers and the Internet, cyberspace in the form of electronic mail, Internet video, and cellular telephones supplemented more conventional modes of communication” (p. 215). Only a few of the 16 Vietnamese fathers in my study fit in MacDermid et al.’s description; many must deal with multiple barriers to communicating with their children during acculturation, including language, cultural, and technological challenges. Two participants served in the military during the Viet Nam War and spent years in re-education camps, and then faced challenges as their children’s modern technological skills at school conflicted with their outdated skills garnered during military service. For example, Nam Tran revealed, “I was an officer for the South government, I then became a political prisoner under the Communist regime, and now I have to learn technology or my daughter will leave me behind.” Similar to other Southeast Asian cultures with undoubtedly patriarchal hierarchies, Vietnamese fathers represent the most powerful figure of authority and accountability in the family. Spade and Valentine (2010), Phan (2005), and Kibria (1993) demonstrate the parental power dynamics in which male dominance still remains in the Vietnamese traditional family due to gender hierarchy.

Studies show that father-daughter communication creates anxiety when girls are influenced by American culture and ask for gender equal opportunity (Spade and Valentine

2010; Phan 2005; Kibria 1993). Spade and Valentine (2010) confirm the evidence of gender inequality in parenting practices by showing that girls juggle school and household duties, while boys have greater leisure time. Phan (2005) points out, father-son interactions are punctuated by the pressure for sons to achieve academic excellence in the fields of medicine, law, and engineering. In order to ensure a better future for their children by sending them to private or well-known schools, many Vietnamese parents “often have to work long hours, especially if they own a small business, and as a result, have little contact with their children” (Phan p. 74). Phan points out that many Vietnamese parents lose their parent-child connection as they battle to provide financial support for their children’s education under economic hardship. Cheung and Nguyen (2001) explore how professional experts encourage Vietnamese parenting skills to promote generational harmonies in Vietnamese American families.

Hughes and Hans note the dearth of research from family theorists on how familial bonds are changing during the digital age. They critique the fact that family scientists fail to investigate the significant function of computer technology in family relations. While acknowledging the lack of literature on Vietnamese American parenting styles, Nguyen and Cheung (2009) describe earlier studies of which “an extensive literature review only found information generalizing Asian parents’ use of parenting methods that are punishment-oriented and authoritarian in nature” (p. 2).

As mentioned earlier, the scholarship by Espiritu (2004) and Uba (1994) criticize the practice of lumping all Asian Americans as a homogenous cluster and thus ignoring underprivileged Southeast Asian Americans. In the 1990s, Southeast Asian inhabitants generally faced financial hardship due to insecure, low-wage labor, governmental assistance, and involvement in the informal market (Espiritu, 2004). Espiritu points out, these economic

struggles highlight the risk of using the umbrella term “model minority” for all Asian Americans, because many Southeast Asian American men still fall below the socioeconomic status of “average” Asian American (p. 22). As new immigrants, Southeast Asian American men have not only lost their traditional power including material belongings, family, relatives, career, social status, and country, but also their influence, which challenges their masculinity and self-identity. In the patriarchal Asian American family formation, Uba argues, Asian “men often underreport their problems, complying with the sexist stigma that denigrates men who admit emotional distress” (p. 177).

Nevertheless, the Vietnamese men in my study showed their determination to rebuild their lives, and accepted these hardships as obstacles to be overcome. For example, Nam Tran, a Vietnamese veteran as well as the oldest father among my male interviewees at age 64, rebuilt his life to become a good father for his daughter and son. He represented one of the most confident Vietnamese American fathers in my study who experienced war traumas, but did not “fall easy prey to alcoholism and depression as well as to becoming child and spouse abusers” (Phan, p. 73). Neither of my Viet Nam veteran participants faced these challenges. Tran’s narrative does not support Phan’s argument that first-generation Vietnamese fathers tend to become chauvinistic, deviant, and violent, and refutes that this is representative for fathers. Tran recalled, “I used to be a war prisoner. I came here poorly, faced language and technological barriers. Truly, I don’t have a normal life.” With a strong mindset, although juggling work 10 hours per day, he arranged time to take his daughter to the Vietnamese language school and to learn basic computer skills.

Although Tran still maintains his dominant role as a breadwinner, he is challenged by his daughter’s technological skill. He recalled, “I would fall behind if I don’t know how to use

computer when I monitor my daughter's progress at school...and she will ignore me." In order to educate his children successfully, Tran said, "I have to be an English-Vietnamese bilingual and have to understand both conflicted culture." Sometimes, he cannot understand English fluently because "teachers speak so fast." He regularly monitored his children's progress, "although not from the web environment," by attending teacher-parent meetings, participating in the school's activities, and communicating with teachers via emails. He said, "I check emails and contact with teachers in different classes very often."

Johnson (2006) and Vo et al. (2004) demonstrate that gender and race are reciprocally instructive and interconnected in families. "Men of color, for example, can make use of male privilege to compensate for their oppression under the weight of white privilege" (Johnson, p. 52-53). In other words, while many men of color struggle with racial inequality, they are more privileged than their female counterparts. For example, Tran had an opportunity to finish his college degree and improve technological skills, while his spouse, a full-time housewife, completely depends on him because she cannot speak proficient English. Tran recalled, "She feels isolated and I always support her...Although she participates at the parent-teacher meetings, she is unable to communicate with teachers because the school doesn't provide translation services." My findings corroborate the authors' studies and illustrate that some Vietnamese American fathers experience more gender privileges than their female counterparts, which compensates for their racial disadvantages. While he was sympathetic towards his wife's struggles, Tran also critiqued the school system that provided sex education to young girls: "It is inappropriate for 10 or 11 year old female students, like my daughter, to learn physiology because if she understands about sex too early, it might create a negative result, which does not suit for Asian ideology." While Tran's response concentrates on protecting his daughters

from male strangers, his traditional belief fosters male dominant ideology in which his daughter is considered an inferior subject whose sexuality he is entitled to control.

During acculturation, Tran's experience illustrates the complex characteristics of a breadwinner. While he participates in the gender hierarchy as an over-protective father and the head of a household, he also tries to enhance the communicative roles with his daughter and teachers to bridge the digital divide and preserve the Vietnamese culture. The findings of this study are therefore crucial to understand the complex interactions that influence the communicative and gender roles in father-child relationships and family-school relations. Many Vietnamese American fathers try to digitally communicate with their children although they struggle with language, cultural and technological barriers. These challenges push them further to the marginalized communities, where they struggle with the digital divide that restrains their interactive roles not only with their own children but also with school teachers.

Chen (2010), Tewari and Alvarez (2009), Nguyen (2008), Paik (2004), and Okagaki (2001) confirm that authoritative parenting styles rather than authoritarian styles are the best way to promote the parent-child relationship and encourage self-confident and well-behaved children. Nguyen (2008) points out that most Vietnamese American adolescents in his study professed that their fathers have not acculturated and that they still maintained the conservative authoritarian parenting ways, regardless of how long they have lived in contemporary America. Nguyen examined how these parenting styles affect their children's development and found that those who perceived their parents as *authoritarian* demonstrated lower self-esteem and higher despondency levels than those who perceived their parents as *authoritative* (p. 337). Nguyen's analysis emphasizes the significance of parental respect/disrespect that affects their children's well-being during adolescence.

While I agree with Nguyen's arguments, my findings show complex characteristics of parental behavior, in which on one hand, some fathers are perceived as authoritative, and on the other hand, they are perceived as authoritarian. For example, Tom Doan, a conservative married father who has lived in the U.S. for 18 years, showed ambivalent parental attributes related to supervision. On one hand, he emphasized, "I do not force them to follow my path" which illustrated his respect for his children's interests, and he encouraged them to choose their future careers. On the other hand, Doan revealed, "I am hesitate to say I am proud of myself; however, I truly notice every action of my children." For instance, although Doan wanted his children to become successful in the science fields, he was aware that his children grew up in mainstream culture where they might become whatever they wanted to be. Doan acknowledged his children's individualistic values during acculturation. He revealed his new philosophy: "My children live their own lives but not mine [smile]." As compared to many Asian parents who want their children to become doctors, Doan stated, "I do not think that way because not every doctor is happy. Sometimes, a mechanic has a happier life than a doctor." While Doan supports Nguyen's argument of how many Vietnamese adolescents psychologically develop confidence as their parents perform *authoritative* roles, he also demonstrated *authoritarian* views: "I think every school needs to have a secret website for only parents and the primary teachers to monitor students closely, and for the teacher to report to parents right away." He asserted that "it is the best if the school can do that."

From Doan's perspective, "American culture is very liberal and it is very dangerous." He said, "My son is in his teen age and it is difficult to teach young teens from seventh to eleventh or twelfth grade. If we control them and they can pass this tough stage, they will be more intelligent." Doan's narrative illustrates this dualistic method and outcomes as a result of

parental performance including both of these conflicted parenting behaviors. Contrary to Nguyen's study and his polarized view of paternal authority, my findings describe the complexity of parenting styles in which fathers negotiate their beliefs about gender and communicative roles.

Research sample

The research sample comprised 14 married and two divorced fathers (including one married father who recently dissolved his marriage), ranging from 36 to 64 years in age, who arrived in the U.S. between 1975 and 2007 under varied circumstances. Nine were "boat people," one arrived under the Operation Frequent Wind, three arrived under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP), two under the Humanitarian Operation, and one due to the Homecoming Act. Their educational backgrounds ranked from middle school to college, including one doctor, one engineer, two middle school teachers, two Viet Nam War veterans (a captain and a soldier), one pawn shop owner, one college undergraduate, seven high school students, and one who was middle-school educated.

In the U.S., these fathers demonstrated significant occupational flexibility. The doctor became a post-doctoral researcher in biology; the engineer became a baker; one middle school teacher became his wife's partner in their hair salon family business, and the other became a construction worker. While one Vietnamese veteran (the captain) became a technician at Tech Aerospace, the other became a farmer, and the pawn shop owner became a computer technician. The college dropout became a mechanical assembler and the middle-school educated man helped his wife run their family nail salon. Among the seven high school dropouts, all left Viet Nam as teenagers and have lived in the U.S. for at least 22 years. Their careers related to their education level, here arranged from the highest educated to the lowest: an engineer, a construction business

owner, a real estate agent, a manager in an international packing company, an electrical technician, and two workers in unspecified jobs. As my findings will show, these fathers' lives changed tremendously in diverse and complex ways during their acculturation process.

The narratives unearthed during my research illustrate the complexities of first-generation Vietnamese American fathers, who, regardless of their socioeconomic status, remain deeply connected to the Vietnamese community. In this group, most Vietnamese fathers face linguistic barriers. Except for the researcher and the real estate agent who spoke proficient English, the rest chose to respond in Vietnamese³⁰ rather than in English. As a result, although some Vietnamese fathers had good technological skills, their effectiveness in playing a communicative role was limited, because they struggled to communicate in English with their children and with teachers who did not speak Vietnamese. The situation became more difficult for Vietnamese fathers who also faced socioeconomic hardship, cultural barriers, and technological challenges.

Issues with technological barriers: websites

My first examination focuses on how Vietnamese fathers respond to race, class, and gender relations as they monitor their children's progress via the online school systems. The relevance of this investigation is evident in one of the research participants' comments. Viet Le, a 52 year-old, a married father who had lived in the U.S. since 1980, had two daughters in middle school but had never navigated the Seattle Public Schools (SPS) websites. Although he held two bachelor degrees in drafting design and mechanical engineering, Le later was a mechanical technician instead of an engineer because he faced linguistic racism. Le revealed a complaint from his boss: "Truly, you are doing this, but your English is bad so you have to do something else." Le was challenged to climb up the ladder and was aware of racism at work:

³⁰ Respond in Vietnamese: See Appendix A

“Yes, there is racism, but it is hidden in the company...human development, technological development and ideological development, so racism is still exist, but in a less degree than in the past.”

While Le recognized the school’s websites, he felt that contacting teachers in person about his children’s progress at school was more significant than monitoring their progress via the online network. By thinking that “this website is used to contact the school for some reasons, such as informing teachers for an absence, or report information,” Le confessed, “I only check for snow issues...because the school did not even send home any notice to mention about it clearly in details.” He preferred to meet teachers at the school conference where “teachers will report students’ status and activity at school, but parents and teachers only meet once in that conference.” Le claimed, that monitoring students’ progress via school websites did not help parents completely understand what was going on with their children’s learning behavior. He claimed that a white male teacher was rude to his daughter by “yelling at her as the small girl didn’t listen to him or something like that. His voice seemed to bear a grudge,” Le continued, “My little girl cried. It seemed like many classrooms nearby could hear his lousy voice. His manner was not proper as a teacher.” Le was worried about being powerless to protect his daughter from racial and gender inequalities. From my perspective, his daughter’s behavior was described as passive, subordinated, and controlled in public settings associated with whiteness. Le’s sympathy of his daughter’s situation was part of his patriarchal power.

In “a multicultural school environment with a diverse student body including Mexican, Filipino, Laotian, Vietnamese, White, and Black,” from Le’s perspective, “That attitude was racist.” He raised a question: “The teacher taught in a class. How he could be racist?” After the incident, his small daughter felt isolated in the class environment. Le and his partner, who

was also a full-time employee, had to juggle work and filed a complaint. The principal promised to “reexamine the case, but it was ignored.” Because the case was overlooked, Le finally decided to transfer his daughters to another school. His narrative showed the difficulty of a Vietnamese father in dealing with racial inequalities. These factors negatively affect his confidence in monitoring his children’s progress from the school’s network.

Park, Endo and Rong (2009) and Yang (2008) assert that facing language barriers makes parents feel inadequate in school settings in which many Asian American parents are challenged by being actively involved in their children’s educational lives because they are not English speakers. Interviewee Quoc Huynh, a 41 year-old, married Viet Nam veteran and a farmer, faces language and technological barriers. He arrived in the U.S. as an immigrant with little education or technical skills. Men like Huynh had to do whatever they could to survive economically in the new country. This challenged their patriarchal power “not only in the public but also in the domestic arena, which places severe pressure on their sense of well-being” (Espiritu, p. 22). Huynh felt isolation in dealing with his children’s education and technological skills while he lost his confidence and parental control to discipline his children. He was concerned about the way that teachers were educating his children because he believed that education is one of the most important things to improve his children’s way of life. Through my observation, Huynh’s desire was to leave the memories of the war behind, but the trauma still remained in his mind. Although Huynh had lived in the U.S. for 16 years, he was unable to check the school’s websites to monitor his children’s learning process. He said, “I have no idea if my children say bad words. I do not understand the school websites and grading scale, so I do not know if my children receive good or bad grades.” Huynh felt depressed, since he had to work long hours on

the farm for his family's survival by leaving home in the early morning and coming back late in the evening.

Kanatsu and Chao (2008), and Luster and Okagaki (2004) assert that, although Asian fathers perform important traditional gender roles for their family's survival as wage earners, they lack involvement in domestic labor as caretakers of their children. Huynh's narrative confirms the authors' analysis. "My wife does housework and she has more time with the kids than I do," confessed Huynh, "I go home too late; thus, I do not have much time for them." In relying on translation services, Huynh suggested that "schools should have a Vietnamese version on their websites." Like many underprivileged fathers, Huynh was challenged to face the digital divide in using the online school system to monitor his children's progress. In the private realm, Huynh's role is a head of the household, the sole breadwinner and the patriarch. His lack of contribution to household chores constructed a division of labor based on gender.

Another interviewee, Son Lam, was a 47 year-old laborer and a married father of three sons who rarely used a computer for his job. Living in the U.S. for 22 years, he knew some basic computer hardware skills, although he did not know much about the Seattle Public Schools' websites. Park (2009) reports that many hourly-paid working parents have inflexible schedules, which prevents them from participating in school activities because "the entire family would have less income for that month if they took time off from work to attend school activities" (p. 12). Lam lacked involvement in family-school relationships to closely monitor his sons' progress, which confirms Park's assertion. Lam confessed that he relied on his wife, a computer information specialist, to contact teachers via email concerning his children's progress because she was better in written English and computer skills. Thus, the traditional gender roles have shifted in Lam's family.

While both Coltrane (2010) and Kibria (1993) demonstrate a transfer in gender authority as women manage their social and financial capital, Coltrane confirms, “Further changes in fathering are likely to be driven by women’s increasing independence and earning power” (p. 444). Kibria asserts, “Women’s responses to their improved control of resources were ambivalent in certain respects, in ways that reflected the complexity of their relationship to the traditional family system” (p. 130). Although both authors show how women earn some power, Kibria reveals the ambivalence of Vietnamese American women in shifting gender relation. From my perspective, Lam’s wife is exceptional as a Vietnamese-Chinese American woman because she does not demonstrate this ambivalence. As Lam continues, “I studied ESL classes...I do not know much about computer, but my wife has good English and computer skills to help the kids.” Lam admitted that his wife attained a higher education, earned more income, and gained more power, which does not represent the typical ambivalent Vietnamese woman in Kibria’s analysis. As Lam’s wife independently managed parent-teacher communications and their children’s profile through the school online network, Lam emphasized, “most importantly, she is the mother of my three sons.” My observation shows that Lam was pleased as his wife signed on a consent form after I interviewed him, without asking for his permission. Although his roles have shifted in gender relations, I argue Lam’s patriarchal ideologies remain in power because he strongly believes that “my surname will keep go on and that’s what matters.”

Like Son Lam, Vinh Trinh, 47 years old, a married father and post-doctoral researcher, who had lived in the U.S. for 24 years, did not pay attention to SPS websites. Trinh often discussed with his wife, a dentist, how to monitor their children’s learning process without acknowledging the existence of the school websites. He stated: “I’m not quite familiar with the SPS websites. I’ve never got on that website at all because I don’t know it does exist.” Trinh’s

narrative confirms the fact that his gender role has shifted because his spouse is a highly educated and financially independent woman: “She works fulltime and her job is more stable than mine. She takes care of big bills; I take care of the kids and we share cooking duties.” Trinh and his partner monitor his children’s progress without receiving information to recognize the online school system.

In contrast, Quach Hoang, a 47 year-old married father of four and a manager in an international packaging company, played the traditional gender role as the head of household, including monitoring his children’s progress via the network environment. He showed his enthusiasm about digital technology, particularly the online school structure to monitor his children’s progress. Hoang stated, “I am very excited about the school’s websites... SPS have done good work. It does not have to change at all. If I see my children have lower score, such as B or C, I find out what happen to them right away and encourage them go back to normal range.” Living in the U.S. for 26 years, he relied on computers both at home and at work, and viewed the school website as a significant tool, because “it saved lots of time and provided fast services.” After returning home from work, Hoang managed his children’s grades, activities and behaviors through the school websites, while his spouse, who worked part-time and spoke little English, was mostly in the kitchen preparing the family’s dinner. Hoang recalled, “We do best for our children; they mostly got 4.0. I personally rely on technology.”

Kevin Tran, a 50 year-old married father, and at the time of the interview, a real estate agent and a programmer analyst, has lived in the U.S. for 33 years. Tran noted that he was “blending fine with technology” and believed the school’s websites were like “a tool to use to network” between parents and teachers. He understood the difficulty of other Vietnamese parents in his generation who struggle with digital communication, including his former partner

who did not work outside the home. “You can’t teach an old dog a new trick...Anybody that older than I am, they have a very hard time to adapt to computer and check the school webs.”

It is evident that some Vietnamese fathers felt uncomfortable monitoring their children’s progress from the school websites because they face racial, class, and gender discrimination along with limited language and computer skills. This discomfort did not apply to all of them. Several fathers, like Quach Hoang and Kevin Tran, were enthusiastic about computer technology and viewed the school’s webpage as an effective tool to manage their children’s development.

Issues with technological challenges: email communication

My second investigation aimed to explore how Vietnamese fathers coped with any language barriers as they communicated with their children’s teachers via email. Toan Luong, one of the interviewees, presented a relevant narrative. A 44 year-old baker, Luong is a married father and a newcomer to the U.S., arriving in 2007. In struggling with the language barrier, he had to depend on translation services. Luong recalled, “I have received emails or phone calls, but I don’t speak English [smile]. People then understood. An interpreter was assigned to help me to communicate with teacher.” Being unable to speak, read, and understand spoken English, he felt like he was dumb, blind, and deaf. With an unhappy feeling that he was going downhill, Luong tried to overcome these obstacles. He attempted to learn English as much as he could, but it was hard for him to remember a new vocabulary. Luong stated, “In the past, I only learned one, but I knew of...ten. Now I’m learning one hundred things, but it is restored in my mind only one thing, and as I get out of the class, it only left in my mind a half of it.” He demonstrated a lack of confidence in his English ability about communicating directly with his children’s teachers including via email. Therefore, he recalled, “I lack of contact to my children’s teachers caused by my English barrier.”

Like Luong, Tuan Cong, a 45 year-old married father and a mechanical assembler for SPS who had lived in the U.S. for 13 years, felt challenged because of his language barrier whenever he had to receive or respond to English documents that teachers sent him. Cong stated, “I struggled with English. When receiving letters or emails from the principal or teachers, I ask friends or someone with English proficiency for translation because I do not understand these letters completely.” Furthermore, Cong admitted that email communication is a challenge because he did “not know much about computer technology.”

Huy Dang, a 48 year-old computer assembler and a divorced father who had lived in the U.S. since 1992, felt ambivalent about communicating with teachers via email because of the language barrier. He was not comfortable with writing emails in English to communicate with his daughter’s teachers because of substantial language barriers. He knew how to use a computer, but only for sending messages to his “family members and reading online newspaper to see what happens around the world via online news in Vietnamese and family members can receive instant messages in few seconds.” Dang was aware of his disadvantages in writing English. He noted, “I need an interpreter for some complex information... Sometimes, I call [my daughter’s] primary teacher to check on her learning standard and to see what and how she is doing.” Dang was able to discuss his daughter’s performance with her teacher in simple conversations via telephone. He admitted that the “language barrier is a major problem for parents who do not speak English... There are not enough interpreters for all non-English speaking parents that the school can afford.”

Timothy Bui was a 36 year-old married father who helped his wife run a nail salon business. As a Vietnamese Amerasian, Bui looked Caucasian, but the language barrier separated him from mainstream society. Although Bui was able to access the school’s websites, he was

unable to email teachers because of his limited English writing skills. He stated: “I think the school should send notices to parents by giving students these notes. It is...easy and simple...because parents are busy and not many of [us] know how to use [the] computer.”

In contrast, Viet Le, an educated father who was familiar with the online network, still refused to communicate with teachers via emails. He emphasized, “When I need to solve a problem, I would like to meet [the] teachers or the principal in person to settle an issue, but not via the network environment.” While Le agreed that email offered a convenient way to communicate with teachers, he showed his concern about voicing his opinion on the school’s online network because he was not sure “if teachers respond quickly...not many teachers check parents’ notes often...I’m not sure how soon the school responds [to] my idea, or I have to wait for three or four months for the matter that I point out.” Le recalled that his conversation with teachers was mostly through phone calls, clearly indicating that he did not prefer communicating with teachers online.

Similarly, Son Lam recalled: “Although I did not have a high school education in the U.S., I do not face struggles when contacting with teachers regarding my children’s progress at school...I do not need a translator.” In choosing to contact teachers through telephone rather than email, Lam said, “I choose to make phone calls and leave messages for teachers...If my children return home unhappy or if they get bad grades.”

Like Son Lam, Erik Ngo, a 47 year-old married father of two daughters and an electronic technician, preferred to stay involved in school activities or contact his children’s teachers by phone calls or letters. Living in the U.S. since 1975, Ngo noted that he was able to speak English and depended on the computer to learn new things, such as accessing the Internet to listen to daily news, music or to search for essential information. However, he did not depend on

email communication with teachers, but preferred to meet school personnel in person. Chang-Muy, Fernando and Congress (2009), and Burke, Herron and Barnes (2004) assert that parental involvement in school activities, such as meeting and discussing with school personnel and/or becoming involved in student support groups is an important way to contribute to their children's academic achievement. Participating in a parent-teacher conference, Ngo can discuss his children's issues directly with teachers, counselors, or the principal in person, illustrating a concrete way to promote the child-parent-teacher connection. Ngo chose his own ways to communicate with teachers directly by "involving at school's activities, such as parent-teacher conference, sport activities, and fund raising events," which corroborates the author's argument. He recalled, "I do not have language problem...I have never contacted teachers via emails, so I don't understand how school's computer system works...I have opportunities to meet teachers to voice our opinions...or see the principal for discussions." Ngo was not using email communication with teachers, even though he stated that he could write English.

Trieu Dam, a 48 year-old married father who had lived in the U.S. for 23 years, studied and worked in the field of technology for more than 10 years. Nevertheless, Dam stated, "I face struggles when communicating with Americans [including teachers] via email because I can't write proficient English." Dam's account illustrates that no matter how long some Vietnamese American fathers have lived in the U.S., they still have difficulty performing online communicative roles, regardless of educational and technological backgrounds.

Tom Doan preferred to visit the school and directly communicate with teachers rather than communicate by email, because the latter required writing skills in English. Doan recalled, "If schools offer many opportunities for students, but parents do not pay attention or ignore the school's letters, or emails, their children will not get the best results." Doan chose to

communicate with authorities directly by participating in a large orientation meeting before the school year started, by joining the parent association, and by becoming involved in volunteer activities at school. In addition to helping his wife run a hair salon business, Doan monitored his son's learning tightly at home. Doan directly talked to teachers, but he still was disappointed about supplies for students, because the school failed to provide them with enough French books. He recalled his meeting with a teacher when his son needed French books. "My son is studying French but the school does not have French books for students to do their homework. I visited the school and inquired about that matter many times...I have not received any news of book in order to help my son at home," he said. After meeting and communicating directly with teachers, Doan found out that the school failed to provide enough supplies for students, but this failure was not the teachers' faults.

Doan also noted that many Vietnamese parents who faced language and technological barriers worked long hours, which led them to not only struggle with email communication, but also "forget to pay attention to their children." Park (2009) reports that many hourly-paid working parents face challenges of inflexible schedules, which prevents them from participating in school activities because "the entire family would have less income for that month if they took time off from work to attend school activities" (p. 12). While many Vietnamese parents rarely contact teachers due to conflicting work hours, a concept supporting Park's argument, many others "even skip the school's meetings to find out what was happening to their children at school," Doan stated.

At the same time, Doan expressed disappointment over what he felt was lost parental power due to cultural conflicts. He said, "I am also afraid that schools in the U.S. always follow legal regulations where teachers care too much about individualism and the rights of students

when parents want to access students' information online." Doan directly contacted "the principal, vice principal, counselor, and teachers in person very often," but not via email communication.

In contrast, Vinh Trinh claimed that "email communication is the way to go" to interact with school teachers. His wife's participation in the interview was very important, from Trinh's perspective, because her ideas were very persuasive. For example, he initially preferred to communicate with teachers through hard copy paper letters: "If we need something, we just wrote a letter and then our children just bringing it to the teachers." Trinh, however, changed his statement after a short discussion with his partner, which reflects a shift in gender relation: "Email is essential and email address is almost like a mandatory requirement nowadays." He conveyed that at the end of a month or a quarter, the teachers can make an email group list for each class. "Once they want to send some things out, they just click one and everyone got the email instead of calling to many different parents to their phone numbers," without knowing if the parents were available because "they're mostly at work." Vinh Trinh strongly supported email communication between parents and teachers. From his perspective, "beside the teacher-parent conference, email communication will be a really good choice nowadays." He noted that teachers and parents should have even more contacts, "if it is possible via email communication ...the teacher can just send us an email and tell us how [our daughter] had been doing the last month."

Gregory To recalled, "The most convenient way for parents to communicate with teachers is using emails." While To supported email communication, he acknowledged that many parents hesitated to speak out because of their limited English proficiency, and usually the school had English-Vietnamese interpreters to help for translation. He stated, "Some

[Vietnamese] parents do not have access emails, they can write a letter in Vietnamese and put in a communication folder, and their children will take it to school for teachers, and then a Vietnamese-American interpreter will help for translation.” My findings suggest that most of the Vietnamese fathers felt uncomfortable interacting with teachers via online network, such as email, due to their limited language and computer skills and educational backgrounds. While only a few of them were excited by computer technology, they do view email as an effective tool to interact with their children, teachers, and others.

Father-child role reversal

My third analysis concentrates on the pressure Vietnamese fathers may or may not feel as they depend on their children’s help with language and technology during acculturation. In Vietnamese American families, many children gain certain familial power because they develop proficiency in English exceeding the limited language of their parents. As Kibria (1993) argues, “Some children had assumed an important role in dealing with institutions outside the ethnic community on behalf of the household – a situation that could result in an unprecedented degree of power for children” (p. 151). Toan Luong demonstrated his dilemma as he depended on his children for English communication, which aligns with Kibria’s study. As Winek (2009) and Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind (1999) emphasize generational role reversal is based on gender, age, and social class, which undercuts parental authority while parents depend on their children’s assistance during acculturation. While Luong tried step by step to learn new terminologies, he recalled, “My big son said that now I am falling behind because of my English problem.” He felt that he was losing his parental control as he acknowledged the power dynamics of his family had shifted: “My sons have taught me. In the past, parents taught children, nowadays, my sons teach me hour by hour. They teach me how to turn on a computer

in English version.” From Luong’s perspective, he played a role as a “student” and his sons were “teachers.” While his sons showed Luong “The Source,” he was reluctant to learn how to navigate the website. Luong stated: “My sons let me view ‘The Source,’ but I don’t touch it...They teach me how to tap the keyboard, but I’m reluctant to touch it.” Luong lost his confidence to deal with computer technology because he not only learned English and the computer language at the same time, but he was also worried about “how to pay the rent and other expenses on time.” He depended on his sons in learning the web environment, which confirms the authors’ argument and such restrictions lead to the role reversal between fathers and children.

From Quach Hoang’s perspective, there was no pressure as he depended on his children’s help because of his language and technological barriers. “My children speak proficient English and they helped me read letters and documents in English most of the time.” Hoang was aware of how these language and technological disadvantages limited him in assisting his adolescents with their homework: “I can only help my small children to do their homework if I can remember what I have learned before...I can rarely help them in math, chemistry and physics in case if I can remember. Except these subjects, I cannot help them much.” Hoang recalled that when his children were in kindergarten, he was the one who had better English skills, and the responsibility of explaining things fell on him. However, after ten years, they, in turn, help him “not only read computer language, but also translate information into English.”

Tuan Cong was interested in learning English and computers, while at the same time he had to work long hours to support his family. He said, “I’m learning basic computer now; I can learn computer with my daughter.” Cong’s daughter was only in first grade, but he was worried

about the fact that he was unable to help her for the next level, and he hoped that she would teach him computer skills in the years to come.

While Erik Ngo claimed that computer use was not very important - “I only use computer for searching news” - he noted that, “My daughters teach me how to connect to the Internet and email from a cell phone. Their great help and their technological skills are beyond my imagination.” Ngo initially helped his daughters turn a computer on and off, but later asked them “how to access their school’s websites to see their grades and activities, and open email accounts.” He was impressed about his daughters’ improvement in technological proficiency.

While Garson (2006) and Giacuinta et al. (1993) assert that fathers play a vital role for the computer use at home, my outcomes show that some Vietnamese American children help their fathers learn how to use computer. My results show that many Vietnamese fathers, who faced language and/or technological barriers, depended greatly on the help of their daughters and sons in computer skills, which created a role reversal in father-child relationship. The exercise of parental control over their children, therefore, becomes more complex in these Vietnamese families during acculturation.

Long distance relationships between fathers and children

My last research question focuses on whether Vietnamese fathers actively promote parent-child communication in cases where they do not live together. There were only three Vietnamese fathers in this study who did not live with their children. Brad Vuong is a 45 year-old construction business owner and divorced father who has lived in the U.S. since 1988. He recalled that he had his own way to communicate with his two sons concerning their progress in school and personal activities. “I used to call my sons almost every day and every week, although they don’t live with me.” Vuong continued, “I...believed...what they told

me...whether it's true or not. I ask them if they have already finished their homework.” Vuong not only asked his sons, but also asked their mother to make sure this was true. He requested that his children let him see any papers or documents that the school sent home. He explained, “Although I do not speak English as well as them, but grading procedure or school's or teacher's comments, I can read and understand.” Vuong's parenting style made his sons feel closer to him and he chose to monitor them that way even though they live apart. As Vuong revealed, “they only appear by my side during holidays, break time, generally they visit me,” - the father-child interaction developed in a positive way. While he preferred to use telephone communication, his elder son invited him “to join Facebook for instant text messaging communication in case if the phone doesn't work.” Vuong talks to his sons in Vietnamese and encouraged his children “to speak Vietnamese and practice Vietnamese culture at home.” This connection made him very happy.

Similarly, although Huy Dang did not live in the same household with his daughter, he chose in-person conversations and phone calls to check “on her learning standard and how she was doing at school.” Dang's major concern was that “parents should watch for children learning every week, if we see they are not doing well in particular subjects, we have to help them for a better learning result.” Dang met his daughter on a weekly basis. He said, “She shows me what she receives at school and her personal stories.” He was proud of his daughter as, “She used to get A's in most subjects. She gets a B in math. That's why...she needs to work with her tutor in math.” Dang often received his daughter's updated information by participating “in parents' conference at school every quarter, where teachers report students' progress and how students meet school's learning standard.” Dang believed that the father-daughter relationship would be stronger if he could help his daughter in English subjects. However, he raised

concerns: “When she was little, I could help her, but not now because I do not have enough knowledge in English language and literature.” While Dang taught his daughter Vietnamese, she taught him new vocabulary in English. He recalled that his daughter successfully convinced him to talk to her on Skype: “She is teaching me how to set up a Skype account so that the father and daughter can chat, and I’m learning slowly because the software is new and I’m very busy.” While Dang worked full-time, he suggested that the school should send “letters for parents to attend at the conference about five days in advance” to help him arrange his busy schedule for participation.

In contrast to Vuong and Dang’s preference for verbal and face-to-face interaction, Kevin Tran was exceptionally interested in digital communication. Although he recently was divorced and lived a few miles away from his son, Tran still communicated with him by using emails, instant messages, and phone calls. During his six-month trip to Viet Nam for international business, he still monitored his son’s progress through the school websites and talked to his son about “guy’s stuff.” Many times, his son helped him “correct grammatical mistakes in English.” At least once, Tran recalled that “he downloaded a new version of a small software application for free video chat and instant messaging on cyberspace environment,” and father and son communicate and learn from each other via online network. Tran worked for “a company in the U.S. working with another company in Viet Nam to build some type of machine, is new energy that uses worldwide.” From Tran’s perspective, he talked to his son about this information because he wanted his son to follow his path in upholding a family business in Viet Nam in the future. Tran was excited when communicating with his son through the digital network. Sometimes, the conversation between the father and son was all about soccer games, Vietnamese music and food. He said, “Right now digital we use a lot is online network and

telecommunication.” Tran’s narrative illustrated how communication technology promoted closeness in a remote father-son relationship in the digital age.

According to Nguyen and Cheung’s (2009) report, in general, Asian American fathers usually carry on the traditional roles as the household’s most powerful breadwinners and are the decision makers in the family; 83% of their study participants “chose fathers to respond to a survey on parenting styles, and this overrepresentation spoke of the perception that the image of a father is highly related to children’s view of ‘parenting’” (p. 8). In other words, in many Vietnamese traditional families, fathers exert a strong influence in parent-child relationships. Although the three Vietnamese fathers in my study lived far away from their children, they tried to maintain father-child communication in their own complex ways, including phone calls or visiting their children in person. These fathers were responsible, and tried to support their children’s education and well-being regardless of the children’s gender and of distance.

Conclusion

While racial, gender, and socioeconomic status affects Vietnamese fathers’ participation in their children’s lives, I argue that fathering styles are varied and complex depending on the individual fathers in different educational levels, technological skills, characteristics and values. Despite the fact that these Asian fathers came from diverse backgrounds, the vast majority of first-generation Vietnamese American fathers have limited or no knowledge of the English language. In fact, the primary hope that ran through most interviewees’ narratives was their struggle with the language and technological barriers during acculturation. As the digital divide isolates these Vietnamese fathers from mainstream society, cultural and language barriers become even more complex. Tuan Cong recalled, “Parents would be trapped in language barriers.” Regardless of whether these Vietnamese fathers lived with their children or apart, they

tried their best to provide for their children's education. Some Vietnamese fathers, like Huy Dang, were concerned that not understanding English caused confusion for Vietnamese fathers because they were not aware of their children's progress or school plans.

Many Vietnamese fathers' dependence on their children for translation services and technological skills causes significant turnaround in gender roles and positions. As earlier studies show, after settling in to American society, many Asian immigrant families deal with parent-child role reversals and issues arising out of these changed roles (Kibria 1993). Immigrant children adapt to the dominant language and culture better and faster than their parents, and play significant roles in family matters such as filling out general application forms, translating English documents into Vietnamese and vice versa, and taking care of bill payments (Ho 2005).

Some of my interviewees' circumstances validate Ho's report. Role reversals within the familial structure sometimes cause conflicts within the family, affecting father-child communication. Huy Dang recalled, "Older Vietnamese, non-English speaking parents need help in translation in order to voice their expectation when sending their children to schools." To promote their communicative roles, many Vietnamese fathers try to teach their children the Vietnamese language and culture or send them to Vietnamese language schools, which help promote father-child communication. Like Dang, Tuan Cong recommended "parents should try their best to learn ESL because it is very helpful" in monitoring their children's learning process. I suggest that to help Vietnamese fathers improve their communicative skill when emailing, Vietnamese communities should recruit more bilingual technology volunteer specialists to help disadvantaged parents develop their computer skills.

As demonstrated by scholars such as McBride, Schoppe, and Rane (2002), Kurasaki, Okazaki and Sue (2002), Harris, Furstenberg and Marmer (1998), Harris and Morgan (1991), and Marsiglio (1991), fathers from various cultures chose to be more involved with their sons than with their daughters. In contrast, Coltrane (2010) and Endicott (1992) report, fathers treat their sons and daughters equally on a regular basis. Since my outcomes do not have enough evidence to confirm these authors' studies, future research is needed to explore how fathers' involvement influences their children's development in gender relations. Nguyen and Laurell (2003), Zhou and Bankston (1998), and Swatos and Kivisto (1998) demonstrate that Vietnamese traditional parents would desire to have sons rather than daughters because sons maintain the family's name, provide care to the family members, while daughters would marry, subsequently contributing to another family's well-being. Doan points out the disadvantage of Vietnamese women in a patriarchal system, where a girl would become "a daughter-in-law...then that daughter-in-law has to be charming, good behavior, talented in domestic duties, and excellent in communication." In other words, "Boys were thus viewed as the future of the family and were often pushed to attain their highest achievements at school, while girls were raised to be housewives" (Zhou and Bankston, 1998, p. 84). The authors criticize gender inequality in Vietnamese traditional culture. In contrast, Hofferth (2003) and Fagan (1998) illustrate how fathers equally engage with both their sons and daughters. My findings confirm the complexity of the way in which Vietnamese fathers treat their sons and daughters, which, in scholarly literature, has shown some to favor patriarchal models, while others practice gender equality. Although the scope of my sample is limited, my findings indicate that Vietnamese fathers support both of these conflicting viewpoints because each father's personal belief and value systems are different and multifaceted. For instance, interviewee Doan encouraged both his son

and daughter to “improve their technological skills and integrate in mainstream society.” Conversely, he also participated in outdoor activities with his children in the Vietnamese Boy Scouts. His children, therefore, “will not always be working in front of a computer, but they interact with their friends to have fun and learn how to cook and camp.” Nevertheless, Doan kept “an eye on them” so he could “pull them back anytime.” Doan tried to maintain parental control more on his daughter than son in the process of acculturation, noting, “girls are like flowers; they need to be taken care of in order to mature into a beautiful garden. If parents do not monitor them very carefully, wild grasses will grow along with flowers, and the garden will have more grasses than flowers instead.” Dang’s definition offers a metaphor for Vietnamese girls as delicate and inferior. His belief finds roots in a patriarchal system which includes parental control that promotes inequality between genders.

Hughes and Hans argue “qualitative studies are needed to provide a richer description of the families, processes, and context surrounding Internet use” (p. 19). My qualitative study illustrates the ways the web environment affects father-child communication in complex ways concerning generational reversal and gender roles. My observation shows that while many Vietnamese fathers still uphold traditional gender roles in their families, they tend to value both their sons and daughters for their technological skills and academic achievement. More expansive research emphasizing paternal analysis with a complete investigation in language and technological challenges as well as gender relations should be developed.

As a result of this study, I recommend researchers take into account how technological changes affect father-child communication in tandem with particular family circumstances. Although first-generation Vietnamese American fathers are more conservative than the 1.5 generation fathers, I explore how each father’s technological skills affect his communicative

roles with his children and their teachers. I argue that in modern American society, many Vietnamese fathers, regardless of whether or not they live with their children, show a strong connection to their sons and daughters because they receive technological assistance from these young adults and teenagers to improve their communicative roles.

Hughes and Hans (2004) recommend that “researchers should focus their attention on the ways in which the Internet is used in the context of family life” because “for the most part, family scientists are not engaged in exploring the role of computer technology in family life” (p. 515, 517). They are concerned with the lack of research supporting how families adapt to technological development and how technology affects father-child relationships, including online social contacts and Internet communication. Further research is warranted on how technology not only affects the complexities of parenting styles in the domestic realm, but also in the social realm, including communication between parents, school personnel, and community advocates. The Vietnamese community should recruit more volunteer bilingual computer specialists, along with ESL teachers and translators/interpreters, to help Vietnamese parents overcome language and technological barriers.

Future research should also focus on how computer skills influence communicative roles concerning father-child interactions, which in turn affect children’s progress. Public schools should recruit more bilingual teachers to help with translation services, because the majority of first-generation immigrant parents, like the Vietnamese American fathers in my study, face language barriers. This policy should focus on the poor Southeast Asian American population, to help them embrace their communicative roles in interacting with their children and their children’s teachers in their own ways. This study illustrates ways Vietnamese American fathers challenge themselves to sustain their families under economic uncertainty. They must overcome

technological challenges in the online environment as well as threats to their traditional power and gender roles within the family. As a complex cluster, this male minority group should be differentiated from other Asian American male minorities because of their diverse, underprivileged backgrounds and multifaceted acculturation contexts.

CONCLUSION

As evidence that the mainstream concept of a post-racial society is idealistic rather than realistic, this study provides a basic framework for a greater understanding of the real-world difficulties, including the digital divide that Vietnamese American refugees and immigrants face daily on both institutional and individual levels. This study found that although a rare few of the Vietnamese American participants are satisfied with the “model minority” stereotype and have found material wealth and success, racial, class and gender tensions still greatly affect minorities in the United States. For example, many of the first-generation Vietnamese American parent participants, particularly some Vietnamese mothers, are isolated from the larger society, and even from their own children, because of language and technological barriers. While many Vietnamese adolescents and young adults gain access to communication technology and media consumption, they, like their parents, are not fully accepted as Americans.

Research in Vietnamese American and Asian American Studies (e.g., Aguilar-San Juan, 2009; Chan 2006; Vo 2000; Do 1999; Rumbaut, 1995; Kibria, 1993, and Montero 1979) reveals how Vietnamese refugees and immigrants struggle to acculturate while carrying the legacy of the Viet Nam War and resettlement on U.S. soil. A few studies show that some Vietnamese Americans encountered educational and economic opportunities; they are generally portrayed as “foreigners” in the process of assimilation (Espiritu 2008; Inkelas, 2006; Le, 2007; Kibria, 1993). Although these valuable works address the fundamental struggles of Asian American refugees and immigrants including language inadequacies, they do not address how digital technology complicates the lives of Vietnamese Americans.

My study investigates how such families face and sometimes overcome these challenges of acculturation. My findings reveal that while a few highly educated, high-income and authoritative parents equally shared gender roles and have integrated into mainstream society, most did not. A few of the Vietnamese American women in my study had notable advantages such as opportunities for higher education and paid jobs to supplement their traditional domestic responsibilities, such as cooking and doing laundry; therefore, these women had the necessary extra time to help their children to learn computer skills. Recent studies show that during acculturation, some Vietnamese American women found opportunities to voice their opinions, took jobs in industrial companies, contributed to the family's incomes, took advantage of resources in their new homeland, and practiced more control over resources than they did in Viet Nam (Nguyen, 2009; Vo, 2003; Kibria, 1993). However, most of the Vietnamese women in the study juggled work-family duties and faced racial and gender discrimination at work.

My results support earlier authors' studies and expand them into new areas to examine the ways in which technological issues additionally segregated the Vietnamese American women in their marginalized communities without social mobility, as they juggled work and domestic duties for survival. Phan (2005), Bui (2004), and Kibria (1993) show that many Vietnamese Americans adopt individualistic values to become stronger, with women having more influence than men in their families' structure. This process, however, can alienate men, who feel a loss of their social status and economic power. This previous research formed the groundwork for my study to expand on shifting gender roles.

As Bui (2004) and Kibria (1993) argue, Vietnamese American women have shifted in their roles from being invisible and subordinate to playing a key role in their families' sustenance, although most married female participants felt reluctant to take on the role of

breadwinner. Particularly, many women need emotional support from their families or community members when they face social isolation and unstable employment. They are ambivalent about shifting gender roles and the loss of parental authority because their desire is to preserve maternal power and thus tend to support Vietnamese traditional culture. This underlines the complexity of these women's lives, situated between the traditional patriarchal system and U.S. mainstream society.

My findings also show that a few educated and high-income Vietnamese American women participants felt confident in their roles as mothers and involved themselves in their children's activities at school and helped them solve homework problems. Results highlight how Vietnamese American women participants try to learn basic technological skills to help with their children's homework and communicate with school personnel.

Many Vietnamese American fathers also struggle to learn technological skills, and to maintain their social status and financial security to support their children's educations. As Vietnamese fathers try to maintain their traditional values, the need to learn computer skills to contact their children and teachers is essential, especially for divorced fathers who live far from their children.

Trinh (2005), Kibria (1993) and Rutledge (1992) argue that while many first-generation Vietnamese Americans try to maintain extended family values and traditions, the majority of second-generation Vietnamese Americans become "Americanized." Their behavior and dialogue represent a decline in parental authority, since they view the traditional family as outdated. In other words, intergenerational gaps threaten the sustained survival of Vietnamese American identities. Vietnamese immigrant families, though, construct ways to survive the social, cultural, and economic challenges in the U.S.

While my findings confirm these authors' research, my results also show the myriad ways that Vietnamese American elementary, middle and high school students respond to the technological gap between themselves and their parents. Some try to teach their parents basic computer skills, while others feel that their parents need to take classes and ask their own teachers. One of my findings illustrates how younger siblings tend to acculturate faster than their older siblings, including acquiring technological skills.

Results reveal that digital media consumption of CDs, DVDs, video games and communication technology can reinforce both generational solidarity and disparity between Vietnamese parents and their children. On one hand, digital media consumption promotes generational harmony when parents use DVD videos and music to teach their children Vietnamese language and culture. On the other hand, digital media consumption endorses generational conflicts when children are interested in watching American movies displaying influencing individualistic behaviors. These media consumption effects reflect new challenges in technology, including the digital divide that Vietnamese Americans experience during acculturation.

The majority of Vietnamese American parents face the digital divide while they communicate with school personnel via the school's online network, interact with their children's consumption behavior and homework assignments, and preserve their traditional culture. Consumption in technology creates conflict in some Vietnamese families, because some parents feel a loss of parental power as a result of their children's individualistic behaviors. Results show that technological development brings greater opportunities for wealthier study participants, but widens technological gaps in underprivileged Vietnamese families and communities.

Chan (1991) argues that negative stereotypes of Asian Americans in a long U.S. immigrant history, especially in greater Seattle, prevent them from becoming the “norm.” Instead, they were considered to be inferior, excluded, and alienated under the oppressive policies, practices, and attitudes of White dominance (p. 49-50).

Better (2008), Smith (2003), Wu and Song (2000), and Hirabayashi (1998) confirm Chan’s study and demonstrate that Asian Americans continue to face socioeconomic hardship including racial and gender discrimination in social institutions, such as housing, education, law enforcement, and employment during resettlement. Asian Americans, particularly, Southeast Asian immigrants who still carry the legacy of war trauma, role reversal, language and cultural conflicts frequently lack insight into how technological barriers segregate them into their marginalized communities. Advocacy and community-building coalitions, therefore, can improve their situation.

My findings demonstrate that many Vietnamese American parents try to overcome challenges to rebuild their new lives, to bridge the digital divide, and to become part of mainstream society. These parents often experience role reversal in family settings because their children function almost independently in their technology consumption and in English skills. The illustrated experiences and values of Vietnamese immigrants demand social changes in policy perspectives. I recommend that more education for school personnel about diverse cultures should be included in school curricula, while I acknowledge that mainstream economic downsizing greatly affects funding in public schools. Budget cuts promoted by many White conservatives and libertarians confront underprivileged Vietnamese American students in underfunded institutions. I suggest that existing equal opportunity employment policies and anti-discrimination laws be enforced and improved. Asian immigrants would benefit by building

community with other racial minority groups as they face institutional and individual racial discrimination in social realms. Vietnamese American community leaders should network and plan strategically with Asian American leaders to bridge the digital divide between separate Asian American communities. Community organizations should hire more bilingual Vietnamese-English teachers and bilingual technological skill specialists at different levels. Vietnamese community leaders such as board directors, executive directors, and board members should interact with and listen to their low-income community members' viewpoints to effectively serve their needs. Community directors should organize to provide flexible schedules of classes to serve Vietnamese Americans who work long hours during the day.

Since new media technology creates wider gaps between the rich and the poor in mainstream society, I suggest that more research be conducted to bridge the digital divide in marginalized groups including Vietnamese communities. Scholars should be more sensitive to the complex needs of new immigrants to promote interactions between Vietnamese American parents, their children, and teachers. Scholarship to examine the inequality among underprivileged and privileged Vietnamese is a must. Public policies should help Vietnamese students living in substandard housing and studying in underfunded schools. More funding is needed in the schools surrounding working class neighborhoods because the schools cannot afford to pay for qualified IT specialists and teachers. The need for access to new technologies must be addressed to give disadvantaged Vietnamese students the same opportunities as their counterparts in wealthier institutions. Future study should concentrate on underprivileged Southeast Asian Americans, including Vietnamese American parents, to examine how they use different forms of technology to interact with their children, school personnel, community members, and others to develop their cultural skills.

Vietnamese Americans face racial discrimination not only based on personal prejudice, but also on institutional manifestations. People of color, including Vietnamese women, should be treated equally at school, work, and in public realms. State policies should recruit more bilingual Asian American police officers, to fairly enforce the law and protect the victims of racial violence. More research is needed on how fathers sustain their families under the threat of economic uncertainty. Public schools should change their racial attitudes in evaluating students' ability to speak proficient English. A better understanding of how Vietnamese Americans struggle while acculturating will help raise an awareness of personal and institutional racism. Public policy should help disadvantaged Southeast Asian American students' access technology to improve their academic achievement. Future research should be essential to examine how racial discrimination affects second-generation Vietnamese American immigrants, who are caught between two conflicting cultures.

The struggles of Vietnamese American men and women should be brought to public attention, since the legacy of the war still lives on for many, and is compounded by socioeconomic hardship and social isolation. More scholarships and grants should be provided for the research community to learn more about the struggles of Vietnamese Americans during acculturation. Public policy makers should understand the special needs of Southeast Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans, to help them overcome social isolation and technological challenges.

Vietnamese American community members should recognize the few educated Vietnamese American women who choose to reverse traditional roles and embrace their independence. These women should become involved in community volunteer programs not only to help their children's academic success, but also to act as role models for Vietnamese

adolescent girls. Female achievement of higher education, technological skills, financial security, and involvement in their children's activities, may influence other Vietnamese American women and mothers.

My work contributes to the Asian American Studies knowledge base by demonstrating how Vietnamese American families face language and technological barriers during acculturation, in addition to discrimination based on race, gender, and class. Although the American dream does exist in a few cases, it has not been attainable for the vast majority of Vietnamese American participants. This work fills a gap in the literature and adds a new dimension to Asian American Studies, because it reveals how underprivileged Vietnamese Americans experience the digital divide in the dominant culture and also grapple with the changing roles and relationships within their own families and communities.

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APPENDIX A

FOOTNOTES

1. The “model minority” stereotype: An idealistic assumption that Asian Americans are homogeneous, they work hard and achieve the American dream, which does not reflect the real situation for all Asian Americans.
2. The “digital divide” is described to be the gap between the information “haves” and the information “have-nots” in relation to technological usage, such as access to the Internet, among underprivileged and privileged groups.
3. 1.5 generation refers to young Vietnamese Americans who came to the U.S. under the age of 18.
4. C.N. Le (2007) considers: “‘Asian American’ and ‘Vietnamese Americans’ refers to the population living in the United States who self-identify as having Asian or Vietnamese ancestry respectively, regardless of nativity, citizenship status, length of residence, legal status, or I.N.S classification (i.e., refugees versus immigrants)” (1).
5. C.N. Le (2007) argues that ‘acculturation,’ or ‘behavior assimilation,’ “takes place when s/he absorbs the cultural norms, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the ‘host’ society - in effect, when one begins to act ‘American’” (23).
6. Helping Link was founded in 1993; its website is: <http://www.seattle.gov/helpinglink/>
7. Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees from my research in summers 2008 and 2009 in Seattle.
8. Dac-Lo was founded in 1997; its website is: <http://www.daclo.org/index.html>
9. Van-Lang was founded in 1994; its website is:
<http://www.vanlangseattle.org/main/index.cgi>
10. According to U.S. Naval Institute – Naval History and Heritage Command: Operation Frequent Wind April 29-30, 1975: Saigon fell to the Communists, and a large number of Vietnamese and American personnel were evacuated by aircrafts and ships. This event was considered the major helicopter rescue in history.
11. After the mass migration of Vietnamese refugees and immigrants settled in the U.S., the federal government’s “Homecoming Act” established easier immigration requirements that applied to Amerasians. According to Zhou and Carl L. Bankston III (1998), in 1988, the Amerasian Homecoming Act directed the U.S. government to bring the Amerasian

children born as a result of the war to the United States. The authors show that under the Act, the federal government cut the documentary requirement for an Amerasian to leave Viet Nam to a minimum. An estimated 82,000 Amerasians and family members immigrated in the United States as “legal permanent residents” (p. 33 - 34).

12. Humanitarian Operation (HO): D.R.SarDesai (2005) reports that the U.S. negotiated with Viet Nam in 1989 to accept between 400,000 and 450,000 Vietnamese. Many of these were former inmates of reeducation camp “who had served the South Vietnamese and U.S. governments before 1975. They would be admitted under the Special Release Reeducation Center Detainee Resettlement Program” (p. 271).
13. Paul Rutledge (1992) reports that on May 31, 1979, the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) was established and divided by three categories for family reunification, former personnel of the Republic of Viet Nam’s government including military services and allies with U.S. government, and other cases, such as individuals involved in military services or overseas studies under sponsorship by the U.S., or Vietnamese who had experienced punishment, because of association with the U.S. government (p. 65).
14. “Vietnamese Amerasians are a living legacy of America’s longest and least popular war. The children of U.S. citizens and Vietnamese women, many Amerasians grew up in poverty as ‘half-breed’ (con lai) outcasts on the fringes of Vietnamese society,” says Robert McKelvey (1999). He continues, “Amerasians initially rejected as the responsibility of either the Vietnamese or the U.S. government, American public interest in them was rekindled in the 1980s by journalistic accounts of their fate, leading, in 1987, to Congressional passage of what became known as the Amerasian Homecoming Act” (3). By distinguishing Vietnamese Amerasian from other Amerasian, McKelvey confirms: “There are doubtless thousands of other Amerasians in Japan, Korea, Laos, the Philippines, and Thailand. However, the Amerasians in Vietnam hold a special interest for Americans. Not only are they America’s children, but they were left behind in the hands of the enemies of the United States” (10). Personally, I think the term “Vietnamese Amerasian” was created by the American public, not from the U.S. government because the U.S. government portrays all Amerasians the same.
15. C.N. Le (2007) argues for two types of assimilation: behavior assimilation and structural assimilation. Behavior assimilation or ‘acculturation,’ “takes place when s/he absorbs the cultural norms, beliefs, and behavior patterns of the ‘host’ society - in effect, when one begins to act ‘American.’” Le continues that structural assimilation “occur[s] when the racial/ethnic minority or immigrant and his/her descendants in later generations enter and become integrated into the formal social, political, economic, and cultural institutions of the host country (‘secondary relationships’) and develops numerous long-lasting personal friendships with the members of the majority group (primary relationships’) (22-23).
16. Hegemony: The notion of a subordinate population dominated by another dominant group. The power of the dominant class seems not to force the subordinate group, but the

theory claims that the ideas of the dominant culture are viewed as the norm in the mainstream culture. In reality, this “universal” perspective only benefits the dominant class. For example, Vietnamese Americans have to learn English because English is the primary language in U.S. society. Many Vietnamese Americans stay in the margin of the dominant culture because they cannot speak English.

17. “The Source” is a website for parents to check their children’s progress in Seattle Public Schools. Parents, Teachers, Administrators and Students also use The Source to communicate and cooperate with each other for educational purposes.
18. Diana Ly, White Vietnamese Amerasian, defines herself as a first-generation Vietnamese American because she feels connected to the Vietnamese language and tradition. She left Viet Nam at the age of 27.
19. The Vietnamese language school Van Lang, where children learn Vietnamese language and keep Vietnamese culture in proper ways. For example, they learn how to respect elders by showing their politeness and reason whenever they leave and return home or bowing their head when greeting the elders.
20. “Cai lung” or “renovated theater” traditional performing arts mixed between western opera and traditional Vietnamese music, most popular in South Viet Nam.
21. Robert Dunn (2008) observes that “‘consumption’ defies simple definition, encompassing a vast range of human practices and mental and feeling states (shopping, acquiring, using, possessing, displaying, maintaining, collecting, wasting, desiring, daydreaming, fantasizing,)” and all of these “involve complex relations and attachments to an infinite variety of objects and experiences. Material expansion and the proliferation of new forms of consumption have rendered mainstream economic ideas about consumption obsolete” (1).
22. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (2001) states that “Pornography is the sexually explicit depiction of persons, in words or images, created with the primary, proximate aim, and reasonable hope, of eliciting significant sexual arousal on the part of the consumer of such materials” (1347).
23. According to Wright et al. (2010), the term “digital divide” was invented by Lloyd Morrisett in 1995, the previous president of the Markle Foundation. Morrisett shows that the “digital divide” was alertness of segregation between those who are able to access information technology and those who are not.
24. ESL refers to English As a Second Language
25. WASL stands for Washington Assessment of Student Learning, a high school graduation requirement in a system of standardized educational assessment for high school students in Washington State.

26. Aviation High Schools (AHS) belongs to Seattle Public School system, but only recommended a very small number of outstanding students for admission. According to one of my participants, each year AHS only accepts about 100 gifted students who are interested in aviation technology.
27. SAT: (Scholastic Aptitude Test and Scholastic Assessment Test), a standardized test for American colleges' admissions.
28. IQ refers to Intelligent Quotient
29. I volunteered as a bilingual computer supporter/teacher at Helping Link in the summer of 2008 in Seattle.
30. Some fathers can speak English, but they chose to speak Vietnamese. I translated the entire oral history interview.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FOR FIRST AND 1.5 GENERATION VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PARENTS

In the role of a participant, before answering specific questions, every participant will be asked about his/her name, gender, age at the time of the interview, marital status, occupation, and number of years living in the U.S. and experience with digital technologies.

PRE/POST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LTSP'S VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PARENT PARTICIPANTS

1. What are your specific technological concerns regarding language barriers and cultural issues that you encounter when sending your children to Seattle public schools?
2. What are the changes on the Seattle public schools' websites that you might want to bridge the cultural gap between the Vietnamese traditions and the mainstream culture?
3. In what ways does computer technology affect your life?
4. What is your most important concern about your children's progress at school?
5. How do you monitor your children at school if you do not have access to technology?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO DISCOVER CULTURAL SKILLS

1. How often do you help your child in doing his/her homework?
2. Do you have a computer at home? (If "Yes") How often do you use it?
3. How often do you contact your children's teachers?
4. In what ways do you contact your children's teachers/administrators?
5. What is your best way to further develop communication with the faculty and staff in Seattle Public Schools?
6. In what ways do you feel most comfortable breaking down barriers between Vietnamese-American parents and Seattle Public Schools' teachers?
7. What factors should Seattle Public Schools consider in getting to improve to create better cross cultural skills between parents and teachers?

NHỮNG CÂU HỎI PHÒNG VẤN PHỤ HUYNH NGƯỜI VIỆT THẾ HỆ THỨ NHẤT VÀ 1.5

Với tư cách của một thành viên, trước khi trả lời những câu hỏi cụ thể, mỗi thành viên sẽ được hỏi về tên, tuổi, giới tính, tình trạng hôn nhân, nghề nghiệp, thời gian sinh sống tại Hoa-kỳ, và kinh nghiệm về kỹ thuật vi tính.

NHỮNG CÂU HỎI TRƯỚC/SAU KHI CÁC BẬC PHỤ HUYNH THAM GIA CHƯƠNG TRÌNH HỌC KỸ THUẬT ĐIỆN TOÁN

1. Khi gởi con em đến Nha Học Chánh Seattle, quý vị trải qua những khó khăn cụ thể nào về kỹ thuật do vấn đề trở ngại ngôn ngữ và phong tục tập quán?
2. Những gì quý vị thấy cần thay đổi trên mạng lưới điện toán của Nha Học Chánh Seattle để nối liền sự khác biệt giữa hai nền văn hóa Việt Mỹ?
3. Kỹ thuật điện toán ảnh hưởng như thế nào đến đời sống của quý vị?
4. Điều gì làm quý vị nhận thấy cần quan tâm nhất về việc học tập của con em ở trường?
5. Việc học tập của con em được kiểm tra như thế nào nếu quý vị không có cơ hội để biết về kỹ thuật điện toán?

NHỮNG CÂU HỎI PHÒNG VẤN TÌM HIỂU VỀ VĂN HÓA

1. Quý vị có thường xuyên giúp con em làm bài tập ở nhà không?
2. Quý vị có máy vi tính ở nhà không? (Nếu có) Quý vị có thường xuyên sử dụng không?
3. Quý vị có liên lạc với thầy cô giáo của các em thường xuyên không?
4. Quý vị liên lạc với thầy cô giáo của các em hoặc nhân viên ở trường bằng cách nào?
5. Quý vị thấy phương pháp nào hữu hiệu nhất để tăng cường việc trao đổi ý kiến với thầy cô giáo và nhân viên phục vụ ở Nha Học Chánh Seattle?
6. Quý vị cảm thấy cách nào thuận tiện nhất để vượt qua trở ngại văn hóa và ngôn ngữ giữa các bậc phụ huynh người Mỹ gốc Việt và thầy cô giáo ở Nha Học Chánh Seattle?
7. Những yếu tố nào Nha Học Chánh Seattle nên xem xét lại nhằm tạo ra và nâng cao giao lưu văn hóa giữa các bậc phụ huynh và thầy cô được tốt hơn?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR 1.5 and 2nd GENERATION ENGLISH SPEAKING VIETNAMESE AMERICAN STUDENTS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO DISCOVER FAMILY INTERACTION SKILLS

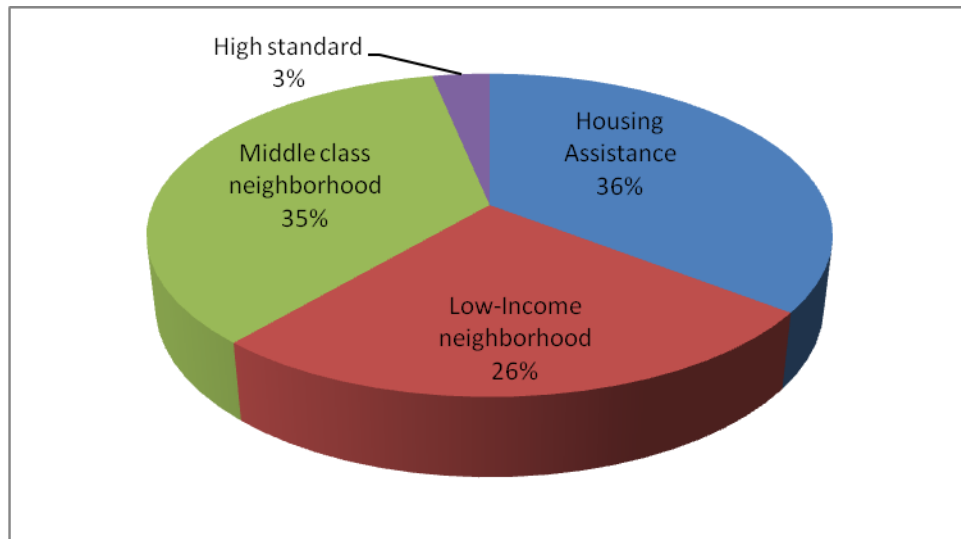
1. How often do you talk with your parents? Do you speak English or Vietnamese with them?
2. If you do not live with your parent/parents, what is the best way to improve your communication with them?
3. How do you feel about your parents monitoring your progress at school, your relationships with friends, and your homework at home?
4. What is your most concern regarding generational conflicts that you have encountered in your family? Please give an example.
5. What important factors should you and your parents consider to develop mutual understanding in your family?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO DISCOVER TECHNOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SKILLS

1. Do you feel you fit in your school environment as you are able to access technology and speak proficient English? Why or why not?
2. What are your specific concerns regarding technological skills, language barriers, and cultural issues that your parents encounter while they interact with your teachers?
3. How does the role of computer technology positively or negatively affect your life?
4. Are there any language, cultural or technological issues between you and your parents. (If yes) In what ways do you feel most comfortable in breaking down language, cultural, and technological barriers between your parents and you as well as your parents and teachers?
5. How you would improve the communication between you and your parents as well as parents and teachers--and how can technology be useful?

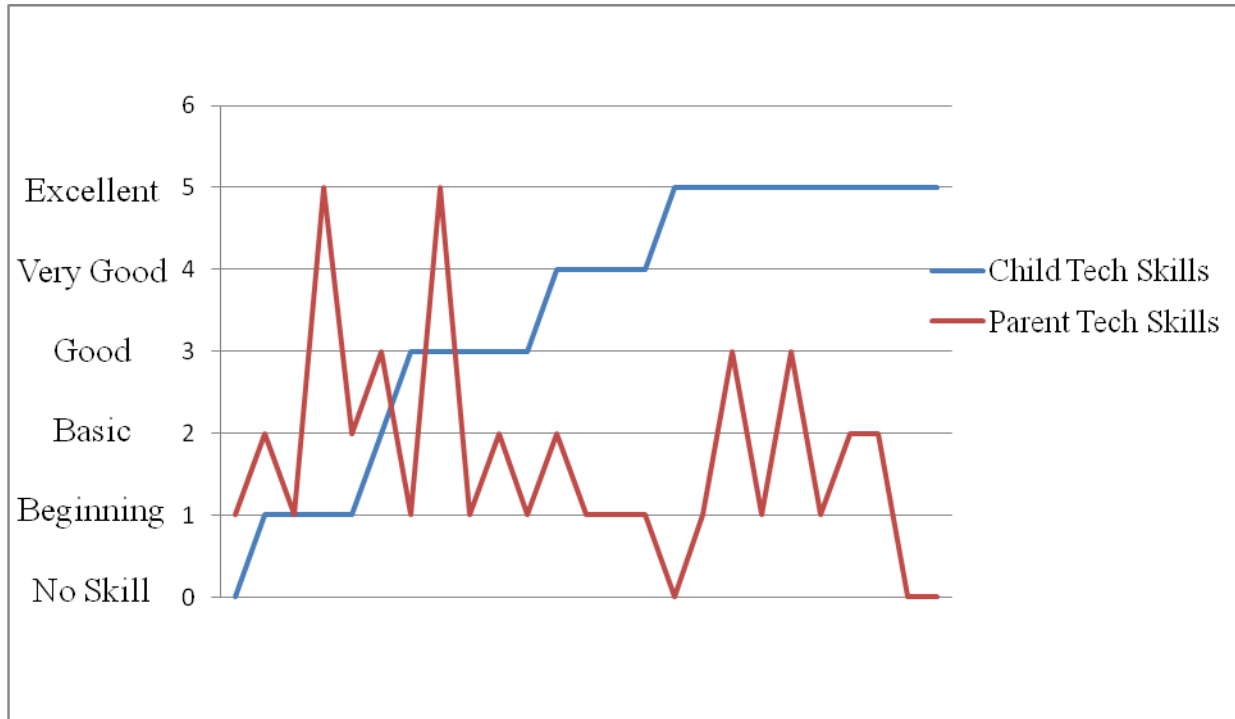
APPENDIX C

COMPARISON OF VIETNAMESE AMERICANS IN HOUSING CONDITIONS



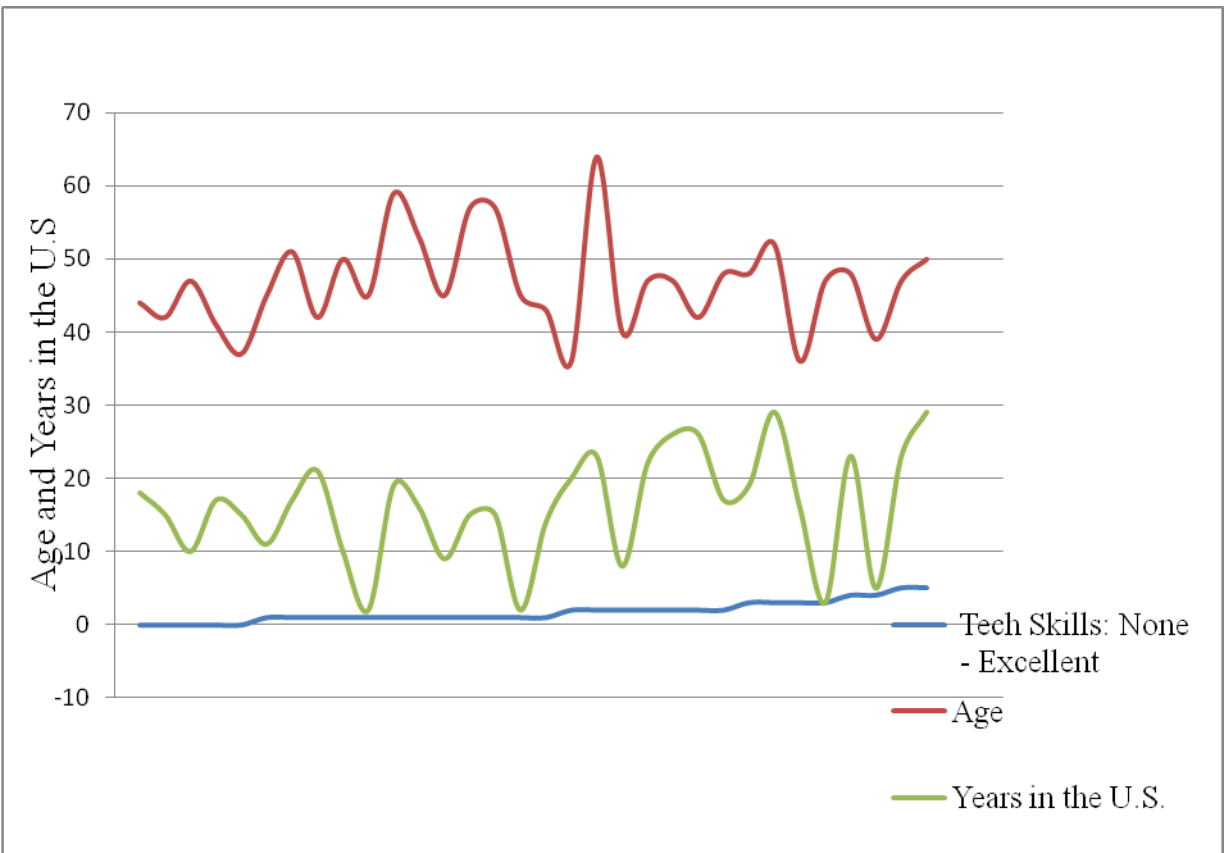
* Scale derived from my observation along with quantification of participants' qualitative responses to open-ended questions regarding interrelated factors throughout the interviews, such as education, occupation, number of years living in the U.S., cultural issues, language barriers, and technological skills.

APPENDIX D **THE DIGITAL DIVIDE BETWEEN** **VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PARENTS' AND THEIR CHILDREN**



- * There are 25 pairs of Vietnamese American parents and their children. While the interviewing methods included one parent and one of his/her child in each family, there were two cases that I interviewed one parent and two of his/her children, and one case that I interviewed two parents and one of their child.
- * Parents' technological skills: Scale derived from quantification of participants' qualitative responses to open-ended questions regarding their experience with and use of computer technology at work and at home.
- * Children's technological skills: Scale derived from quantification of participants' qualitative responses to open-ended questions regarding their experience with and use of the Internet, video game, at school and at home, and how often they help their parents to learn technological skills.

**COMPLEXITY OF TECHNOLOGICAL SKILLS OF VIETNAMESE AMERICAN
PARENT INTERVIEWEES SUMMERS 2008 - 2009**



* Scale taken from Appendix D

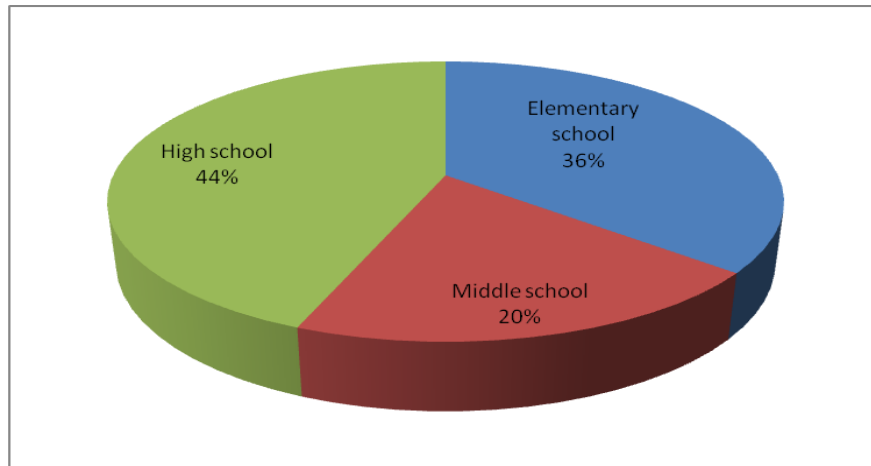
* There are 32 parent interviewees from summers 2008 and 2009

* The graph shows that the level of technological skills does not depend on either of the variables: age or time in the U.S.

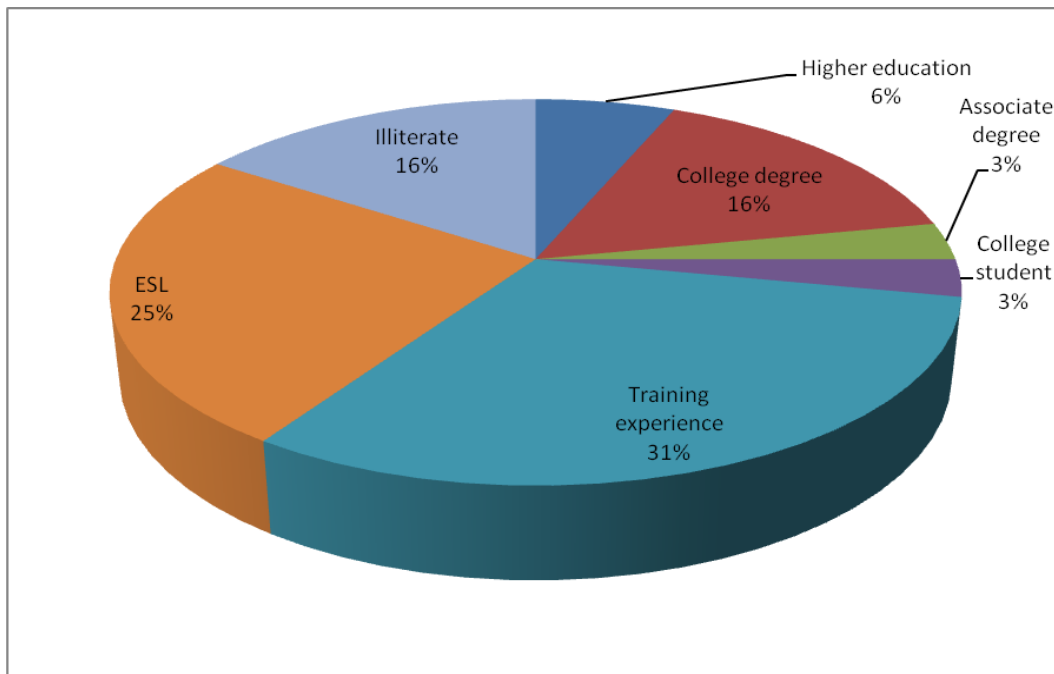
APPENDIX E

VIETNAMESE AMERICANS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN THE U.S.

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN STUDENTS' EDUCATION



VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PARENTS' EDUCATION

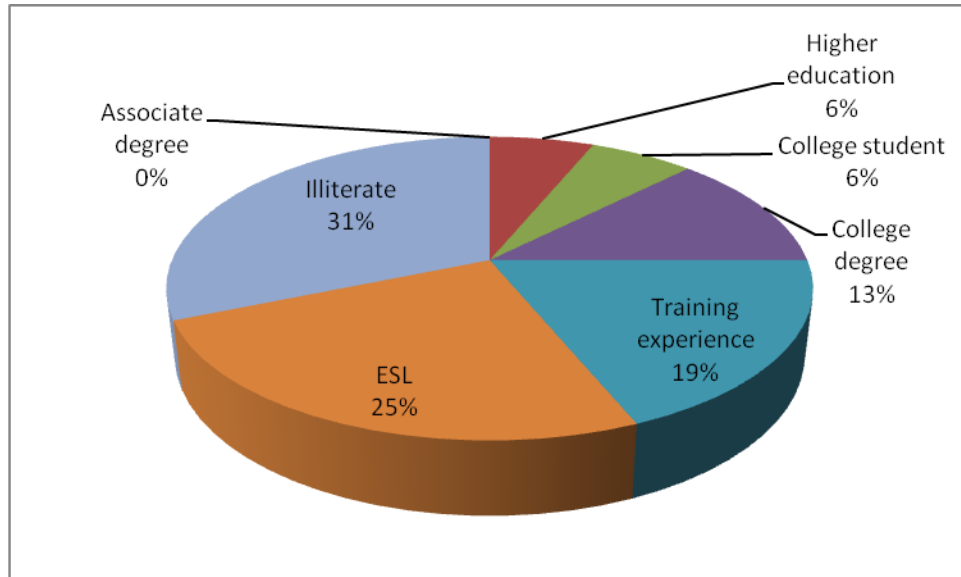


* The relationship between students' performance at their grade level and their parents' academic achievement and/or English proficiency (as these students are in an English-speaking educational system)

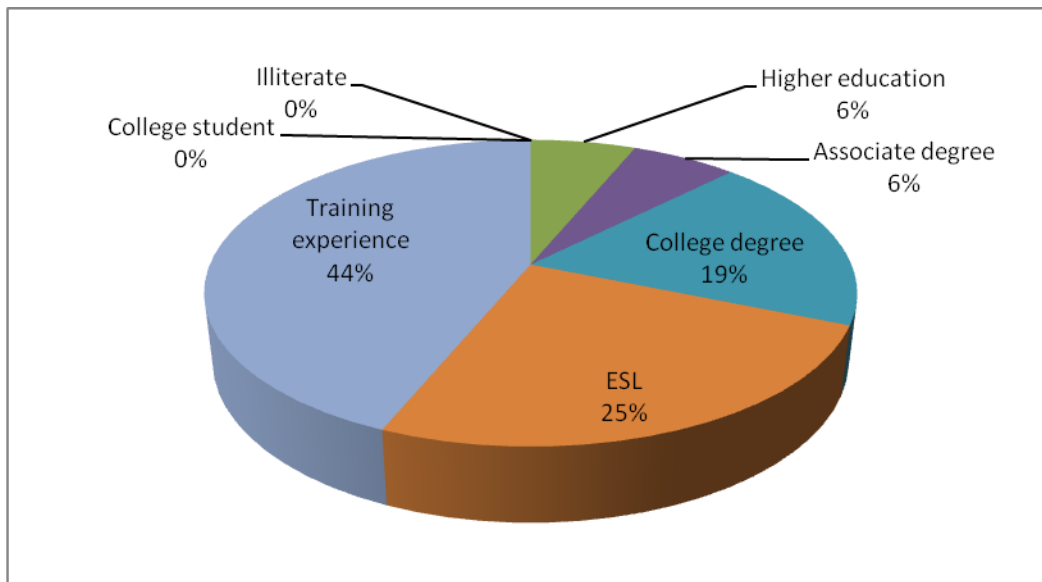
APPENDIX F

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PARENTS: GENDER IN EDUCATION

VIETNAMESE AMERICAN FEMALE EDUCATION



VIETNAMESE AMERICAN MALE EDUCATION



VIETNAMESE AMERICAN PARTICIPANTS: GENDER IN EDUCATION

