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CASE HISTORIES.

In this chapter we have assembled 12 case studies of the adaptation of Southeast Asian youth in the United States, representing 4 Vietnamese, 4 Khmer, and 4 Hmong youth. The cases have been altered by names, dates and places, and in some instances the cases are composites of separate individuals. The alterations were made to protect the privacy of our subjects, but in all instances we have attempted to preserve the essence of their experiences and feelings. All of the quotations in the case histories that follow have been taken verbatim from transcriptions of our audiotaped interviews with these respondents, as previously detailed in Chapter 2.

Even with the relatively small number of cases, we have selected ethnographic materials representative of recurrent themes found in the larger pool of our intensive interviews with both youth (N=26) and adult (N=52) informants. We have selected a range of "successful" and "unsuccessful" youth, males and females, youth who arrived both pre- and post-puberty, who came as early as 1975 and as late as 1984, from urban and rural backgrounds, with many and with few social class resources, with and without their parents and families. In doing so, we include some exceptional cases -- representing, in effect, deviant case analyses -- which help to better identify key parameters and themes by providing a contrast against which the core elements of the various ethnocultural refugee groups can be exposed and made salient, enhancing thereby our ability to understand and explain them. Though these cases by themselves do not represent compelling proof of our generalizations, they do vividly illustrate for the reader the experiences and feelings of our subjects toward the process of making it in America.

To come away from a reading of these case histories with a set of fixed stereotypes for each of the refugee groups would be as unfortunate as it would be misleading, since we present these cases as representative of some ethnocultural "central tendencies" while recognizing that members of each ethnic group may vary widely along such major parameters as social class, age, gender, life events, personality, individual skills and attitudes, coping strategies, and level of adaptive success. Indeed, a reading of these case histories should convey instead a sense of the rich and complex human variety represented by our respondents. Thus, we advise the reader to approach the case materials as heuristic devices to be articulated with the quantitative findings earlier reported as a means of making sense of those findings. As in any study of many individuals, we recognize the necessity to "generalize" as a basis for making some scientifically useful claims about the human world; yet to permit the reader to reify those claims, without recognizing the wide range of contingencies that shape particular cases, would be a serious disservice to those communities we have been studying and attempting to understand.

Though in all instances we selected English-speaking subjects, we found a wide variation in their English language competence. This we attempted to handle by transcribing selected
interviews with an eye toward intensive content analysis; we also attempted to see if recurrent themes emerged during the series of relatively open-ended interviews. When we did a content analysis of the whole set of interviews, we were pleasantly surprised at the consistency of the way in which the subjects talked about their world: for example, Khmer subjects repeatedly used the phrase "step-by-step" when referring to their strategy of coping with problems; the Vietnamese organized their responses consistently around the central theme of "family;" and for the Hmong a central recurrent preoccupation was "parental control." We were also mindful of variations in the responses of our subjects and attempted to capture the essence of these differences. For example, we wanted to see how "successful" respondents differed from "unsuccessful" respondents, and found that they use different explanations about the outcomes of their experiences; thus, among the Vietnamese, the unsuccessful subjects constantly pointed to "external" events as the locus of control, while the successful ones referred to "internal" factors such as personal effort and hard work. In part, we were also interested in reporting our respondents' folk theories on why some people do better than others. But we make no strong claims on the validity of those theories. Rather they provide the reader with data about how "success" and "failure" of Southeast Asian youth are interpreted by the youth themselves.

Sometimes, as a result of new information gathered after we entered the field, it became necessary to reevaluate the criteria we had used in our initial classification of "successful" and "unsuccessful" respondents along a continuum of adaptive outcomes. In addition, after completing all of the field interviews, we were able to establish a more empirical basis for determining comparative levels of both intergroup and intragroup "success." For example, one Khmer case was reclassified as "unsuccessful" after we had interviewed him; initially we had thought he was quite "successful," given his two jobs and his perceived stature as a leader in his community, but through the interview we discovered that he dropped out of school, had no plans for the future, was unhappily married without any specific plans for resolving his marital difficulties, still experiences frequent "flashbacks" and could not resolve the emotional trauma resulting from his experiences during the Pol Pot period in Cambodia and its aftermath.

We attempted to capture the essence of each subject by beginning with themes they presented to us, and then by connecting those themes as they reappeared throughout their story, concluding with a summary comment about how they might represent different coping strategies and the dynamics underlying them. We are mindful of selectivity in both the questions we asked and the materials reported herein, but we interviewed sufficiently widely to gauge whether or not the themes reported here have validity or truth value, i.e., whether or not the themes are recurrent or idiosyncratic. We opted to focus on recurrent themes, particularly insofar as they seemed causally relevant to the interpretation of adaptive outcomes and of the youths' prospects for economic self-sufficiency. We laid aside issues which seemed idiosyncratic, since our objective here is not to provide full-fledged biographies. This oversight of the idiosyncratic means that we are truncating our description of the full range of experiences which our subjects may have had. Therefore, we recognize that our pragmatic choice "simplifies" and cannot do justice to the human fullness of our subjects; the subtlety and complexity of their attempts to cope with the world are in no way exhausted by our characterization of them.
A. Four Vietnamese Case Histories.

V-1: Van Le

Van Le is a 26-year-old Vietnamese medical student at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). He will soon be a doctor, a goal he has had since he was 11 years old. Along the way he has faced many obstacles, one of the most difficult being in a family of ten children with a widowed mother on the edge of poverty. His is a classic tale we come to associate with the well-publicized success of many Vietnamese refugees: a modern Horatio Alger story, Asian style. Beyond its mythological aspects, Van's story reveals the functional advantages of the collectivist family structures and values of educated Vietnamese social classes within competitive American educational and occupational contexts.

Van was born into a North Vietnamese family that migrated South during 1954 in the aftermath of the Geneva Accords and the partition of Vietnam. His father was a nationalist and idealist who fought the Japanese, the French, and the Communists. Because of his preoccupation with politics and the pursuit of ideals, Van's father devoted little time to the economic well-being of his family, and once gave away to a cause the money they had assiduously saved to buy a family home. As a "temporary" measure he became a high school teacher, albeit one with a modest income. While Van respects the way his father remained true to his ideals amidst the corruption he often witnessed in Vietnamese politics, he is critical of his father's lack of pragmatism and poor management of money. His mother completed only elementary school but was a daughter of a wealthy family in North Vietnam; during the exodus to South Vietnam, however, they lost their business and their money and experienced downward mobility. By the early 1960s, she was working as a secretary for the United States embassy in Saigon in order to supplement the family income. Thus, although they were from an educated class, they lived frugally in Saigon under the shadows of more well-to-do Vietnamese of the same class. Under these circumstances Van came to resent the treatment he received from school mates who looked down on his modest circumstance. When he was eleven, he made plans to go to France and become a physician, with a hidden agenda to show his haughty school mates that he was worthy of respect.

Since his mother had worked for the United States embassy, their family was given priority to leave Vietnam upon the fall of the Saigon government in 1975. While at Fort Chafee, Arkansas, where they were taken, the Le family (which consisted of mother, father, grandmother and nine children) had to be split into two parts because there were few sponsors willing to take in so many people. One group stayed in Arkansas while another was resettled in California, sponsored by a Protestant church. The separation lasted for several months until finally they were reunited in Stockton. A year later Van's mother gave birth to a tenth child in California.
His father died in an automobile accident in 1979 and left his mother a widow with ten children. Prior to his death, Van's father held many jobs, working as a janitor, counselor and interpreter. Before he died, he insisted on staying off of welfare and therefore the challenge was how he could support a family of 12 persons in a foreign country: "He was willing to do anything, working as a janitor in the hospital, and then as a janitor at a school. Working in the morning, working in the evening, and working weekends as a counselor." In spite of his pride he received food stamps for a while and was embarrassed by it.

Even while in Saigon, Van's older siblings were about to enter professional careers -- the oldest sister was about to graduate from law school and another sister was in the middle of her college training. The oldest sister changed her major in the U.S. and completed instead a degree in electrical engineering. She currently earns a high income working for a large corporation in Silicon Valley. She also married an American and has several children. His second sister was studying linguistics and had planned to become a professor in Vietnam. Since her arrival in the U.S., she received a business degree and is currently working as an accountant. A third older sister also got a degree in electrical engineering and is currently working in Orange County.

Van majored in Biochemistry at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and matriculated at the UC Irvine medical school. His undergraduate GPA at was 3.94 but he did not participate in extracurricular activities. He explains this in terms of his personality as a quiet individual and also of the influence of his father who encouraged him to think of doing well in school as his number one goal. "While, by contrast, my younger brother, the one after me, is more involved. He's more active giving speech to Vietnamese community and that kind of thing. So it's different. I guess personality... I was very quiet and more fit with the research type."

Van, who arrived in the U.S. when he was 15 knowing no English, is self conscious of his accent and realizes that many people have difficulty understanding him. He experiences no difficulty in writing and does well with the English language. When he first entered college, his English skills were still weak, while his math ability was very high [SAT verbal score = 300, SAT math score = 750]. Four years later his math and science skills remained high and his language skills, though still weaker than math, nevertheless improved: "On the MCAT [Medical College Admission Test], I did... in terms of the science part I got 13 throughout, from biology, physics, chemistry, problem-solving [out of 15 possible points]... But I come to reading, I drop down to 6... So I still have problems. It's too fast. I didn't finish the test. I finished about half of it by the time comes."

His continuing problems with English reflect his proclivity to avoid embarrassment: "Like speaking. I am quiet, because I'm afraid that if I say something wrong, it kind of embarrassing. In term of understanding, I can follow the lecture very well, I guess when the teacher, the professor giving lecture speak slower than some other conversation... Even [now] I still... when I talk to people I have to concentrate. I have to look at the person. It's a little bit more difficult for me to talk to someone like sitting to my back behind me and talking to me. I still understand, but I have to stop everything to listen... I think my language can be a liability. People understand me but usually takes... My first statement people usually ask me, what is it? They ask me to repeat it the first time, but once they usually can pick it up. So most the time I... most time I'm not conscious about my accent or my language. But where everybody is Caucasian where I'm living,
I'm more conscious about... but everybody... when I talk to them, first statement they ask, What is this? Will you repeat it again? Enough of time I'm conscious of that."

He does not think much of being a minority but he has had his share of racial baiting and confrontation, especially from the younger high school students. The older students are less overtly prejudiced and "it seems like the higher up you go the less of a problem it becomes." However, he has considerable pride and easily takes offense to racial slurs. He feels he must control it and does this by seeking ways to avoid confronting racist individuals: "Even now I still have that feeling [of wanting to strike back], but I'm little bit more controlled now."

While speaking of fighting back, he recalls that in high school he joined the school's wrestling team as a means of showing others that he should be respected. His father permitted him to be on the team but felt it interfered with his schooling: "He asked me, after two years when I received a lot of medals and he knew I was satisfied... the first year I lost almost every match. The second year he knew that I am going on to redeem myself, so he let me do that. Then after that he asked me whether I still wanted to go to medical school. He didn't think that wrestling... the wrestling took too much time out of me, training time. So he asked me if I still wanted to... It's hard for me to decide. First hard for me to take serious classes, college class." This was a lesson in priorities which he remembered while completing his college courses.

Education, in Van's case, is a family affair. As the oldest male he had to learn the ropes of the American school system and has since passed on his wisdom to his younger siblings. One younger brother graduated as class Valedictorian from high school and has a 3.9 GPA at UCSD. He too is planning to go to medical school. A younger sister has graduated from UCLA in political science and will be entering law school -- either UC Berkeley or Stanford. "If she gets into Stanford, either she can borrow money or I can help her out if that is what she need. Whatever's better..." This last remark is notable because it reflects the system of collective help in this family.

After the death of his father, his mother still was not involved much with the decision-making about education among the children, so, as the eldest brother, he took on the role of advisor to his siblings. They discussed the pros and cons of different schools and careers. He also felt that it was his responsibility to set an example for his siblings: "If I finished with a high education, then my other brother and sister can follow that."

He didn't receive advice from his older sisters because they didn't know life sciences: "I pick my school, and I pick my major and do everything. Because since they didn't know life science... if I go to engineering, that's a different story. They know more about that. But I'm the first one going to life sciences, so all new to them. They don't know school... about the school or about the major or anything. But now I'm giving advice to my younger brother or sister who would like to go to life sciences " This remark reveals the dynamics of an intrafamily support system where advice is seen as a pragmatic matter, but underlying the particulars of advice-giving is the clear assumption that the children will do well: "I did very well in Vietnam, in high school in Vietnam. And I did fine in high school here. I did much better than my older sisters, so they just assumed that I have no problem of schooling. So they didn't give me advice at all about how to study. They figure I knew... I know very well how to study, do well in exam. And they just assume that I get all the A's. So that's another pressure I get, too. My whole family just
assume that I get straight A. They would be surprised if I get B or something in any subject, any kind of subject."

The system of advising and directing children is based on birth order and gender. Van and his brother, being the oldest males, were instructed on general academic matters directly by the father. They in turn became responsible for giving advice to and monitoring the younger siblings: "It's different from my brother, my second brother, from this one. The first five of us who went... who left the refugee camp early... the teaching we get directly from my father. Like my father tutor me and my younger brother directly, so I didn't... my sister didn't teach me... My father was the one that teach that... that taught the first five. His philosophy... he would taught the first five while he's still young and have the energy. Then we will take his role and teach the younger one."

Family members look at their income as part of the family's income. For example, he had work-study employment at UCSD as an undergraduate and gave that money to his mother. As each child enters the work world, they are required to give a "tax" back to the mother. The downpayment for the house she's living in was given by the two oldest sisters and the monthly house payments also come from them. His mother's low-paying job in electronics assembly is enough to cover the costs of food and daily living costs, but it would have been impossible for her to live in that house without the family tax system. Even Van expects to pay a tax when he becomes a practicing physician.

Those who remain in his mother's house are expected to pay half of their salary to the mother. The tax is seen as "generosity" and is given freely without resentment and treated as a natural obligation of child to parent. In fact, whenever a child marries, part of the conditions of marriage is the acceptance of the tax system; this includes the American-born husband of Van's eldest sister. This system of taxing is flexible enough to take into consideration the financial needs of the child so that if grandchildren are born, the tax is reduced.

Van notices that his younger siblings have begun to move away from science and math-based occupations, such as electrical engineering and medicine, toward more language-based occupations such as law and teaching. He thinks this shift is associated with the "Americanization" of the younger siblings. One of the younger sisters even studies "like an American. She is a lot like Americans the way the study behavior, that kind of thing. Wait till the night before the exam to study, instead of like us steady for like a week in advance. And she came up and ask how come I got a B on paper? I wrote it last night?" Not only does she study at the last minute, Van said, but she studies with loud music on by the edge of her bed!

He thinks that this change in his younger siblings is the result of exposure to American life and the lack of exposure to Vietnamese ways: "The younger ones see the easy life in America. They don't know the value of the money. They don't have to go through the time that they starve to death and hungry and didn't have money. And they didn't have to work very hard for the money, especially now when everybody... my older sister working and giving money, almost giving anything they want to... They take it easy. And they have no problem with the English, so... And I thought that they would do much better since they have no problem with English. But it turn out that they use that to just relax and study the night before the exam."
Van's folk theory of explaining how Vietnamese are doing well reflects the Vietnamese emphasis on hard work rather than talent, as opposed to what one finds in the United States: "I would say that. I start doing well at school... Part of it, intelligence is one part. But you have to work hard for it, too. And study. That's my secret. I told my brother and sister. They said... they keep telling me I have a brain. That's why I have no problem. And I told them it's not so much of that. You have to work very hard for what you get."

Not only does he subscribe to this theory but he feels the urgency of life as he experienced it in Vietnam placed pressure on him to succeed. He noted that those Vietnamese boys who didn't do well in school were conscripted into the army during wartime--a powerful incentive to do well. "If you fail a class, you go into military. And that's a very strong pressure... And for life. Don't get out until you die, or you lose your arm or leg. So that's a very strong pressure on the man in Vietnam. If you fail one class... In Vietnam exam only once a year. You pass exam, you pass the class. You fail exam, you fail class... That's why Vietnamese men of my generation or older tend to work harder in school, because we went through that kind of environment. And here all a sudden you come to U.S., you can fail a class and still stay in school. It's so easy..." Van thinks this may explain why younger Vietnamese who grow up in America seem to lose the drive that characterizes their older siblings: "My father didn't have to push me, because I see a lot of thing in Vietnam. I realize that, in Vietnam... and when we moved to U.S. I realized in order to move and advance, I need to work hard. So on my own I doing it. I just disgust with the life in Vietnam. I just want to advance my life. I do it my own will. But my younger brothers and sisters, they need someone to push them."

As a substitute to the natural pressure in Vietnam, he feels it is his duty to put pressure on his younger siblings. He recalls his natural pressure in Vietnam this way: "In my opinion, in my experience my motivation comes more from our situation in Vietnam. When I lived in Saigon in a community where there's a lot of rich... all the rich people around, and I be ridiculed by them... our family's not rich, so we ridiculed by them... Yes. So I stay there, and live in constantly... I grow up there when people look down on our family constantly. And they have money, and so that's how I determine I will work hard to earn my degree. And I know that I have to go out of Vietnam to earn my degree. And I could come back and get a better status that way. Bring up my family status that way."

He finds it ironic that his Vietnamese motivation to succeed is more highly rewarded in America -- reflecting the immigrant view of America as a place of opportunity: "So every time I study I think about that. I work harder. The nice thing about the U.S. is the harder I work, the more I can advance. Not like in Vietnam. It's not even sure there that you can advance if you work harder." Yet Van grew up in a household that reinforced the ideals of education and hard work, and as illustrated in his father's encouragement to abandon high school wrestling, the priorities were embedded in concrete actions. Before his father died he would give pep talks about the virtues of hard work and education.

Observing that large families may be seen as a liability in the United States, Van was asked about his large family: How do you deal with the contradiction between the view that a large family is an economic asset versus the view that a large family is an economic liability in the United States? Like many other Vietnamese coming from large families, he celebrates the
virtues of large families because it is a "corporate" entity that generates its own self sustaining resources: "It's a plus that we have such a big family, because we all can work and contribute to the family... With my family a person consume a lot up through high school. Once you're in college, then we produce more than we consume, especially when my mother send somebody away for college... by not staying home. And we got... all of us receive some kind of scholarship. Then I am earning money. I worked part-time in college, and by the end of the year I save $800. I gave it to my mother on top of my summer salary... My parents feel that's an investment, the children. So the more children they have, the more investment they get. And when they go to college and go to a career, you get it back... If the child will not go to college and will not work, then they lose their income. The parents lose their investment there. So you have to get the child to go to college and finish." Not only do they lose their investment, but also their security for old age.

In Vietnam, with no public social security system, the children were seen as social security. Van observes that, since there is social security here, for the Vietnamese the continuing motivation to do well involves status-conscious pride more than financial worry. This is reflected in the prestige and respect they are accorded if other members in the community see that their children are going to college. As with many other refugees who see welfare as a poor option, he thinks the welfare system undermines pride: "And now in term of the welfare, I've seen... like when we work at beginning, but now we see welfare. I've seen a lot of my friends or my parents' friends who receive welfare live a much more comfortable life than our family did." But he adds that "Vietnamese, we can live very comfortable below that level [the welfare threshold]. Because when you pool money, and eat little, even a family of 10-15 people, eating Vietnamese food, it's very cheap. Even on welfare. That's why... a lot of American cannot understand why people receive welfare still have money to buy car. Because they don't need that much money for living."

The consequence of Vietnamese being on welfare is, in his opinion, the undermining of ethnic and family pride. But he also keenly appreciates the difference that social class resources make in the paths available for socioeconomic mobility in the United States: "I think those people... they... it's just my opinion, they have no pride in themselves. They have no interest to advance themselves... Some people cannot achieve in school. And most Vietnamese refugee... either they build up enough money to open a business to advance, or they have to achieve in school and to advance that way. That's what it takes to survive in American system. You have, let's say, a fisherman or somebody who have very little education in Vietnam, came here. They had no money to open business. And they cannot go through the education in order to advance. So they have to work at minimum wage jobs. And they look at the neighbor living on welfare, and earning extra without reporting it, live a very comfortable life. Why not stay on welfare and do work on the side... I would say that, especially if the family have had children, they will be doing that way while waiting their children old enough to get into college and become somebody..."
us a lot. And my mother saw that if we member of the church, then we will receive a lot more
benefit than if we are not members. So she forced all of us to go to the church, get confirmed,
and then go though all the study... She go to church every Sunday. She's very faithful church-
going. But at home she pray to her own god." Van himself is not religious: "I don't enjoy any
religion. I still believe there's God. That's about it, the extent of my religion. There's some man
upstairs decide our fate. And I think all the religion, all the god, Buddha, Jesus, and so on... they
come from same God."

He thinks of himself as primarily Vietnamese but aspects of American culture are also now a
part of his self concept. He feels Vietnamese about "dating and relationships, and having sexual
relationship is very much Vietnamese. And in my idea about family." On the other hand,
interestingly, he thinks of himself as American in terms of work: "Vietnamese tend to be little
more relaxed about working... Hard work in school is Vietnamese, but I think once you get out
school system Vietnamese more relax in term of working." He also sees himself as American in
his punctuality: "Another thing is... I'm very punctual. I like to be right on time. Most of
Vietnamese, they tend to stress 'rubber-band time'..." In fact, he joined a Vietnamese student
organization while at UCSD but quit soon after because he was disgusted with their lack of
punctuality.

He objects to the American de-emphasis on the family and friendship. He feels Americans
are distant and not as loyal as Vietnamese. Regarding boy-girl relations he think American
relations are superficial and lack commitment. His previous commentary on the family tax
system might strike Americans as mercenary but he feels the emotional basis of that system is
what is fundamental about family and social relations: "To my opinion there's more than just
providing the parents the money. There's more than just the money. That's the emotional thing,
attachment to everything else." He found strange what he sees here as the separation between
parent and child: "The children to the parents... they don't have... I guess... I've seen a lot of
American parents kick their children out the house by 18, by the age of 18 or something like that
so..." The idea of independence and separation between family members seems to undercut his
notion of how one should order one's life; for him, even if one does not need one's family
financially, the goal of life centers around the meaning which family gives to individuals: "It's a
good feeling when a lot of... when you go out and contribute something to the family. Then you
feel like you grow up now. You're not a child anymore, but a man now, you know. So he's
helping out the family..."

Ironically, Van recently became engaged to an American-born woman, a decision that would
seem to raise questions about his concern about the sanctity of the family which he so
extensively elaborated. They plan to marry when they both graduate from professional school.
He rationalizes the upcoming marriage in terms of how his-wife-to-be has accepted his
conditions of marriage, including the family tax system. Her acceptance of the tax system won
his mother and family over because they felt they were not losing a son, and hence their
investment, but rather gaining an additional member who would strengthen the family. Given
their cultural preference for patrilineality, they were more concerned that the eldest son might
abandon family obligations: "And they feel that the wife is going to take the man away. So if
it's the woman that marry, easy... the family get the son-in-law. But when the son marry... the
wife take the..." What made the girl even more acceptable was the discovery that her side of the
family would not make claims on her: "Yes, well, with this girl.. she doesn't have... she have a family of her own, but she's so distant... from her family, that she accept our family as her family. So that's the aspect that my mother really like in her. And our family become her real family. She was very lonely." He views her as being like a Vietnamese rather than American because her values complement his ideals of the family.

Van also anticipates that he and his wife-to-be will equally share decision-making and responsibilities in the household. "That's what I'm looking for in a family. That's, I guess, the Americanized... I want to have a partner, not somebody lower than me. Somebody that can talk intellectually." He agrees that women are subordinated in traditional Vietnamese society—as reflected in the proverb that says of women that as daughters they must obey their fathers, as wives they must obey their husbands, and in old age they must obey their sons—but only up to a point, in public rather than in private life, frontstage rather than backstage: "The teaching is that the woman has to obey the man. And she will do that in public. But as I said, anything [goes] behind the door... And the woman know that... They have another saying that the woman soft, but they can hit with a big stick and manipulate the man easily. They knew that. They knew that they have that power." But at the same time, the man must be allowed to save face in public: "A good wife will have to do certain things so that the man have face... yet still control behind him, control him behind the door... The bad wife is the one that try to control him in the public. And that is the kind of wife nobody want to touch." Still, while many Vietnamese women control the family budget and make key household decisions, Van adds that "in Vietnamese culture the woman job is cooking in the kitchen. And that, even in any kind of relationship, even if the woman control the man behind the door, she's still doing the cooking. In America you don't... sometime the woman and the man share in the cooking."

Despite his analysis of the way in which a large Vietnamese family is a net social and economic asset, Van himself does not plan to have as many children as his parents did. "At least two [children]. But the maximum is four... Not ten...When I'm getting old I don't want to still be taking care of my children." He specifically plans on having an even number of children: two or four, because that allows for more sibling cooperation, but not three, because that may create division. He explains: "Well, the idea... I think that three is the crowd, because the two will stay together and leave the other one alone. So I like to have a couple together."

When asked about his one greatest wish, he pondered the question and thought about his dream of completing his medical training, but resolved his reflections by focusing on the family: "Only one wish. I think more about... I wish more like if things go fine with my family. That's my wish. That we still remain tight, close together, and be a happy group. Even now that's my one wish... Everybody... from my brother and sister succeed in whatever they do. And I hope that they aim high... and still stay close together."

Reflecting back on his central life interest, the family, he couldn't think of many good friends other than family members. "Right now the only close friend I have is my fiancee. And so I don't have many Vietnamese friend. I have my family all the time." And the same can be said of his siblings: "Every one of my brother and sister... they have very few friend. And we just do... go camping with each other... When we play ball, we just get split in half, the brothers and sisters, into two teams, and..." On this mundane point about family members having fun with
each other, it seems especially clear that in Van's case the central focus of his educational and occupational success--indeed, of his life--is the family.

V-2: Quy Nguyen

Quy is an 19-year-old Vietnamese student in her first year at a local university. Since her father was connected with the U.S. government, he obtained passage rights for 13 family members during the fall of Saigon. Her family, including her father's parents, left in 1975, when Quy was 8 years old. Since they were such a large family unit (7 children, 2 parents, 2 grandparents, and 2 widowed aunts), it was difficult to place them; but the father insisted that they remain together as a family, and as a result they stayed in the refugee processing center at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, for nearly 9 months. The father was then working for a U.S. voluntary agency and, with the Volag's help, was finally able to find a placement for the whole family in Missouri. The father, although one of 13 siblings, was the only son, and as the oldest son he was responsible for the well-being of his parents. He has continued to adhere to filial piety values since their flight from Vietnam.

From Missouri they moved to Houston, where the father found a better job and where they lived until 1985. There, Quy's mother gave birth to two more children in 1979 and 1980. In their recent move from Texas to San Diego, the grandparents, one of the aunts and 3 older brothers stayed behind. The brothers are enrolled in colleges in Texas (computer science and pre-med) and are connected to networks which they think will enhance their job possibilities. In the last years in Houston, the grandparents and aunts (who had been working steadily) bought and moved into a separate house because they were running out of space, especially as the children grew. That second household is now well established.

The father's decision to move to San Diego in 1985 included the following factors: the ailing Texas economy, the fact that the father (who had been to San Diego prior to 1975 with the U.S. military) always wanted to settle in California, the large number of their relatives in California, and the local weather. Eventually the grandparents will resettle in California as part of the father's plan of family reunification, underscoring his strong commitment to filial piety. Meanwhile the family recently bought a new tract house in a suburban area of San Diego, where Quy now lives with her parents, five of her siblings, an aunt (who helps out in the household), and two young cousins. Several other relatives live nearby, adding to their base of mutual support, and they too are working at bringing family members in Texas and elsewhere to join them in San Diego.

Quy's parents are Catholic and both were college educated in Vietnam, which Quy said was considered a very prestigious accomplishment although she does not know what their majors were. Her aunt, the one living with them, was a pre-school teacher in Vietnam and was her teacher there. In fact, Quy commented that she was permitted to attend school one year early so
her mother could work in her seamstress business there. The father has attended community college in the U.S. and now works in the computer field, though again Quy did not know any specifics about his job. He would like to be on his own as an independent entrepreneur, and thinks they have enough children (and cousins) as a labor pool to start a business; but they are holding off until they can accumulate enough capital as backup for the venture. This will have to involve Quy's mother because she is the bookkeeper and financial manager of the family. Quy is very proud of her mother's ability to "manage a really tight household budget," and as proof she claims that they live in a nicer home than other Vietnamese despite their lower income. Her mother worked in several blue-collar jobs in Texas, mainly in electronics assembly, occasionally reverting back to sewing work. In San Diego she works doing alterations for a large department store. Eventually she too would like to establish her own shop.

From all appearances the family looks like it is doing very well financially. In spite of this, Quy insists that they are on extremely tight budgets. The mother manages the budget very well by keeping a close eye on expenditures, allowing only essentials to the exclusion of luxury items. For example, they rarely go to movies or eat out. Instead they entertain in the home and do things with the family, such as having picnics. Their house is their main investment. Indeed, as with many other Vietnamese families, all financial expenditures seem to be precisely calculated to preserve capital for long term investments such as their present home, which is intended to return two benefits -- the appreciation of property value and access to the best suburban schools. They just moved to this location because the schools are much better; in fact, the dropout rate for the high school in their new neighborhood is one of the lowest in San Diego County. By contrast, the schools in East San Diego, where they lived previously, were poor, with dropout rates nearly ten times that in their present schools. Last year, her sister went to Jefferson Junior High and they observed that the Vietnamese there seemed less interested in schooling. Other students were also less interested in schooling -- in fact they were poor students. Also, there were too many Vietnamese there, Quy noted, and this meant that they were more likely to be involved in sociability rather than concentrating on school. Quy sees the Vietnamese children in East San Diego as coming from lower-income homes which do not support education as much; their parents are working all the time and therefore cannot properly supervise them, and they generally seem to have more troubles with their children. According to her, she has learned that associating with high achievers is important because they help set the academic standards.

The oldest brother is currently unemployed, given the depressed Texas economy. He remains there because of a network of friends, but he still feels the pressure to be with his parents because he is the oldest son. Quy discussed without hesitation her oldest brother's educational history, including its detours and its significance for the rest of them as a folk theory of childrearing and academic success: "We were not really into academic things until my brother graduated third in his [high school] class. He just kind of ended up being third without really trying or anything. And so my parents felt that now that he's gone though it, he knows the system. That kind of opened our eyes, because up until then we just, you know, went along in our studies. There's not that much pressure to do very well until once my brother did do well. And so that started us off... and everybody just followed. So afterwards we kind of knew the system, what classes to take, the class that was easy because the teacher knew my brother. So it made it a lot easier. But the key thing is that... how the older ones start off. Because if you see
the older children starting off on the wrong foot, it's very hard to get the younger ones in the right track. And I have seen that happen, even to my relatives." Each sibling needs to transmit schooling information to the next oldest and so on down the line, instructing them, socializing them into attitudes of academic achievement, and setting the tone--and all the while family reputation is established in the eyes of teachers who come to expect the younger ones to repeat a familiar, familial level of excellence. **With responsibility for tutoring shifted down the sibling line, the entire family becomes a mini-school system.**

Quy's second oldest brother graduated from that Houston high school as class Valedictorian. Her third oldest brother graduated fourth in his class. And Quy herself was co-Valedictorian: "It was a very close race... It was a Korean girl. And we had been friends ever since the sixth grade, and we had studied together. We wanted to win, but we didn't want the other to be disappointed. And she was also pressured a lot by her parents, and so the result was the best for both of us, because we both ended up getting it. Everybody was happy." The priority of education and the import of the competition was reflected in the fact that she stayed in Houston during her senior year, after her parents moved to San Diego, just so she could stay in the race to become Valedictorian--to compete not only against her Korean friend, but also against the record of her brothers: "That's the reason I stayed behind, because I was in competition with them."

The oldest brother went on to the University of Wisconsin to major in Physics. He did not do as well as he thought he should and this, in combination with his felt obligation to the family--especially given that it would have taken him an expensive ten years to complete a Ph.D.--caused him to change course. He returned to Texas and switched to computer science. This pragmatic shift meant he could enter the job market sooner and could help to support his family: "Because he was the eldest one... he had to get out early to get a job to help my parents." Quy commented that this experience was good for her brother, especially his contact with other Vietnamese at the University of Wisconsin. They became role models for him -- and they have done well subsequently, with one of his friends going to Harvard Medical School. This it was a "maturing" experience for him as well: "When he went to Wisconsin he had a really tough time, and he had to prove himself. He had to grow up really hurriedly. And it affected him a lot." But interestingly, Quy does not regard that brother as a role model for her.

Instead, in an attempt to explain why he didn't succeed at the University of Wisconsin, Quy theorized that as the eldest son "he'd always been pampered and spoiled by my grandparents. He's the eldest son of the only son. And somehow even if he doesn't do too well, he's still the eldest son. His status is already guaranteed. It was a very big event when he was born. My parents told me that. And so that's why the younger brother is the one that... of the two, he's the more hard-working. And that's why, I guess, one of the reasons why the [Wisconsin] experience was so devastating to him." This theme--"discipline, hard work"--recurs throughout her comments, reflecting her explanation of educational success. To reinforce this interpretation, she considers her second oldest brother, the Valedictorian, as the one who wasn't spoiled and therefore does better in school: he is a pre-med third-year student at a Texas university, and, Quy says, her real role model.

Therefore, the central explanation of success focuses on moral character, in which her oldest brother was found lacking until his experiences at Wisconsin sobered him and consequently
improved his moral character. She also confirms the Vietnamese theory that the commitment to hard work and educational effort (being studious)—which reflects moral character—is more important than talent: "The key thing to doing well academically is the fact that you're studious. It's not whether you're gifted or you're really bright, but it's just more how studious you are... I think sheer ability has only to a very, very small extent... but everything else comes down to that you have to work at it." Quy believes that the secret of that studiousness, in turn, is to be found in "the nature of the family," and involves a combination of competition and cooperation: "To us there's always the competition. There's always... each of us urging each other to do... it always creates a really neat atmosphere. And then there's a certain feeling that you get when you're trying to help younger brothers and sisters. And that urges you to do your own studies well." Therefore the parent's role should be one of moral development rather than discovery of talent. This perspective is compatible with Asian values of collective obligations in contrast to Anglo-American emphases on individual discovery and development.

During all of her years in junior and senior high school, her parents never met her teachers. This is surprising given the American theory that parents should be involved in schools. She explained this paradox by suggesting that her parents assume that schools have their authority and that when their children are at school, teachers are the authority. Parents are to support the idea of education, but in the home setting. Her parents only checked on her schooling at report card times. Her siblings provided the day-to-day supervision of her school work.

Quy is now a freshman at a branch of the University of California, majoring in biochemistry and aspiring to go to medical school. Her reactions to the UC campus centered around there being "too many Vietnamese." In Houston she was friends with non-Vietnamese—Americans and a Korean immigrant; in contrast, most of her contacts here are with Vietnamese. This reference to Vietnamese appeared to be one of ambivalence, combining both a negative and a positive tone: the negative tone seemed to be critical of the "sticking together" style of the Vietnamese, and the positive one was their academic motivation. Since coming to California, she has been exposed to more Vietnamese than ever. At UC she was surprised at the number of Vietnamese students, and she hasn't done as well as she had hoped: she received a 3.3 GPA, whereas a 3.5 would have been seen as good. For her and other Vietnamese, she said, getting a B is like getting a C. "There are a lot more Vietnamese than I expected. They make it harder, because there's a lot more competition, really. They majority of Vietnamese are either enrolled in engineering or in science or in something pre-med, like biology or biochemistry, to get into medical school... very technical fields. When we ask them, what's your major, every time we hear pre-med. And the Vietnamese study all the time, every time you see them, they're always... studying, or talking to the TAs and stuff. Always doing something school-related... So you feel pressure and competition... At least you know that the Americans are always... not studying that hard. They always have specific time for leisure."

Why are Vietnamese being channeled into medicine? Social status, primarily, is her answer. "The idea, the title doctor attached to the name now is very, very important in the Vietnamese community. And to say you're a doctor means a lot. Not just a college degree now, but a doctor. And so my parents are pushing a lot of the children to go into this field. And because parents have a lot to say in the children's education, that's why there are a lot more Vietnamese... Parents
definitely like to live off the prestige of their children." Even "pre-med" is prestigious. There is a "hunger for status."

The single-mindedness with which technical fields are being pursued by Vietnamese students also reflects their English language handicap. The Vietnamese want to compete and to win, but they can't succeed against American students in English-based courses, and they feel, as Quy did at first when she came to the U.S., "somehow, to a certain extent, being pushed off and being looked down upon because I couldn't communicate very well. And the first thing I wanted to do was to tell people that... I'm not different or anything, that I can learn." Like many Vietnamese, she is preoccupied with being "insulted." She remembers how, because of the language handicap, she and her brothers and sisters were held back a grade by the sisters at the Catholic school in Missouri when they first arrived in the U.S., and still feels cheated out of a year. Instead, she recalls, "the one thing that gave me that satisfaction was math, because in Vietnam you were taught at a much faster pace. I remember the things that I learned in second grade were not taught to the students here until the fourth or fifth grade. And that's why... the Vietnamese are very strong in math. I found that out."

One of the reasons for this is that the Vietnamese system of education emphasized memorization. "It's all memory work. Everything is memorized. Prayer, just everything you do is memorized. Grammar rules are all memorized. And so that's one of the reasons why I think math is attracted to the Vietnamese. Math doesn't require much ingenuity. It seems like math rules are already established, and you just learn the language... but in an English class where you have to write a paper, you have to be... you have to show a lot more imagination than you do in math." English doesn't seem to have rules one can memorize like math, and to learn it requires the experience and familiarization that can come only from usage. Indeed, "math is the language that the Vietnamese do know... and there they feel like they're not being handicapped."

It was through such a single-minded pursuit of math and science classes that she consciously "played the game" and calculated her way to the co-Valedictorian honor, focusing on those honors or "accelerated" classes that yielded extra grade points for her GPA, unlike classes like history that did not. "Being Valedictorian doesn't necessarily mean you're smart. You have to play the game, and I just happen to know the rules." Standardized tests, however, are a different matter because she does not do as well on them as she does in regular classroom assignments. On her SAT in high school, she got a score of 750 in math but only a 490 in the verbal section--though she speaks English effortlessly and without an accent, reflecting her young age at arrival, and does reasonably well even in essay exams--partly because her reading level is not speedy enough for the standardized tests. She had done even worse on the verbal portion of the PSAT the previous year, and is still bitter about that because it knocked her out of the running for a National Merit Scholarship. "In my PSAT I did lousy in English and very good in math. I was just here three years. I hated it because to determine whether you're a National Merit Scholar or not, they take the English score and they double the English and then they add the math. But if they had taken the math and doubled the math and then add the English, that would have made a lot of difference. And that was why it was really frustrating to me."
Nevertheless, Quy has been recently reevaluating her educational goals. "Things," she says, "are changing." It was important for her to become a Valedictorian, but after receiving the honor it was no longer that important. She's disappointed about the achievement because it was such a single-minded pursuit, and seems to lack substance. "Once I did achieve that goal it was anti-climactic. You know, because you think about it, and you say, who's going to remember? You think, gee, it's more like a very short, glorious moment. And somehow I feel like after that four years of working myself up to it, there was just... I guess the glory was too short or something." She now wants a more well-rounded education and wonders what she missed while she was pursuing the Valedictorian honor. By contrast to this single-minded approach to education, Americans seem more open and diverse, Quy observed, and she is coming to appreciate those qualities. "In the Vietnamese school system they made me memorize things. Well, here you have to learn to apply it, and that's one of the things why I really like it, the school system here, even though it's not that prominent in high school as it will be in college. That's one of the things I hated about the Vietnamese school system. If you were a person with a good memory, you're considered really, really bright even though that's not the case. You know, in America you're valued for your ingenuity and your imagination."

She was taught to obey and respect teachers and they have played a role in guiding her. One of her favorite teachers was an English teacher. She seemed more well-rounded and showed concern with students as human beings. In this sense she feels more "Americanized" than fellow Vietnamese students. This teacher was especially sensitive to her struggles in selecting courses. She now feels guilty in playing the numbers game rather than in emphasizing her own personal development. She is taking electives at UC which might expand her focus -- e.g., she is taking a psychology course now -- though it should be noted that it is one of the more technical and precise courses offered rather than one of the general education courses which have broader scope. She is also wavering about whether or not she will become a doctor. Medical school was her sole educational objective but she is now considering options. Her parents tell her to go into an occupation which makes her feel comfortable, but she also knows that their preoccupation with status means that they would be delighted to see her get a medical degree. In any event, regardless of jobs, it is important to get a college degree. One of her uncles even had to defer getting married for four years until after he had completed his college degree requirements. She said that her father would discourage dating and relations with the opposite sex until she had completed her education. Then it would be okay to look for a mate. Education comes first. She has had only one job and that was a summer job in a cheese factory where an aunt worked. As a girl she is not required to work outside of the home, although the boys are expected to do so. When the children earn money, they give the entire amount to the mother, who in turn gives them money; when they need money, they can ask. This money pooling and control by the mother/wife is commonplace throughout Asia.

She mentioned several times the strict separation of American friends from her home while she was in high school. The two worlds were kept apart because they might conflict with each other. At school she had American friends but she rarely if ever brought them home. She has been denied access to clubs and social activities because her parents did not like the children being out. She regrets not having a social life. She would like more time to be by herself, and especially to participate in school activities like sports (volleyball, swimming) -- "sports
particularly, because as a girl I was not allowed to be... But my brothers were allowed to. I mean, they had much more freedom than I did." And she has not dated. As mentioned above, dating or contacts with boys are supposed to occur after completion of her education.

Her potential mate will definitely be Vietnamese, Quy told us, but when she was younger she thought of marrying an American because of the TV images. Since coming to San Diego she has gotten to know more Vietnamese and seems to have become more ethnically conscious and traditional. In Houston her friends were mostly Americans but here in San Diego they are mostly Vietnamese. In Houston, she experienced a dilemma. Most of her friends were Americans although there were many Vietnamese there. Therefore she segregated her school life from her home life. She sees herself as Vietnamese, especially as it pertains to family life. She feels very close and permanently bonded to her siblings: "You are always with them even if you don't get along. There is no choice so you accept them. Always you have to stay together. Don't let anything separate that... As long as you stay together there's always going to be that bond that's very, very hard to break." Americans, by contrast, seem less bonded, more individualistic.

She sees the large family as an investment. Many children are desired because it is understood that children will continue to support parents and younger siblings. Parents pin high hopes on their children. Quy would like to have six children. She is accustomed to people and would feel lonely without many people, many children. But nine children--as many as her mother had--would be too many. When asked to reconcile her goal to go to medical school and her wish to have a family with six children, she laughed: "I have to choose one or the other. But I don't think that I would try to do both, because that conflict... That's the traditional part of me. There's a lot of conflicts in Vietnamese views, in trying to compromise what you believe... It's very, very hard... I think the [traditional Vietnamese] family structure works best." For all of her single-minded pursuit of educational goals, she will not pursue career and family simultaneously. Career, for Quy, is form; family is substance. The family is a key to life.

When she couldn't answer some questions about her parents, especially her father, she seemed to be referring to a complaint that surfaced when discussing the family. She felt a lack of communication with her parents. Instead, she communicates via her brothers; the solution she has developed to cope with the communication gap is using older siblings who act as go-betweens between herself and her parents. She likes the American emphasis on communication between parents and between parents and children. The Vietnamese, by contrast, do not communicate as openly and this leads to conflict. "Even though the family system works for us, there's lack of communication... because you're always taught you have to obey your parents no matter what happens. And that's why there's been a lot of... I mean, that's why there are a lot of Vietnamese teenagers who are really breaking out. Because they're really rebelling against the older generation and trying so hard to fit in with American society. The Vietnamese youth are now comparing their family with the American. They're questioning, why do we have to obey everything you say? You know, you might be wrong... I think there has to be a certain compromise between the two cultures." Quy's own rebellion is scarcely in evidence, and her feelings are guarded and suppressed. She accepts her subordination, however, given her unwavering belief in the legitimacy of the family. In the conflict between individual needs and collective priorities, Quy grants the primacy of the collective.
On a self-identity measure, scaled from 1 to 10, Quy ranked herself as 7.5 on the Vietnamese scale and a 4.0 on the American scale. Others might see her differently: Americans (and not a few Vietnamese) might think she was highly "Americanized," but then she has learned how to "switch gears" between Vietnamese and American worlds. She feels she has more in common with Vietnamese than Americans, and so has, over time, shifted more attention to Vietnamese, especially as friends. Now she has only friends who are Vietnamese. The Vietnamese Catholic youth groups in Houston helped her make a transition into Vietnamese society, and now in San Diego she is an active member of a Vietnamese student association. This attachment to things Vietnamese seems to be changing: while her older siblings are more comfortable with other Vietnamese, her younger ones seem more so with their American friends. Nevertheless, she feels it is important to get along with both Vietnamese and American people. "You have to be with both. The younger Vietnamese will realize this and learn how to be bicultural. We will retain ties with both sides." If given a single wish, she wishes to have a family just like the one she grew up in. She would like the experience of closeness and interdependency of the family.

V-3: Xuan Tran

Xuan Tran is a 19-year-old Vietnamese student who will soon be starting his sophomore year at a university in the Los Angeles area. His father had been an official in the South Vietnamese government, and after 1975 the new communist government imprisoned his father in a re-education camp, as were other members of his extended family. Since two of his uncles had been able to leave Vietnam during the "first wave" of immigration, it was thought that Xuan and his brothers, if they could survive the sea passage, had the possibility of being sponsored into Switzerland or the United States where the uncles lived. Xuan's two older brothers attempted to escape first; only one survived, and he ultimately made it to Switzerland. When Xuan was approaching 12 years of age (in 1979, about the time of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea), his mother decided that he was getting too close to draft age and that it was time to send him to America. Not only did he leave behind his parents, but also four sisters. Xuan left with his Aunt and Uncle, to whom he had been very close, and with their two young children--along with eighty other "boat people" crowded into a small raft.

While at sea his boat was attacked by Thai pirates, the women were raped, the men beaten and several passengers killed. He sustained minor injuries but was more traumatized by the death of a fellow passenger who was seated in front of him. The boat experience, though traumatic, served to provide him and the survivors with a metaphor on the meaning of their flight from communism. From a romantic vantage, the drama of escape and survival through hell-like experiences creates meaning in an otherwise mundane world of ordinary life -- and compels the attention of others. Xuan may use that escape experience as a device, albeit a somewhat unconscious one, to cope with Americans, especially to gain sympathy and favors while they are involved in the task of making a place for themselves in the United States.
Still, despite the extraordinary circumstances of his escape, Xuan's main preoccupation is with making the transition into adulthood and only secondarily with being a professional refugee. Part of the developmental transition of his adolescence involves the conflict posed by competing rules of relationships in Vietnamese and American cultures as they pertain to parent-child relations. Particularly relevant is the identity crisis he is now experiencing about being Vietnamese within an American setting. Though some might characterize Xuan as a "detached" minor, his Uncle and Aunt have provided him with unequivocal support: they feel like they are his parents, and he reciprocates by thinking about them as his parents and acting as the older brother of his young cousins -- though all recognize the existence of "real" parents back in Vietnam. Nevertheless, unlike the cases of some Vietnamese youths taken in by an uncle in which the foster child is treated poorly, Xuan has all of the physical and social facilities that many American-born youth take as standard, including his own room at their Los Angeles home.

His father is a college graduate, as are Xuan's Uncle and Aunt. Xuan's Uncle, though he was trained as a lawyer, most recently was employed in the county welfare department as a case worker; his Aunt is nearing the completion of her teacher training and works as a fulltime teaching assistant. With both incomes they are now able to afford to rent a single family home in a middle class residential area of metropolitan Los Angeles, which is seen as a step up in prestige from the houses they lived in when they were first resettled in Santa Ana.

Xuan's acculturation to the American school system was letter-perfect, with highest honors at Washington High School and a scholarship to the university he is now attending. His high GPA and his active participation in school extra-curricular activities as an officer in the Associated Student Body (ASB) earned him the highest praise from teachers and the Vietnamese community. Unlike many other Vietnamese students, he was also involved in a variety of school clubs, including a California business association of high school students. He was featured in a special article on high-achieving Indochinese youth in his senior year.

Two teachers were especially proud of his achievements, for they became especially close to Xuan as "fictive" parents in the school setting. This was reflected in their presumption that they could make decisions for Xuan, such as helping him to go to the senior prom, and during the graduation ceremonies they ignored his Aunt and Uncle while taking pictures of him. Even though he has been out of high school for almost a year, he still returns to the school to see and consult with these former teachers.

There was never a doubt in the minds of his Aunt and Uncle nor in his own mind that he would enter a university and become a professional -- not only because of the college experiences of his family's older generation, but also because of the widespread support system in the Vietnamese community for entrance into higher education. The high level of competition among Vietnamese youth for academic honors has created an atmosphere of high expectations far surpassing even those of the upper middle class white students. Regularly the Vietnamese community sponsors extraordinarily impressive and elaborate awards ceremonies for high-achieving Vietnamese students at all grade levels in the Los Angeles area -- from Kindergarten to college -- in order to further impress upon them the value of educational achievement. Xuan, for example, considered a B grade a real disappointment. His main disappointment is that he ranked only fourth in his graduating class; he now thinks he could have ranked number one if he
had only been pushed and pressured more by his Uncle and Aunt. As a point of information, the top three students in his high school were also Vietnamese.

The transition from high school to university was a shock to him, since he had to learn how to cope with the greater freedom (and distractions) and relative lack of structure of college life, and to create self-initiated strategies for completing his academic work. He now finds himself cramming, whereas in high school teachers scheduled numerous activities which led up to exams. Now he may have only two exams per course all semester, which is very different from high school courses with ten assignments, several regular quizzes and six exams per term-- the latter providing an external structure with greater regimentation, feedback and predictability. His grades took a dip the first semester, by his standards, but he feels he is learning how to deal better with college life.

His Vietnamese friends have formed study groups for midterms, but no longer on a weekly or daily basis. They had experimented with regular study sessions, but found that these became unfocused social affairs. So now they meet only to prepare seriously for scheduled exams. "We have a little system where we have... one guy put on a problem, and then the other guy try to solve it. And then if there's three, the third guy try to solve it if the first guy couldn't. And then that guy put up a problem we must solve... he must know the problem. We won't put a problem that nobody know, because that's a waste of time. And sometime you find a solution which is incorrect after fifty minutes. And then you check the back of the book and it's wrong, and then it's a waste of time. I have to put up a problem where I know exactly, precisely each step of that problem." The students only address problems that someone has solved and is able to explain to the other students. They divide up the problems among themselves and thus are able to solve more problems quickly and learn the various intricacies of each problem. This solution does not work every semester since it depends on who is taking the course. So they are constantly working on new ways of helping each other through school. At times if they are not focused, they waste each other's time; therefore they have learned to budget their time. Thus Xuan finds places on campus where he can study alone without interference from his friends. This first year was an experiment, and based on what he has learned on the different techniques and strategies which work here, but which may not have been appropriate for high school, he feels more optimistic about doing better in the following year.

In order to protect his GPA, which is currently "only" around a 3.0, he has decided to take his humanities units from a nearby community college and have them transferred to the university without threatening his GPA. "Because I'm weak in writing, and humanities is mostly writing. A lot of writing. Because of my weakness... I recognize this. So I was recommended... to fill it outside of university. It's basically the same, but outside you're allowed to take... You take a grade outside. But when you move... when you transfer the unit, it counts as pass or no pass. So if I could get a C or B or whatever, it won't hurt my GPA... and I won't mess around my GPA." Though the weak critical thinking and creative writing skills are not completely rectified by taking courses in an "easier" learning environment, Xuan's coping strategy in achieving high marks reflects his preoccupation (typical of many Vietnamese students) with gaining public or formal evidence of his achievement rather than with substantive progress.
The transition from high school to the university was also different because his friendship circle shifted from a mixture of people in high school (White, Black, Hispanic, Asians) to an almost exclusive set of Vietnamese friends now in college. Aside from ASB, during high school he did not spend much time having fun and instead spent considerable amount of time studying. Now that he is older, he wants to make room for fun. "One of the thing is down in high school, I've been a serious student. I want to get the good grade. I concentrate too much a lot of my time on studying and just on books, because I thought there's nothing else out there but studying. I did not know much about parties and fun." He and several other Vietnamese friends have discovered a ballroom dancing college class which they use as a source of fun and sociability; otherwise, especially so for the Vietnamese girls, they would be restricted in such activities which would traditionally require adult chaperones.

As mentioned above, he had learned how to cultivate high school teachers, but at the university they are less personal and don't have the same time to spend with individual students. As of this time, he hasn't developed close relations with university instructors. He misses the close relations he had with his high school teachers, especially the two teachers who had become close "friends" and role models: "They would want to listen to my story about the boat people. And I would check out... get a book on the subject and give it to them. And they were interested in the past, about the family in Vietnam, and they were real interested in things... I look at the way they teach and the way they work, how they dedicate their life to teaching. And I was quite interested in teaching as a career also. I respected these two. And I see how they so involved in their work. And I get interested in how they work, because... And they influenced in the way... I usually talk with them, you know, and they quite close to me. And I talk to them about my problem sometimes. If I have problems at home or at school I would come and talk with them. They were more than... they were like a friend. The relationship is not as teacher and student. It's a friend kind of relationship."

He continues to see them and has not found anyone like those individuals at the university. He is extremely interested in meeting adult advisors, not only because they might help sponsor him for special programs, but also because he is constantly seeking advice on how he might better deal with his changing world. He even mentioned wishing there were a 40-year-old Vietnamese refugee who might have come to the United States at the age of 12, like Xuan, so he might examine the experiences of such a person as a guide to what he might expect for himself in the future.

He is intelligent and resourceful, and shows a high level of sophistication in seeking strategies for survival, as exemplified in the above comments on dealing with other Vietnamese at the university, and how he used the two teachers as guides for making it at Washington High School. It is interesting to note that he is constantly open to strategies that "work" and shows great flexibility and pragmatism in abandoning measures which have limited utility, such as studying in unfocused groups with other Vietnamese students. For that matter he is curious and has been open to a wide range of interests and activities other than the purely academic; when he was in high school, for example, he taught himself to play the piano on the side.

Since last summer, he has been more and more in the company of his friends and has spent less time with his Aunt and Uncle. Although from the viewpoint of the Aunt and Uncle Xuan
seems to be "Americanizing," he has become increasingly uncomfortable because, he claims, of a series of minor conflicts between himself and his cousins. Therefore, when some Vietnamese friends invited him to spend time in their apartment, he decided--on his own--to live only on weekends with his Uncle and Aunt and the rest of the school year with those friends. He looks at his cousins as sisters and his Aunt and Uncle as his parents, but the somewhat uneasy feeling reflects a gap between himself and his local family. Xuan is involved in a process of "cutting loose" from a family in which such behavior is proscribed by Vietnamese norms yet prescribed by American standards.

Part of the conflict appears to stem from a difference between American and Vietnamese manners, especially signs of overt affection. Xuan had learned to expect overt signs of affection such as hugging from his American teachers and has wondered why his Uncle and Aunt don't show such affection. While realizing that Vietnamese never show such affection to youth of Xuan's age -- usually physical affection ends at the beginning of the school-age years -- he nevertheless feels its absence. As a measure of handling this discomfort, he projects his displeasure against his cousins whom he claims are too Americanized: "I did not have problem with my Aunt and Uncle because they are pure Vietnamese, but a lot with the little ones... They are the one I have conflict with... those cousins are pretty much American. They look at things... so I have a lot of fighting and argument, and I, you know... little things... such as the food. Certain food that they really like, and I just can't stand it. Or sometime I would like to make a certain thing that they don't like. Or music... you know, they would listen to certain song that I don't like. Or certain ways I arrange my clothes, I wear my things, or how I go about the house, my habit of doing this or that... it's just little things like that. It's just different."

Perhaps more crucial is the reality of his natural parents back in Vietnam. Although the Aunt and Uncle are surrogate parents, they do not feel they have the right to be 100% parents in such areas, for example, as requiring Xuan's participation in Catholic church activities. Xuan's father is Buddhist but his Aunt and Uncle are Catholic; since the Aunt and Uncle spend a significant part of their time in the Vietnamese Catholic community, there are times when Xuan is excluded because of religious differences that the Aunt and Uncle do not want to impose on him. They do not feel they have the right to convert Xuan to Catholicism, since such a move would be an insult to Xuan's father. In consequence, however, Xuan feels not fully accepted. There is also the unalterable fact of "real" parents living elsewhere: not only does it limit the possibilities of Xuan's relationship with his Aunt and Uncle, but the deeply-embedded ideology of "blood" relations means that the rights and prospects of surrogate parents for imposing authority over the youth are institutionally incomplete, regardless of the wishes of the individuals involved.

The frequently mentioned authority and help relations between siblings in large Vietnamese families exist though at a somewhat reduced level between himself and his cousins. On a sporadic schedule, he helps his cousins on school projects: "Only on special project. Like with (cousin), she say oh, next week they have... they need to invent something for their class, and I don't know what to do. You got to help me. And I say OK, let's do a robot. Bring me scissor, bring me the paper. OK, this how you cut to make a robot. What do you want to name it? We'll sit and after that I'll work with her, you know, on the robot. And with certain word she doesn't understand, she'll ask what does this word mean? And I'll say OK, and if I see it's a hard one, I'll
try to explain to her. And if it's an easy word, I'll give her a dictionary and say, here, look it up. You know, little things like that. Not a daily kind of thing."

In spite of the recent gap between Xuan and his relatives, he feels committed to extend them help if they should need it: "I always want to leave some money just for (Aunt and Uncle) in case they need it. If I see that they're financially unstable, I will give... if I have extra money I will send all I can to help them out... I just feel I have to help them out, whatever I can do. If I'm better off than they are, I will try to help them out. Because they help me out. If my parents come over here, definitely I'm obligated to take care of them. They're all... they won't be able to... so I'm obligated to probably live with them, to stay with them and pay all their way. But with (Aunt and Uncle) I also would definitely, if they are in need of help, more than just money, anything, I would always come back. Even if I live away, let's say in a different state or whatever, I would still keep that." Whether these sentiments might be translated into actions remains to be seen.

He wishes it would be possible to bring his parents and sisters to this country though he thinks so with some hesitation, since he feels his parents would have to make big adjustments: "I feel that my parents would have some problem dealing... adapting to [American culture]... But I would want them to come. My sisters I think would be OK." Part of his hesitancy in encouraging his parents is the realization that he has changed and would have problems adjusting to his parents' traditional ways. He has already had difficulty with his Uncle, who discouraged him from becoming a teacher because it doesn't pay enough nor does it have enough prestige. His Uncle had asked him to major in pre-medicine but he refused this request, even though, under traditional circumstances it would be seen as reasonable: "Some of the Vietnamese culture, such as the parents wanting the kid what to do, follow the footstep... With American, I don't see... like if I am a lawyer man, you be a lawyer. Or if I'm a doctor, you should be a doctor. But with Vietnamese now a day, they ten years, twelve years away from the country, family is changing, you know. The kids are doing what they want. But before... they say in Vietnam... or some even over here... some father, you know, make kind of a pressure on their kids to learn what they think their kids should learn. And they would try to convince them, even though they can't say be this... because they can't over here. They will try to convince them not to do this, that they should do this and that. And some time the kid would go into bio-med without... not really liking it, but just because the parents want him to. The parent think they should. They will do that. Not to be told by the parents what to do. He [the student] is old enough to go to university. He should have... he's old enough to determine, to know which area he's interested in. And maybe he'll be good in medicine, and maybe he'll be good in business. But ... only he would know that."

The shift from high school to college was accompanied by an oscillation between being American and being Vietnamese. In the tenth grade, he acquired an Anglo first name, John: "One thing is that I wanted to be active. And I guess I wanted to be known to everybody as fast as possible. I want to be popular in such a short time. I want to be active. I'm in a club. I deal with a lot of American. I'm in numerous club. I went to competition. And then I say I got to find a better way that make them to say my name. That's why I say OK, fine, it's a name [John]. It's a name. It's only in the name. I want to be part of the crowd, I start hanging around more Americans in part of eleventh grade. After that I say well, John doesn't really have any use. It
really doesn't make it much easier, whatever. It doesn't really help that much." Not only has he abandoned the name John, but he has made it a point to emphasize his Vietnameseness.

As mentioned earlier, his friendship circle now is predominantly Vietnamese, whereas in high school it was about 50/50 Americans and Vietnamese. It should be noted, however, that the contacts with Americans were confined to school settings and that they were primarily females with whom he had some working relations. The Vietnamese friends have a range of skills in the English language but they are more interested in things Vietnamese than American. He sees himself as being Americanized and regrets that transformation. "No matter which group I'm with I'm always... mostly I'm just myself. I don't try to behave, you know, in a certain way because I hang around with certain group. And at all the time I'm a Vietnamese. If I hang around with an American group, I want them to know me as a Vietnamese. You know, I'm not a Vietnamese-American, I'm not an American half... I'm a Vietnamese."

When he compares himself with his Vietnamese friends, he sees himself between two extremes: "I'm pretty much in the middle. I'm more Vietnamese than half of them, and I'm more American than the other half. I see some who are just Vietnamese-Vietnamese. No English almost. And I don't know why they got over here (laugh). But Vietnamese... they write well. They think well. They do homework well. They study hard. And they can't speak English." Xuan, by contrast, seems comfortable in American contexts. At the same time, he remains very active in his college's Vietnamese student organization, and participates formally in traditional Tet New Year celebrations and other Vietnamese cultural occasions.

Note how critical he was of himself (and of his cousins) in becoming Americanized and yet he is also critical of Vietnamese who attempted to be primarily Vietnamese: "What they should do is they should go out, learn everything they can about the American culture, learn the language. I know some guy who came.. who came the same time as I did, even earlier. One of my best friend came about a year earlier. And he's about the same age I am. He came about twelve, eleven. Now he's at university. He's one I stay with. But he listen to Vietnamese music. He hang around Vietnamese. He read Vietnamese books, novel. His English is terrible! If I don't know him, I'd say he come about a year or two ago."

The identity issue is embedded in an ambivalence between embracing Vietnamese ways and gaining more control over his life by seeking (in the terminology of American adolescence) "more space" for themselves. His self-initiated move out of his home reflects his attempts to create more control over his life, yet without recognizing that his actions violate Vietnamese traditional sensibilities: "With the American culture the kids, the teenagers, are more free to do whatever they want. Vietnamese are more restrictive." Based on talks with his teachers he came to the conclusion that it was best to be permissive with children and to have good communication with them, and especially to let the children have their say without feeling or making them feel that they are stepping out of line.

He would like more open communication with his Aunt and Uncle, along with the right to talk back to them and to feel less restricted: "Yes, not disrespectfully. But just to open up to say exactly what the problem is, to determine exactly what the problem. And they have the trust in you, even if they did something wrong. They know that after they tell you, you won't scold them. Some family, even if you know that after you say the problem out, you will be helped.
The parents will help you definitely. You will get help. But then you don't want to say that. Somehow you were not brought up, raised to say these things out."

His Aunt and Uncle are not particularly strict with him but they expect him to participate in family affairs and hold him accountable to participate fully in them. As an adolescent, he tends to be self-absorbed and is unaware of the full extent of his relatives' feelings regarding his apparent violations of traditional Vietnamese expectations. Rather, he sees himself as following Vietnamese norms, but he has unilaterally defined himself to be an adult, justifying in his mind his talking forthrightly to his older relatives: "When they tell you to do something, and you know definitely one hundred ten percent they're wrong, they didn't understand you, they didn't understand the whole story, we don't say it back. And you don't know how to say it back. You're not taught how to say it back. Little kids, American, they know how to talk back. The parents expect them to talk back if they say wrong (laugh). But here, no. And now that I'm a little older, I can talk back a certain way that wouldn't be the same as a little kid talk back to an adult."

What Xuan seems to misread is that his self-defined status as an adult is not accepted by his older relatives and that this difference in interpretation leads to their disappointment and even exasperation. Thus, from a traditional Vietnamese perspective, Xuan comes across as manipulative and self-serving: while he thinks that he is acting appropriately, others perceive that he has repeatedly violated Vietnamese role expectations -- including deference norms regarding proper age-graded pronouns and forms of address which require acknowledging his subordinate status as younger person, not abiding by rituals of symbolic gift exchange between older and younger relatives, living in separate quarters, demanding privacy of his own quarters when living with relatives, assuming rights of coming and going without the necessity to consult with his elders, not being formally accountable for his time, assuming the rights to receive financial support without accountability, demanding self-selection rights over career and mate selection, coming and going as he pleases and spending money without asking permission, and the like. But Xuan, to be sure, does not see it in that light: "[My Aunt and Uncle] just talk to me differently. They use different word. There's words that you can use for little kids, and there's a certain way you can ask a guy to do in polite way. So now they talk with me in a different way, and they give me a lot of freedom. And I can do whatever I want. And I also come back to them, and I will talk to them when I have problem. Once you're older... it doesn't matter what the pronoun is. You know, I can call... somebody is from a high level, but I can talk to them in the same level." This lack of sensitivity or perhaps conscious refusal to comply with traditional expectations creates an ongoing tension within the family whose genesis he does not acknowledge nor take responsibility to resolve. In a sense, he seems to want the privileges of two cultural worlds without the commensurate responsibilities. This description seems very much consistent with our characterization of him as a late adolescent who is absorbed in the process of forging his own independent identity American-style, and of coping with often conflicting choices in a bicultural context, while not being sensitive to the consequences of his own actions in his relationship with his effective parents.

Contrary to the perception Vietnamese adults may have of Xuan as "Americanizing," he views himself as subscribing to the main tenets of his culture. In this he is critical of "American" culture on three issues: (1) what he sees as the lack of close and intimate individual involvement
with family, (2) the lack of mutual emotional and financial support among family members, and
(3) the excessive freedom given to children: "You know, how they... eighteen and they
separated, and they go to live their own life. Some of them come back and take care of their, you
know... and some of them will keep in touch. But some of them, they go and live their own life...
they don't show it [involvement] physically. Maybe they write a card at Christmas and come and
visit mom. But I don't think that... I prefer the Vietnamese way, the way you stay really close.
Even though you don't live in the same house, you stop and visit often. And you go and help
out, if you have financial problems. You know, because I see that happen with (Aunt and Uncle)
when they financially unstable, their sister or the mom will send them a check. It's really nice to
see that. [Vietnamese] always helping each other... And I am sure that there's some cases like
that in American culture, too. They're helping out. But somehow they not quite as close as we
are. Like the grandma... we would live with her forever, until she die. We won't ever put her in
a hospital, in one of those old home. Also little kids, sometimes they have too much freedom,
that they shouldn't have, you know."

"They [Americans] take things for granted, you know. There's this... they have not a lot of
respect for their parents. They are really... because their society, when you're fourteen, fifteen,
you start working at MacDonald's, making your own money, saving up, and you have a car or
whatever. And then you just start... society makes you... independent, you know. And then you
grow out of it then, real fast. 'I don't really need them.' So that's not quite good. You know, it's
related to the other one. It's... when you start little, and then you don't really have a lot of respect
for your parents, because you're not that restricted. You're allowed to talk back. Sometimes not
good... communication. But it depends on how you handle it."

The irony of these quotes is not only that the criticisms are applicable to Xuan himself and
how the elder Vietnamese relatives see him, but that in principle he agrees with the critiques
while failing to see himself as a violator of traditional expectations. He believes both career and
mate selections are the prerogative of the individual, though both are areas of traditional concern
and control by Vietnamese parents. As mentioned previously, he wants the right to select his
own career, even if it is contrary to the opinions of his elders: "They [Aunt and Uncle] were
against idea that I would be a teacher (laugh). They said that doesn't make much... a lot of
money. 'Be realistic. You can't support a family with that.' But I say I like that. It's OK. But
they don't think it's good. And they say, 'how about medicine? You like it?' I say, no, I
absolutely have no interest in medicine whatsoever. And they mention it again, and I say no.
They say OK. But, you know, they do have the idea of what they want me to be." Beyond the
feeling that he wants to select his own mate, when asked the background of a prospective mate,
he did not concede limiting himself to Vietnamese females but said it would be someone he liked
without background limits. Whether or not he would reject pressure from his family is not
certain, but he is in conflict over how he will reconcile his gradual Americanization and his pride
in retaining Vietnamese values.

In sum, Xuan is a Vietnamese refugee youth at a crossroad. He left his home and his parents
when he was 12 years old under very difficult conditions, and, after a year in refugee camps in
Malaysia, was resettled here when he was 13. By any standards he has done exceedingly well
academically. Xuan has a high level of sophistication dealing with teachers and Americans in
general, is outgoing and resourceful, and we would be very surprised if he did not become a
competent professional or pursued a successful business career, reflecting some of the aptitudes he has already exhibited. But especially since his transition from high school to college, he has been experiencing a double life crisis: the developmental crisis of adolescence and the biographical crisis of being a reluctant refugee in an exile that requires him to bridge two cultures--and two sets of parents. He has his feet placed in both cultures but he is unresolved about how the two will be combined in his life. Nonetheless he has been engaged in a complex if unfinished process of bicultural adjustment. He struggles to maintain his Vietnamese ways, identity and values while realizing, perhaps more on an unconscious level, that his actions reflect American patterns: "Not totally American. I have my own values. All the Vietnamese that came around twelve or thirteen have their own values, their Vietnamese values, unless you were born here or were a couple of months old when you come. You won't have those values unless you were taught by your parents. But once you have it, you would remain that value. You would always have that, and you always think of your native country and your language. You will try to find out more about your country. You read up on your country. You want to find your origin. You want to come back to it. Because one day you will not be recognized in America."

V-4: Ngoc Truong

Ngoc Truong came to the United States in 1980 when he was 17 years old. As the oldest son in a working-class family of six children, he felt it was his duty to seek a better life for his family since they were marked by Vietnamese authorities as undesirables. His father had been in the South Vietnamese Army's secret service and after the fall of Saigon was sent to a re-education camp. With the increasing conscription of Vietnamese youth for the Cambodian conflict, he knew he had to leave. Also, since members of his family were considered unreliable by the authorities, he had thought that if drafted by the military he would not be permitted to carry arms but instead be used in a work battalion or perhaps part of a mine-sweeping operation. In any case, he did not want to stick around for these possibilities. He hid from the authorities by staying in different places until he was able to make connections to escape. Not having money, he was hired as a lookout for a boatload of people escaping Vietnam. Although he did not elaborate on the boat journey, his boat included 110 people; and the subsequent experience of losing his sister on a similar boat escape has made him think twice about the feasibility of any other family members left behind in Vietnam attempting such an escape.

Once in the refugee camps in Thailand he lied about his age and claimed to be a few years older than his actual birthdate. He figured that this would facilitate his resettlement. Other youth in his circumstances might select a younger age, figuring they would have better educational opportunities; however, since he was alone and had no sponsors, he thought he would have a better chance by lying as he did. After being accepted as a 20-year-old refugee, he was sent to the United States.
He was first resettled in Minnesota, where he was placed in an adult education ESL class; then he tried to find a job without success. Since he did not have relatives in the United States, he sought out friends he had met in a transition camp; they were then in San Diego, so he decided to join them. The thought of leaving the cold winter also added to his motivation to leave.

Once in San Diego he resumed ESL classes, but given his post-puberty age at arrival, he had particular trouble with pronunciation and with remembering all the irregularities of the English language. "Especially, you know, I'm a little bit old, not like the young children. They pick up the language so fast. Me pick up, you know, a little bit difficult. Especially I speak French and Vietnamese in Vietnam, so my pronunciation not correctly. So pretty hard for me to communicate with the American people. You know, like it very seldom to me to have a chance to talk with them to improve my English. . . ."

He continues to feel embarrassed about speaking since he feels that Americans make fun of his accent. Referring to reactions of Americans to his accent, he said: "Some of them bad. It's some of them bad that make me so embarrassed, you know. If I talk, and they would have to say, "What, what, what?" And they make fun, thing like that. Make me so embarrassed, and I don't want to talk to me anymore."

Though he did not graduate from high school in Vietnam, he reports being a good student, especially in mathematics. His parents both had a high school education and were committed to having their children have as much education as possible. In fact one reason why his mother encouraged Ngoc to escape was the thought that he could find educational opportunities in America, especially to become an engineer. "I love my mother. She send me a letter, only letter she wrote...'Try to study hard, to graduate from school, to be a engineer or something.' So I have to. I don't want she to feel bad." Though it is conceivable that Ngoc might enter an engineering program, he like other detached refugee youth carries the burden of succeeding in America in the face of many obstacles that change original long-range intentions into a present-time materialistic orientation often associated with troubled Vietnamese youth, such those involved in gang-like activities.

After a few years in San Diego, he enrolled in a local community college and earned an AA degree in electronics. Even though the fees are very low, it was a struggle for him to finance that schooling. He dreams of going to the state university for an electrical engineering degree but that is out of his reach, at least for now. He was happy with his community college experience since he was able to study electronics. But he disliked the extensive reading requirements because of his poor English skills, and he was profusely critical about the costs of books which he felt were not thoroughly used: "They ask the student buy too many books, but maybe we don't use all of them... we lost money for nothing. So if a book, you know, we study real careful just one book then we can... But we study ten book, and then we didn't learn anything. Just like me, if I study one book and real understand about that book, I might learn something. But study ten book, too many. Cover too many thing, but then, you know, I forgot real quick."

Ngoc is troubled by any course which emphasizes the English language, such as history. He wishes for an educational path which did not require such "non-essential" content: "Another bad thing about the school over here... If I studied about the major [electrical engineering] I can, you
know, study faster. But beside that I have to study like history or thing like that... waste time. So that's why I didn't pick those course. You know, I just studied the major." He took extra physics courses instead of history courses thinking they would help him for admissions to an engineering program. He continues to look for ways of circumventing English-based courses and concentrating on his proposed major, if and when he continues his education.

He has selected electrical engineering as his career goal because he can manage math and science. His first preference is to become a pilot but that has been shunted aside because it is seen as unrealistic: "Really, you know, I'm able to do many things. Really, I would like to be a pilot, too. If I have the chance to go up there. Or I would like to be a teacher, too. Sure, so what, you know? But I don't think that I don't have a chance to do so." His attitude is a pragmatic one which sees occupation as an instrumental activity rather than as a central life interest: "Because in electronic field, to require for BS degree you have to be good in math... Both them I think that I can qualify for if I try to study hard. Math, if I come back and review it or something like that, I think no problem with me."

Aside from his low level of English competence, he perceives that barriers to further education are primarily due to the lack of money: "I think just about the money, because... I need the money to do many things. And because I have to work, so I don't have the chance to go back to school. Because school cost money." His financial struggle to complete community college was solved partially by having friends support him: "Friends help me out with the money. By that time they have money, so they help me out. Because the first year I study fulltime, worked fulltime. But after that I quit my job, I just study fulltime. And during that time I have no job, so my friend help me out with money."

His view of continuing school is tentative: "Right now I need more money. In the future I will quit my job and then try to go back to school. Anyway I need to improve my English and, you know, my education... Maybe couple more years. Maybe next year. I plan this year, but this year I don't have enough money to. So maybe in two years."

Although friends are a source of support, he still thinks family is a key to success: "The Vietnamese people I know, they help me. But they can study. Of course, they have families that can help them out. But they can go for four year, thing like that. Why... why can't I? I can do that. Why not? It just take time, then I can do that."

Currently he has two jobs, one as an electronics technician and the other as a janitor. The two jobs add up to 60 hours per week of work and this leaves him little or no time for pursuing schooling: "I don't have enough time to sleep..." These jobs pay in the $5 to $6 range and provide some health care benefits. Nevertheless, they are entry-level jobs which are insecure. He was laid off one job for several months and had no medical insurance coverage. He seems to have an unending demand for money, which leaves him without much savings for his plans to return to school. In one of a series of misfortunes, he was billed several thousand dollars for a lawyer's fee which was necessary for him to stay out of jail. He would like to work for a larger company which would give better pay and security, such as General Dynamics, but he feels that it is impossible without citizenship papers and thus he feels he is stuck in low-paying jobs unless and until he can earn a college degree.
He says he views welfare as unacceptable, although at one time he received cash assistance: "I tell you the truth. It's most of the young people, like single people, you know, they don't want to be on welfare... I'm strong. Why do I need to do that? You know, people look at me like I'm handicap or something, because I need to study English, you know, to understand and to get along."

The reluctance to use welfare also extends to receiving unemployment insurance: "Like right now... like I were lay off last several months. I didn't try to ask for money from unemployment. I don't want to get that kind of money. I want to work." Even when he qualified for unemployment he didn't ask for money. Instead he looked for another job. Beyond the issue of pride, he also has difficulties with bureaucracies and appears to be afraid to even fill out application forms. He exhibits an ineptness in dealing with impersonal organizations and seeks, instead, personalized relations as a means of dealing with organizations. If a bureaucrat were to develop personal ties with him, he would seek services. Otherwise he seeks alternative resources over which he feels he has some control. Most of life, from his perspective, seems to be affected by a series of "bad" external factors which undercuts his life. His reluctance to use bureaucracies stems from his feeling that he has no control over them and would be subject to the whims of strangers should he present himself for services.

As a result he spends much of his waking hours juggling several part-time jobs, working at times over 60 hours per week. The frenzy of his activities makes him appear unreliable with regard to time and appointments. He has the demeanor of someone who is trying very hard to make it in America but whose life is so structured as to invite a constant stream of crises. A simple matter of getting to an ESL class turned into a major headache: "Another problem is the program before. Most of the time in San Diego, they ask the people come down... come to downtown to study ESL. Before I live in Linda Vista, they ask me to go down to downtown to study ESL. But by that time I had problem with stomach. When I got on the bus I throw up. And I ask them to send me back to Linda Vista study. And they didn't agree, so I quit."

Rather than finding ways of alleviating problems, Ngoc and his peers seem to have the ability to invite troubles or to magnify small problems into larger ones: "I tell you some story about some of my friend. I know one friend. He's almost like me. And he borrow a little money to buy an old car, pretty old. He bought a car for about week. By that time Sunday he have no food to eat. Can you believe that? And the car bumper, the rear bumper, and the tire no good, you know. He drive on the street, and the police pull him over, say that he were running over speed, maximum, you know, on the freeway. You know people drive 65, believe me, so what, about 65. He drove about 60, you know. Not over speed, and the police say that, OK, no bumper, no good tire, many thing. And how can he get the money? He just bought a car. Then the police give him this fine. And if... how can he find another, you know, money to pay that ticket? If he didn't pay that ticket, he get in big trouble. And later on for a couple more year, I know he escape. He live in Tijuana." Though by our standards a traffic ticket may seem a trivial matter, for Ngoc and his friends it is seen as a serious matter requiring drastic solutions such as moving across the border. It is difficult to understand their perspectives in dealing with the law or other institutions especially when they view such encounters as involving life-and-death outcomes.
Though he and his peers may have the best educational and occupational intentions, their world seems to be inhabited by unlucky spirits: "Some of the young people, they unlucky. You know, like one young man about fifteen years old, he... with his friend. He play with his friend in a park. And his friend smoke marijuana. He didn't smoke. He just sit together with them. Whatever they want to do, he didn't do that. The police, you know, got all them, put in jail."

He is particularly troubled by the police, as they are seen as antagonists in an already difficult world: "The police need to help people, not try to put people in the problem. They picking on the young people, you know. And sometime they picking on the wrong person, and that person go into the wrong way... Like last time I knew that they... the shooting in East San Diego. The police pick up the wrong person, put in jail. Not that one. I knew the other one. He ran away already. And what do you think about that person, that boy [still] out in public and in San Diego, too?"

He has been arrested several times, all, according to him, mistakes: "Me, too. I got wrong... I got... police put me in jail twice? First of all, the shooting in Normal Heights... OK, by that time I live in Normal Heights. And my brothers' friends get involved in that shooting. Not my brothers, not myself. But they knew my house in the corner. After the shooting they ran away in L.A. or somewhere else. I don't know. But they came back. And they knew that the police question them, so they afraid to get hurt, to go back to their house to pick up things. They would like to pick up some more clothes, thing like that. Then they run away again. But they knew my house. They stay in there. By that time I drove a van to deliver things for my friend's mother in L.A. I get home around two o'clock in the morning. I saw two men, young people, sleep in the living room. I ask my brother, who's there? My brother say that his friend. He said that they ask for... they have nowhere to sleep. They cannot live... sleep in the park. It's so cold. They would like to, you know, stay a couple hours in my house until morning. They will leave early. I say, in that case, can you kick them out right away? I didn't know about the shooting. I said OK, so I would like to get out my house in the morning. And don't do the bathroom. Don't make a mess in the house. But in morning police surround the house. They surround in the night before already. And they handcuff me. And that why I move out of that area."

Particularly vexing for him was being publically humiliated by being handcuffed in open view: "They [police] say that I am a gang member. Make me feel so bad. Because the police handcuff me. In my country the very dangerous person, then the police can handcuff. Otherwise they just ask come to the police station. Right now if I do something that, the police just come over to my house, say O.K., I would like you to come to my office to the police station at that time, you know. If you don't show up over there, then he can handcuff you. Sure, because I afraid. I would like to be a good citizen. I have to show up over there. He doesn't need to handcuff me, to put me in the car, put me in jail. I agreed to go the police station. If he didn't drive me, I will go over there to be a good citizenship. But handcuff me. Make me feel so bad."

It is difficult to ascertain from his comments whether or not he has participated in illegal activities but his frequent contact with Vietnamese youth who are reputed gang members and involved in crime raise questions about his participation in that underworld. Regardless of his possible violation of laws, his involvement with this refugee subculture of detached youth reflects pressures towards "maladjustment."
Another event involving contact with the police is illuminating about his contact with trouble and his method of perceiving and handling troubles: "Once I got into a car accident. They say that drunk driving. Right now I got in record drunk driving. By that time I almost try a way to go back to Vietnam already. You know, I feel like I want to live there. Nothing more for me to do with this country. Especially, yes, by that time I met my friend for couple years. The American friend that came over to my friend's house, and we drank together, drank couple beer, you know, all the way home because it very heavy, you know, raining. The water, you know... you can ask my friend. The water... I think on the street in East San Diego... And on the left lane I saw this car try to escape... you know, to cross the street. And so I changed into the right lane, and the water [caused the vehicle to skid and hit a parked car, involving property damage]. I wait until the police come over. They didn't listen to me. They handcuff me and put me in jail. They say I drunk driving, but by that time they give me the test [breath] on the street. Sure, you know, it's so cold. I'm cold, you know. And I didn't listen carefully, and they ask me to repeat them carefully, slowly for me. And sure, because... I have to follow the curb. They said that I not walk straight. And with the slippery street, you know, the sidewalk so slippery. Can you walk so firmly? He said I missed step. But I didn't know. I thought I passed all the test. He asked me to go to the car. I go to the car, and they say... he say "turn over," handcuff me, put me in the car, go to jail. So I refuse the breath test, because I was so mad by that time. That my mistake, the lawyer told me. Told me that my mistake. If I agree to put... to take the breath test I might get out the problem. But because I so mad, they put me in jail. Because they handcuff me, thing like that. You know, I didn't... I thought I passed all the test, and I can go home. Then right now I try to find out how can, you know, the car, thing like that. But he handcuff me, put me... disappoint me a lot. By that time I was so mad that I..."

In this incident he never accepts fault but sees himself as a recipient of bad luck and unreasonable police officers -- in effect, "bad forces" from the outside. Although Ngoc has not been convicted for crimes, the police have identified him as a potential troublemaker. While we cannot conclude from these incidents that Ngoc is a "failure," he does represent the experiences of youth who are likely to be unsuccessful. The encounters with trouble, the overaction, the attribution of blame on outside forces and the self-characterization as victim are aspects of Ngoc's psychosocial adjustment in the United States -- all without the benefit of parents.

As an unattached youth, one without a family, he falls into a Vietnamese subcommunity which is disdained by other Vietnamese refugees as "deviant" or "bad" youth. His world of friends are males of similar age who are either without family themselves or whose families have lost control over them. This circle of friends include Vietnamese youth from other cities, leaving the impression of a floating world of youth without roots. There are frequent comments about going to different cities and doing things with Vietnamese youth who do not live permanently in San Diego. Since San Diego is next to the international border, there is frequent talk about going into Mexico to avoid the law, to let things "cool off," or to have sex.

In Vietnam he consulted with relatives whenever he needed advice, but here, since he has no relatives, he seeks counsel from friends: "I make friends with all the people, and I learn from them by talking with them, you know... So I talk with them, you know, and try to ask them things so I can learn from them. And the younger people, too... the one in the problem [referring to youths in trouble], and talk with them, why they got that problem, so I can teach my brother."
His social world revolves around friends, and it turns out that they are both a resource and drain on his resources: "Me, I got problem sometime. But I borrow my friend money to get out of problem and to put... We help each other out. Like before I got married, still single, sometime I need some money, you know, like couple hundred dollars to pay something, like rent. So he help me out. He lent money to me. They by the time he need money, then I have the money. So we don't care about money. We care about the friendship. Help each other out... if he borrow about $500, if I have that kind of money, I give to him. And whatever he has that kind of money, give back to me. If he don't have, forget it. I give to him. But he the one need to remember he owe me $500."

Not only are his friends a source of money but they are seen as a reliable source of assistance for all types of services: "About car, you know, like my car broken down. Then I cannot, you know, borrow other car. And I need go to for job interview. I cannot take a bus, you know. It's too late. So I can call him, and he give his car for... to me right away so I can use it. We help each other out in many cases... Sometimes. Like right now I borrow record. He let me. He say give it, use it until you don't use it anymore. Give back to me." In this exchange relationship he is frequently asked favors by friends, thus creating additional demands on his limited life schedule of work and dealing with personal problems.

Although he has had American friends, they are secondary to his Vietnamese friends primarily because they are not seen as loyal as the Vietnamese: "The friendship... we need to help each other. Not care about money. For example, if I... my car broken down. I need to go to L.A. right now to do very important things. And my Vietnamese friend have nothing to do, he need to help me right now. Take his car, pick me up, and run me up to L.A. Or lend me his car right away. But American friend, they say no, or maybe pay him twenty buck ... That make me feel sad, you know, make me feel sad. Friend need to help each other. Don't care about money. Because whatever they ask me to do things, I do right away. Even midnight or one, two o'clock in the morning. Sometime my American friend call me, I pick him up. When I need him, can you run me down to the station to pick up my car, he say, you're lazy. Walk there yourself. I say forget that (laugh). I take the bus. Sometime they lazy about the friendship, you know. They don't care about the friendship much. They just... if you call them, hey, I have a party. They say, yeah, right away. They come right away. But if you say, my car broke. Can you come over, fix my car for me? They say, forget it."

Since he left Vietnam, two of his siblings have also escaped and joined him. As the eldest brother, Ngoc attempted to create a family structure with himself as the acting parent. Initially they lived together but he was unable to sustain the "family" and he experienced troubles supervising his brothers. "They didn't listen to me, especially my youngest brother. He said that in this country the children is the most important things on the world. And no one can touch them. No one can do other thing to them. Whatever they want to do, they can do. But he's strong. [This brother is bigger and physically stronger than Ngoc. In fact, during one of his attempts to control him, his brother overwhelmed him.] Now he knew that he's strong."

Although he himself was undergoing pressures to associate with Vietnamese street youth and their activities, including drinking, using drugs, going down to Tijuana for sex and associated illicit activities, he felt he should keep his brothers in line but has not succeeded: "Because he
lived with me and I ask him to study, to do thing like that, not go down to Tijuana. Because if you go down, maybe the people like they smoke and thing like that, you will be in trouble. So better then stay home, study hard, then when you leave school you have a good job. You can enjoy yourself. A lot of time. No problem. He didn't listen to me. He went out, not with the other, you know. Luckily he just went to the movie, thing like that. But it cost money, too. Cost money to buy book, thing like that. So I try to tell him many time, to share a room with another family. But they nothing like me. They don't care. Whatever he want to do, go there, do. They don't care. But me, I care. So that why he ask me to, you know, cost less so they can go back to live with them. I say I can't for right now. Try to live with other people more, to learn. That's how to deal with people."

The three brothers have since gone separate ways, but Ngoc hopes to reunify them under a single roof: "They depend on me, and I depend on them, too. So that's why I plan to ... ask all of them to come back to live with me, so I can take care of them. But they depend of me, because they afraid my parent will be upset because they didn't listen to me. Do you know what I mean? So... because I'm the oldest son in the family, so I... right now... like I represent my father to take care of them. They need to listen to me. If they live with me, then, you know, I can watch them. I can ask them to do good thing and watch them."

He explains that his inability to do this is due to his lack of funds, but it is apparent that his authority over them is insufficient for him to demand compliance with his requests. He sustains the Vietnamese belief in the central role of the family and has hopes of resurrecting his own family. In supervising his younger brothers he realizes the failure in managing the middle brother but has some hope for the youngest one; in thinking about reasons why some fail and others succeed, he observes: "That depend on the family, too. Like luckily my brother not too bad, especially the youngest one. He still study. But if... right now it I have a house or something, I can take good care of them, ask them to go to school, push them in school, thing like that. So then I try to help them out with the thing, so maybe a couple more years they do very good student. Or four more years in college. But most of the trouble young people, they are with a bad family... the parents, you know, try to work all day. You know, go to work. Don't have time to watch for them. And then when they go to school, they strong with another friends and unluckily they not good friend. They start they stealing things, thing like that. And by the time that parents know, that's too late. They get involved with the problem, you know, already." He concludes that when the parental supervision is not there, then the chances are that the kid could get in trouble. He tacitly admits to his own failure in guiding the middle brother, who has had extensive scrapes with the law and had been reputed to be a member of a Vietnamese gang which robs other refugees.

Although he still has family members in Vietnam, he has lost all hopes of reunifying with them. Possibly his own assessment of not having money and still being on the edge of survival undermines any optimistic possibility of bringing his family here through the Orderly Departure Program. When asked about encouraging them to escape by boat, he strongly felt they shouldn't try: "No, I told them don't escape by boat anymore, because the Thai, you know. I don't like. And especially my older sister escaped after me. She just disappear to sea. So I don't want any of them, you know... get into that." In addition to the dangers, he sees his family's reputation with the Vietnamese government is a reason why the authorities would refuse to let them go: "It
depend on the communist. If they agreed to let them out of Vietnam or not. That's another thing. The most important thing is the communist there. Most of the people over here, they try to sponsor their family. Their families agree. OK, so... but the communist then they have to let them out, so..." His attitude is that they are stuck and that he will try to send them some money from time to time. Thus any notion of making a family in America rests with reunifying with his brothers and producing children for a new generation.

He recently married a Vietnamese woman who, like him, came without parents, although she has a sister here. The marriage has made him consider the future and his responsibilities for creating a new family. He expects his wife to be homebound: "No, really I try to put home, because in future... for sure we will have children. And I would like her to take care of my children, rather than work."

He is now thinking that he must settle down and divert his attention away from his previous life as a fun-loving bachelor: "It can make a big difference, because by single I can do whatever I want to. If I just have my family, otherwise I just continue study or working. But right now I got marry. I have responsibility for my wife and my children. So I have to save more money to do thing very carefully." He expects to have two to three children instead of the six his parents had, since he thinks of the cost of raising children: "The cost, because I don't enough money to... Because when I have children I have to... have enough money to raise them, to do... you know, to make them a good person later on. But not: have children, then divorce, and put them out on the street, thing like that.

Temporarily, they are living with his wife's sister and her family, which includes a husband and two children. Although they share quarters, he does not expect assistance from the sister-in-law in the pursuit of further education. He does expect to rejoin his brothers as a family and considers his sister-in-law not a part of his family. His greatest wish is to give his children-to-be an opportunity to be educated: "If I have enough money I wish my children study more to get a Ph.D. or something. That's good for them. Because when they are Ph.D. something, they make a lot more money. They can take care their family, so their children would be good, too."

Thus, in spite of his experiences here without parents, he recapitulates the desirability of the family and the associated goals of studying and working hard: "Two things over here we have to do. Even the single man, or the man with a family. Two thing we can do. Anyway we have to take care of the family. One thing, we try to study hard. And after that we working hard. Or if we don't have a chance to study, then working hard to make money. So they... with the younger people, some them... they would like to be a doctor, but their family cannot afford, you know, support them to be a doctor. So they change their subject to any field they can go for."

He maintains an instrumental attitude towards schooling and work by subordinating them to the necessity to support family members at the highest level possible. The irony in Ngoc's case is that his experiences here are without parents and with peers, yet still he opts for the family as his central life preoccupation. This attitude is clearly reflected in his comparison between Vietnam and the U.S., whereby he identifies the family as the center of his universe: "The culture is the family. Because in this country, you know... it different from our country. Our
country the mother take care the family, and the father have to take the children, have to have each other to live on..."

He is critical of this country in its apparent destruction of the family: "In my house my mother... I love my mother the most, you know, in the world. My father teach me how to get along with people, how to go out to be with people. And my father working hard to earn money to take care the whole family. Over here the parents, they don't have enough money to take care of their children. They busy with the job, busy with making money... So sometime their children can lie to them or make a mistake. Still the time they find out, it too late, you know. Like if they don't know that their children have been smoke marijuana. By the time they find out, too late. You know, it's too late. They smoke already. In our country, yes, most of the time, you know, when the children do bad, then they know right away. Stop right away. Otherwise we get into a big problem. But over here, I see most of the time, the children, they do bad thing, but their parent doesn't know. They don't know."

On the other hand he likes the idea of freedom in this country and would like to become a U.S. citizen, but is fearful that he will be turned down because he has had encounters with the law: "I plan to apply for the citizenship before. But right now I don't want, because I got a bad record. So... I don't want to apply for citizenship. Another thing is I don't have time (laugh), working all day. There's no time to apply for... and another thing is I have to go into the citizenship, I have to know about the history of this country. I don't have time to learn about those thing."

He makes no mention of patriotism or anti-communism in spite of the troubles he experienced from the current regime. His preoccupation is not with political ideology but with more practical matters such as making money and possibly creating a new family. He does not think of returning to Vietnam except as a remote possibility: "It depend. I can't say... right now I can't say. Before when I single, yes, sure. I go back. But right now I'm married, settle down my life. And if I settle down my life, when I have children, maybe my children will have more opportunity to study here than back in my country. So maybe I might stay here, because my children."

In short, Ngoc, though surely not an absolute failure, reflects a portion of Vietnamese refugee youths who are struggling to find a niche for themselves and who do not show on the Valedictorian lists. Given his marriage and his traditional value commitments to the family, he is likely to leave the world of Vietnamese street youth culture, but it cannot be denied that he has and will continue to have troubles making a successful adjustment to the United States.
B. Four Khmer Case Histories.

K-1: Bopha Roath

Bopha Roath is a 26-year-old married Khmer woman who came to the United States with her husband in 1975, during the fall of Phnom Penh. She is unusual because there were relatively few Khmer who came to the U.S. during that "first wave" period. Her marriage was arranged by her adoptive parents when she was 13 years old to a young military officer. When the old government fell a year later, he and Bopha fled to the United States. She was not yet 15 years old when she arrived. Initially they were placed in Kansas, but because of friends in San Diego they decided to migrate here.

With six years of formal schooling, by Cambodian standards Bopha's level of education was above average. She was fluent in French, and because of her family background and experiences as an urban dweller (in Battanbang), she was already familiar with Western languages and ways of life. She sees her early life, however, not as someone from a privileged class but as someone who was victimized by others from birth, beginning when she was only a baby when she was sold like "fish in the market" by a poverty-stricken family who were on the verge of starvation, then growing up with physically abusive adoptive parents, and finally marrying a man whom she has not grown to love. Her biological background is unclear, but she is told that some of her biological roots include Vietnamese as well as Khmer and possibly others. She is haunted by this background of being a mixture as well as being adopted by a Cambodian woman who was married to a French-speaking Belgian man. Although she is not of European biological stock, she felt part European because of her adoptive father who spoke French and provided the family with a Western-style standard of living. Another point of her confusion was her attendance at a Catholic school in spite of being of Buddhist background. This series of mixtures, though seemingly indicative of an unusual respondent, reveals the generally exogamous character of a Khmer refugee community which talks of Khmer "purity" in the face of pervasive mixtures; e.g., when Bopha herself made reference to her husband as a pure Khmer, she mentioned in an offhand fashion that one of his grandparents was Chinese.

Her resolution in dealing with her mixed background is to ask for acceptance as an individual: "I'm so confused about either Cambodian or Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer. I just think I'm a human being. Sometime I don't want a label at all... I don't look at people as their color. I mean, I would like for us to just look at each other as human beings. And since we were at different places and doing different ways, when we get together we just try to help each other and learn about each other, their language and customs... But instead people just fighting, discriminate... and it doesn't make sense." Throughout our conversations she would deal with her identity as a dialectic between being Cambodian and being a unique individual. It is an irony that she has a nine-year-old American-born daughter who sees herself
comfortably as Cambodian-American, a hyphenated label not yet frequently used among the refugees to describe themselves.

She experienced prejudice and discrimination in Cambodia, and she has had her share of it here as well: "Like you're walking along the beach or in the parking lot or going to a store, and then an American adult or sometimes a kid would just throw a few words at you... 'Hey, you Kung Fu!' Or 'Hey, you Chinese people!' Or 'You refugee!' Or sometimes they use bad words, four-letter-words. And then I would sometimes experience the prejudice indirectly, like when you have to go to an office somewhere and you don't look American, and you don't speak English as well..." She tries to accept all of this without anger or bitterness, to see the good in people and to seek **harmony**, rather than dwelling on the negative or on ways of avenging and settling the score through confrontation. "But the good that I would see from the people in America outweighs that..."

She has a long history of service-oriented jobs in the U.S., all the while approaching education in a "**step-by-step**" fashion. She has maintained a combination of part-time work and part-time schooling for years now, while also being a fulltime mother to her daughter. Her goal for the near future is an A.S. in nursing; longer term she may consider the possibility of a B.S. in nursing. "The only reason that I considered the short-term degree [over the B.S.] is because it would provide me an income. And also to get a feeling for what it's like in the field. If I really like it, then I will go on. If not, and I decide to change a major or something, it wouldn't be so much of time wasted." She is a cautious person with a fear of making mistakes. She would rather experience the work in stages to see it would fit her practical and emotional needs. In part her changing occupational attitudes are reflected by her daughter's parroted aspirations: "Yes, but it's always changing. But one time... because now mommy wants to be a nurse, she said 'I want to be a nurse.' And then when I didn't have a major and I asked her, she didn't have any idea (laugh). Before, I say, what do you want to do? But she was younger at that time, and she said 'I want to be a mother just like you.' I said 'Oh, oh.' And then later she said 'I want to be a nurse.' And I said ever since you've been here, you go to school, you know, straight from the beginning... I told her if you decide on the medical field, being a doctor would be better. You can help people...help them more and make more money, too. She goes 'OK, I'll be a doctor and a nurse.' And then recently she said 'No, I want to be a judge... a judge,' and we go 'OK' (laugh)." Bopha is clearly aware of the financial advantages of being a doctor, but her emphasis on "helping" runs through her conversations as if it is the proper way to talk of one's occupational motivations.

Although she knew no English before she came, her accent now is slight and her command of the English language is excellent. Her prior knowledge of French, she says, helped her a great deal in her initial attempts to learn English. Nevertheless she is preoccupied with learning the language better, as reflected in the challenges of reading difficult texts in her community college courses: "Well, now I don't have as much trouble as I used to, but... because it's like I can read, but the concept of understanding the context is very hard, especially when I took the first science, the first biology class."

She began her college studies at a state university and found it was too difficult for her and over her head. Sensing it wouldn't work out, she quit and picked up work as a teacher's
aide for a refugee social service program, where she met a teacher who in turn guided her through an ESL adult school. As a teacher's aide, she said she herself learned in the class while she was helping the students to learn. She continues to tutor this semester at the community college in French and physiology. She made acquaintances with many people, including teachers and office personnel, who helped her in her own struggles to learn. She was noticed by the ESL teacher "because they see me, I guess, at break time, or I would come early. This class started at eight. I was already there by 7:15 am, and I sit in a bungalow, because at that time they don't have a place... So I sit there and just have a whole long list of vocabulary words, and I just rewrite it. And then re-read it..." This sort of visible effort on her part is evident in her coping with college lectures, which she tapes and painstakingly transcribes; her apparent motivation in turn creates a positive attitude in Americans toward her and this, in combination with her gentle and warm ways, has resulted in the formation of a help network. For along the way, as she has always done, she makes friends with teachers and students. She was particularly pleased with her friendship with a 50-year-old psychologist who returned to school after a successful career. Given her age and enthusiasm, Bopha is inspired. They took a difficult physiology course together last semester, and along the way they studied with each other and with a couple of other American women students at the college. She makes up for her lesser knowledge of English by sharing her taped lecture notes, and they in turn assist her in understanding the textbook that the teacher didn't take time to explain. Bopha is a determined person, and seeks to do her work as well as she possibly can. Substance generally takes precedence over form. The quality of the end result is far more important to her than the quantity of output, and how well she relates with others in the process is more important than how efficiently time may be used.

She views her extensive and perseverant efforts as being motivated by her life experience as a "marginal" person and by her drive for self-justification: "Because of all the hard life I've had and all that... I wanted to be able to do something on my own... to achieve something, to get ahead. And I realize that I don't have anybody. Even with Kung (her husband) I feel lonely. And so I sort of... one of the good things that I get out of my father, even though he abused me, he put scars and he made me feel so confused... But he always tell me to value education. He always... because he's an education-oriented man. And he was going to send me to France to get an education. And in Cambodia to be able to go abroad, to a foreign country and get an education either in France or in America... it's... they really look up to you, and they think you're very lucky, very rich, you know."

She sees the role of education as giving people the possibility of helping others: "And also my mom's family... none of them have education. And when they see me adopted by this European, they always sort of think that I'm going to grow up... that there's a future in that girl. And sometime they would tease me and say when you come back from France with all that degree, you will be able to save us. You'll help us. And I... as a child I liked that." She also sees education as a lasting value: When her first adoptive father died, her mother, being of uneducated background, was unable to hold on to their wealth and soon had nothing left. Bopha concluded from this experience that "education lasts and stays with you until you die. You can always keep that. You can go to work... get jewelry and houses... But they can be destroyed and you don't have them anymore. But if you have the
knowledge and the skill built in you, nobody can take it away." Education, as a result, can also aid to neutralize the disadvantages of women in a man's world, and it can provide a sense of self-confidence and a means of holding one's own when confronted with prejudice and discrimination generally.

She has taken this lesson as a central core of her world outlook and has emphasized this to her daughter: "I always tell this to my daughter. It's just like a broken record. I know. When I start to say something, she finishes it. She's completed the whole sentence for me (laugh). I'm not going to support you... I'm not going to... you know, mommy wouldn't be able to take care of you forever, you know, when you grow up. You use this college in order to get a job...on your own, you know."

While she values education, she entertains no large material ambitions, and she is in no hurry to achieve the goals she does set for herself -- so long as she accomplishes them. Instead she qualifies her approach to schooling by reference to a "step-by-step" process: making progress slowly and gradually, taking small steps one at a time. Being deathly afraid of failing, she began by taking French because she already knew the subject. After receiving an A, she felt a vote of confidence and started to feel familiar with the college, the teachers and the classrooms. "And then little by little I started to take the lowest level of English at City College, like English... just a review... English review. I took that. I got an A. Then I go on to a little more and more... which is not... it was not college-level English yet, but I took it anyway." In her step-by-step approach, she has accumulated 70 units at the community college with a 3.87 GPA. She has more units than the minimum but she took additional courses just out of interest.

Her pursuit of education is slowed down by marital problems, and her plans of obtaining a divorce will lead to further money problems since she won't ask her husband for anything but child support. Taking these practical barriers in mind, she has decided to scale down her educational and occupational goals. She wants to make sure she will be able to enter the nursing job market as soon as possible at a semi- if not professional level and then be able to devote time with her daughter: "[I want to] make sure that I have time with my daughter... always important. Because my education is very important for me, but her... she is more important to me. So if I have to... like I have a long-term goal. I want to be a surgical nurse or a nurse practitioner. I thought if I was younger I would like to get into medical school. Because now I feel that I can't. My teachers... my anatomy teacher, my physiology teacher, said I should give it a shot. But it's kind of late, and I thought nursing will give you a chance to work in the medical field to help people, too. And I can go step by step..."

She will enter the nursing program this Fall and anticipates having to work to supplement any financial assistance and loans she can garner from foundations and granting agencies. She strongly wants to avoid going onto welfare, and if it means going into debt, she will do that.

She has constructed her world around her daughter, the only person she feels she has left in this world, not as a claim to pass on a family name but to make meaningful a life full of tragedy: "Well, she is... she is my life, and I consider that she's the only one that is my real flesh and blood. I never have anybody, never have a real father. She's all I got."
She also has no status-hungry "agenda" or expectations that she would push on her daughter. She has not tried to encourage any particular religion, for example: "I'll leave it up to her. She will be what she wants to be. She will do what she wants to do. I just try to raise her and be a good mother."

When asked about role models, she immediately referred to her job as a translator at a local hospital where she was able to observe educated professionals, especially female ones: "I see all these educated people, how well they present themselves and how well they can... they can do lots of things. They can help people. And I thought that as a child, that's what I had wanted too. And then I got cut off. And then I got to know Dr. Eva Smith [an American psychologist], and she was... the way she talks, the way, you know... I really admire her, really look up to her. And I learned some things along the way." She saw in those women skills they acquired through education which enabled them to "interact with other people, at a higher level, better... present myself better. And maybe people wouldn't look down on me so much. Maybe they'd have more respect, you know, and it wouldn't be so lonely. But what is it that I admired them? Their knowledge, the way they treat patients, the way they talk. You know, they talk to patients. They're understanding, compassionate, and yet they're strong and they're smart."

In her job as a case worker, she sees many Cambodian women who seek help for their depression. She has empathy with the women and thinks that the place of women should be changed. She observes: "Culture, the tradition, puts a great stress on women. They require women to be hundred percent, but men can be as loose as they want. OK? And society... the women have to follow the rule, the tradition. If the woman don't follow or fulfill her role as a wife or as a daughter, then the community really put her down." She claims the Cambodian culture makes it difficult to resolve their problems and instead expects women to accept their fate: "See, the thing is that... The women, they were raised to think that good women don't talk about their family problem to others. A good woman should be strong and resolve it and bite their tongues. Bear with it until the end, because that is her Karma. She... even though husband mistreat them, they have to wait until the day that he will come to his sense. Then they will live happily ever after." The role of women in Cambodian society, however, varied significantly by social class: "The woman in the peasant class, she works hard in the rice fields all day, all night, and come home and take care of the kids and the kitchen. The middle class woman... some may hold a position as a teacher. And she has respect because of the education, but she will still fulfill the role as a mother and as a housewife, too. But life is a little easier for her, because she has... she can afford having servants. And the servants are those people that is in lower, lower class who never have opportunity with anything except for their skill in the kitchen. Now the high class, we're talking about the wife of a colonel or a professor or high-ranking officers... I don't see them doing anything... just a life of leisure and gossiping and competing with each other about jewelry or 'my husband is higher ranking' and all that stuff... I don't like those things."

Although Bopha left Cambodia before the Pol Pot period, she sees its consequences here, particularly as they disrupt Khmer family relations: "Oh, yes. We see a lot of those [women traumatized by the Pol Pot period] in the clinic, too. There are couples that stick together.
You know, model couples. There are a lot of those, too. So there are good Cambodians, but most of them... they don't do so well. **They don't adapt well, because they feel that there's nothing to live for. They lose their country. They lose home. They lose family. A lot of them... sometime... like the whole family and relatives are killed in one day. And so it's so hard for them to leave that behind... They keep seeing it. They keep dreaming about it. They keep... they're hurt, and you know it... They don't feel the meaning of living... And even the younger people, they have just as much a hard time, because a lot of them lost their wife, or they lost their husband and children. And they seem to be doing OK, but the scar is there. They still bear that with them... that loss.**

Her observations of Cambodian widows, particularly those who are also the mothers of many young Khmer students in San Diego, are equally devastating: "**They feel alone. They feel handicapped. And we know, most women don't receive much education, don't have much confidence. They sort of like.. their life always depend on parent or husband. There are many Cambodian women who do, you know... who are independent. But a majority of them are that way. And so those widows here, they have not only a hard time to cope with this kind of situation, but also a new lifestyle in this country, and they feel alone. They don't know who to go for help, besides depending on welfare. And for single... for women with just one or two children that she has to support, they don't get much help, and they don't... the help won't last that long either. They have to be out there on their own. They have to learn. It's like the first time. But it's not like when you learn the first time you leave home, but you don't have any problem, any stress by losing anybody. But now they have to learn and also that burden on top...**"

**She sees their reaction as accepting fate, seen as their Karma:** "They would just say, it's my bad fate, you know, fate... my luck, bad luck. Yes, they always say, 'there's nothing I can do.' It's just bad luck. And, you know, it's... I don't think it's too good. They use that as an excuse from fighting... just like no matter... That's just the way Cambodians are." As an educated person, she does not accept that explanation and feels that one can intervene in one's own fate and make a difference in this life. Her folk explanation of educational levels or whether or not someone came from the cities or the countryside is used constantly to explain differences between those who take charge of their lives or those who are passive and accept whatever bad fates befall them. Thus, educated Cambodians may be [Theravada] Buddhists, she said, "but they don't just sit there and wait for things to happen." It is in this context that she thinks the education of herself and her child will make a difference in their lives. She doesn't want ever again to be a victim, as she has characterized much of her life.

This leads to a current preoccupation with the relationship with her husband. She expected him to provide her with emotional as well as physical support. Thus far, his response has not filled her needs: "Well, I believed that he's everything to me. I look up to him. I always depend on him. But things didn't work out so well for us for over ten years. So now that he's changed, I'm already changed, too. So we sort of grow apart instead of grow together along the way... He was like... a young typical Cambodian man... out with friends. You know, when I needed him, when I needed to talk to him, he wasn't there. And I never felt whether he really loved me and cared for me. I just don't feel the bond, the closeness, the love... It just subsided, until we have become detached mentally, and it hurts
She has attempted to resolve the problem of isolation from the Cambodian community over the impending breakup, which she expects will be blamed on her. She does not have close Cambodian friends but has gone out and found American friends, including Dr. Eva Smith: "I'm more open. I... it's not like I tend to bottle things up inside. I'm not ashamed to talk about, you know. I think everybody has a skeleton fall off their trees. I was following these rules, these traditions, these things. But I tried my very best. I tried very hard to get my mom's approval, to get the love, you know, from husband, to fulfill the... every rule that a girl in Cambodia, you know, should do... whatever I was taught, whatever I had learned. But the result was always pain and loneliness. So now I've reached the point where I don't care about those anymore. I said to myself, I still love Cambodian people. But I wouldn't get myself close... too close to anybody. I feel like they have to earn my friendship, my respect. If they are my true friends, they still accept the fact, you know, that we would break up. They will accept that. If they are not true friends, they look down on me, that's fine. And it's none of their business. It's my life. I breathe on my own, myself. They can't breathe for me. So it hurts me very bad that I would detach myself from this society."

In spite of the expected rejection from her community, she remains committed to giving service to the people of the community: "But still I work with the Cambodian people. I help the Cambodian people." This sense of community loyalty is a recurrent part of the way she talks about it. One senses that her feeling of self-worth is profoundly connected to giving service to others, hence her selection of a service career.

When asked what she would wish for if given one chance, she replied: "Well, I hope that the divorce thing will end up in peace, that we will come to terms, that this is... you know, life is not always the way we want it. That it's... nothing more important to you. Because I don't like fighting. I like to... conciliate, just for (daughter's) sake, and to finish my goal to go up with education, to a professional level as high as I can, and to be good mother, you know. Not to put... do things in a way that would give a child a bad example and... or she would turn against me."

In comparing American and Cambodian cultures she finds that the latter gives more respect to the elderly but on the other hand Americans are more open, which she likes very much. She feels the openness leads to a greater fragility of friendship, in contrast to the way Cambodians stick together. She also cherishes Cambodian traditions of continuity such as the Cambodian New Year. When asked whether there are some things that she really hates about American culture, in a typical Cambodian fashion, she replied, "I don't hate anything (laugh)." In terms of her own acculturation, she judges that "I've become very Americanized, yes... I tend to start to think about myself more. My interests come first. You know, that 'number one' first. Because before, I lived for someone else, for mom, for the reputation of
being Cambodian or whatever... But I've learned to be independent. I've learned to express more, to be more open."

The idea of living between two cultures (American and Cambodian) does not strike her as unusual because she has been between cultures all of her life, beginning with her adoptive European father and adoptive Cambodian mother. Her double marginality vis-a-vis both the Khmer and the Americans has meant she could not take for granted her status and identity in either setting. For her, life has always been contingent and uncertain, rather than given and assured. She has always had something to prove to herself and to others, and that drive may explain, in part, her above-average [certainly by Khmer norms] level of perseverance, determination and commitment to hard work. In the U.S. setting she sees herself as becoming American especially because she is thinking more about herself rather than what other people think of her. She wants to be more independent and more expressive -- this showed throughout our conversation. She is open to change and speculates that if she were in Cambodia she wouldn't make these changes. "But now I'm in America. I have the opportunity to fulfill my dreams, my goal." Nevertheless, the resolution she seeks to the dilemmas of her marginality reflects essentially Khmer coping styles.

She is successful in Khmer terms by staying out of welfare and by her continuing educational plans of becoming a nurse. Her social class resources [urban background, more education than is common for Khmer women of her age] have surely been a part of that success; but the ease with which she has been able to establish close relations with Americans, especially psychologically-oriented females, is also a clue to her ability find a place for herself in America. Americans like her. We found her very likeable since she comes across as emotionally forthright and sensitive to the feelings of others. She seems to be able to interact and talk in a manner which creates trust rather than distance -- a critical skill on an affective interpersonal plane. Her ability to articulate feelings struck us as that of someone who was "Americanized," but her expressions, rather than seeming manipulative, seem to flow naturally. By contrast we have heard recurrent criticisms of other non-Khmer refugees for their seeming inability to deal affectively with Americans and, when feelings are being addressed, appearing to be manipulative.

Bopha approaches her circumstances with an uncomplaining and passive attitude. Though she exhibits both talent and motivation to do well in all her endeavors, she approaches challenges by defining little goals (step-by-step approach) rather than large-scale ones -- e.g., selecting being a nurse instead of a surgeon, then selecting the A.S. program in nursing instead of the B.S. program. She is successful in comparison to other Khmer, and in spite of some early academic difficulties, she has done very well at the community college level, and she remains perseverant and determined, though in a gradualist and unambitious way. Underlying her reduced level of aspirations is a persistent preoccupation with affective rather than instrumental outcomes in all areas of her life, whether they be in marriage, school or work. Harmony is a salient theme. She also manifests an individualist rather than collective orientation to social action. In contrast to the common stereotype of Asians, she expresses in her interpersonal relationships a fluidity of social arrangements [e.g., in entering and exiting marriage] which, while shaped by what others expect, ultimately is based on how she feels about them. Rather than emphasize "family" [conceived as a collective obligation]
as her focal point [as do, by contrast, most Vietnamese], she looks to successful emotional relationships between individuals, such as her relations with her daughter; and on a more abstract level she feels strongly motivated to contribute to the well-being of the Cambodian "community" rather than to her "family." One might conclude that she is an unusual case, but she embodies strategies and approaches commonly observed among the Khmer.

K-2: Narong Chhay

Narong Chhay is a 21-year-old Khmer who came to the United States as a teenager in 1981. He was originally from a Cambodian farming family located near Phnom Penh. His father had been a priest for eight years before he married and became a farmer. Sometime before the birth of Narong, the family moved from an area near the Vietnam-Cambodia border to a farm near Phnom Penh. He is the oldest of eight children: three living with him in San Diego, and the other four still living with his parents in a Thai refugee camp.

When the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975, he was separated from his family and sent to work on a farm 30 miles away. At the time, he was nine years old, or so he thinks. He is not certain he is 21 because that is based on the age given him by his Aunt in a refugee camp. It is possible that he could be as old as 23, he said, but he doesn't know himself. In 1976, he stayed away from the farm for a month because he was hungry and went looking for food. When he was found, they put him in prison -- his worst experience during this period. The prison consisted of a large barracks and a surrounding work yard. There were many young persons his age in that prison camp and therefore he did not stand out as unusually young. Six to eight persons in his barracks died every day, and he figures that the chances of getting out alive were maybe one in ten. Death came from starvation and exhaustion. Every day they were fed a handful of rice and a glass of water while working from 6:30 a.m. to dusk. "I believed I had already died. Today I find it hard to believe that I am here, alive." His friends died in that camp, and he relates one story about a friend who slept in the bunk next to his. One evening while they were chatting his friend stopped talking, and he thought he had fallen asleep. Next morning he couldn't wake him up, for his friend was dead; there was liquid oozing out of his mouth. "After that I kept thinking of my death."

"One day I told the guards that I was sick and they let me stay behind in the barracks. Later that morning one of the guards gave me the duty of herding some buffalo which I took to a field about a half mile away from the barracks. When I saw no one was looking I escaped towards my father's farm which was about 30 miles away. It took me two days to get there and when I got there I was so skinny and half starved. I stayed with my family until I regained my health, then I was sent to another farm. The Khmer Rouge from the prison never found me because they from a different district. Anyway the Khmer Rouge in my father's district were not so mean."
When asked why he thought they were so mean, he gave two explanations: (1) many of them were from the jungles and were uneducated, and (2) many who came from this area were bent on seeking revenge against people who had slighted them prior to the Khmer Rouge period. The first reason is commonly expressed and seems to be used as a general explanation for differences in behavior, especially to account for those whose actions are unacceptable. When asked if some of the Khmer Rouge were from the local area, he said they were the ones who were especially cruel rather than those who were from remote areas. Those persons has special reasons for venting held-in emotions.

He remembers the Pol Pot period whenever he has a nightmare, which used to be every night but now it occurs only about once a month. His sister and brothers remember those days too. They sometimes talk about those times and he has learned to talk to friends, including Americans, about his experiences, which helps him to deal with the trauma. He read in a book on psychology that it is best to talk out bad experiences and he thinks that is true.

When the Vietnamese occupied Cambodia in 1979, his father took him, two brothers and a sister to the Thai border with his Aunt. He then returned to his farm to join his wife. Narong and his siblings lived at a village by the border for six months, buying things from the Thai and then reselling them to Cambodians. They barely made enough to eat and conditions were unsafe, so they decided to cross the border and enter a refugee camp in Thailand.

They stayed in the camp for over a year, until finally they were assigned to go to the United States. Incredibly, Narong later learned that on the very next day after they left, his father, mother and another brother entered the same camp as refugees. Seven years have since passed, and he would like to see them very much. In the camp, his parents have had three more sons, so now he has four additional brothers overseas.

Narong arrived in 1981 in San Diego with his Aunt and younger siblings. They lived with his Aunt until 1984 when he turned 18; then they were able to move out on their own and he became the guardian of his sister and brothers. He didn't like staying with his Aunt because she was "crazy." For example, one time she left and didn't come back until days later, all without telling them.

When he arrived in the United States he was 14 years old -- at least that is what his Aunt told him. He began at Morrison Junior High then went to Cleveland High School. Even though Morrison had a reputation of racial antipathy toward refugees, he "got along okay." Actually, if he thought someone might do something bad towards him, he avoided them. This is similar to his strategy of avoiding troubles during the Pol Pot period; he would, simply, withdraw and disappear whenever he could spot troubles.

Going to school was hard, especially because he "didn't understand English or anything." He didn't know how to speak, read or write. The most difficult subject was English, then physics and chemistry. His GPA at Cleveland High was 2.75 and, according to one of his school advisors, Narong took hard courses which depressed his grade point average. His best subject at Cleveland was Math because, he said, it is easy. When he talked of computers and
electronics he voiced great enthusiasm and expressed intrinsic interests in those subjects: they were "fun." He has a playful attitude toward computers and electronics. On the other hand, his worst subjects were English-based courses. "I couldn't get the words together."

After graduation from high school he enrolled in a community college, where his GPA is 2.5 and his major is "electronics." He has done best in courses in his major, and made special mention of "lab." He received mainly As and Bs in those courses. His worst courses were History and English. He received mainly Ds and Cs in those courses. He was especially enthusiastic about the lab courses because that is where he is able to have "fun." When asked about his proudest educational achievement, he said he is most proud of being able to do things quickly. He can do things better than he can talk them out. He learns fast and considers himself among the fastest. He has made his own computer, which makes him very proud.

Despite his comments about his poor English, he can and likes to help people with their learning. After exiting from ESL in his junior year at Cleveland, he volunteered to be a teaching assistant in ESL classes. "I like very much explaining to other people. I like helping people." This theme of helping others extends to helping his friends at the community college, especially Khmer students who need help in completing financial aid applications and with their math and lab assignments.

What does he like of American schools? He likes especially the teaching method here. In Cambodia, he said, the teacher hits students if they don't understand. Here they are nice to students. What he likes about good teachers is that they are easy to understand. They use a "step-by-step" method. He can understand everything when it is explained step by step. He also likes class participation, as when the teacher asks students to step up to the board to do problems. Those teachers make him understand a lot better. He thinks teacher attitude is very important. The kind of teacher he likes is one who likes students, who makes himself available to students, and who is kind. What he especially dislikes about American schools is that people from different races don't get along with each other. He thinks it would be better if everyone would collaborate together, without prejudice and conflict.

He claims he doesn't study all that much -- about two hours per week per subject. He likes to have fun with his friends, especially going to the beach. Although he thinks he is doing better in college than high school, he admits that he did better in social studies in high school than in college. He likes the freedom and the choices available to him at the community college. His favorite teacher smiles all the time and never has expressed any "bad thoughts" to students. He also is a step-by-step teacher. Anytime he has questions, the teacher has time to answer them. He has even asked him for advice on getting jobs. When he has teachers who get mad at students most of the time, however, they upset him and make it hard for him to study. For example, one teacher asks refugees about their level of English, meaning that he does not think their English is good enough. Sometimes there are teachers who do not follow a step-by-step method and there are teachers who yell at him. They upset him. These comments reflect his preoccupation with harmonious interpersonal relations.

Narong seemed to be honest about himself. During the course of this interview the topic of trust arose. He thinks a teacher should be trustworthy because it is hard to deal with
people you don't trust. He said that, as a result of the Pol Pot experience, it is very difficult for him to trust people; he learned then that people are not trustworthy. This was a puzzling remark because he has many non-Khmer, non-refugee friends. Still, he added that he trusts Asians more than Americans because they have had similar experiences and can understand each other better.

The selection of electrical engineering as a career goal is based on his interests in playing with radios and TV sets; in Cambodia, before the communists came, his uncle once took apart a motorcycle and used the alternator and a cycle to generate electricity -- this he found very exciting. When he was in Texas, at a friend's house, he attempted to fix a fan but he misconnected the wires which then burned the motor. Although that was an embarrassing failure, he has not repeated that mistake. He made a 16K computer, and he can repair computers and understands how they work. This recitation of his intrinsic interests in electrical things suggests that he has selected this career path based on his personal experiences and interests, rather than on some abstract parental admonition that it would be a practical, prestigious or lucrative occupation. That is, Narong chooses electrical engineering simply because he likes it, not because of ulterior instrumental or status reasons, nor because he somehow feels he owes it to his parents. His teacher at the community college told students that if you believe in yourself you can succeed. He thinks he will succeed because he believes in himself. It took him four semesters to finish his community college credential -- less time than most other students. He thinks this means he will succeed because he wants to succeed.

How did he pick electrical engineering specifically? He first thought of working on electrical things but found that they didn't have such a major at the state university; instead, he was told, the university offered a program in electrical engineering, which seemed like the closest thing to his interest. When he found that out, he decided to become an electrical engineer. Khmer friends who were going to the state university told him all of this, but none of them are majoring in electrical engineering, nor does he know anyone who is an electrical engineer or exactly what the university's program requires. One thing he dreams of, though, is designing a computer in the Khmer language.

Narong says that money is not really a problem because he has received EOP, Pell and Cal grants. He has few complaints and, like other Khmer, he goes out of his way to avoid complaining and complaints. The complaints he does have concern interpersonal relations or affective affairs rather than instrumental ones.

His job history includes gardening and assembly line work (at a plastic bag company); he currently works as an electronic technician for $5.80 an hour. This last job is a summer job that he got on his own. He is optimistic about his future and knows he will be "okay." His eventual goal, he states, is to own a business repairing TVs, videos, computers and other electronic goods. He mentions that he doesn't know anybody who is a regular TV man or owns a repair shop. This is something he learned for himself. When friends ask him to fix their TVs he gladly accepts their requests, which make him feel good. Some people even give him money for fixing their TVs. Again, his preoccupation with feeling states resurfaces throughout the interview. And he displays a relative lack of sophistication about his
expressed occupational aspirations, tending to be unclear about any differences between the work of an electrician, that of an electronic engineer, and that of a repairman of electrical appliances.

Initially they lived with his Aunt, but they had trouble with her coming and going without telling them. Therefore they separated once Narong turned 18. Now his sister holds the pursestrings in their apartment, because she is married and her husband is working fulltime. Before her marriage he held the pursestrings. Their total rent is $500 per month and he gives his sister $500 for both rent and food. The amount was determined by the welfare department. Aside from that money he keeps a separate account from which he gives his brothers money. Besides the money he earns, his brothers receive AFDC. Then he gets some money for college from EOP and other grants. In general he makes the main decisions for his brothers but this will not be for long since he plans on living separately from his brothers when they are grown up, which will be soon. He would like to be free of his brothers. Then, when he can live by himself, he'll find a girlfriend to share his apartment.

Shopping, cleaning and other household chores are done by his sister and brothers, but mostly by his sister. If something has to be cleaned, whoever is around cleans up. There is no set schedule for cleaning. He is happy that they have little conflict among themselves.

If his parents (who are still in a refugee camp overseas) were to join him here, he would live with them, but only temporarily for a few months until they learn to do things for themselves. At first he would feel obligated to support them, but once they can manage for themselves then that would be preferable and he would not feel obliged to continue to support them. The family system is nuclear and individualistic, lacking the compelling sense of "ought" or obligation to the collective that is more typical of Vietnamese families.

He misses his parents but he feels it is better without them here because he has more freedom. Even if they were here, he thinks they would let him do the things he wants to do. In general, he does not impose his wishes on his brothers and when they want to do something, Narong usually says okay.

He does not have "best" friends since people are difficult to trust. His friends at community college include one Mexican, one Filipino, one Vietnamese, and several Cambodians. He had both Khmer and Vietnamese friends in high school. Since he doesn't like to be alone, he makes friends for the company they provide. When he compares himself with other Khmer, he thinks some are doing better, such as speaking English better, but some are not doing as well as he did such as in math courses in school.

He wants to marry but not for now. His mate could be any "Oriental" girl and she doesn't have to be a beauty. She should be able to take of the home and his comforts. His sister didn't like Mexican girls who liked him, so now he doesn't go out with them. The person he chooses must be somebody he really likes, and his family members should like and accept that choice too.

When asked about differences between American and Khmer cultures, he had difficulty answering since he does not have a global perspective. What he did compare were some
specifics: One difference, Narong believes, is that American girls can do anything they want to do, but Khmer girls cannot do anything the family does not like. Another difference has to do with clothes: he thinks Americans dress sloppily. And finally, Americans spend too much money. Of the things he likes of American culture, he mentioned being oneself and being free; but "there isn't anything" he dislikes about American culture, at least not that he can think of (despite his earlier comments about money and clothes). Aspects of Khmer culture which he wishes to keep include the Khmer language. There are some Khmer ways he doesn't agree with; for example, when Khmer marry they spend too much money -- sometimes spending as much as $5000 for a marriage celebration. For Narong, neither frugality nor the careful management and investment of money are Khmer virtues.

He can speak both Khmer and English comfortably, but it depends on the situation whether he uses one or the other language; for example, he uses Khmer when he speaks with his sister. He feel most comfortable reading English, and he can write in both English and Khmer. Actually, when he is at home he uses a mixture of English and Khmer. He really doesn't see a contradiction between being American and being Khmer. He believes one can be both at the same time.

His single greatest hope is for a better life, a house, a good place to stay, and friends. His last comments were that he wished to be a person who could help people with anything they needed. That would make him very happy. Indeed, Narong comes across as basically a happy youth, retaining a positive outlook on life despite having gone through hellish experiences. Although he still has recurrent nightmares, they are infrequent now. He is satisfied with his life in the United States, especially with his freedom of choice, and he remains, like many other Khmer, quintessentially optimistic.

K3: Sok Chhim

Sok Chhim is a 25-year-old Khmer who arrived in the U.S. in 1979, when he was 17. Sok was the son of a farmer who later became a wealthy miner. When Sok was young, his father moved from a farm near the Vietnamese border to the Thai border where he "homesteaded" a mining operation. Eventually his father built up a successful operation, employing, he says, up to 200 persons; this success permitted Sok to attend school without having to work. He knew his father was educated but was not certain of the type or length or schooling. Sok himself claims to have had formal schooling into the high school level, but this is not evident either in his task performance or in the opinion that other Khmer have of him.

His manner is quiet and polite. During the interview, he revealed a constant preoccupation with the Khmer Rouge period in the late 1970s in Cambodia. Furthermore, his dissociative style of talking, going from depression to views of optimism, is consistent
with survey research that indicates that the Khmer are at once the most affectively depressed and yet the most cognitively satisfied and optimistic among all of the Southeast Asian refugee groups (cf. Rumbaut, 1985a). This method of talking and assembling facts about themselves is, at first, disconcerting because they appear incoherent and contradictory.

During April 1975, when Cambodia fell to the Khmer Rouge, Sok was 13 years old. They were given three days to pack up before being sent to a farm. While on the farm he saw people killed and die due to the lack of medicine -- experiences which he said went beyond the portrayal in the film "The Killing Fields." During the months he was there, he began to think that they would all die. Near starvation, he decided to join the Khmer Rouge because they had food and medicine. He recalls receiving a gun. Within a week of becoming a soldier, members of three adjacent villages decided to cross the border together. He joined them and arrived in a Thai border camp in 1976, where he remained until the following year when he was recruited by anti-communist forces to go back into Cambodia. Since his family had remained behind in Cambodia, he was very homesick for them and wanted to return. Joining the anti-communist forces gave him the opportunity to return.

He went back with one thousand other troops and recalls having little food during a year of fighting. When he returned to Thailand, only 300 troops remained -- the others died or joined other anti-communist units. That was in 1977. From then until 1979 he remained in a Thai refugee camp. For him it was prison; they were surrounded by Thai troops who came and went at will, frequently stealing from them and raping Cambodian women. In 1979 he was sponsored to go directly to Long Beach. He left behind four brothers (two others were born after he left) and both parents; those family members came out of Cambodia in 1984 and have since remained in the limbo of a "non-refugee" camp in Thailand near the Thai-Cambodian border. He was actually less preoccupied with their safety while they were in Cambodia, he thinks, in part because there was no way to communicate with them and he had no knowledge of their existence or their whereabouts. But now he is depressed because he cannot help them and is uncertain about their future, especially because they have not been given refugee status.

Upon arrival in the U.S., he was assigned to an ESL class. "Everything was difficult." He complained of the teaching method and the strangeness of other students. He felt very lonely. In listening about his perceptions of school, one is struck by his apparent "confusion" in thinking -- at one point he finds the methods strange and yet at another point he talked about how he liked the methods. This same curious oscillation occurs when he talks about his feelings about American culture -- first a rejection, then later a suggestion that he likes it.

Sok states that he has overcome these initial barriers to schooling but seems preoccupied with his current family situation and emotional state. Sok has been living in Long Beach with a woman he calls his wife and their child, though their "marriage" lacks formal recognition from either the civil society or a Khmer religious ceremony. He thinks that his family problems interfere with his continued education. He says that his wife [who is apparently mentally ill] acts strange, makes him depressed, talks loudly and at times doesn't want to cook for him, and doesn't listen to his advice. Because of these things he cannot concentrate enough to finish schooling. Throughout the interview he was preoccupied with
giving and receiving advice. Later in the interview he added that his pre-occupation with the Khmer Rouge period makes it difficult to concentrate on school: when people talk about the period, it makes him feel depressed and angry. Mixed with this is his preoccupation with his family overseas, especially since 1984, where they have been in the "limbo" of the border; the preoccupation centers on his worries on how he will be able to help his family, especially since they do not have refugee status. The combination of these pressures keeps him away from studies. He feels that he could return to school only if he feels "happy."

He also mentioned that his involvement with the large Cambodian community in Long Beach interferes with his education. People always ask for help to fill out forms and write letters, and to provide related liaison services with the surrounding English-speaking society. During the past week he had helped five or six persons. He also spends considerable time at one of the Buddhist temples and has helped with the Cambodian New Year's ceremony.

Sok attended junior college from 1984 to 1985, when he dropped out. He says he has no educational goals for the future. His best subject was Math, which he found easy and fun; however, he found English courses were difficult. When asked about his main educational achievements, he said "nothing." When asked his likes and dislikes of American education, he said he liked everything. In America there isn't as much emphasis on memorization as was the case in Cambodia. There is nothing he dislikes. Although he has no concrete educational goals, he would like to study; but he cannot cite any individuals or role models who may have shaped his desire for education. At school he had no peers who influenced his decisions on coursework and career choices. He seems to emphasize doing things alone. One gets the impression that he talks about his desire for education but has no heart for it.

What would help him with being successful in school? His answers were somewhat incoherent, wandering remarks: "doing a lot of homework," "not having a wife," "being happy," and "being involved in music makes him happy." His responses centered around emotional rather than "pragmatic" factors such as money.

Sok perceives that his main barrier to schooling and jobs is his lack of English skills. He has also experienced an inability to concentrate and to remember. If he reads a page, he can't remember the beginning; in effect, he can't concentrate enough to comprehend even one page of writing. "My mind goes blank." This lack of concentration extends to activities where he forgets what he is supposed to be doing. He finds that he does things subconsciously, such as working with Khmer youth; after he has done something, he cannot remember how he was able consciously to accomplish it.

He has no future plans but deals with life on a day-to-day basis. Whereas before he could live in the future, he now lives in the past, which he despises, or is consumed with the problems of the present. He thinks the problem, as mentioned above, can be traced to his preoccupation with the safety of his family in Thailand and his loneliness for them. When they were in Cambodia he didn't think about them, but now that they're in a border camp in Thailand, he can't help worrying about them. "Can I sponsor them?" "I don't have
enough extra money to send them." "If I had a house and money, I could bring them here. My life would change when they come here. When they write for money, I know I can't give them money so it makes me unhappy."

His work experience in Cambodia consisted of assisting his father in the mines and soldiering. In the U.S. he has had experiences as a translator. He has no future occupational aspirations or ambitions but sees himself continuing on part-time jobs for an indefinite time into the future. As he states, "I have no future goal." He has little job security and has not made any efforts to gain credentials which would place him in more secure work. From a purely instrumental point of view, he is going "nowhere."

Sok has been living with his common-law Cambodian wife for three years. He met her at a party. Since he was lonely and she was pretty, he became involved with her -- though he disliked her social background and personality. He was also motivated by her apparent poverty and took pity on her. After moving in, she gave birth to a child. He loves the baby girl, and that is the only reason why he continues to live there. He will not officially marry her, at least not until his parents come. They will give him advice on what he should do. The decision is up to his parents. "My ideal mate should not be too pretty but polite, treat me well, then I will love her very much."

When his wife's family arrived from the camps, they lived with him but have since moved out. They rarely see each other because he doesn't like them. If they come to his apartment, they stay only a few minutes and then leave. "Anyway I dislike her family. They are also rude and impolite. They are uneducated." He continued to emphasize their manner of speech and included comments about how they talk behind his back. He thinks that they gossip too much. Although he has no greatest hope for himself, he does hope that his child will receive a good education. He repeatedly mentioned that part of the troubles with his in-laws centered around their children's lack of interest in education. "They are not good people. They are not educated."

In Long Beach, besides his wife's family which consists of 12 persons (father-in-law, mother-in-law and 10 children), he also has about 40 relatives whom he has sponsored since his arrival. They are uncles, aunts and cousins. He has little relations with either side because both sides dislike each other. Sok dislikes his in-laws and his relatives dislike his wife. Therefore they have little contact and share little between themselves. Nevertheless, he is periodically consulted by his relatives about schooling and jobs. He gives advice but does not receive advice from others.

Sok referred to "Randy" as his only real friend because he gave good advice. His other friends do not give good advice though he claims they receive good advice from him. "The advice other people have given have been wrong." Those friendships were formed in this country with co-workers through the workplace. He also has friends in Khmer volunteer organizations. Throughout the interview he makes a special reference to giving and receiving advice. Advice giving and receiving has for him the notion of subordination and superordination.
In the beginning of his relationship with his wife, he made all the financial decisions and held the household money. If she wanted money, she had to ask him. Now she is given the money because she wanted to handle the household budget, but he is very unhappy with this because she is a poor money manager. For instance, she buys luxury items such as gold jewelry which they can't afford. Why did he give her control of the household money? He gave up after a series of conflicts with her; in the beginning he attempted to control her whenever he was unhappy about something she did or didn't do, such as keeping the apartment clean. When he was angry he would hit her, and she in turn would call the police with charges of wife abuse. However, the police intrusion was not the reason why he stopped hitting her, or so he claims; as an alternative tactic he sought to "persuade" her to change her behavior. This has not worked either, and therefore he has now resigned himself to her unwelcomed ways.

On mutual support activities with others, Sok did once belong to a rotating credit group of Khmer peers but dropped out when he could no longer afford to contribute money -- that was when he lost a fulltime job. Since that time, if needs to borrow money, he will go to the bank; that is what he did when he bought his car. He says if he had money he would support his relatives who are, for the most part, on welfare. He would like to win the California lottery so it would be possible. In fact, if he could wish for only one thing, he said he would like to win the lottery, which he plays regularly. Then he would be able to afford to do things for his family.

When asked what he likes and dislikes of Americans, he is vague and evasive. He says the good things about Americans is that they are nice. What is nice? From that topic he interjected racial remarks about not liking Blacks and Hispanics. "Blacks steal from me and talk badly to me. I also hate Mexicans." By contrast he says that most whites are okay. When asked to identify things he liked about Khmer culture, he said they are "involved." By this he meant that Khmer "don't close doors on others; they know each other, and they help each other out." On the other hand Americans do not get involved and do the opposite. The "real Cambodians are quiet and polite because they are Buddhist." He feels troubled because he sees himself changing toward the American ways. For instance, he now calls the police whereas before he would have helped directly the person in trouble. On the other hand, he dislikes certain manifestations of Khmer culture; for example, the Khmer do not supervise their children when they have parties, and in movie theaters they talk aloud to each other during the movie, disturbing other individuals.

In comparison with other Khmer, he feels he is doing better because he relies on himself and others have to rely on him. Though he appears passive and shy, this self assessment was surprising since it seems to be contradictory -- it seems self-aggrandizing but is undermined by his lack of achievement in school. He did enroll briefly in several community college classes but soon withdrew and dropped out of college. Perhaps within the Khmer context he is successful, but by comparative Vietnamese and American instrumental standards he would not viewed as exceptional.

He viewed the interview as "a conversation between friends." Although he seemed to discuss the Pol Pot experiences openly, he hates to talk about that time in general, because it
makes him angry and upset. Whenever his friends bring up the topic, he asks them to stop. When he does think about it, he has to get out of the house and go to a bar to calm down. His persistent depression and the continual stress emanating from those experiences, his strained relations with his wife and her family, the thoughts of his parents and brothers in Thailand and his general melancholy -- all of these circumstances sap his energy and vision in seeking more education (which he strongly wants for his child) and in working toward some future occupational goal. His hopes, and the little money he has, are instead invested in the lottery.

Despite these problems, or perhaps because of them, Sok has devoted himself to the Cambodian community, especially to do volunteer work in one of its Buddhist temples, and in this capacity he is seen and appreciated by other Khmer as a serious and very reliable contributor, giving much of himself to others. **He exemplifies a general Khmer characteristic of being neither adept nor predisposed toward instrumental tasks, but instead drawn toward expressive tasks and social functions involving not so much one's family as one's "community."** The way he looks at himself in relationship to others is as a "giver of wisdom" and as a "helper:" it is in such a role that he finds self-justification and meaning in his life.

**K-4: Sophy Keng**

Sophy Keng is an 18-year-old Khmer girl who came to the United States three years ago. She was only six years old when Phnom Penh fell in 1975. The low-rent apartment complex where she now lives in the San Diego area is rundown, and numerous Khmer children were running about when we visited Sophy. Most of the adults there were Khmer women, though a few of the other residents were non-Khmer -- mainly low-income Blacks and Hispanics. The "lawns" consist of dry dirt, despite the presence of lawn sprinklers, and the place looks makeshift, though the management seemed to be in the process of repainting the outside walls of the buildings. Although the complex is shabby, the inside of Sophy's apartment was neat. In the living room of her apartment, the floor was covered with a straw mat, and the walls were covered with female picture calendars from Khmer markets. Despite the obvious poverty of the place, in a corner of the living room was an "entertainment center" with a Sansui stereo system, a color TV set connected for cable (which was turned on), and pictures of Sophy's roommate and her children in heart-shaped picture frames on top of the TV. Throughout the interview, children came and went and three women walked through the room. All were Khmer dressed in long traditional skirts, although Sophy wore an American-style skirt. During the interview, a middle-aged woman came into the room, sat on the floor and proceeded to assemble religious "altar" materials (coconut, dried betel leaves, incense, paper, etc.).

Sophy was born in Battanbang in 1969 to a soldier and a clerk. Her father was a mixture of Vietnamese, Chinese and Khmer ancestry, and her mother was of Thai and Khmer
background. In 1974 her father disappeared and has not been heard from since. After the fall of the government, her mother married for a second time but the step-father died in 1979. Although it is unclear how much education her father had, he did graduate from some school with enough education to hold an officer rank in the Cambodian military. Her mother is approximately 50 years old (she seemed unfamiliar with her parents' ages) and had about a seventh grade education. Overall, it would appear that Sophy's social class background was above average.

After the Khmer Rouge came, her mother and two siblings were sent along with Sophy to a small village in Cambodia in 1976, where they stayed until 1979. However, during this time Sophy was separated from her family and forced to work on a farm. Despite her tender age, she was required to work from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day. Once a day she was fed gruel, which consisted of a little rice and water. "Everybody got skinny." One day she was alone for her mother and left the farm without permission to go see her. When she returned she was beaten with a branch so severely that she still bears the scars on her back. This was the worst treatment she received. She did witness killings and feared for her own life. She recalls the horror of being called out of bed at night (about 10 p.m.) and taken to a field with sharp stakes sticking out of holes in the ground. There she witnessed babies thrown up in the air and impaled to death as they fell onto those sharp stakes.

She thinks about the Pol Pot period all the time. When her mother went up north recently to search for her younger brother who had run away from home, she cried and thought about that time in Cambodia. She felt sad. Anything can cause her to remember those days.

In 1979, her family fled to Thailand, where they lived in several camps until 1983, when they were transferred to the refugee processing center in the Philippines. In 1984 they arrived in San Diego, sponsored by an American family.

When Sophy lived with her mother in San Diego, as she did until recently, her mother received SSI cash assistance from the welfare department due to her poor physical condition, resulting from extensive beatings by the Khmer Rouge. Apparently, the mother is distraught and has had difficulty taking care of her family. Sophy and her brother received cash assistance through the AFDC program. She seemed unaware of educational planning and occupational placement. Her older sister stayed in school for half a year but dropped out. Her younger brother is supposed to be in the eighth grade but is currently missing after having run away from home. In 1985, Sophy was married unofficially in the Cambodian fashion, and in the following year she bore a son. Her "husband" has since disappeared.

In May 1987, Sophy moved in with her girlfriend. "Friend living alone so I moved in; want to stay for summer." Actually, she doesn't want to move back to her mother's apartment because it is more lonely there than here. "At home it's lonely, nobody visits me there." She had asked her mother three times before the mother consented to the move. Apparently her mother is "crazy" and Sophy wanted to get away from that situation. Her mother sends her $100 per month and if she needs more money she will ask her mother. Her friend helps her out and she tries to return the favor if her friend needs money. She is thinking of asking for
the AFDC money herself but she doesn't know how that is done, and besides she has no specific plans on how and when she will do it. She does recall seeing the social worker when she was pregnant, but hasn't seen one since that time.

She had no schooling in Cambodia during the Pol Pot period, had some while in the camps, and more in the Philippines. She was 14 years old when she arrived in the United States and she found schooling here difficult. She recalls being embarrassed, especially by her difficulty in pronouncing English words; one time she attempted to say "excuse me" in attempting to pass by some American boys at school and they teased her by claiming she had said "kiss me." They let her go, but only after kissing her.

When asked what subject at school was most difficult, she said it was "Art" because she didn't know how to draw. But afterwards she said "hard to read, how to pronounce them. I lucky because I try anyway; friends correct my mistakes. What does she consider her most noteworthy achievement to date? She says she is "proud about English cause my friend helped with the right words." She seemed a little confused, but it is clear that she is proud of learning English. She likes school because they have lots of classes that she likes -- Math, English, U.S. history, Science, Music. She doesn't have any dislikes. She remains undecided about how much education she will work for, though she would like to finish high school. She complained about going to school with the baby and has missed much school. In fact, she said she received all Fs because she had difficulty getting someone to take care of her baby. "I go low now, go down." She claims she received good grades before the baby (As and Bs), but now it is all Fs. Her mother doesn't seem to be a reliable resource and therefore she frequently is unable to find a baby sitter during school days, causing Sophy to stay home and resulting in school absences.

When asked about her career goals, she selected "clerk" because her mother was one, and so was her grandfather. But other than this, she has no idea about future occupations. She has no plans or ideas about working that are specific, and says "I plan to but I don't know about what to do."

When asked about her marriage, she said "I don't to marry who," apparently indicating that the question was embarrassing, especially since her "husband" has disappeared. She refuses to discuss her baby with other students at Jefferson High School despite the fact that other Khmer girls have babies without visible husbands. "At Jefferson they don't know about baby but I ran away and I don't tell them anything." She seems too young to make decisions and is frustrated at working out her daily subsistence, going to school, raising the baby, wanting to have companionship, and not knowing what to do next.

When asked about the role of her mother in decisions which affect her life, she said "she can tell me to do things but I don't like to do what she asks." She does consult with her mother, and the move to the present quarters was based on her mother's consent, but she definitely would determine the person she will marry. "I want choice, they love me, I love them, then okay." When she lived with her mother, she studied and her mother did all of the household chores. Since moving to the new apartment, she shares the household responsibilities with her girlfriend; however, it is not on a regular basis but rather "if I see something dirty I clean. When she sees something dirty, she cleans." In spite of her
preference to stay here away from her mother, if she could have one wish it would be to live with her baby, her mother, "my family together," meaning her brother and sister.

Her friends are those Khmer women who live in the apartment complex. The friend she is living with has two children but no husband. She has no friends at school, apparently resulting from the embarrassment over her baby, and notwithstanding her reference to friends who had earlier assisted her in acquiring English. She sees her current friends as important because "they nice, they help me." These friends provide companionship, shelter and a general sharing of resources. They also talk about the Pol Pot experiences and about themselves, which helps her since she remains fearful and skittish about that period. She also appreciates the fact that she is given the opportunity to help them in English: "They let me teach ABC." When asked on how she compares herself with other Khmer refugee youth, she said "I don't know." She probably has something to say but she averted the interviewer's eyes and looked down when asked this question.

What did she like best of her American friends? "I like they come to home and teach us." She was referring to the time that some American friends visited them at her home and taught them English. When asked what she disliked of Americans, she said she didn't have any dislikes. Although many of the artifacts in the room were Western, one had the sense that most of their lives revolved around things Khmer -- language, friendship, religion, etc. When asked to compare Khmer and American cultures, she couldn't answer the question. She mentioned that Khmer culture is good because "they doing nice and all those things," which she later explained meant friendship. On the other hand she was not sure about American culture.

Does she feel she is a part of American culture? "How could I be American? I black skin, black eyes, black hair." She expressed this very emphatically and insisted on defining "American" in racial terms. When asked about how she was treated by Americans, she eluded the question but later mentioned that "my English not good enough and my skin color black." When asked about her identity as Khmer, she continued to think in racial terms rather than in the more symbolic ways Americans may come to expect. She sees herself as half-Khmer because of her parents' mixed backgrounds. She speaks Khmer most of the time, though it should be noted that her girlfriend does speak English and is seen by the Black assistant manager of the apartment complex as the one who can speak English. Apparently most of the other Khmer residents do not speak English.

Sophy is a young woman who has been engulfed by sudden, stressful and tumultuous events in her life. She is trying to manage somehow despite a difficult home situation, instability of residence, uncertain welfare payments, little education and no ideas about how she will enter the world of work. She is distraught and confused about both her past and her future. She is preoccupied with the painful memories of the Pol Pot period in Cambodia and seeks the company of other Khmer women with children who, like herself, are without a husband. This "solution" of moving in with another Khmer woman who herself is single-parenting two children expresses the fluidity and ephemeral character of some Khmer refugee household arrangements, where everything appears to proceed ad hoc with no set plan or agenda. Sophy herself has no idea how long she will live there under
those conditions, nor has she any idea of what she will do with her life. Life is something that has "happened" to Sophy, and she experiences it as largely outside her control or direction.

Her circle of female friends provide her with some comfort but the economics of her situation remain tenuous. Eventually she will have to straighten out her receipt of AFDC monies and possibly return to her mother's apartment -- though the present unavailability of her mother (who is herself distraught) and siblings (her sister dropped out of school, her brother ran away from home) make any such scenario improbable for the foreseeable future. The combination of all of these factors has led to the progressive deterioration of her academic performance in high school. Given her F grades during the past year and her inability to both raise her child and go to school, it is likely that she will drop out of school herself before the beginning of the next school year -- revealing in the process some of the dynamics of the higher-than-average Khmer dropout rate we have found in San Diego high schools. She seems destined to remain on public assistance for her subsistence, unless and until she can break out of the vicious cycle in which she has found herself enmeshed. Despite all of her problems, Sophy remains outwardly calm and accepting of her situation.
C. Four Hmong Case Histories.

H-1: Moua Yang

Moua Yang is a young Hmong married man who at age 25 is well respected in his community as a liaison between the Hmong and outsiders. Moua's wife, Blia, is 23 years old. Moua and Blia arrived separately in the United States in 1976, as part of the small "first wave" of Hmong immigration. Their English is clear and confident, but spoken with a slight accent. They met and married in San Diego, when they were both in high school; they now have two children, and share their household with Blia's mother and younger brother. Moua was born sometime in 1962, though his birth year is officially listed as 1961, and the exact month and day is not known. The Hmong generally remember events such as a harvest or a battle and associate them with birth dates, but other than that they do not place great emphasis on those dates; rather they consider death dates (of parents, grandparents and ancestors) to be important.

Because his father had been a soldier during the war, Moua's family had to flee Laos in 1975 to avoid the victorious Pathet Lao communists. While in the Thai refugee camps, Moua learned some English by hanging around those who spoke English. His family arrived in San Diego during 1976 and was one of the first Hmong families resettled here. An American family sponsored them -- Moua, his father, mother, paternal grandmother, aunt and eight siblings (13 persons in all). At the time he was 14 years old, just past puberty.

In the early years in San Diego, Moua's father became a community and clan leader. Currently he is in his late forties. In Laos, he had been an officer in the Lao army. For a Hmong he was highly educated, with about a 5th or 6th grade education, and he could read and write in Lao. Like most Hmong, Moua's family had a farm when they lived in the mountains; however, during the period when they were associated with the army, they lived in a Hmong-dominated city.

When they first arrived in the U.S., his father took ESL classes and then vocational training courses in machinery. After graduating, he became a machinist but hurt his back, which made it impossible for him to continue working. He went on welfare (SSI) and in 1982 decided to try farming in the Modesto area in California's Central Valley. He was among the first Hmong to settle in Modesto, and as a Yang clan leader, he influenced others to go up to Modesto -- although, significantly, Moua and his wife remained behind in San Diego. The father now works part-time as a farm consultant to other Hmong in Modesto and at the same time he qualifies for some welfare assistance.

Moua's father is unusual among Hmong of his generation in terms of being sophisticated in guiding his children into education. He encouraged educational achievement among
his children; next to keeping control over his children, education was his most important goal. He would turn off the television until the children completed their homework; he would prohibit his children from playing sports such as soccer because he felt they interfered with school. Since his father was educated, he had valued education -- but he also viewed the educational success of his children as a reflection of his character. If his children succeeded in school, other Hmong would know about their achievements and give added respect to the parent. Moua's father has received high respect because several of his children have gone on to attend the California State University system.

The father's views on education have been transmitted to Moua, the oldest son. By placing his school-age child in a special elementary school which is part of San Diego's voluntary busing program [the district has created special magnet schools to integrate children throughout the city], Moua has demonstrated his belief in the importance of education. He does not want his children to associate with too many other refugee children because he thinks they will mislead his child away from doing well at school. He thinks that refugee students at the regular neighborhood school would influence his child to stay after school to play instead of coming home; Moua wants to avoid such unsupervised time. He claims those other children have a "play attitude" and he wants his child to put education first. As of now, he doesn't permit his children to play in their frontyard, since the other neighborhood children play in the streets and this might tempt his children to get away from his control. Therefore, he has his children play in the backyard where adults can supervise them at all times.

Moua went to "college," French style, in Laos, where he finished about 8 years of schooling before he and his family fled. His educational achievement in that school placed him in algebra and geometry classes which were more advanced than the equivalent grade level in the U.S. This helped him a lot when he enrolled at Washington High School in San Diego. He knows English, Hmong, Lao and Thai. At one time he knew French but has lost his ability in that language. He eagerly accepted English because he knew he would need it. Since he was successful in the English language, Washington High School hired him to be a teaching aide for four years.

He was still attending Washington High School when he married Blia. At the time she was 16 years old and he was 19 years old. After graduation he attended three semesters at a community college but had to drop out because of insufficient funds. His grade point average in high school was about 2.8; he is apologetic about it because he felt it should be higher. He explained his "poor" performance by blaming himself for spending too much time participating in sports (soccer) and other recreational pursuits. He is now attending another junior college and is achieving a 4.0 GPA, which is more to his liking. He is planning on receiving an AA degree. He has even thought of entering the state university for a B.A. degree, but at the moment this is considered a remote possibility -- in general, he does not like to extend himself too far without dealing with practicalities such as time and money.

Blia's father worked for the CIA during the war and died in a plane crash in 1971. Like Moua, her family fled Laos in 1975. When she arrived in San Diego, she was accompanied by her mother, three older sisters and a younger brother. Three more sisters of Blia had been
already married in Laos and fled separately with their husbands' families -- they are now living elsewhere, two in Canada and the other one in Santa Ana. Her three sisters in San Diego are married and living with their husbands. Except for her one brother, who is now 20, all her siblings are females. In fact, after Blia's mother produced seven girls, her father married a second woman in order to have male babies. The second wife produced two male babies and she is currently living in Fresno, but Blia does not have a relationship with her.

The cultural significance of this is that, by Hmong tradition, Blia's widowed mother could not expect to rely on her daughters for support, leaving only her one son to count on. The Hmong kinship system is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal, and daughters at marriage are expected to be "lost" to their husbands' families and clans. This is of great consequence because it fundamentally devalues the worth of females in Hmong society, resulting in little or no institutionalized obligation to provide future support to them. Therefore, from the viewpoint of traditional Hmong parents, there is little incentive to educate or otherwise invest in the development of the female. Blia and her husband, however, are unusual in that they now have Blia's mother and brother living with them: this decision was made recently, not out of kin obligation but rather as a practical choice by Moua and Blia. Blia's mother would have understood and accepted not living with them because in the Hmong way only males are so obligated to their parents.

Although Blia's mother never had any formal education, she has encouraged her children to advance themselves. Blia's brother is currently working full-time as an assembly line worker in a factory and is also attending a junior college on a part-time basis. Blia herself has graduated from high school and intends to attend a community college, though for the time being she is working full-time and parenting her two children.

Blia had a 3.0 GPA at Roosevelt High School. She worked hard to complete her education and has all the appearance of a rugged, confident, independent individual who would not permit others to walk over her. In this respect she is much like her mother, whom both Blia and Moua see as a "strong woman." In work settings and private conversations where we have observed her, Blia comes across as a strong-willed person with clear and well-thought-out opinions who is not afraid to articulate them; but during the joint interviews we had with Blia and Moua, she deferred completely to her husband. Even though Moua thinks women should have similar opportunities as men have, both agree, through their actions, that the husband "wears the pants in the household," at least in public. Therefore throughout the interviews, she not only deferred to him but let him do almost all of the talking. Furthermore, when discussing the case of a Hmong girl who was not encouraged to go on to college despite her fine high school record, Blia agreed that Hmong families would not want to invest in the girl because when she married "out," there would be no guarantee of a return on their investment. She used the term "going to the other side" to mean that a Hmong girl, upon marriage, from then on belongs to the husband's family. Although it did not seem fair to her, she accepted its reality. Another indication of Blia's acquiescence to this gender norm was her surprise when Moua agreed to accept her mother and brother into their household: "I never expected him to let my mom and brother live with us."
Moua was motivated to get married early because his grandmother told him that he, being the oldest son, should marry and produce a grandson that she could see before she died. On the other hand, Blia, who was then in the 10th grade said that "we don't want to be old maid so we decide to marry." She stated that 18 years could be considered to be an "old maid's age" among the Hmong. But she added that "we just like each other and it wasn't because I was trying to avoid being an old maid. After we married, he told me about his grandmother's request." Thus at that time, although their families valued education, they still married early and had a baby -- resulting in their seeking welfare assistance.

Both Moua and Blia are aware of the economic problems that early marriage and early child production can create for a young couple trying to make it in this society. Like many Hmong youngsters, even those with uneducated parents, they were encouraged to complete high school with the understanding that schooling would enable them to obtain gainful employment. On the other hand, the idea of entering and completing post-secondary education programs was more difficult to grasp. Three things were clear: (1) after high school, the dependent child loses AFDC eligibility and this creates the necessity to find an alternative source of income, primarily work; (2) after high school, Hmong children are encouraged to marry and have children, which interferes with continuing education; and (3) since parents are not likely to support their children's continuation of schooling after high school for the first two reasons (all the more so if they are girls), Hmong youth have no one else who might encourage them to continue schooling. There are hardly any available local Hmong role models who have completed college.

Although Moua attempted to complete his community college program, being the eldest and lacking financial resources forced him to quit in 1982. However, it was different in the case of Moua's younger siblings, for not only did his parents support their continuing into post-secondary schooling, but also Moua talked to them and gave them financial support -- even to his sister. Moua's support was crucial since most Hmong youngsters do not know any respected persons from their community who have completed post-secondary schooling. They have not accepted or even clearly envisioned post-secondary education as a goal, like the Vietnamese. For most Hmong youngsters, post-secondary schooling is an abstraction and they are not easily motivated by things which are not very concrete. Even though Moua has not yet completed his AA degree, as an older brother who has already accomplished much.-- such as being among the first Hmong paraprofessional social workers in the area -- he is respected by his younger siblings and hence they are willing to follow his advice to continue schooling.

Moua's support of his younger siblings illustrates the expected role of the Hmong older brother who is responsible for setting the tone for younger siblings, especially males. This is similar to the Vietnamese children who are expected to be models for younger siblings. In addition, Moua provided financial support for his siblings, a behavior that matches the pattern seen among Vietnamese families. The main difference here between Hmong and Vietnamese families is the much greater likelihood of this mutual support among the Vietnamese, reflecting the great differences in resources and in the opportunity structures of the two groups.
One of the most interesting facets of Moua's and Blia's case concerns their decision to leave welfare. After almost two years on AFDC assistance (during 1980-81) they decided to go off of welfare. This was a costly decision since it meant they would lose MediCal benefits and that Blia (who by then already had one baby) would have to work too. Given the costs, what was Moua's motivation to abandon those benefits? While still in high school, one his teachers complained to his students about welfare because it was "degrading," especially because those on welfare could be told what to do or not do such as how much they could spend on cars; at the end of that speech, the teacher told the students to "get up and stand on your feet." This speech struck a resonant chord in Moua's ideals of pride and independence, a virtue long valued by the Hmong.

At the time he decided to follow the teacher's advice, he had only a part-time teacher's aide job at Washington High School. The job was not secure and at any time he could be let go. So the decision was a gamble. Soon after giving up welfare, his wife joined him as an aide at the same school. When Blia began working, she had to quit high school because the hours conflicted. While working at school, her supervisor suggested that she could take evening classes at the same school and earn her high school degree. She accepted this advice and thereafter her daily schedule began at 7 a.m.; following an 8-hour work day, she attended the evening classes until 9 p.m. She would then rush to her mother's home, pick up her baby and go home. **Blia would not have been able to work and go to school had not her mother been available to provide her with free fulltime child care help.** Indeed, it was in part Moua's and Blia's recognition of the key role played by Blia's mother in their economic self-sufficiency that led them to incorporate her and Blia's younger brother into their household. In the meantime, Moua had attempted to earn an AA degree while working and staying off of welfare, but the financial burden was too great, leading him to leave the AA program. All in all, the decision of leave welfare was costly. In 1981, soon after leaving welfare, he was hired as a translator, which meant fulltime employment with benefits, including medical coverage. This relieved the uncertainty of their financial situation. In 1983, he was hired fulltime as a case worker in a social service agency -- a more stable job where he also receives health care benefits.

The teacher's remark about getting on his feet had touched Moua's pride and fanned his frustrations about being on welfare. Other family members such as his father complain about being on welfare as degrading, though it should be mentioned that many Hmong see welfare as another form of work. Moua also commented on the crucial support he received from both his wife and his mother-in-law. He consulted with them before he wrote to the welfare office. Thus the decision was a collective one.

**An associated and critical move was the decision to restrict family size.** Blia's position on this point is that "if you have too many kids, you can't be off welfare." After they struggled with Moua's decision to leave welfare, Blia worked as a teacher's aide and then in 1982 she found as job as a fulltime typist clerk. She was required to type in the Hmong language. By 1984 she had her second baby (also a son) which, unlike the first child, was planned. She decided the first child needed a sibling but that this would be their only additional child until they could afford to have more children. The struggle to support their children was costly and she vowed she wouldn't have another child unless they had more
money. Moua also said that his first years as a case worker meant his hours were irregular, which led to an inability to be with his child on a regular basis. He wanted some quality time with his child. Additionally, before his current job, they didn't have enough money to clothe his child adequately or to pay for things which would enhance the life of his family. **Moua and Blia have consciously chosen to invest in quality of children over quantity of children. Theirs is a decision more typical of couples in modern societies where the "demographic transition" to low fertility has been accomplished.** It is particularly remarkable in the Hmong community. Moua's and Blia's decision to restrict family size goes entirely against traditional norms, and whether or not it can or will be emulated among other young Hmong couples remains to be seen.

During this time, Blia's mother baby-sat their two children and gave moral support to restrict family size. She wanted her daughter to be successful and was tired of being a welfare recipient herself. She compared herself to other family members who were working and not on welfare. It should be remembered that Blia's mother had eight children -- all but one of whom was a girl; this meant she produced children who might not be available to support her in old age. She felt that the fates were unfair in giving her so many girls, but eventually she developed an attitude that she wanted life quality for her grandchildren because of the hardship in raising eight children. Ironically, she has come to reap the benefits of her daughter's success, since other people recognize it and give her credit. Both her personal economic well-being and her community prestige were enhanced by her daughter's success.

Moua's father was one of the clan leaders who encouraged the Hmong to settle in California's Central Valley, partly for the perceived possibilities of employment in agriculture, which seemed like a reasonable strategy since most Hmong were farmers. Nevertheless Moua disagreed with the move; he thinks that it may be a short-term gain but a long-term loss. Although the living costs are cheaper there, job opportunities are fewer. Why didn't Moua move to Modesto when his father and family went there? His father pressured him to join them, but Moua was able to make his case to stay for the following reasons: (1) he wanted to finish his education, a goal that his father had already conceded was important; (2) he was married with a child and his wife's family was in San Diego; and (3) they would need a baby sitter, and since both Moua's parents were expecting to work, as did Moua and Blia, that left his mother-in-law as the only available and reliable family babysitter. In spite of the move, Moua has kept in close contact with his father and family, including giving advice to his brothers, sending them money, and the like.

Nearly two years ago, when mortgage rates fell to their lowest point in several years, Moua and Blia bought a three-bedroom, two-bath home in the San Diego area. This acquisition makes them among the youngest Hmong to own a home, a sign of great prestige in the community. It is both an affirmation and a payoff of their decision to go off welfare and restrict family size. In spite of this commitment to contain family size, Moua continues to believe in the support of extended family members. Besides his nuclear family (himsel, Blia and two sons, ages 3 and 7 years) and his wife's mother and brother, Moua recently took in one of his brothers and his family (brother, brother's wife, and two sons) -- making it a total of eleven persons living in their home, slightly over the average Hmong household size.
His brother moved down from Modesto five months ago because he wanted to get away from the heat but also so that he might be able to find a better living situation. Since his brother and wife are disabled, they receive SSI which they use to contribute to the household.

Moua would like to be promoted to a more senior case worker position, but few if any such positions have opened up; nevertheless he entertains the possibility of advancing professionally into such a position. As an alternative, he has thought of going into the real estate business. He got the idea that property may be a good way to make money when he discovered that his $76,000 house may now be worth almost $100,000 -- in only less than two years! Thinking along the lines of working with his father, he has asked his father to go into business with him in the future, after the other brothers go off of AFDC. His father hasn't accepted the idea yet but Moua thinks that income property would be an excellent opportunity. He realizes that he has little capital to go into such a business, but he is optimistic that he will be able to work his way up into that career path. No one has encouraged him nor taught him about this business idea -- it was something he thought of himself.

He is preoccupied with maintaining control over his children and looks to the experience of his father and his relations with his children. For instance, he doesn't approve of his 19-year-old brother who is wearing "new wave" clothes, in the punk style; he feels that his brother does not remember the old ways since his memory of Laos is weak. His father does not approve of the clothes and other aspects of the lifestyle which his brother has acquired. This poses a conflict between father and son. His 21-year-old brother has also violated his father's authority. During the school year he was "dating" an older American girl. The father suspected something was amiss when that son did not return home one day. Without permission, the son married the girl and was afraid to tell the father about it. He talked with Moua who told him he had to tell the father. The father did not accept the marriage though he has occasional talks with that son ("now they talk from time to time."). The father had two reasons for being upset: (1) he felt the son should finish school before marrying, and (2) "it is hard for our culture to marry out." While it is unusual for a Hmong parent to insist on a child completing school before marriage, the attitudes of the Hmong are moving in that direction; it is the grandparents who are most likely to prefer family formation before schooling since they would like to see grandchildren before they die. The second reason seems more important because in effect the father has "lost" a son in a way similar to losing a daughter upon her marriage. The father has to adjust because although his son remains his son, he can no longer rely upon him as he wishes because he has married "out." Moua's own attitude is that "this is not Laos, you can't force child to marry. You have to accept the child's choice. Elder people won't accept it but younger ones will have to accept it."

Moua feels that the relationship of his father to the children has been changing considerably since they arrived in the U.S. His father is "looser" than he used to be: e.g., when he was young, Moua was prohibited from using his father's camera and other possessions; now his younger siblings can now use not only the camera but also the car and even damage those things with relative impunity. These things he takes as a sign that the father is making concessions to the younger siblings. As a Hmong father, he used reasoning first before using physical punishment, which he used only rarely. This is unusual because
Hmong parents frequently resort to physical punishment first. He now emphasizes reasoning even more as a method of controlling his children and the lines of discretion are more broadly drawn. Nevertheless he maintains boundaries of control, which, though widely drawn, are known and accepted by his siblings, such as the father's insistence that his children attend college near home.

Moua is worried about the problem of Hmong parents losing authority over their children, especially regarding school affairs, since most Hmong adults are uneducated and unable to supervise their children's homework, and they also are not nearly as proficient in English as their children. He feels the younger children are sensing the greater power that comes from these advantages and that they can claim some control over their lives: "This country's freedom," "Why should I listen to you when you are uneducated!" This urge for the youth's self determination is further supported in this society, Moua argues, by child protective laws which limit parents' rights of physical punishment. Thus, even such an "enlightened" Hmong parent as Moua feels threatened by the undermining of parental authority. He talked of a celebrated case in the Hmong community in which a Hmong parent was accused of child abuse. The parent was so furious with his daughter that he beat her fiercely, leaving body marks; when she went to school fellow students saw and reported the marks to the teacher, even though the daughter was unwilling to tell on her father. Nevertheless, child abuse laws made it mandatory that the teacher report this case to the authorities and the subsequent investigation led to the separation of the child from her home. This incident was interpreted by the community as both a loss of face for the father but also a sign that authorities can and will interfere on the side of children and against the parent's right to physically punish their children -- which for uneducated and psychologically unsophisticated Hmong parents is viewed as their principal tool of control. This means that all Hmong parents share in the fate of having their authority diminished.

Yet it is apparently that pervasive parental control over their children -- enhanced by extended family and clan social pressure -- that has so far accounted for the very small rates of school suspension and juvenile delinquency among Hmong youth. According to Moua, a Hmong explanation for why some youths get out of control is their association with Vietnamese youth who lead them astray. Thus the Hmong parent will go out of his way to supervise his child's playmates. For the most part, this means confining playmates to other Hmong. According to Moua, one of the most deviant Hmong youth in San Diego is reputed to have had such associations with Vietnamese youth. This is a Hmong folk theory of "differential association:" if you want to know a youth's character, look at his playmates.

Moua and Blia continue to think of themselves primarily as Hmong and believe in the sanctity of the core values revolving around close supervision of children [maintaining parental authority] and respect for elders. On the other hand, they think that both boys and girls should be treated equally, contrary to traditional Hmong norms. Parallel with these attitudes, **they view negatively American attitudes and practices which they feel undermine parental authority:** (1) laws on self protection giving rights to those who might assault and rob you, (2) laws restricting parents' rights to punish and control children, (3) giving too much freedom to children, (4) exposure to premarital sexuality without the consent of parents, including dating, kissing, etc.; and (5) the general lack of respect for
elders, especially as shown by the existence of nursing homes ("Why raise children if they are not going to take care of you when you are old?"). On the other hand, they like the following aspects of American culture: (1) more open communication between parents and children, and the idea of spending quality time with children; (2) funerals here are much more humane and not as fearful as Hmong funerals; (3) freedom and opportunities for adults in education and jobs; (4) a much higher standard of living; and (5) Christianity, to which Moua and Blia have converted. On this last item, they think that Christianity is important because it makes this life important, in sharp contrast to beliefs about reincarnation as are found in Laos: "This means that you only have one life to live, it's this one, which means you must live it with meaning. It is the only time you will be judged for good and bad." Moua also praises Christianity because it has allowed him to focus better on the family. "Before religion, I gambled and drank and did not concentrate on the family. Now I can concentrate on the family. It has not only made me a better family member but now my father is proud of me." He has taken that part of Christianity which reinforced traditional Hmong values.

They think of themselves, therefore, as bicultural, blending the old with the new. They try to pick the best of both cultures but the fundamental values are centered around the continuation of the family. This was made clear when they answered a question on their main wish for the future: both agreed that their one wish was for the health of the family.

In sum, Moua and Blia represent an exceptional case of first-wave Hmong refugees who have been clearly successful in their adaptation to the United States. They have addressed the issues of early marriage and high fertility by restricting family size, emphasizing life quality within a modern setting. One of Moua's advantages was his father's educational background and support of education as a primary life goal. While affirming the legitimacy of parental authority, he was also able to circumvent the full impact of his father's wishes to move to the Central Valley by a combination of luck, of having already formed a separate family, and also having the support of his wife and her mother. Their case also shows how, given the Hmong emphasis on patrilineality, they were able to deal with an atypical situation where the male breadwinner was dead and the dead husband's family was unable to provide support. In such instances as Blia's mother's circumstance, the Hmong are forced to innovate and on occasion they transcend the limits of female subordination, giving females more rights than they would have received under traditional male domination. In Blia's situation, realizing that they were without resources from her dead father's family, her family supported her efforts to restrict family size and enter the job market. Blia's mother not only provided moral support but also her labor as a babysitter. Fortunately for Blia, Moua's flexibility and supportive attitude were also critical for her entrance into the job market, which in turn ensured their ability to leave welfare and ultimately buy a house. Thus, the peculiar circumstances of the failure of the patrilineal support system, combined with the relative social class resources of Moua's family, provided the groundwork for changing Hmong norms of family size and female participation in the job market.

Additionally, Moua's and Blia's decision to adopt Christianity provided further social and ideological support for their decision to alter traditional Hmong expectations. The initial close similarity of fundamental Christianity to Hmong ideals of the sanctity of family
continuity made the cultural gap between Laos and urban America easier to bridge. The Hmong proclivity to seek explicit and simple rules for guiding behavior is apparently nurtured within a fundamentalist Christian setting and assists them with adaptive strategies for dealing with life in an extremely complex and frequently ambiguous society. In part, that setting provides them with both explanations and insulation to withstand the full impact of the contemporary secular world. As reflected in Moua's constant concern to limit the exposure of his children from "undesirable" influences, the church provides a cocoon within a world that could undermine Hmong ideals. This family's evident socioeconomic success after a decade of struggle reflects the complex (and not easily reproducible) interaction of adaptive resources, contexts and strategies in shaping self-sufficiency outcomes.
H-2: Cheng Xiong

Cheng Xiong is a single 25-year-old Hmong who arrived in the U.S. in 1979 when he was 17 years old. His home mountain village in Laos consisted of 15 families. During the war, in 1970, his father was killed, leaving his family at the mercy of his mother's relatives since his father's relatives were too poor to extend them much assistance. Given the Hmong preference for patrilineality, Cheng's family was not respected by his mother's family. Thus, prior to their flight from Laos, they were already partially marginal to Hmong society. In June 1975, Cheng's family fled through Laos and across the Mekong River into Thailand. The family was then composed of Cheng, his mother, two older brothers, three younger sisters and one younger brother.

They remained in Thai refugee camps for four years until 1979, when they were accepted for resettlement in the United States, except for the two older brothers (and their wives and children) who were subsequently sent to Canada. Cheng had begun to take a leading role in his family even though he was (in 1975) only 13 years old, partially as a result of his greater aggressiveness and success in dealing with authorities; it is surprising that his mother and older siblings deferred to Cheng at all, but he did have a greater command of English and was more persuasive with authority figures in the camps. He had also acquired fluency in Lao and Thai languages. Because of his precocity and ability to learn, he was able to pick up some English from American camp workers. He helped make the decision to split the family into two, figuring it would be much easier to find placement for two smaller family groups rather than one large one. He regrets this decision, since his older brothers were sent to Canada while the rest of them were sent to Santa Ana. The family has not been able to become reunited ever since.

Having taken command of the part of the family that included his mother and younger siblings, he learned that he had to lie about his age in order to be given legal status as head of household. Therefore he added five years to his age, and their placement in the United States was based on Cheng acting as head of his household. Now, legally, he is listed as 30, but he is actually only 25; at the time of arrival in the U.S. he was listed as 22 but in fact was barely 17 years old. This meant he couldn't enter regular high school here and was therefore confined to adult ESL classes. Still, after he did well and gained a command of the English language in those classes, he was hired as a teacher's aide.

While in Laos Cheng had finished the fifth grade in school, and he now wanted more schooling than he was receiving from adult education. Since high school was not an option, he sought entrance into a community college despite the deficiency in his educational background. As a survivor of the war and the refugee camps, he had learned to fabricate stories; therefore when he was asked about his educational background at the college, he told them that he graduated from high school in Laos. When they asked for documents, Cheng said the communists took them and the college admissions officer accepted his story. So he entered community college with this fabrication, a strategy not unique to this individual refugee. Cheng had no doubts about his ability to manage his way, in part because the adult
school teacher encouraged him, but also because his TOFEL test score of 507 was seven points above the minimum required for junior college admissions at the time.

Once in junior college he took basic Math and English. In effect, though he began with a fifth grade education, through ingenuity and bluffing he was able to complete his AA program with only two C grades and the rest As and Bs, achieving a 3.35 grade point average. After the completion of community college he gained admissions to a Southern California university where he majored in anthropology, graduated with a cumulative 3.15 GPA, and has been accepted into a graduate program -- a remarkable achievement in the Hmong community. During his undergraduate studies, he found courses in theory to be the most difficult because they were too abstract for him and required extensive vocabulary. As a strategy for managing the difficult theory courses, he taped and transcribed every lecture, making sure he understood everything the instructor said. He also talked with his instructors to confirm his understanding of the materials, though it should be noted that his approach never even hinted at asking for special consideration in the grading process. Having ourselves met with one of his instructors and discussed extensively how Cheng approached teachers, it is clear that his requests were instrumentally motivated to obtain information and clarification rather than to pursue the development of friendship, sponsorship or other personalized relations. The Hmong generally come across as cautious and affectively neutral in interpersonal relationships with Americans, and characteristically avoid asking for any favors (even a letter of reference) that might oblige or indebted them unnecessarily to outsiders, and for that matter avoid entering into any kind of gift exchange with them.

Why did he decide to major in cultural anthropology? "Well, I started with psychology in the community college, and I end up with social welfare. I end up getting an A.A. in social welfare. And then after working a couple years with people... I mean, two years with them, my job at Oceanview Park Social Service agency, which is basically social services, I think that it probably isn't the thing I really want to do. So I changed it to anthropology. I probably already knew a lot of anthropology within myself, but I hadn't realized it yet."

Cheng thought of the idea himself and was not told by others to select it. He reasoned that there are no Hmong who have done this before and that there is a need to write about Hmong culture, the origins and history of Hmong migrations, and so on. Anthropology provides him with a method for doing it. Cheng has developed the notion that in this world of written records the absence of written documents about the Hmong, for the sake of both Hmong pride and understanding, calls out for works to describe the nature and the virtues of the culture. He is also painfully aware of the low levels of literacy among the Hmong and what he sees as the resulting xenocentric feelings of inferiority. The development of literacy and a literature of the Hmong would, from his viewpoint, provide a basis for greater self-reliance and self-confidence among the Hmong. For Cheng, education means power to redefine one's reality and to come to grips with the long history of injustice and suffering of the Hmong people.

On a more personal level, he sees the possibility of redeeming the name of his family through the accomplishment of written works. This drive to produce written celebrations of
the culture provides a major motivation to learn: "I think it's past experience, too... My father died when we were very young, and we depended on my mother and maternal relatives, my mother's relatives. And... we were discriminated against [by other Hmong, because maternal relatives have no obligation to support them and the patriarchal kinship arrangements always give more respect to the father's rather than the maternal side of the family]... And then also, we were discriminated against by the Lao. But now that I have... this Western idea... and I tend to see why they treat us that way... So it's a good thing to be knowledgeable and self-sufficient and self-reliant."

His long range educational objective is to earn a Ph.D. degree and join the academic circles of researchers or university professors, perhaps in Thailand, perhaps in the United States. He makes no special commitment and expresses no special loyalty to any nation. Like many Hmong, he has inherited the memory of a people unwanted in many nations, including Laos. Cheng welcomed the thought, though he admits it is far-fetched, that an Israel-type solution for the Hmong diaspora might be created someday whereby the Hmong would be able to establish a separate nation-state.

He has gathered eight other Hmong students to form an association dedicated to uplifting the educational aspirations and accomplishments of Hmong youth. **Cheng recognizes the talent among his people and yet knows all too well that few go beyond high school. He characterizes their failure to fulfill that potential as a "tragic waste of talent": "What is tragic about this is... I saw lots of people, girls and boys in junior high school that were doing real well. But as they get older, they stopped... I think that it's the family condition that is contributing to that. We live in very crowded apartment and have no place to study and spend our money poorly, such as on new cars, when we should be spending money on schooling." In these remarks and many that follow, Cheng emerges as clearly the most theoretical and critical of our Hmong informants, and he is the one most interested in dealing with the Hmong as a whole community rather than stick close to his own personal or family life. This preoccupation reflects his aspiration to write about the Hmong. Nevertheless, much of his comments are based on direct observations and personal experiences.

He claims that when Hmong youth come of adolescent age, "they have emotional problems, and our people do not recognize emotion. And therefore at the end of the senior year very few of them may have good grades. The parents are recognizing the importance of allowing girls to study, especially those with more educated parents. They are the ones with some degree of literacy or more. Those would be the people who are most likely to be changing traditional customs. And it is all their daughters and sons that are... that make good grades. The more educated the parent, the more they will value education and the more that will transfer to the children. So even within the Hmong group there are significant divisions between those parents who have some education and value it and those who are strictly uneducated and illiterate parents from the mountaintop that don't..."

Ironically, according to Cheng, given the Hmong parents' lack of sophistication and concern about emotional development, **their daughters see early marriage as a solution to meeting their psychological needs:** "I don't think there is pressure on them to get married. But the girls see this as a solution to their psychological needs." Some of the community
elders, in fact, have commented and begun to worry about girls getting married at even younger ages than they would have back in Laos.

"At the time of graduation [from high school] we see lots of promising Hmong college students, but after a year or just one semester, everyone drops out. College requires self-discipline because it's not structured. It's not structured like high school. There's more freedom for the average student and they don't know if they are able to cope with this freedom or not. And they see that it's easier to withdraw from college. College, which is very competitive, requires choice. In high school they don't have a choice. So in college if they want to go to class, they can. And if they don't, they skip class and nobody's going to take attendance. And so there's no policeman forcing you to do it."

Given his position as a teaching assistant in adult ESL classes, he observes many Hmong adults of all ages taking classes as part of the requirement to receive welfare payments, and concludes that many, though capable of doing better in English, refuse to show progress in order to remain on the welfare rolls. He connects this to his earlier comments about Hmong youth not realizing their academic potential, which he termed a tragic waste of talent, and about young Hmong girls marrying and leaving school partly because their parents don't understand the emotional problems of adolescents. When he puts it all together, will another generation of Hmong find itself dependent on welfare? Cheng thinks that among the second generation -- meaning children who were born in the U.S. or who at least came here when they were very young and who are now entering their twenties -- some are still "marrying, having a child right off the bat, and getting on public assistance." He hopes, however, that the majority of them will be able to find work and avoid welfare.

For Cheng, one radical way to getting the Hmong out of this dependence on public assistance would be the abolition of the cash welfare system. He thinks the system should allow and encourage them to work as much as possible, "not as now where they are getting six hundred dollars cash assistance for three people, but if they work, they might earn much less." He would leave MediCal [Medicaid] intact, since most of the jobs that Hmong men have are minimum-wage jobs that don't provide health insurance benefits. "So they're taking a risk by working, because if someone has health problems in their family, the whole thing could collapse, and one could go bankrupt. So when you fear that, you'd rather stay on public assistance and get MediCal. It's safer that way." With the high level of childbearing in the Hmong community, there are very high needs especially for maternal and child health services. Therefore, Cheng sees a constant and critical need to guarantee access to health care services for the Hmong community.

Cheng observes that in Laos, having many children (especially boys) constituted the social security system of the parents for their old age; in addition, the children were a source of farm labor as well. Hence, from their, children were an economic asset. In the United States, children may not be an economic asset in the same way, but indigent families can at least get assistance from the government to support dependent children. In the Hmong community a well-known expression is "marry a widow:" The idea is to "get out of school and marry a widow who has... already a couple of children, so it will save you the problems." This saying implies that in this way one can tap into welfare cash assistance immediately
without having to go through the trouble of creating a new family -- an instant flow of money. Although welfare will never make one rich, he reasons, neither does it stigmatize Hmong recipients. Most Hmong, he feels, will certainly agree that it is better to be off of welfare if the economic and employment options were better, but if not, why not accept welfare? Some even see welfare as just "another job," requiring not a little effort on their part to get and stay on it.

The issue of the Hmong moving to places like Fresno, Merced and Stockton has bothered Cheng because, from his viewpoint, they are moving precisely to places where their children will be most disadvantaged for the future. He observes that the rents are much cheaper in the Central Valley than they are in cities like Santa Ana or San Diego, leaving more money for the family to spend on other goods and services, but the opportunities for education and jobs are fewer there. Thus he sees the move north as a short-term gain but a long-term risk: "I think it's the lack of long-range planning. And then they probably don't understand that they can't run away from problems, that they will eventually catch up."

Cheng is critical of clan loyalty because "it divides the Hmong as a whole," meaning it pits clan against clan. "Yes. I'm totally against them, and I can be very un-Hmong in that sense." He finds the associated factionalism results in undesirable outcomes, such as the bride price being determined by someone who has more money, more power in the community, more respect, higher status, or more education. If one party objects they could be asked to pay large sums of money, somewhat like a fine. He also is against the severe gender inequity among the Hmong and thinks women should be given an equal chance. Aside from these critical remarks, he takes great pride in being Hmong.

Of things American, he likes best the legal system and its associated concept of justice, which differs from the Hmong system of justice because it extends beyond one's particular lineage and incorporates universal criteria. This sense of fairness and justice is a feature mentioned positively by many Hmong, especially youth and women, with respect to American culture. Cheng also admires the American legal use of evidence and logic and their application in practical affairs. And, as commonly expressed by other refugee youth, Cheng likes individual lifestyle which gives the single person more options, more freedom to do things. On the other hand, he dislikes the American preoccupation with money: "One of the things I don't like is the constant of money... The people are doing everything and anything for money... it sometimes leads to justice based on money and materialism rather than to justice based on morals, to moral justice."

Cheng has been working for an income since 1980 and expects to continue to work without resorting to welfare. Even during his refugee camp days, he worked as a translator and liaison between Americans and the Hmong. Since coming to the states he has had jobs as teaching assistant, community case worker, and interviewer. Two of his younger sisters have married and have moved out of Santa Ana, leaving him with his mother, a younger brother and a younger sister. He has taken the role of head of household, managing the budget and closely supervising his younger siblings. He claims they are talented and have performed well academically.
His younger siblings have been eligible for AFDC payments, and so the combination of his income and their payments have made it possible for his family to get by. However, his brother just turned 18, officially, and lost his AFDC assistance, though he is actually 17 years old [again, another miscalculation in age adjustments made in the refugee camps]; and in two years his sister too will be off of welfare. Then only his mother may need to have recourse to general assistance if Cheng isn't making enough money by that time. Looking around their apartment, there is nothing in the way of expensive material goods: old furniture, cheap stereo equipment, an old television set, an old bicycle and picture calendars. Cheng, like many refugee community workers, is ambivalent about welfare: on the one hand it violates his sense of pride and independence, and yet for those with many children, it provides "significant" amounts of money, at least from the refugee viewpoint, since their food and clothing requirements are very modest, leaving what appears to them to be substantial discretionary income. He mentions disapprovingly some welfare families buying fancy new cars for their sons, yet concedes that public assistance has also been the only means of survival for many needy Hmong families.

He plans for the day when they will be free of welfare. When his sister goes off of AFDC, she will need to find an alternative source of income, and given Cheng's goal of completing his education, he may be unable to support his mother. If that is so, he plans on sending his mother to live with one of his older brothers in Canada until the time comes that he will earn enough to ask her to return to live with him. His singlemost wish is the reunification of his family, including both his mother and siblings. He surmises that the difficulties of the past eight years would have been much less had they been living together all along, since he would not have had to shoulder alone and at such a young age the burden of family provider: "I would have been more free to achieve a lot more... than I have so far." Cheng, then, despite his appearance of rejecting some of the traditional Hmong ways, retains a strong traditional commitment to organizing his life around the family.

Cheng's case represents that of a successful Hmong refugee. Factors which seem to be associated with his motivation to be successful include his experiences as a marginal Hmong and his consequent drive for self-justification; being fatherless without sponsors on his father's side and thus assigned to the care of the mother's relatives; being a male, thus avoiding the assignment of being "valueless" in Hmong society; remaining single and avoiding early marriage and child-raising responsibilities while he completes his university education; his critical and objective ability to step out of Hmong worldviews and to forge a flexible bicultural adjustment in the American setting; his skills in managing the English language and his resourcefulness in dealing with authorities. His marginal role is particularly noteworthy because he became the effective head of his household and was thus not under the authority of an older Hmong male. Additionally, in his area of residence, his clan is weak and thus the coercive power of social control found among other Hmong families has been considerably less. He has not married and deferred family formation until he achieves his larger educational goals. Then he will marry and will have children. As is common among many Hmong clans in the United States, persons like Cheng, who are competent in dealing with American outsiders, acquire respect and recognition for their services -- such as English translations, completing forms, and consultations. Although he seeks alteration of Hmong norms such as those maintaining gender inequity, he firmly
believes in the importance of the family and in the idea of being Hmong as a guide to his daily actions. Within his efforts to reunify his family, he perceives a role for himself as a Hmong who could in effect try to turn the refugee diaspora produced by the Indochina War into an advantage: by helping to develop literacy and create an educational base for empowering his people to become a self-reliant group in a modern setting, in sharp contrast to their past as a preliterate mountain people in an underdeveloped nation.

H-3: Boua Cha

Boua Cha is an 18-year-old Hmong student completing her senior year in a San Diego high school. She arrived in the U.S. in 1979 at the age of ten, and now speaks English effortlessly and without an accent. She is the second child of her father's first family, which consisted of eight children at the time they fled Laos in 1975. A ninth died at childbirth, along with Boua's mother, in a refugee camp in Thailand when Boua was eight years old. This event is a major marking point of her life and she still misses her mother very much. The father remarried and has six additional children with his second wife -- thus 14 surviving children in all. Since the family was so large, they had to divide it up in coming to the U.S., but eventually they were able to reunite the family in San Diego.

Because of the size of the family, and given the local unavailability of affordable housing for such large families (most available rentals are two-bedroom apartments), they split the family into two parts: Boua, her siblings from the first mother, and her maternal grandparents (the parents of Boua's mother) live together separately from her father, step-mother, and six half-siblings. They live only a block away from each other. Since she is the oldest female child in this household, Boua has the responsibility of running the household, including shopping, cooking, cleaning and other duties which her mother would have accomplished--in addition to being a full-time high school student. This requires her to get up at 5 a.m. each weekday to prepare breakfast for the family, as her classes start at 7 a.m.; after school she cooks and serves the evening meal, and she will attend to her homework only after all the household chores are done.

She sees education as something which she has to balance with her home responsibilities, especially since she has the role of "mother" for this household. She debated about going to the local University of California campus or the State University system, and decided on the latter because it is seen as less demanding and less costly--hence it would make it easier for her to help the family. She expects to continue being the "mother" of her household while going to college and working. Although her grandparents are illiterate and her father had only two years of schooling altogether, she has an uncle who was a teacher and her oldest brother is in the last year of his engineering training at a nearby college. Additionally, her older sister is attending a community college in another city. Thus, despite her parents' and grandparents' low levels of schooling, she has role models in education. Boua says her father
thinks of education as being of "great importance, because he didn't have the chance to get it himself." Additionally, she is viewed as a female Hmong youth leader who advocates for increasing education among the Hmong.

Of her siblings, one sister has a 4.0 grade-point-average in school, her older brother has a 3.5 GPA, and she has a 3.3 grade average. Although her father doesn't know how to read English, he knows enough to realize that an A is better than a C; he sometimes comments to her about "doing better next time." She wants a better life for her family and herself; and what is surprising is her apparent assumption of the role of eldest son, since her oldest brother was forced into an early marriage and has since lived in a separate household. She realizes that her brother can no longer be depended upon to help the family as they have frequently discussed: "Before he married, we had these goals (of helping the family) and, I mean, we always shared our goals... He want to have a house or, you know, his job before he married and stuff like that. But then it just happened, you know, when he's married, he didn't talk about it anymore, because I know it's gone. I mean, he doesn't have this house anymore. It's up to me to do it. It's my goal now."

In filling her brother's role, she says she realizes that she cannot marry before graduating from school and obtaining employment afterwards; otherwise she will find it impossible to bring home the kind of money necessary to raise the standard of living for so many people. As it is, her father works for low wages as a laborer, her grandparents are on general assistance and the bulk of the household income comes from AFDC. She was a recipient of the latter source until recently, when she turned 18. During this year, in addition to being a de facto head of household and full-time student, she worked part-time to help make up for the elimination of her AFDC money. She does not hesitate to say, when asked about her financial goals, "Well, I certainly don't want to live like this now. So I want to have a better job, money, more than a minimum-wage job like I was paid in summer jobs."

The surprising twist in her story is her realization of a contradiction between that plan of supporting her family and the Hmong rule of patrilineality, which implies cutting off support relations between a wife and her family of orientation. If the rule prevailed, it would mean she could not realize her dreams. In spite of this contradiction, she feels confident that she will be able to succeed. She projects confidence and an ability to "educate" her father on the legitimacy of her plans and her various moves to adapt to American society. For example, she went to the high school prom without having to fear a forced marriage: "My dad understands. I mean, he understand what my activities are. Once I explain it to him... my school activities, my speech (on the topic of prejudice, for which she received a first place award from a local Optimist Club), my activities in school, sports. He understands if I explain it to him and say, Dad, this is this, and I want to join into this."

A key issue facing Hmong families is whether or not to join other Hmong up north in California's Central Valley farming area where many of San Diego's Hmong families have recently resettled. Given the same level of welfare payments throughout California, the Central Valley has much cheaper rents and a lower overall cost-of-living, which means those fixed welfare payments can be stretched to meet daily family expenses much easier there than in San Diego. In fact, the net savings realized just from the difference in rental housing
costs may amount to several hundred dollars per month -- a significant amount for Hmong families, which are typically very large and very poor. The negative long-term consequences of such a move, however, include the lower opportunities for jobs (unemployment rates in Fresno and Merced Counties are among the highest in California and in the U.S.) and relatively more restricted educational choices for Hmong youth.

Thus, Boua's comments on the desirability of remaining in San Diego because of both jobs and schooling reflect her hopes of helping her family move out of welfare as soon as possible. Education is a central preoccupation for her and she feels fortunate in having an understanding father who supports her goal. They have "eased" some household demands on her in order for her to be successful. Her grandparents still think she is getting too old and should marry as soon as possible and have grandchildren they could see. She resists that pressure by acknowledging them and ignoring their request at the same time.

Just recently a 14-year-old cousin was forced to marry because she went out with a boy on the equivalent of a "date" without parental permission. Boua sees many of the younger Hmong marrying and vows that she will not make that mistake of early marriage since she knows it will interfere with her education. Nevertheless, she looks forward to the day she will be able to marry and have children. She thinks 4 to 6 children will be ideal, though she realizes that having many children in this society is financially difficult; but she looks forward to the time when she will be able to give her children the things her father is unable to give her, such as going out to eat once in a while and exploring the opportunities outside of her community. As a practical choice, she would restrict herself to finding a Hmong mate because her husband would have to share her culture -- even a Lao person, she said, would be too far removed from her culture.

A gregarious individual, Boua has extensive social relationships outside of her family. Those include being a member of a local Mormon church (which she joined on her own for social reasons, she said), having many American friends, and having close ties with many of her teachers. The latter she cultivates by going out of her way to see them before and after classes, asking for assistance on school matters. Some teachers have given her their home telephone numbers, so it is possible for her to consult with them at most any time. Though she is optimistic about getting along with others, she is acutely aware of racism against the Hmong and other refugee groups. During lunch time at her high school, non-refugee students eat outside of the cafeteria, deliberately leaving it just to the "Asians." Her Optimist Club award-winning speech addressed the prejudice which she sees all around her, including those from some teachers and the conflicts between the different ethnic-racial groups at her high school.

She has had much success and recognition from teachers, including very favorable response to a life history essay she wrote about her refugee experience and adjustment to the United States. This essay was published in her high school's paper. Given the difficulty of the English language for most Hmong, it is surprising to discover her interests in becoming an English high school teacher or a journalist. One of her teachers has been grooming her for several years to become a teacher and has even assisted her in getting a tutoring job which she loves very much. She reads extensively and mentioned two favorite novels: To Kill a
Mockingbird, and The Good Earth. The first novel appeals to her preoccupation with the unfairness and injustice which her people have suffered over the years; the second novel struck a resonant chord because it reminded her of her mother: "This woman... the wife of the farmer, she was having a baby, you know, and she was still working. And she came back, had the baby, and then after that had to go back to the farm just right after the birth, and go back to the farm without the husband... I cried at this time, because I was thinking about that right now (her mother's death), you know, all the times that we have. And all the work that the wife was supporting her husband and everything. And it's really moving."

These comments also reflect Boua's feelings about herself and about being in charge of her household. Despite the "easing" of household demands she still feels heavily burdened, like the mother in Pearl Buck's novel, and resents not being appreciated by her grandparents: "What I'm saying is that they don't appreciate the work that you've done. I mean, instead they still think... Like I work all day and I'm so tired. My grandmother didn't say, you know, 'Gee, if you're tired... just go and lie down or something, and I'll do this for you.' Or say, 'Oh, this is good, I like this.' They never said this to me even once... all my work in high school." Since she arrived at a young age (before puberty), she has been rapidly acquiring American ideas and attitudes, as reflected in these comments. She stands between two worlds and has been sorting out which values she will stand by. She likes the American notion of free choice, such as being able to select one's spouse and being able to acquire education, but with qualifications since she thinks unbridled freedom is undesirable. She sees a need to balance American notions of freedom and Hmong notions of control. In herself, she sees one of her prime virtues is discipline, which would seem to be obvious given her ability to fulfill extensive responsibilities. She doesn't like the American lack of respect for elders but she agrees with the American ideal of gender equity. She thinks Hmong "put down women too much."

If given one wish, she replied, "I always wish that my mother could have come to this country and could have lived with us, enjoy this restaurant (McDonald's) with us... She worked so hard like the girl in The Good Earth. And everything that she had she had to give it to her children... And all of a sudden she's just dying giving birth to this sister... And, you know, she never had... never really had a good life." This image of her mother and the contrast between the hard times in Laos and the contrasting prospects of good times in America seems to give her the incentive to take the educational opportunities and fulfill her American Dream: "I just say OK, now here's my intention (going to college), and here's how I going to do with my life..." When asked whether or not she is going to waste her potential and whether or not she will pass up the opportunities which may come your way, she emphatically stated, "No, I'm not going to blow it."

Boua graduated with honors, was admitted to the local state university, received some financial aid, was supported by teachers and members of her church, and in general looked forward to college. Yet a few weeks after her graduation she met a Hmong man from Fresno, and two to three weeks later married the man and moved north with him. Apparently he hasn't finished high school, is divorced, 28 years old and works as a laborer. Church sponsors who had placed great hopes in her educational plan had even thought of filing a suit to prevent the marriage but were persuaded by clan leaders that
Boua was 18 years old and couldn't be prevented from marriage. We don't know her side of the story because she has left for Fresno. Here is a Hmong female with great potential, who subscribed to the idea of education and equity between male and females, yet she opted for marriage and formation of a household separate from her family. Like her sad commentary about the failure of her brother to help the family out of poverty, she too joins the path which she so eloquently vowed to avoid—early marriage, deflection from further education and "abandonment" of her family of orientation. Boua's case documents what one respondent called the Hmong "tragic waste of talent" and identifies the dynamics which lead to such outcomes.

A number of sociocultural and economic factors appear to have combined in Boua's case to frustrate the post-secondary schooling plans and ambitions of a clearly motivated and well-prepared Hmong girl. After talking with various members of the Hmong community over the issue of Hmong girls not going on for further education, they pointed out that supporting a female through college is a poor economic investment because daughters have no obligation to support members of their family of orientation and would, instead, become contributors to her husband's family--which may in some ways be in competition with their own family and clan. In male-dominated Hmong society, girls are "lost" upon marriage and are devalued accordingly. Hmong females tend to be treated as a source of free labor without emotional support or appreciation for their contributions to the household and for their own developmental needs; early marriage, within this context, is not only culturally normative but may be perceived by discontented Hmong girls as a highly desirable if not the only solution to this form of household "slavery," even though they may end up trading one form of subordination for another--and reducing thereby the likelihood of their gaining additional education, entering the labor force, postponing childbearing, and decreasing their dependence on public assistance.

Beyond the cultural devaluation of females as poor investment risks, and their general subordination and control in Hmong social life, it is clear that most Hmong adults are in a very disadvantaged labor market position and have a relatively unsophisticated strategy for economic survival in this country. Given their very high levels of poverty, unemployment and fertility, they are reliant on the welfare system which supports indigent families with dependent children. For example, even if both Hmong parents in a family of six children (the average completed Hmong family size is actually larger than this) were to find fulltime work at the minimum wage, their combined annual income would still put the family below the federal poverty threshold and below the level of cash assistance they could receive from AFDC in California. When children reach the age of 18 they lose their AFDC eligibility, becoming an added economic burden to the family unless they can secure some form of gainful employment--or unless they leave the household to form another, which may itself then become eligible for AFDC as they produce new offspring. Given the cutoff of AFDC and the pressure to seek alternative funds to finance their college training, it comes as no surprise that few Hmong girls will be able to afford to choose post-secondary schooling, despite their best intentions, as happened in Boua's case. Lacking at present both the financial wherewithal to be able to support a child through college as well as the active encouragement of the Hmong community and culture--indeed, faced with the weight of the Hmong patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal kinship system--Hmong parents
will be unlikely to be able to facilitate the transition from high school to college for their children in general and their daughters in particular. The consequences may well affect the entire coming generation of Hmong youth.

H-4: Deng Vue

Deng Vue is a 19-year-old Hmong welfare recipient living with his wife (who is 18 years old), two children, grandmother, aunt, father, mother, and three younger siblings. The household, therefore, consists of eleven persons, and they are crowded into a small two-bedroom apartment in a low-income neighborhood of San Diego. Deng had three other siblings who died in Laos of unknown illnesses. The family left Laos in 1976 when his father, an ex-soldier, decided their lives were endangered. After four years in a refugee camp in Thailand they were able to come to the United States. They arrived here in 1980, when Deng was 12 years old. No one in the family had any education except for Deng and a sister, each of whom received two years of schooling in a Thai camp.

In general, Deng is unhappy with his life -- being married, living with ten other people in a two-bedroom apartment, being dependent on welfare, being forced to take "meaningless" ESL courses -- and he is uncertain about his future employment. He accepts these conditions as givens while yearning for the freedom of his single friends and having fun with his friends.

When he first arrived in this country, he knew no English nor did he understand much of the content of instruction. Everything was difficult, including pronunciation, spelling, reading, writing and math. Though he arrived in the U.S. at a young age (pre-puberty) and has been here already for seven years, his English is strongly accented and his comprehension of the English language is weak. In fact, he never exited out of ESL classes even though he is a high school graduate, graduating from Adams High School last year. There were few things he enjoyed of his education and they were mainly in the non-academic areas, such as graphics, woodshop and physical education. What is surprising, given his non-academic orientation and his problems with the English language, is his relatively high grade point average: 3.33. The course he most disliked was U.S. History because they talked about things he didn't know or understand; for example, he felt the teachers assumed that the students knew the names of presidents, the meaning of the Civil War, and so forth. He hated being placed in classrooms where teachers made too many assumptions about what students knew. In contrast, the teacher he liked most was one who did not make many assumptions but went over details: "[I liked her] because she tell me what the word for everything... when I went every after school, too, or in the morning, every homework you don't understand... You go in there, and then she tell you how to do. Do the homework so you don't fail the test. Gave some notes... As she very nice teacher."
While attending high school he did have an opportunity to discuss post-secondary schooling with a Hmong-speaking counselor's aide. Because of his good grades, he was urged to attend community college but he felt he was unable to afford that luxury. The decision not go on was made with some regret since some of his friends have gone to college and he feels he might have had a chance to do well there. Nevertheless, while still in high school he was forced to marry a Hmong girl whom he did not particularly like, and he remains indifferent about her to this day although she has borne him two sons.

He met his wife at a party and took a liking to her because she was pretty. She on the other hand was interested in marriage because it seemed like a preferable alternative to living with her parents, which was stressful to her. According to Deng, the "date" which sealed their marriage was a 30-minute walk outside of her apartment. Apparently she did not ask her parents for permission to walk with him, and as a result this "date" precipitated the decision that they should marry. The parents found themselves forced into pressuring their children to marry under these circumstances because public knowledge of even such a seemingly minor escapade would cause them to lose face, and it would show to others that they did not control their children. Deng was surprised when his father told him he had to marry his "girlfriend." As he explains: "I don't know about that, but... you know in the Hmong custom it's very different. Like I want to marry her if... I don't want to marry her, but, you know, like all the old people, my father... say you have to marry her. So we just decide all the people want us to marry, so we just marry. The Hmong custom is very different, you know." He accepts this decision because he does not see that he has any legitimate right to refuse, even though he is unhappy about it.

The following dialogue reflects the his emotional reaction: "I did not feel very comfortable... It's not very OK, because I don't want to marry her at that time. Even now I don't want to marry her, but they say so. So you just marry. We not happy marriage." Though the words might seem emotional, his delivery of these words is given in a flat affect, reflecting control over his emotions, and from the viewpoint of an American, an astonishing acceptance of an "arbitrary" decision. He views his wife as wanting the marriage both as an option to staying in her parents' home and because she was failing at school. Soon after their marriage, she dropped out of school and began bearing children.

He also thinks the marriage was a mistake because it limits his life chances: "Because we marry too young, so it difficult, you know. You have to... you know, like you have to go college or something like that. You don't have any money to support your family. You cannot go to college, or you cannot go to university. If you are single, you can go to college and get some part-time job. Even like now can't go like that. If you go only part-time job, you have no money to support your family. I think that's very hard. I don't have any experience, so I cannot get a good job. I cannot even go to college. So that's really hard time for me."

Although he has had two children since his marriage, almost the biological limit given the short length of his marriage, he thinks he will limit the number of children to three or four. His parents, on the other hand, encourage him to have more children: "Probably they want many, but they don't what our future, you know. They just... they have to... they
just still keep their own way, custom, like in Laos, how many children you can have. Like ten or more, you just fine. But in this country, I think the old people just still think about that. But I don't want to think about that, because you cannot support you. If you have like eight or seven, you're never going to support." These remarks and those throughout our conversations reflect someone who has thought about marriage, procreation and their consequences for schooling and employment; furthermore he has thought about how Americans look down upon those on welfare, and he accepts that view as legitimate. Nevertheless, we find him marrying early, starting early with children, and going onto welfare. How does he view the contradiction between his actions and his judgments? He talks about having to comply with parental demands and accepting the authority surrounding the elders of his family and clan. He does not question their legitimacy but he does complain about the consequences.

He hopes to enter a machinist training program and rationalizes that choice as one requiring little proficiency in the English language: "Because I think that's... like some people they are like... they not very good English. They can still work on that, you know. So I think I can do." Additionally, he knows some Hmong who are machinists who talked to him about this occupation. One in particular is a 40-year-old Hmong man who has influenced him about this path. Deng is waiting to get into that program and in the meantime, as part of the conditions for receiving welfare assistance, he attends an ESL course. He resents taking this course since the teacher presumes the students are idiots and he isn't learning much.

As the eldest surviving son he knows that he is obligated to his parents, but given his poor short-term prognosis for economic self-sufficiency, he does not think he can support them. In some ways he views them as having a more secure future given their prospects for continued welfare support, while he has to struggle to find a job which will be able to bring more money than his welfare income: "Because they... still have... their AFDC. Probably my mother, they have SSI, so they don't a lot of problem like me. You know, if I... me, if I... this country, United States, I don't do any jobs, I just go to apply for AFDC all the time. It's no good for my life... In case... only if I don't have money, it's OK. But like if it's just stay over there... in the United States, you know... graduate, just go apply for AFDC... no good. They don't like. The American people don't like. American people, they say you graduate in United States, and you just apply for AFDC. You don't have any job. So that's... I mean, that's no good."

There is no question in his mind that he and his extended family will remain together in a single financial pool even though he fantasizes about moving into his own separate apartment. As part of the financial pooling of resources, his mother bought him an old used car which is the family's only means of transportation other than the public bus system; he in turn is responsible to drive family members to health clinics, shopping and other trips.

None of the family members keeps a bank account, reflecting both a lack of capital and sophistication in dealing with money matters in this country. Deng keeps his money separate from his parents but he feels free about sharing it with them, and apparently he can rely on them for support in case of emergency needs. The monthly rent is divided three ways:
Deng's family, his parents' family, and his aunt. They also share in the other expenses, such as utilities and food. Two years ago when the family bought a 1981 Honda for the household, not having the money to pay for the car, they borrowed it from his uncle. As he describes access to financial capital, he does not use banks because they aren't flexible and personal; in contrast, the family's reliance on each other for finances is seen as desirable because of the personal qualities involved, including the flexibility of missing payments in emergencies without having to pay penalties. There is no exchange of services or money between his family and his wife's family. This stands in contrast to the collective pooling of resources among members of his family and fits the patrilineal kinship model.

In spite of his complaints about crowded quarters and wanting a separate apartment, he is committed to collective decision-making and pooling of resources. In fact, he is critical of Americans because they lack the "help" system prevalent among the Hmong. He even defines being Hmong as being able to rely on each other: "I like when some people die, and you don't know about them, you know. But a lot of people still go help them."

Although he still sees his friends from his high school days, primarily for amusement, they comment about his marriage and joke about feeling unwelcomed by his wife. Still, they are his source of emotional solace -- not his wife or his parents. If he has to talk over personal problems, his friends give him the time and listen to him. In return, he helps them when he can. He meets with his friends on a regular basis -- perhaps once a week. They visit each other's houses and sometimes go to the movies. These friends are important because they provide occasions for fun, like sports (soccer). They're also important because they are people he can rely on for help: "Like if you have some problem in your home, you cannot do. You can call your friend. Maybe they can help you." He also relies on them for information on jobs and career development: "Some, they tell you how to get some job or to study or how to change your goal. Maybe you go to the wrong goal, you know. So they tell you to change your goal and study for some different way, so you can get some education."

Deng views America as a place which dislikes the Hmong and he is self-conscious about being a minority. There is a sense of feeling inferior to Americans, as when he compares himself to them by emphasizing their greater levels of education. The idea of inferiority re-emerged during a conversation about the establishment of a special country for the Hmong, not Laos where he felt they were also treated as a minority, but some place where they could be free. What he appreciates about America is that it is a place where a lot of people are free from having to live in crowded conditions, and are free from restrictions. By this he doesn't mean he'd prefer being socially separate from his parents, but just having some privacy and extra space: "I want to live separate, but we still the same family, you know." Like most other Hmong, he feels strongly about the importance of family and the clan system since they are the basic source of support.

Deng's case is commonplace because it reflects the high GPA accomplishments of Hmong high school students without the post-secondary follow-through. In other words, the Hmong high school GPA in this case is not a reliable indicator of future self-sufficiency, hinting at the need to look more closely at the problematic transition from high school to college -- and at the gap between the secondary and post-secondary levels
in Hmong educational attainment. Commonly associated with this lack of academic follow-through is the role of early marriage as a diversionary pressure. It is as if the time scale for Hmong youth ends at graduation from high school, whence they are expected to pass fully into the adult world. This contrasts with the expectation of contemporary American-born youths to spend extra years in post-secondary schooling as a prelude to adulthood -- a much later timing associated with later marriage and family reproduction. The hints of emotional distress among Hmong youth, masked upon self-presentations of flat affect, are evident in the decision to marry early, especially in the strong motivation of teenage girls to seek new household arrangements. The pervasive theme of adult authority and control and the surprising acquiescence by youth is amply illustrated in Deng's case.

Unlike the previous Hmong case histories we have sketched, Deng is much more likely to accept his situation as a given over which he has no choice or control. He will do what his father tells him to do. He lives in a world of command and tradition, of fate and not of choice.

On the other hand, we do not conclude that Deng and other Hmong youth are ignorant of options, especially as he himself was able to articulate the consequences of his early marriage. Rather, his acquiescence speaks to the power of Hmong social structure to compel behavior in a way that goes beyond the attitudes and feelings of Hmong youth. They live under a collective reality which, though they may be critical of it, nevertheless shapes how many of them view their world, including their willingness to comply with the wishes of their elders.

Deng, much more than the other Hmong youths whose lives were sketched above, reflects the fairly rigid, humorless and unquestioning maintenance of traditional Hmong norms, roles and identities. Moua, Blia, Cheng and Boua, by contrast, have all expressed considerable bicultural competence, courage and creativity in bridging their native and adoptive worlds. Each in their own way, though not without cost, has been engaged in a process of constructing a world of choice and not of fate. For all of them, the process will be a lifetime occupation.