Immigration and Crime

Race, Ethnicity, and Violence

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Chapter 6

Delinquency and Acculturation in the Twenty-first Century

A Decade's Change in a Vietnamese American Community

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"It used to be that the Vietnamese students were always the best in my classes. Any time I saw a Vietnamese name on my roster, I knew that person was going to be a star. Now, it isn't like that. I still get some good students who are Vietnamese, but a lot of them seem even worse than the others. And it's weird, because these kids today were all born here and speak good English." These observations, made by an instructor at a local college in California to one of the authors, seemed to echo opinions we have heard from many professionals in education, law enforcement, and social services. It is possible that anecdotes like this simply reflect the clash between stereotypes and realities. It is also possible that a few Vietnamese academic success stories in the 1980s and the early 1990s led to the idealization of Vietnamese youth. As people come to face the fact that Vietnamese adolescents and young adults are as complex, diverse, and troubled as any other young Americans, this harsh reality may have provoked an excessive reaction.

Our own interest in investigating an apparent increase in problem behavior among Vietnamese young people stems from our research on the "valedictorian-delinquent" phenomenon in the early and mid-1990s. In our book *Growing Up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States* and in a series of published articles, we argued that popular, and seemingly contradictory, views of Vietnamese young people as "valedictorians" and "delinquents" were rooted in actual social tendencies.[1] Although this research was primarily based on a case study of a

Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans, it shed lights on the understanding of this new ethnic group in the United States.

Findings in the Mid-1990s

Vietnamese emerged on the American scene in significant numbers only after the fall of Saigon in the mid-1970s, and most arrived in the United States as refugees. By the early 1990s, many had been in the United States for about a decade and a half. This meant that the adolescents we studied in *Growing Up American* and other works were the first cohort who either had been born in the United States (the second generation) or had been born abroad but had spent much of their lives here (the "1.5" generation) and that the parent generation was a war-traumatized, ill-prepared, and economically deprived refugee group. Although Vietnamese refugees had no preexisting ethnic communities in the United States to shelter them and their resettlement here was almost entirely determined by government agencies or nongovernment organizations, the outcomes of their adaptation were uneven. On the one hand, many children were adapting to the American environment, particularly the academic environment, surprisingly well on the basis of media accounts and a number of case studies.[2] On the other hand, however, there were numerous reports of gang activities and other forms of serious delinquent activities among Vietnamese youth.[3] Local police reports also showed a rising concern with the growth of violent criminal activity among Vietnamese juveniles.[4]

Vietnamese parents were aware of and extremely concerned about the two major possibilities—scholarship and delinquency—facing their children. For example, in a survey of Vietnamese living in the Los Angeles metropolitan area administered by the *Los Angeles Times* in 1994, respondents with children under eighteen years of age were asked to identify the most important problem facing their children. Their answers were revealing: while 30 percent said that their children had no problems, 27 percent identified studying and doing well in school as the most important problem for their children, and 20 percent identified staying away from gangs as the most important problem. No other potential problem came close to these two—academic excellence and gang involvement—in the eyes of the parents.[5]

The findings from the *Los Angeles Times* survey of the Vietnamese in Los Angeles were quite consistent with evidence from the survey data, face-to-face interviews, and field observations that we gathered in the Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans in 1993 and 1994. In *Growing Up American,* we argued that the apparently contradictory stereotypes of Vietnamese youth and the polarized concerns of Vietnamese parents both derived from the fact that Vietnamese American young people were indeed moving in two contrary directions in their adaptation to American society. The bifurcation, as we called it, resulted from their being subject to two opposing sets of contextual influences. On the one hand, the ethnic community was tightly knit and encouraged behaviors such as respect for elders, diligence in work, and striving for upward social mobility into mainstream American society. The local American community, on the other hand, was socially marginalized and economically impoverished, and young people in it reacted to structural disadvantages by erecting oppositional subcultures to reject normative means to social mobility.

Drawing on the segmented assimilation theory, which predicts the assimilation among children of immigrants into different segments of the American society rather than into a single mainstream middle-class America, we conceptualize these contextual influences on bifurcated outcomes of Vietnamese youth in a model of multilevel social integration.[6] Individual young people, we argue, are embedded in families, and these families are also embedded in multiple sets of social contexts and social relations. Ethnic social networks and ethnic institutions constituting an ethnic community are the primary set of social relations. Moreover, the individuals and their families are located in particular neighborhoods and surrounded by local social environments where social relations are largely secondary and beyond ethnic boundaries. Whether or not contextual influences contribute to positive adaptation to the larger society depends on how consistent the ethnic and local social environments are with the goals and means of the larger society. When the local social environment is not consistent with the goals and means of the larger society but the ethnic social environment is, young people may benefit from integration into families that connect them to the ethnic community and from intense involvement in social relations in ethnic networks and institutions that connect them to that community.

Our case study of a New Orleans Vietnamese enclave provided empirical evidence in support of this model.[7] We found that although Vietnamese young people lived in a socially marginal local environment they were shielded from the negative influences of that environment by being tightly bound up in a system of ethnic social relations providing both control and direction. The adults in this ethnic enclave were relatively new arrivals in the country. They placed great emphasis on striving for opportunities in the new land and expected young people to obtain these opportunities through the American educational system. They also enforced in their young people the cultural values, such as respect for elders, obedience and hard work, that they brought with them from Vietnam, believing that these values were beneficial in achieving their goal of communal upward mobility. As a result, adolescents who were closely connected to their communities through families and peer groups were directed in ways likely to pay off through school success.

We also found that some Vietnamese young people living in the same neighborhood were rejected by other Vietnamese as "outsiders," or at-risk youth. Some of these youth were simply disoriented drifters and school dropouts, while others were lawless gangsters. Many of these alienated youth had families characterized by absent parents, poor relations among family members, weak connections to other Vietnamese families, or a lack of involvement in the Vietnamese community. We called these families "absent or partially absent family systems" and considered them problematic because they were isolated from the ethnic community. These families' own social isolation led their children astray, so that they drifted into peer groups or street gangs that stood out as being "too Americanized." In fact, being labeled as "Americanized" by other Vietnamese in that enclave did not mean that these youth had become part of mainstream American society; it simply meant that they had become like local American youth living in the same neighborhood, whose attitudes and forms of behavior were disapproved of by both the Vietnamese community and mainstream American society.

Social contexts, therefore, gave rise to a tendency among Vietnamese American youth to diverge into two distinct categories: a larger group that was closely tied to an ethnic identity and ethnic social relations and a smaller but visible group that was at the margins of the ethnic community with stronger behavioral and attitudinal ties to the local American youth subculture. Has bifurcation continued to perpetuate itself among the children of Vietnamese? In this chapter, we examine current behavioral and attitudinal trends among Vietnamese youth, using recently gathered data from the same Vietnamese neighborhood in New Orleans that we studied almost a decade ago. We aim to reevaluate and update our earlier findings by looking at whether Vietnamese American young people still fall into these two categories and, if they do, whether the categories continue to be as distinct as they were nearly ten years ago. Then we attempt to address any changes, using our model of ethnic social relations to discuss how these changes may be the consequences of changing social contexts.

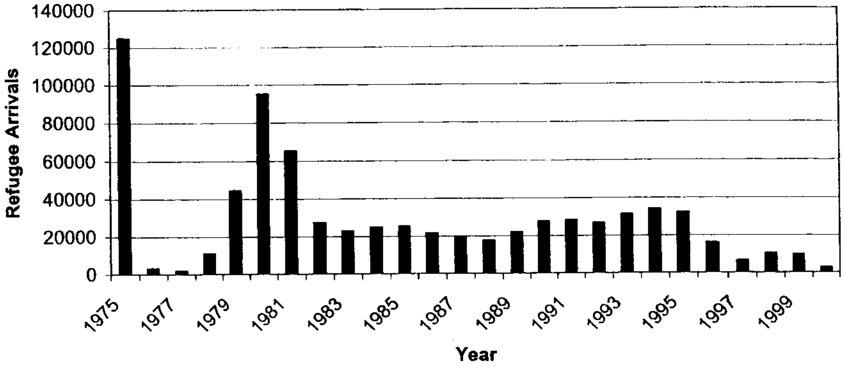


Fig. 6.1. Refugee Arrivals from Vietnam in the United States, 1975–2000

A New Cohort Coming of Age at a New Time

Over the past decade, a new cohort of Vietnamese American adolescents has reached high school age. The young people that we studied in 1993 and 1994 are now in their mid- to late twenties. Intensifying the cohort effect, the large-scale movement of Vietnamese refugees to the United States that began in 1975 essentially ended by the beginning of the twenty-first century. As figure 6.1 shows, the greatest waves of refugees from Vietnam arrived in the United States occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. From the early to mid-1980s until about 1995, just after we concluded most of our data collection for *Growing Up American*, refugee arrivals continued at a substantial rate, totaling around twenty thousand to thirty thousand annually. In addition to the first wave in 1975 and the second wave around 1980, there was a smaller third wave around 1990. This probably reflected programs, such as the Humanitarian Operation Program (HO), completed between the United States and Vietnam in 1989 to allow former political prisoners and their families to settle in this country. The HOs and other new arrivals were still being settled during the research period of our earlier work. After 1995, the influx of people classified as refugees slowed to a trickle, partly because so many people had already arrived in the United States and partly because of normalized relations between Vietnam and the United States.

The trends of Vietnamese refugee and immigrant influx have important implications for contextual differences between the adolescent cohort of 1993–94 and that of 2003. The decline in the refugee influx means that the parents of this recent cohort are much less likely than the parents of the earlier cohort to have fled Vietnam as refugees and that, among those born abroad, the recent cohort is less likely than the earlier cohort to be child refugees. Perhaps even more important, the young people of the early twenty-first century experienced drastically different family processes shaped by immigrant settlement as opposed to refugee resettlement. Members of the recent cohort are much less likely than those in the earlier cohort to be in absent or partially absent family systems as a consequence of the disruptions of flight. They are also more distant from the immediate sufferings and nerve-racking ordeals of war and flight that traumatized so many families and individuals in the earlier years, since the whole resettlement experience was something that largely took place before their personal memories. The Vietnam War had been over and Vietnamese refugee resettlement in the United States had already taken place by the time a fifteen-year-old in 2003 was in early childhood. One logical contextual consequence of this cohort effect would be an intensification of generation gaps between parents, who still had fairly clear memories of the original homeland, and their children, for whom Vietnam was an obscure and faraway place in Asia.

Apart from generation gaps within families, the changing nature of Vietnamese migration to the United States also suggests that the ethnic population has become increasingly diverse and that ethnic social relations between adolescents and their elders have arguably weakened, partly because of the lack of a shared experience, which was the trauma of war and flight for the refugees, and partly because of acculturation. For example, in our studies in the mid-1990s we found that the local Vietnamese Catholic church was the single most authoritative ethnic institution and the unequivocal center of social relations in the enclave. When we spoke with a pastor at this same church in May 2001, he remarked that it had become necessary to hold masses in English as well as Vietnamese because increasingly large numbers of young people did not have a sufficient command of the Vietnamese language. Young people and their elders today are literally speaking different languages. Moreover, as the group is settled in one location for a long time, its members inevitably increase the frequency

and intensity of contacts with non-co-ethnic members in the neighborhood and in workplaces. In the case of Vietnamese Americans, the stabilization of the ethnic population can mean that direct cultural influences from Vietnam are largely thinning out, giving way to influences from the larger society or from the people around them.

Delinquency in a Vietnamese American Community:
A Decade's Change

To contrast the situation of Vietnamese youth a decade ago with the situation today, we use data from two periods. For the first period, we revisited the quantitative and qualitative analyses in *Growing Up American*, based primarily on an in-school survey of 402 Vietnamese students and on fieldwork conducted in the Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans in 1993 and 1994. To contrast the early 1990s with the early 2000s, we administered another survey to 214 Vietnamese young people who lived and attended school in the same neighborhood in small groups and in various locations outside the school during the spring and summer of 2003. The use of these two survey data sets may raise some questions of comparability, since the initial survey not only included a greater number of respondents but was conducted in schools. It is entirely possible that young people would respond to the same survey questions differently in school and out of school. However, we think the fact that the surveys at both points in time were anonymous does give them comparability. We also use informal interviews, conducted in the same manner and in the same neighborhood as the set from the first period, to obtain some qualitative information.

Overall, the 2003 cohort was in a better situation than the 1994 cohort in several ways. The current cohort was more likely to be U.S. born and less likely to be recent arrivals. Their parents were generally better educated. With fewer disruptions associated with refugee flight, they were more likely to live in two-parent homes. However, contradictory outcomes emerged despite such favorable contextual factors.

We highlight the delinquency trend using the three measures that we found most central from our research in *Growing Up American:* drug use, alcohol use to the point of drunkenness, and confrontation with the police. We caution that, because our 1994 survey was a school-based survey and the current one is a neighborhood-based survey, responses of the two surveys may not be entirely consistent with each other. Thus our

TABLE 6.1

Frequency of Drug Use, Alcohol Use, and Confrontations with the Police among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	%	*N*	%	*N*
Drug Use				
Never	89.3	359	37.9	81
1 to 5 times	2.0	8	47.1	101
More than 5 times	8.7	35	15.0	32
Alcohol Use				
Never	77.4	311	31.8	68
1 to 5 times	7.9	32	45.3	97
More than 5 times	14.7	59	22.9	49
Times Stopped by Police				
Never	77.9	313	37.4	80
1 to 5 times	14.9	60	57.9	124
More than 5 times	7.2	29	4.7	10
N	100	402	100	214

interpretation of the data focuses more on highlighting the trends and patterns among Vietnamese youth in the neighborhood than on generalizing them to the entire group in the United States.

Disturbingly, all three forms of delinquency seem to have become more common from one cohort to another, as shown in table 6.1. Almost all (90 percent) of those we surveyed reported that they had never used illegal drugs in 1994, but by 2003 this percentage had gone down to only 38 percent. The percentage of those who had used drugs more than five times had increased from under 9 percent to 15 percent.

Alcohol use to the point of drunkenness had also increased. Most (77 percent) of the respondents surveyed in 1994 said in the earlier survey that they had never been drunk, but around one-third (32 percent) reported so in the current survey. Nearly a quarter in the current survey said that they had been drunk more than five times, compared to just 15 percent in 1994.

Confrontation with the police had become more frequent too. The majority of the respondents (nearly 80 percent) surveyed in 1994 reported that they had never been stopped by the police, but only 37 percent reported so in the current survey. The percentage of those who said they had been stopped by the police more than five times was slightly smaller in 2003 than in 1994. Still, the general trend was much more contact with law enforcement at the later date.

While the number of Vietnamese youth who had never been involved in any form of delinquent behavior dropped substantially, by more than 100 percent, it was no longer as easy as it had been a decade ago to place young people into two distinct categories, "delinquents" and "nondelinquents," as we did in our research for *Growing Up American*.[8] Table 6.2 illustrates the trend in more detail. Using cluster analysis of the 1994 survey, shown in the first two columns, we found that the Vietnamese youth fell fairly distinctly into two separate groups on the three measures of delinquency. Moreover, the delinquents were a relatively small portion of all the adolescents in this neighborhood (less than 1 percent). Further, the U-shape distribution was easily discernible: 94 percent of those in the delinquent cluster reported using drugs more than five times, while 98 percent of the nondelinquents reported that they had never used drugs; nearly 92 percent of those in the delinquent cluster had used alcohol to the point of drunkenness, while 85 percent of those in the nondelinquent cluster reported that they had never been drunk; and 47 percent of those in the delinquent cluster reported that they had been stopped by the police for more than five times, while 84 percent of those in the nondelinquent cluster reported that they had never been stopped by the police. The 1994 data suggest that the delinquents and the nondelinquents were distinctly "bad" and "good" kids. In fact, both adults and youth in the Vietnamese enclave that we studied could easily tell the "good kids" from the

TABLE 6.2

Drug Use, Alcohol Use, and Confrontations with the Police among Vietnamese Youth by Delinquency Clustering, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cllluster	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster
Drug Use				
Never	0	98.1	0	100.0
1 to 5 times	0	1.9	75.9	0
More than 5 times	94.4	0	24.1	0
Alcohol Use				
Never	0	85.0	2.3	80.2
Once	8.3	7.9	59.9	19.8
More than 5 times	91.7	7.1	36.8	0
Times Stopped by Police				
Never	19.4	83.6	12.8	77.8
Once	33.3	13.1	79.7	22.2
More than 5 times	47.3	3.3	7.5	0
N	100	402	100	214

"bad kids." And this general observation reflected an actual split in the young people.

Nearly a decade later, our cluster analysis of the 2003 survey showed that nearly two-thirds of Vietnamese youth fell into the "delinquent" cluster (133 in the delinquent cluster as opposed to 81 in the nondelinquent cluster), which alarmingly contrasts with less than 1 percent in the earlier survey. However, the clustering itself appeared less distinct and more problematic. We no longer see a U-shaped distribution as revealed in our earlier survey, with respondents reporting either a great deal of undesirable behavior or none at all. In 2003, for example, fewer of those in the delinquent cluster reported using drugs, getting drunk, or being stopped by the police more than five times, but more reported engaging in these kinds of behavior one to five times. Even among those in the nondelinquent cluster in 2003, the percentages of those who had been drunk once or had been stopped by the police once were much higher than in the earlier survey.

The seemingly more advantageous contextual factors—more likely to be born in the United States, to have college-educated parents, and to live in two-parent families—did not seem to significantly reduce the overall tendency of the current cohort to engage in delinquent behavior. In our 1994 survey, 67 percent of the respondents were U.S. born, while 33 percent were foreign born (including those arriving at very young ages). By contrast, 84 percent of the respondents in our 2003 survey were U.S. born. Nativity was associated with delinquency clustering differently at two time points. In 1994, 91 percent of those in the delinquent cluster were U.S. born. But by 2003, the association became even more pronounced: almost all (99 percent) of those in the delinquent cluster were U.S. born.

Parental education seemed to be closely associated with delinquency clustering at two time points. For example, those in the delinquent cluster were more likely than those in the nondelinquent cluster to have fathers and mothers with less than high school educations and less likely to have parents with at least some college education. However, such associations became less discernible in the current cohort. For example, none of those in the 1994 delinquent cluster had college-educated fathers or mothers, but more than a third of those in the 2003 delinquent cluster had college-educated fathers, and 9 percent had college-educated mothers.

Family structure continued to suggest a positive association with delinquency clustering, given that family disruption was usually found to be related to problematic behavior among juveniles. Those from two-parent families were less likely to fall into the delinquent cluster than into the nondelinquent cluster in 1994. However, this association had nearly disappeared by 2003: those from two-parent families were as likely to fall into the delinquent cluster as into the nondelinquent cluster.

To address these obvious contradictory outcomes, we turn now to our earlier conclusions about acculturation and maladaptation in the Vietnamese community and attempt to understand changes in the light of these conclusions.

Acculturation

In our research for *Growing Up American,* we found that Vietnamese parents, other adults, and young people had specific stereotyped ideas about "bad" kids. They usually gave concrete descriptions of the attitudes and behaviors of those they considered "bad" kids: spending too much of their time "hanging out" on streets or public places, rather than staying at home; while at home, not getting along or cooperating with parents or other family members and not contributing to family chores; dressing and acting like other American youth in their schools and in the neighborhood; acquiring the tastes and interests of other American youth, such as playing loud American music; showing little interest in Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese ways of doing things. In short, the "bad" kids in the eyes of many Vietnamese adults were those who had been acculturated into American youth subcultures.

The descriptions of problem youth given by Vietnamese parents and other adults prompted us to include in our 1994 survey a number of items regarding tastes and interests. We asked respondents how much they liked or disliked Vietnamese music, helping around the house, reading, participating in school clubs, watching television, hanging out on streets or in public places, having one's nose pierced, and listening to rap music. For the purpose of brevity, we report in table 6.3 only the percentages that gave "likes or likes very much" answers.

Our earlier survey showed clearly that the delinquent and nondelinquent clusters were divided in their interests and activities along lines suggested by the Vietnamese. Those in the delinquent cluster were less likely than those in the nondelinquent cluster to report that they liked listening to traditional Vietnamese music, helping around the house, reading, and participating in school clubs but were more likely to report that they liked

TABLE 6.3
Tastes or Interests (Rated "Likes" or "Likes Very Much") by Delinquency Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster
Traditional Vietnamese music	9.5	67.7	1.5	32.1
Helping around the house	19.1	58.8	0	22.2
Reading	7.1	49.8	3.8	43.2
Participating in school clubs	14.2	52.9	9.0	45.7
Watching TV	95.2	82.3	78.9	80.2
Hanging out	95.2	82.3	93.2	76.5
Pierced noses	21.5	2.7	20.3	43.2
Rap music	83.4	33.5	92.5	76.5
N	36	366	133	81

watching television, hanging out, having their nose pierced, and listening to rap music. That is, the delinquents were more detached from things Vietnamese or things approved by the Vietnamese and more attracted to things viewed by Vietnamese adults as "too American," while the nondelinquents leaned more toward tastes and interests approved of by the adult Vietnamese community.

In 2003, there was a tendency toward a greater detachment from things Vietnamese or things approved by the Vietnamese community for both the delinquent and nondelinquent groups. The putative delinquents who enjoyed traditional Vietnamese music went down from less than 10 percent to barely 2 percent, while the putative nondelinquents who liked it decreased by half, from 68 percent to 32 percent. Both groups also declined in their interest in doing housework over time. While 19 percent of those in the delinquent cluster and nearly 60 percent of those in the nondelinquent cluster reported that they liked helping around the house in 1994, none of the delinquents and only 22 percent of the nondelinquents expressed such interest in 2003. Moreover, the taste for reading decreased substantially for both groups over the period between the two surveys. The interest in participating in school clubs also decreased, although this retained somewhat greater popularity than reading. While those in the nondelinquent cluster were more likely than those in the delinquent cluster to be interested in reading and school social activities, these nonproblematic young people seemed to become more like the problematic ones in their interests in things that used to be considered desirable by the Vietnamese community.

It is odd, but interesting, that watching television became less popular with both groups. However, perhaps we should not make too much of this, considering that the overwhelming majority of young people in both groups and at both points in time liked watching television. Perhaps the slight decrease was due to an increase in the availability of other sorts of entertainment, such as computer games, but this is purely speculation.

"Hanging out" was often taken as a key characteristic of delinquent youth in the Vietnamese enclave under study. As a police document on Vietnamese gangs that we quoted in *Growing Up American* observed, "Being a gang member involves a lot of 'hanging out.'" Gangbangers hang out in pool halls, in coffee shops, in game rooms, and on the street.[9] Still, there is hanging out on streets or in public places, and there is hanging out in private homes. Meeting one's friends at the mall or at home may qualify as "hanging out" just as well as standing on the street corner smoking cigarettes. We should be mindful that this item may reflect a wide range of behavior. The majority of young people in both groups and at both points in time actually liked hanging out. Still, the delinquents were notably more likely to say that they liked it or liked it very much. There was a light decrease in this activity over time for both groups. It may be that there was very little real change in this behavior because it was so popular among adolescents to begin with.

Having one's nose pierced was another characteristic associated by the ethnic community with delinquency in the mid-1990s. Even though it was not as popular as hanging out, delinquents were seven times as likely as nondelinquents to express an interest in having it done, as revealed in our 1994 survey (22 percent vs. 3 percent). Strangely enough, those in the delinquent cluster were only half as likely as those in the nondelinquent cluster to report that they liked or liked very much this type of ornamentation in 2003 (20 percent vs. 43 percent).

Finally, rap music picked up in popularity. This reflected general trends in the larger popular culture. In the 1990s, rap and associated forms of music were beginning to enter the mainstream, and they have spread more widely since then. Our 2003 survey showed that most Vietnamese youth in both groups liked listening to rap music, although it was still somewhat more popular in the delinquent cluster than in the nondelinquent cluster.

Some of the differences between the two surveys, as shown in table 6.3, may simply be due to changes in fashions. Nevertheless, we can identify two important trends: First, the nondelinquents became more like the delinquents in their tastes and interests. Second, not only did the number of young people classified as nondelinquents shrink, but the kinds of activities and interests associated by people in the community with the "good kids" became less favored by most of the young people. If we combine these results with those shown in tables 6.1 and 6.2, there would appear to be a definite shift toward less desirable behavior and toward the kinds of self-presentation and self-expression associated with less desirable behavior.

In the mid-1990s, we argued that looking at the tastes and interests of Vietnamese adolescents could provide some insight into what their elders meant by describing the problematic young people as being too "Americanized." In the elders' eyes, "Americanized" youth included those who were highly acculturated into the local youth subculture and those who were sharply distinguished in tastes and interests from those who remained strongly attached to the Vietnamese community. Today, a general trend has become clear: more and more adolescents are moving closer to the subculture of their American peers and away from their Vietnamese community. However, those in the nondelinquent cluster tended to report having more white friends than those in the delinquent cluster.

Peer Group Association

Acculturation, as we pointed out in *Growing Up American*, is a matter of social contact, or peer group association, as well as of cultural expression. Since so many young people liked to "hang out," we might want to ask: Who are they hanging out with? Table 6.4 shows the racial composition of friendship groups. In 1994, we found that about one-third of the Vietnamese youth in either group had no white friends and that no one in the delinquent group had mostly white friends. By 2003, there was a significant increase in contact with whites for both groups, although such contact still remained limited.

Similarly, contact with blacks was not very frequent, even though the Vietnamese lived in a black-dominant neighborhood and attended black-majority schools, but such contact had increased over time. In 1994, the modal category for both groups was having "some" black friends. In 2003, a clear majority of those in the delinquent cluster and nearly half of those in the nondelinquent cluster reported that at least half of their friends were black. It also seems that social contact with African American young people was more common among those in the delinquent cluster than among those in the nondelinquent cluster at both points in time. At this point, some caveats may be in order. First, it would be incorrect and unfair to infer, on the basis of this association, that there is anything intrinsically "delinquent" about having black friends. In fact, the data showed that quite a few nondelinquents reported having many black friends, and this reporting told us nothing about who those friends were, other than their race. Second, we were not sure whether someone who said that at least half of his or her friends were black or white actually had a friendship group that was composed of mostly non-co-ethnic members.

TABLE 6.4

Distribution of Vietnamese, Black, and White Friends by Delinquency Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster
White Friends				
None	36.1	32.0	44.4	37.0
Some	63.9	63.4	26.3	27.2
At least half	0	4.6	29.3	35.8
Black Friends				
None	2.8	20.2	9.0	32.1
Some	63.9	70.2	12.0	21.0
At least half	33.3	9.6	79.0	46.9
Vietnamese Friends				
None	8.3	0.5	1.5	0.0
Some	8.4	8.8	12.8	3.7
About half	16.7	.3	22.6	17.3
Most or almost all	66.6	81.4	63.1	79.0
N	36	366	133	81

On the first caveat, those familiar with our earlier work may recall that this Vietnamese enclave is located in a low-income, minority neighborhood in which blacks make up nearly all the non-Vietnamese residents and that most of the Vietnamese children attended black-majority public schools. It makes sense, then, that our respondents in both surveys would report more contact with black peers than with white peers. It is also clear that the Vietnamese young people who had friendship ties with non-Vietnamese in the neighborhood would be associating with African American young people. On the second caveat, it should be kept in mind that these items are fairly rough ordinal indicators of the extent of social contacts with different peer groups. We do not believe that our respondents actually calculated the proportions of white, black, and Vietnamese friends at either point in time.

With regard to contacts with Vietnamese friends, it is fairly clear that the peer groups of these young people in both clusters and at both points in time were primarily Vietnamese. The nondelinquents were slightly more likely to report primarily Vietnamese social circles than the delinquents, and this remained constant over time. While those in the delinquent cluster tended to have more ties to outsiders than those in the nondelinquent cluster, a large majority in both clusters reported that "most or almost all" of their friends were Vietnamese in 1994 as well as in 2003.

Given that most of these young people liked hanging out and that they were apparently hanging out mostly with other Vietnamese adolescents, the question arises: Who were these Vietnamese friends? Would the Vietnamese friends of the delinquents be more "Americanized" than those of the nondelinquents? To explore this possibility, we looked at the language use of our respondents. Table 6.5 shows reported frequencies of speaking Vietnamese with friends in 1994 and in 2003.

Vietnamese youth who said that they never spoke Vietnamese with their friends were definitely in the minority at both points in time, but the percentages who said so did increase significantly for both groups, from 17 percent to 31 percent for the delinquent group and from 3 percent to 10 percent for the nondelinquent group. It is interesting to note that the percentages of those who said that they always spoke Vietnamese with their friends also increased over time but increased most markedly in the nondelinquent group, from 17 percent to 31 percent. Overall, those in the delinquent group remained much less likely to speak Vietnamese with their friends than those in the nondelinquent group.

TABLE 6.5
Frequency of Speaking Vietnamese with Friends by Delinquency Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

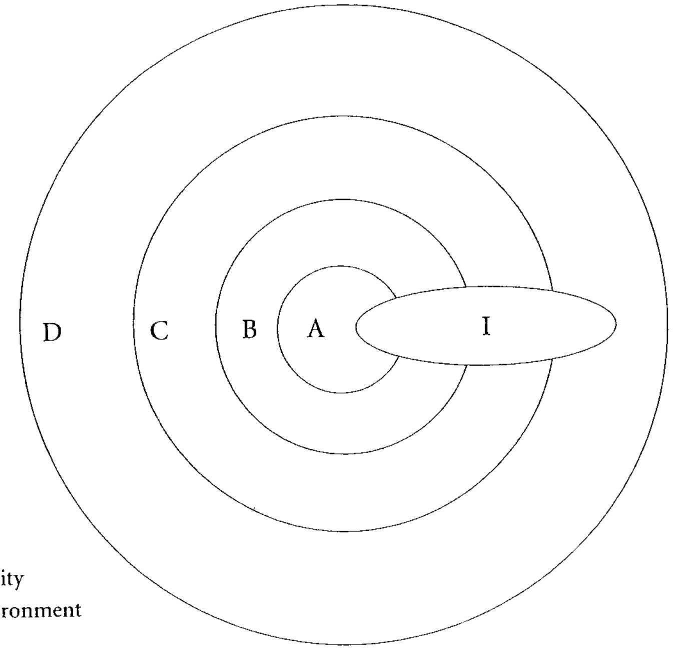
	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Nondelinquent Cluster
Never	16.7	2.5	30.8	9.9
Seldom	22.2	9.0	35.3	13.6
Sometimes	27.8	31.7	18.8	28.4
Usually	30.6	39.9	11.3	17.2
Always	2.7	16.9	3.8	30.9
N	36	366	133	81

What are we to make of these changes over time? In *Growing Up American,* we quoted a social worker active among troubled Vietnamese youth who told us that the youth he worked with wanted "to be American." But he went on to explain: "[W]hat they know about America is usually the worst part of it. They listen to rap songs about shooting policemen and watch movies with everybody killing each other. A lot of the American kids they know are kids who skip school, or quit school, and get in a lot of trouble. So, I think the problem is they're becoming part of the wrong part of America."[10] We argued that the so-called "bad" kids had not just failed to find a place in their own ethnic community. Instead, they had their own established social networks, their own systems of support and control, and their own accepted values and attitudes. They had formed something of an ethnic oppositional culture, existing both at the margins of their own community and at the margins of mainstream American society. But why should the characteristics of this oppositional culture have spread, so that the number of those showing signs of problem behavior increased? Why would even those who were apparently not problematic at all have taken on so many of the traits of the problematic group? To answer these questions, we return to the idea of contexts and look more closely at how the social contexts of Vietnamese American youth may have changed over time.

Multiple Contexts of Alienation and Integration

Our research in the mid-1990s led us to conclude that the apparent bifurcation of Vietnamese American youth was related to their acculturation to American society. In our fieldwork and survey data, we found that problematic behavior seemed more common among those who had spent almost all their lives in the United States and had become highly acculturated. Increasing problematic behavior would be consistent with the fact that most Vietnamese American youth now spend all their lives in the United States and have generally become more acculturated than their uncles, aunts, and much older siblings. Still, to understand why the trend toward problematic behavior may have occurred and may have affected more young people over time, it will be helpful to turn to a revised and updated version of the model of multilevel social integration that we developed in *Growing Up American.*[11]

We have proposed an approach to social integration that takes into account the effects of alienation or integration of Vietnamese youth at four

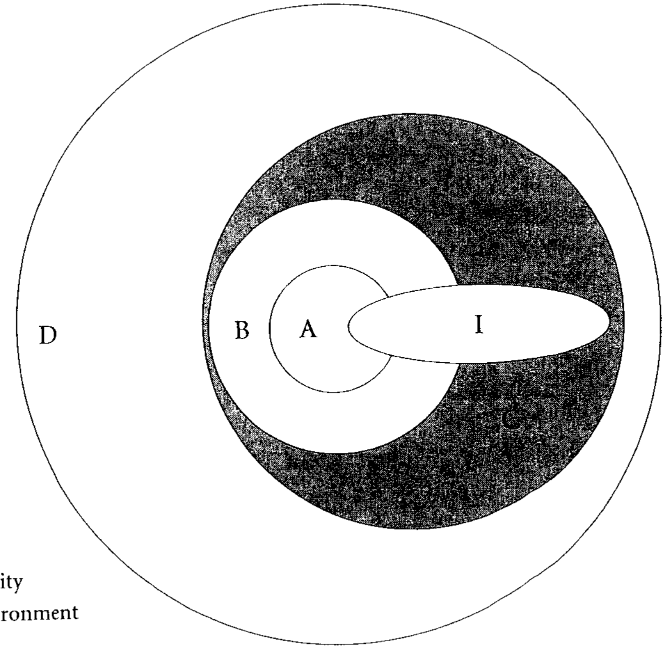


I. individual
A. family
B. ethnic community
C. local social environment
D. larger society

Fig. 6.2. Multilevel Social Integration, Ideal Case

contextual levels: the family, the ethnic community, the local environment, and the larger society. Following Uri Bronfenbrenner, we conceive of a set of relations among family members as an ecosystem, in which ongoing processes promote adaptation to a larger environment.[12] However, the immediate social environment may also be seen as an ecosystem, a pattern of interdependence among families and other social units, which makes possible adaptation to a still larger environment. Thus interactions among individual family members enable them to function in a community setting, and interactions among families and other primary groups determine how the community will act as a mechanism for adapting to broader social and economic exigencies.

The circles in figure 6.2 offer an approximate illustration of how a family system may integrate an individual into larger systems. Note that the oval representing the individual overlaps all of the systems, since individuals do participate in their own families, in their ethnic communities, in the local social environment, and in the larger society. In this ideal representation, however, the family is at the very center of the systems in which the individual participates, and each larger circle symmetrically contains each smaller circle. In the ideal case, the family is well integrated into the ethnic community, the ethnic community is well integrated into the local social environment, and the local social environment is well integrated into the larger society.



I. individual
A. family
B. ethnic community
C. local social environment
D. larger society

Fig. 6.3. Multilevel Social Integration, in the Marginal Social Environment

In this concentric model, problems in adaptation may occur because an individual is insufficiently integrated into an effective family system, because the family is insufficiently integrated into an immediate social system (such as an ethnic community), or because of problems in the integration of the immediate system into the larger surrounding social patterns. When the local social environment is a marginal one (i.e., a relatively low-income area with high rates of crime and juvenile delinquency), integration into the family and community systems is especially important because family and community must direct young people away from the local social environment to prepare those young people for society at large. Figure 6.3, representing the situation of family and community in a marginal local social environment, captures this possibility.

Under the conditions signified by figure 6.3, successful integration into the larger society depends on the fit between familial and ethnic social systems on the one hand and on the fit between the ethnic social systems and the larger society on the other. The local social environment, including both American and Americanized peer groups, pulls young people toward normative orientations that are at variance with those of the larger society. The more that families function to pull young people into the ethnic community and the more the ethnic community guides them toward normative orientations consistent with those of the larger society, the less those young people are drawn toward the alternative social circles of local youth.

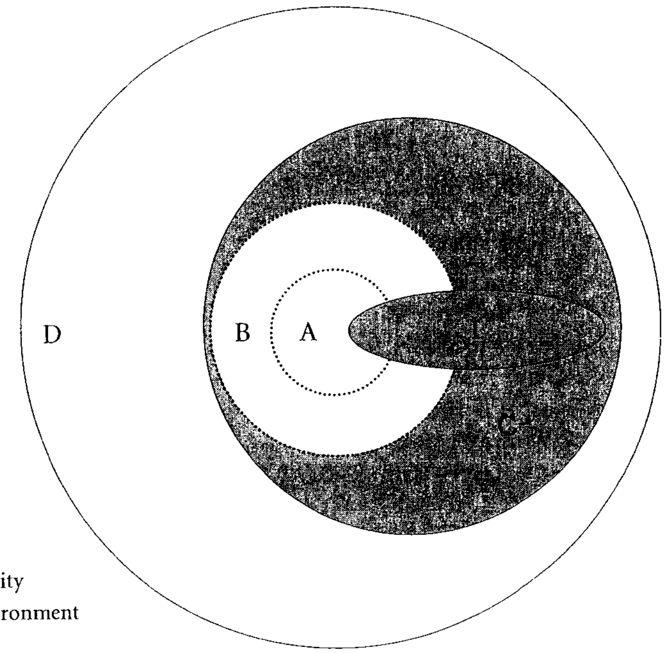
In our earlier work, we argued that individual young people had moved toward the local social environment of the oppositional youth subculture because their families were marginal to the ethnic community, and therefore insufficient to connect them to the ties of that community, or because absent or inadequately functioning families were unable to counter the attractions of the local environment. However, as shown above, today's Vietnamese American young people are more likely than those of the 1990s to come from intact families and have more educated parents. We believe that what has happened is that both the families and the community have become more porous, more open to outside influences over time. We illustrate this phenomenon in figure 6.4.

Systems of ethnic social ties still exist, and families still take part in them. But those systems pose less of a barrier to the outside than they did previously. As one resident of the Vietnamese neighborhood remarked to one of the authors recently, "It's so hard to keep up our culture and traditions when you've been in this country so long. Our children think that Vietnam is very far away, and sometimes we just can't pass things on to them." Even with intact families and with an existing Vietnamese community, it is increasingly difficult for families or communities to function as sealed subsystems. English-speaking children in Vietnamese families are bringing a world different from that of their parents and other elders into their homes and neighborhoods.

Conclusion

Despite the glowing media praise for Vietnamese overachievers in past decades, Vietnamese Americans are facing serious challenges in the twenty-first century. In this chapter, we have examined behavioral and attitudinal trends among Vietnamese youth, contrasting recently gathered data with data collected in the mid-1990s from the same Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans that we studied nearly ten years ago. This recent cohort of Vietnamese adolescents is mostly U.S. born and is growing up in an ethnic context quite different from that of the older cohort of the mid-1990s. We find that bifurcation is continuing but that the ranks of the "valedictorians" or "achievers" are getting smaller, while those of the "delinquents" are growing. Moreover, generation gaps within Vietnamese families are becoming greater, and the families are less able than previously to channel their children through systems of ethnic social relations.

Our examination leads us to conclude that delinquency is likely to become a more serious problem among Vietnamese adolescents in the foreseeable future. While the "Vietnamese valedictorians" celebrated in the media in earlier years will not disappear, it does seem that they will become less common, and it does look as if the parents of today's Vietnamese youth are likely to face more of the kinds of problems that affect other



I. individual
A. family
B. ethnic community
C. local social environment
D. larger society

Fig. 6.4. Multilevel Social Integration, in the Marginal Social Environment, Porous Families and Communities

minority communities in the United States. For immigrant groups in general, these results suggest that we should see acculturation and assimilation into American society as neither purely positive nor purely negative. However, our findings suggest that the acculturation of new immigrant groups is likely to be attended by some serious difficulties as new generations grow up in this country.

NOTES

1. Zhou and Bankston (1994, 1998); Bankston and Zhou (1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1997); Banskton, Caldas, and Zhou (1997).
2. Ashton (1985); Arias (1987); Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy (1989); Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore (1991).
3. Bergman (1991); Butterfield (1992); Davidian (1992).
4. Willoughby (1993).
5. *Los Angeles Times* (1994).
6. Portes and Zhou (1993); Zhou and Bankston (1998).
7. Zhou and Bankston (1998).
8. Zhou and Bankston (1998: ch. 8).
9. Willoughby (1993: 2).
10. Zhou and Bankston (1998: 201).
11. Zhou and Bankston (1998: ch. 8).
12. Bronfenbrenner (1979).

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