Delinquency and Acculturation in the Twenty-First Century:
A Decade's Change in a Vietnamese American Community

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Abstract

Our studies of Vietnamese youth in an ethnic enclave in New Orleans during the mid-1990's showed a growing trend of "bifurcation," a situation in which youth were diverging in two distinct directions—valedictorian (or achiever) versus delinquent. As predicted by the segmented assimilation theory, we found that Vietnamese youth with close connections to their ethnic community through their families were likely to concentrate on upward social mobility through education and that they were able to do so because of the support, control, and direction that they received from their ethnic community. In contrast, those with weak connections to their families and the ethnic community, or whose families were detached from the ethnic community, were likely to develop Vietnamese variations of an oppositional youth subculture and thus became delinquent "outsiders." Our survey data, face-to-face interviews, and field observations all provided substantial empirical support for this bifurcation argument.

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 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 the older cohort of the mid-1990s. We find that

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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. We discuss implications of these apparent trends for the assimilation of the children of immigrants.

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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 1980's and the early 1990's 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

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in the early and mid 1990's. In our book, *Growing up American: How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States*, and 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 1990's, 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 had either been born in the U.S. (the second generation), or who 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 non-government 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 based on 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 growing concern with the growth of violent criminal activity among Vietnamese juveniles.[4]

Vietnamese parents were aware of, and were 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 18 years of age were asked to identify the most important problem facing their children. Their answers were revealing: while 30% said that their children had no problems, 27% identified studying and doing well in school as the most important problem for their children and 20% identified staying away from gangs as the most important problem. No other potential problem came close to these two problems—academic excellence and gang involvement—in the eyes of the parents.[5]

The findings from the *Los Angeles Time* 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 the fact that the youth were subject to two opposing sets of contextual influences. On the one hand, the ethnic communities was tightly knitted and encouraged behaviors such as respect for elders, diligence in work, and strive for upward social mobility into mainstream American society. The local American community, on the other hand, was socially marginalized and economically impoverished, where young people 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 multi-level 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 sets 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 the ethnic community and intense involvement in the kinds of social relations in ethnic networks and ethnic institutions and from integration into families that connect them to the ethnic community.

Our case study of New Orleans Vietnamese enclave provided empirical evidence in support of this model. 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 the cultural values, such as respect for elders, obedience and hard work; that they brought with them

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from Vietnam, in their young people, believing that these values were beneficial in achieving their communal mobility goal. As a result, adolescents who were closely connected to their communities through families and through peer groups were directed in ways likely to pay off through school success.

We also found 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, by poor relations among family members, by weak connections to other Vietnamese families, or by a lack of involvement in the Vietnamese community. We called these families as "absent or partially absent family systems" and considered these family systems problematic because they were isolated from the ethnic community. These families' own social isolation led their children astray, drifting 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 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 re-evaluate 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.

A New Cohort in a New Setting

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 had essentially ended by the beginning of the twenty first century. As Figure 1 shows, the greatest waves of refugees from Vietnam arrived in the United States occurred in the late 1970's and early 1980's. From the early to mid 1980's until about 1995, just after we concluded most of our data collection for *Growing up American*, refugee arrivals continued at a substantial number totaling around 20,000 to 30,000 annually. After 1995, the influx of people classified as refugees had 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.

(Figure 1 about here)

Figure 1 is not a complete picture of migration from Vietnam to the United States because many of the people arriving in this country were classified as immigrants, not refugees. Arrangements between the U.S. government and the government of Vietnam enabled many

people who wished to leave Vietnam to be leave legally and to be admitted to the United States under programs such as the Orderly Departure Program (O.D.P.). Moreover, as the Vietnamese American population grew, relatives were increasingly able to immigrate under the normal guidelines of the U.S. immigration policy, which give priority to family reunification.

Figure 2 shows total movement, both refugee and immigrant, from Vietnam to the United States from 1975 to 2000. The general trend here is similar to that in Figure 1, but in addition to the first wave in 1975 and the second wave around 1980, there is a smaller third wave around 1990. This probably reflects programs such as the Humanitarian Operation Program (H.O.), concluded between the United States and Vietnam in 1989 to allow former political prisoners and their families to settle in this country. The H.O.s and other new arrivals were still being settled during the research period of our earlier work.

(Figure 2 about here)

Figures 1 and 2 have important implications for contextual differences between the adolescent cohort of 1993-1994 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 what we have called "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 had 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 15-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 ethnic social relations between adolescents and their elders 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-1990's, 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 period of time, its members would inevitably increase the frequency and intensity of contacts with non-coethnic 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

In order 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 revisit the quantitative and qualitative analyses in *Growing up American,* based primarily on an in-school survey of 402 Vietnamese students and fieldwork conducted in the Vietnamese enclave in New Orleans in 1993 and 1994. In order to contrast the early 1990's with the early 2000's, 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 it 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.

We used several key indicators of delinquency for our research in *Growing up American*. We found that the most central indicators were drug use, alcohol use to the point of drunkenness, and having been stopped by the police. Table 1 reproduces the results of our earlier study, and compares these with results from the current cohort of young people. 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 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 U.S.

Disturbingly, all seem to have become more common from one cohort to another. As shown in Table 1, nearly 90% of those we surveyed reported that they had never used illegal drugs in 1994. By 2003, in sharp contrast, this percentage had gone down to only 38%. The percentage of those who had used drugs more than five times had increased from under 9% to 15%.

(Table 1 about here)

Alcohol use to the point of drunkenness had also increased. While 77% of the respondents surveyed in 1994 said they had never been drunk in the earlier survey, only 32% reported so in the current survey. More than one out of five in the current survey said that they had been drunk more than five times, compared to just 15% in 1994.

Confrontation with the police has become more frequent too. Although the majority of the respondents (nearly 80%) surveyed in 1994 reported that they had never been stopped by the police, only 37% reported this in 2003. 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.

One of the big changes that we found over a decade's time was that the number of Vietnamese youth who had never been involved in any form of delinquent behavior dropped substantially, by more than 100%. Moreover, it was no longer as easy as it had been to place young people into two distinct categories, consisting of "delinquents" and "non-delinquents," as we found in the research for *Growing up American*. Using cluster analysis of the 1994 survey, we found that the Vietnamese youth fell fairly distinctly into two separate groups on the three key measures of delinquency—drug use, alcohol use to the point of drunkenness, and confrontations with the police. Moreover, the delinquents were a relatively small portion of all the adolescents

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in this neighborhood (less than 1%), as the first two columns of Table 2 shows. Further, the U-shape distribution was easily discernible: 94% of those in the delinquent cluster reported using drugs more than five times, while 98% of the non-delinquents reported that they had never used drugs; nearly 92% of those in the delinquent cluster had used alcohol to the point of drunkenness, while 85% of those in the non-delinquent cluster reported that they had never used drugs; and 47% of those in the delinquent cluster reported that they had been stopped by the police for more than five times, while 84% of those in the non-delinquent cluster reported that they had never been stopped by the policy. The 1994 data suggest that the delinquents and the non-delinquents 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 "bad kids." And this general observation reflected an actual split in the young people.

(Table 2 about here)

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 non-delinquent cluster), which alarmingly contrasts with less than 1% 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. Among those in the delinquent cluster in 2003, for example, fewer of them 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 non-delinquent 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. This raises the question: what has happened to the sharp bifurcation that we saw as such a

marked characteristic of Vietnamese American youth ten years ago? We attempt to answer this question by looking at contextual changes in the environment in which these young people live.

Table 3 provides a descriptive profile of generational membership, parental education, and family structure of the two groups of Vietnamese youth in 1994 and 2003 surveys. Generational membership includes the "first generation"—those who arrived in the United States as teenagers and who were recent immigrants, the "1.5 generation"—those who arrived in the United States between the ages of 5 and 12, and the "second generation"—those born in the United States. It should be kept in mind that some of those classified as "second generation," especially in the 2003 group, may have been the children of parents who had spent most of their own lives in the United States, although not enough time has passed since 1975 for the existence of a significant third generation of Vietnamese Americans among adolescents. In our 1994 survey, 22% of the respondents were members of the first generation, 11% 1.5 generation, and 67% second generation. In our 2003 survey, the percentages were 5%, 11%, and 84%, respectively.

<center>(Table 3 about here)</center>

As Table 3 shows, generational membership was associated with delinquency clustering differently at two time points. In 1994, those in the second generation were more likely than the first and 1.5 generation to fall into the delinquent cluster (91%). But by 2003, the association became even more pronounced: among those classified as delinquents, almost all (99%) were born in the United States.

In 1994, our respondents tended to come from families whose parents had limited levels of education. Parental education seemed to be closely associated with delinquency clustering. For example, delinquents were more likely than non-delinquents to have fathers and mothers with less than high school educations and less likely to have parents with at least some college education.

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By 2003, levels of parental education had improved markedly. However, the association of parental education with children's behavior became less discernible. For example, among the delinquents, none of them had fathers or mothers with at least some college education in 1994, but more than a third of the delinquents today had college-educated fathers, and 9% 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. At both time points, youth from single-parent or parent-absent families were more likely to fall into the delinquent cluster than into the non-delinquent cluster. Those from two-parent families were less likely to be in the delinquent cluster than into the non-delinquent cluster in 1994 (62% v. 66%). However, this association had nearly disappeared by 2003, and the percentage from two-parent families had increased to 78% for those categorized as delinquents and 77% for those categorized as non-delinquents. Nonetheless, having a grandparent in the home continued to be associated even more strongly with being in the non-delinquent category in 2003 than in 1994. But it also appeared that, while living in two-parent families had become more common, living in two parent families with grandparents present had become rarer.

It would seem that 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. But all of these apparent advantages did not seem to significantly reduce the overall tendency of the current cohort to engage in delinquent behavior. To address this obvious contradiction, 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 and Maladaptation

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 dislike 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 only report the percentages that gave "likes or likes very much" answers in Table 4.

(Table 4 about here)

Our earlier survey showed clearly that the delinquent and non-delinquent 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 non-delinquent cluster to report that they liked

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listening to traditional Vietnamese music, helping around the house, reading, and participating in school clubs, but more likely to report that they like 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 non-delinquents were more leaning 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 non-delinquent groups. The putative delinquents who enjoyed traditional Vietnamese music went down from less than 10% to barely 2%, while those in the putative non-delinquents who liked it decreased by half, from 68% to 32%. Both groups also declined in their interest in doing housework over time. While 19% of those in the delinquent cluster and nearly 60% of those in the non-delinquent cluster reported that they liked helping around the house in 1994, none of the delinquents and only 22% of the non-delinquent 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 non-delinquent cluster were the more likely than those in the delinquent cluster to be interested in reading and school social activities, these non-problematic young people seemed to become more like the problematic ones in their interests in things 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.' Gang bangers hang out in pool halls, coffee shops, game rooms, and on the street.[7] 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-1990's. Even though it was not as popular as hanging out, delinquents were seven times as likely as non-delinquents to express interests in having it done as revealed in our 1994 survey (22% v. 3%). Strangely enough, those in the delinquent cluster were only half as likely as those in the non-delinquent cluster to report that they liked or liked very much this type of ornamentation in 2003 (20% v. 43%).

Finally, rap music picked up in popularity. This reflected general trends in the larger popular culture. In the 1990's, 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

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Vietnamese youth in both groups liked listening to rap music, although it was still somewhat more popular in the delinquent cluster than in the non-delinquent cluster.

Some of the differences between the two surveys may simply be due to changes in fashions. Nevertheless, we can identify two important trends: First, the non-delinquents became more like the delinquents in their tastes and interests. Second, not only did the number of young people classified as non-delinquents shrink, also 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 showed in tables 1 and 2, it would appear that there is 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-1990's, we argued that looking at the tastes and interests of Vietnamese adolescents could provide some insight into what their elders meant when those elders described the problematic young people as being too "Americanized." In the elders' eyes, the "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, it is apparent that those in the non-delinquent 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 5 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 none 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.

<center>(Table 5 about here)</center>

Similarly, contact with blacks was not very frequent even though the Vietnamese lived in a black dominant neighborhood and attended black majority school, but such contact had increased over time. In 1994, the model 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 non-delinquent 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 those in the non-delinquent 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 there were quite a few non-delinquents who 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 their friends were black or white actually had a friendship group that was composed of mostly non-coethnic members.

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

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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.

Looking at 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 non-delinquents 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 non-delinquent 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, it raises the question of who these Vietnamese friends were? Would the Vietnamese friends of the delinquents be more "Americanized" than those of the non-delinquents? To explore this possibility, we looked at the language use of our respondents. Table 6 shows reported frequencies of speaking Vietnamese with friends in 1994 and in 2003.

(Table 6 about here)

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% to 31% for the delinquent group and from 3% to 10% for the non-delinquent 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 it increased most markedly in the non-delinquent group, from 17% to 31%. Overall, those in the delinquent group remained much less likely to speak Vietnamese with their friends than those in the non-delinquent group.

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 slip 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."[8] 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 established own 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 those showing signs of problem behavior grew greater in number? 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-1990's 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 to be 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 multi-level social integration that we developed in *Growing up American*.

We have proposed an approach to social integration that takes into account the effects of alienation or integration of Vietnamese youth at four 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 on-going processes promote adaptation to a larger environment. 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 3 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.

(Figure 3 about here)

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 4, representing the situation of family and

community in a marginal local social environment, captures this possibility.

(Figure 4 about here)

Under the conditions signified by Figure 4, 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 1990's 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 5.

(Figure 5 about here)

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 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 21st 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 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 minority communities in the United States. For immigrant groups in general, we think that these results suggest that we should see acculturation and assimilation into American society as neither purely positive, nor purely negative. However, we do think that our findings suggest that the acculturation of new immigrant groups are likely to be attended by some serious difficulties as new generations grow up in this country.

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Table 1: Frequency of Drug Use, Alcohol Use, and Confrontations with the Police among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994 Percentage	N	2003 Percentage	N
Drug Use				
Never	89.3	359	37.9	81
Once	0.5	2	6.1	13
Two to three times	1.0	4	29.9	64
Four to five times	0.5	2	11.2	24
More than 5 times	8.7	35	15.0	32
Alcohol Use				
Never	77.4	311	31.8	68
Once	4.2	17	11.7	25
Two to three times	3.0	12	19.2	41
Four to five times	0.7	3	14.5	31
More than 5 times	14.7	59	22.9	49
Times Stopped by Police				
Never	77.9	313	37.4	80
Once	6.5	26	22.9	49
Two to three times	2.7	11	18.7	40
Four to five times	5.7	23	16.4	35
More than 5 times	7.2	29	4.7	10
N	100	402	100	214

Table 2: Drug Use, Alcohol Use, and Confrontations with the Police among Vietnamese
Youth by Delinquency Clustering, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster
Drug Use				
Never	0	98.1	0	100.0
Once	0	0.5	9.8	0
Two to three times	0	1.4	48.1	0
Four to five times	5.6	0	18.0	0
More than 5 times	94.4	0	24.1	0
Alcohol Use				
Never	0	85.0	2.3	80.2
Once	2.7	4.4	8.0	16.0
Two to three times	2.8	3.0	28.6	3.7
Four to five times	2.8	0.5	23.3	0
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	0	7.1	24.1	21.0
Two to three times	0	3.0	30.1	0
Four to five times	33.3	3.0	25.6	1.2
More than 5 times	47.3	3.3	7.5	0
N	100	402	100	214

Table 3: Generational Membership, Parental Education, and Family Structure by Delinquency Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003.

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster
Generation				
First	2.8	24.0	0	13.6
1.5	5.5	10.9	1.5	27.2
Second	91.7	65.1	98.5	59.3
Father's Education				
Less than HS	47.2	37.2	9.8	21.0
HS graduate	52.8	43.7	56.4	35.8
At least some college	0	19.1	33.8	37.4
Mother's Education				
Less than HS	69.4	56.8	29.3	34.6
HS graduate	30.6	37.7	61.7	27.2
At least some college	0	5.5	9.0	38.3
Family Structure				
Single parent or parent absent	30.8	17.9	22.6	0
Two-parent	61.5	66.4	77.8	77.4
Two-parent with grandparent	7.7	15.7	0	22.2
N	36	366	133	81

Table 4: Tastes or Interests by Delinquency Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster
Traditional Vietnamese Music				
Likes or likes very much	9.5	67.7	1.5	32.1
Helping around the House				
Likes or likes very much	19.1	58.8	0	22.2
Reading				
Likes or likes very much	7.1	49.8	3.8	43.2
Participating in School Clubs				
Likes or likes very much	14.2	52.9	9.0	45.7
Watching Television				
Likes or likes very much	95.2	82.3	78.9	80.2
Hanging out				
Likes or likes very much	95.2	82.3	93.2	76.5
Pierced Noses				
Likes or likes very much	21.5	2.7	20.3	43.2
Rap Music				
Likes or likes very much	83.4	33.5	92.5	76.5
N	36	366	133	81

Table 5: Distribution of Vietnamese, Black, and White Friends by Delinquency
Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent 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	9.3	22.6	17.3
Most or almost all	66.6	81.4	63.1	79.0
N	36	366	133	81

Table 6: Frequency of Speaking Vietnamese with Friends by Delinquency Clustering among Vietnamese Youth, 1994 and 2003

	1994		2003	
	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent Cluster	Delinquent Cluster	Non-Delinquent 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	17.3
Always	2.7	16.9	3.8	30.9
N	36	366	133	81

NOTES

[1] Zhou and Bankston, *Growing Up American*; Bankston and Zhou, "The Effects of Minority Language Literacy;" Bankston and Zhou, "Religious Participation, Ethnic Identification, and Social Adjustment."

[2] Ashton, "Vietnamese Make Grade;" Arias, "Twelve Years Out of Vietnam; Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, *The Boat People and Achievement*; Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, *Children of the Boat People.*

[3] Bergman, "Terror in the Streets;" Butterfield, "Gangs Terrorize Asians;" Davidian, "Dread in Port Arthur."

[4] Willoughby, *Vietnamese Gangs*.

[5] *Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times Poll.*

[6] Portes and Zhou, "The New Second Generation;" Zhou and Bankston, *Growing Up American*.

[7] Willoughby, *Vietnamese Gangs*, p. 2.

[8] quoted in Zhou and Bankston, *Growing Up American*, p. 201.