Family Pressure and the Educational Experience of the Daughters of Vietnamese Refugees

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the issue of gender role changes encountered by young Vietnamese-American women based on our ethnographic study of Versailles Village, a low-income ethnic community in New Orleans, US.

We examine how female Vietnamese high school students deal with conflicts between the stubborn traditionalism of parents and the desire for personal liberty of American-reared children and how they negotiate gender roles at home and in school and society.

Through in-depth examination of the school experience of young Vietnamese women, we find that they not only equal young men in scholastic performance and ambition, but may even show higher levels of achievement. Our data indicate that it is not because the women are liberating themselves from traditional gender roles in order to avail themselves of the opportunities of American society. Instead, the socio-economic conditions of the new land place a new emphasis on education for both men and women.

Immigrant families see the importance of education as an avenue of upward mobility for their children and encourage educational achievement. Precisely because traditional gender roles lead families to exercise greater control over daughters, young women are pushed even more than young men toward scholastic performance.
INTRODUCTION

This article explores the issue of gender role changes encountered by young Vietnamese-American women based on our case study of Versailles Village-a low-income Vietnamese community in New Orleans. In the process of growing up in immigrant households, we frequently hear stories about conflicts between the stubborn traditionalism of parents and the desire for personal liberty of American-reared children. The reality is a good deal more complex. We suggest that both parents and children are struggling to adjust to the demands of a new environment and that their struggles yield patterns of adaptation that combine the old and the new ways. This frequently involves tensions and sometimes gives rise to parental behaviour that most Americans would see as unjust or even abusive. At the same time, the combinations of old and new ways can often help immigrant families adjust to their new world. Immigrant adaptation to a new environment may be seen as the product of opposing pressures interacting in a dialectical process. Beliefs and values from the old homeland are not deserted in the face of new social and economic conditions. Instead, older normative patterns in combination with new conditions produce unexpected and frequently ironic resolutions. Through the lens of gender, we attempt to provide an illustration of these new developments in immigrant families.

BACKGROUND

Studies of the Vietnamese have indicated that gender roles among Vietnamese refugees in the US frequently differ markedly from gender roles that prevail in Viet Nam. These studies generally maintain that the subordination of women is characteristic of ideas about male-female relations in Viet Nam, while movement toward egalitarianism or female independence is characteristic of gender roles among Vietnamese Americans (Freeman, 1989; Kibria, 1993; Muzzy, 1989; Nash, 1992; Rutledge, 1992). A classic ethnographic study of Vietnamese village life in the late 1950s by anthropologist Gerald C. Hickey, testified to the second-class status of women in Viet Nam (1964). He observed that rural Vietnamese women were expected to marry early, bear children, and serve their husbands. Except for a few Catholics, many families accepted polygamy. Most of the villagers Hickey studied were poorly educated; but women were four times more likely than men to be illiterate, since in the past only men received a formal education, while women were taught household arts. Although significant improvements in educational facilities have been made in contemporary Viet Nam, and more villagers agree that women deserve a basic formal education, educational opportunities for women have remained strictly limited (Marr, 1993).

Migration to the US has led to changes in gender roles which we can trace to two sources: necessity and opportunity. The economic situation of Vietnamese families in America seldom permits men to function as sole providers. At the same time, Vietnamese women encounter many more opportunities for education and employment outside the home, enabling them to establish identities that include greater independence from their husbands than women traditionally have had in Viet Nam (Rutledge, 1992). Vietnamese women's work outside the home has also greatly narrowed the male-female power gap within the home (Kibria, 1993). Despite these changes, the literature on contemporary Vietnamese Americans strongly suggests that many women continue to be influenced by beliefs and values about family and gender stemming from the old homeland. Freeman (1989) has assembled a collection of short ethnographic narratives that demonstrate the importance of family traditions for Vietnamese Americans. Maintaining a cultural heritage in family relations appears as an important goal of many members of this group, and group members see real or perceived threats to family traditions as one of the greatest dangers of life in America. Along similar lines, Nash (1992), another ethnographer, found in his participant observation in a Vietnamese community that the idealization of women was a core community and family value.

Vietnamese-American women are thus affected by two apparently contradictory forces. They are increasingly employed outside the home and their activities have expanded beyond those of mother and homemaker. At the same time, the desire to maintain cultural continuity pushes Vietnamese-American women toward traditional gender role ideals. Should we see the mobility of these women simply as a matter of the first force overcoming the second? Our investigations have led us to the view that the matter is somewhat more complicated; that the changing social position of Vietnamese women should be seen from the perspective of Hegelian logic as the product of a dialectic of traditional normative patterns and contemporary socio-economic pressures.

CHANGING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN

Many social scientists who have studied gender relations among the Vietnamese in America have interpreted the increasing entry of Vietnamese women into the non-domestic spheres of employment and education as a straightforward matter of conflict between traditional Vietnamese cultural attitudes, which promote male dominance, and contemporary American attitudes and economic structures, which create pressures for gender equality (Kibria, 1993; Muzzy, 1989; Rutledge, 1992). Our observations in the Versailles Village, however, provide a rather different, more nuanced perspective, with a look at changing but conflictual views of the educational experience of young Vietnamese women.

Do traditional Vietnamese social relations advance or inhibit the education of women? To the extent that tradition promotes academic achievement among
both men and women by providing encouragement and discipline, the answer may be yes (Caplan, Whitmore, and Choy, 1989; Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1991, 1992). Table 1 (page 147) contains data from the 1990 census on educational attainment among adult Vietnamese by period since arrival. Among the most recent arrivals, both women and men had extremely low levels of educational attainment, and the gender gap was substantial; these findings reflect both lack of education and also the gender bias in education. Among those who had been in the US for five years or longer, however, both men and women showed noticeably higher levels of educational attainment, despite a persistent gender gap. Selective immigration among earliest arrivals accounts for part of the difference, but another important part results from the educational opportunities that younger refugees found upon arrival in the US.

Gender differences in high school dropout rates and current college attendance rates among young people aged 16 to 24 look radically different (Table 2, page 147). Because marital status is often negatively associated with educational attainment, especially for women, and because Vietnamese women tend to marry younger than men, this factor is controlled for. Indeed, those who are married tend to show higher high school dropout rates and lower college attendance rates than those who are single, regardless of gender in this age group, and Vietnamese women are four times more likely to be married as are Vietnamese men.

Controlling for marital status yields a sharply diminished gender gap. For those who are married, the dropout rate of women is almost identical with that of men. For those who are unmarried, women drop out at a rate lower than men. Gender differences in current college attendance are even more marked, again showing higher levels of educational attainment among young Vietnamese women than among men; while married women are as likely as married men to be currently enrolled in college, unmarried women are significantly more likely than their male peers to be enrolled in college. These census data indicate a convergence of educational attainment among younger generation Vietnamese women and men.

Results from the Versailles Village study provide corroborating evidence. Table 3 (page 148) shows two measures of educational characteristics likely to lead to future mobility: average grades and attitudes toward college attendance. Overall, female students earned significantly higher grades than their male peers; only 9 per cent of the girls reported receiving grades averaging C or lower, half the proportion of their male peers; in contrast, 28 per cent reported receiving A averages, substantially more than their male peers. Young Vietnamese women also placed as much importance on college attendance as did young Vietnamese men. A slightly higher percentage of girls reported that they definitely would not go to college or that college was not important to them. This was probably due to the fact that women tend to marry younger than men, as confirmed by the census data. In general, though, women's attitudes toward future education are similar to those of men, while the current performance of women is even somewhat to the performance of men.

If there is a conflict between traditional ethnic gender roles and scholastic performance, it could be that young Vietnamese women are doing well in school and setting their sights on high levels of education because they are rejecting the old ties of ethnicity as they adapt to American society. However, this hypothesis does not seem to be supported by findings from our case study. Using data from our sample of high school students, we have computed a measure of Vietnamese ethnic identification by adding together responses to questions on how important it is that they marry within the ethnic group; their self-descriptions as American, Vietnamese-American, or Vietnamese; the extent to which their friendship circles include other Vietnamese; and the extent to which they speak Vietnamese, rather than English, with friends and family members. The resulting scale had possible values of 0 (no identification with Vietnamese ethnicity whatsoever) to 35 (all responses on all items showed a very high identification with Vietnamese ethnicity). For convenience and clarity in presentation, we have recoded this scale into three categories: low ethnic identification, moderate ethnic identification, and high ethnic identification.

Table 4 (page 148) shows little difference between young men and women in their identification with Vietnamese ethnicity. In fact, young women even show slightly greater levels of ethnic identification, although the difference is too small to be statistically significant. It would be difficult, then, to maintain that the academic performance of women is a consequence of their rejection of ethnic ties.

Table 5 (page 149) shows that it is precisely the women who identify strongly with the ethnic group who are most likely to excel in school. Only 18.2 per cent of women with low levels of ethnic identification reported average A grades, compared with over one-third of those with high levels of ethnic identification. On the other hand, none of the women who identified strongly with the Vietnamese ethnic group reported average grades of C or below, even though most of them were in the high high identification category. By contrast, C or lower grades was the modal category for women who showed little identification with the ethnic group. If young Vietnamese women are showing surprising school achievement, it cannot be attributed to a breaking away from the ethnic group in order to enjoy the advantages of the majority American society.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION AS SOURCES OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Young Vietnamese American women seem to out-perform their male counterparts in school despite the fact that older Vietnamese women show educational
disadvantages. It does not appear that this is because the young women are breaking away from the ethnic group to seize the opportunities of the larger American society. In fact, the women who identify most strongly with the ethnic group are those who are most likely to excel at school.

Qualitative data from our fieldwork in a Vietnamese community suggest how the dialectic of contemporary socio-economic conditions and traditional gender roles affect educational attitudes and outcomes for young women. Since gender roles are fundamentally matters of interpretation of the kinds of behaviour considered appropriate to men and women, we will focus on how fathers, mothers, young men, and young women themselves perceive the importance of women’s education and how perceptions of women’s education may be related to broader views about changes in gender roles. In addressing broader views about gender roles, we pay special attention to whether refuge in the US has brought about a break from traditional Vietnamese ways of thinking about men and women or whether these ways of thinking have shifted in subtle ways to adapt to new circumstances.

Fathers’ perceptions

Most of the Vietnamese fathers interviewed considered obedience the most desired quality and achievement the second most desired quality to be expected from or desired in their daughters. But fathers did not view obedience and achievement as mutually inconsistent. From the fathers’ perspectives, obedience produced achievement. One father said:

It is important that all children obey their parents. But it is more important for daughters to obey. The daughters will be mothers one day and they must be good mothers. So, they must obey their parents today.

Obedience from sons and daughters is generally expected in Vietnamese families. In Viet Nam, fathers might have expected obedience throughout life, but in the US they hoped that it would last until marriage. Fathers worried that the greater level of personal freedom in American life might undermine obedience among daughters and sons, but they overwhelmingly agreed that the perceived need to protect the sexual purity of daughters made obedience of daughters even more important than that of sons:

Of course a boy can get away with more than a girl. A boy can do more before he gets a bad name. A boy can get a bad name and still become good later. But if a girl gets a bad name, I don’t know what she can do to get over it.

Fathers whom we interviewed not only tolerated the idea that their daughters would be educated, but encouraged it. They pointed out that women had always participated in the household economy in Viet Nam, but mostly in agriculture, a pursuit that required little formal education. But farming was not part of the Vietnamese experience in the US, as one father explained:

In Viet Nam, the girls helped with the rice, sure, but here nobody’s a farmer. You got to have a job to get money. A good wife needs to help her husband. She got to have a job to help and she got to go to school to get a job.

Having experienced so much hardship in the US, fathers knew the importance of a two-income family. Most of those we interviewed worked as fishermen or in low-skilled manufacturing; their wives either did not work outside the home or were employed at relatively low-income part-time jobs. As low-wage workers, fathers realized that their wives’ lack of job skills made it that much harder to get ahead. They had also learned that living well in America required a relatively high income, a goal that only families with multiple earners could hope to attain. For these reasons, fathers had come to see education as a medium for their daughters to contribute to family well-being, as expected by the traditional Vietnamese family, but in a manner suitable to American needs and wants. One father said:

It is very hard for me being the only one in the family who works, I am a fisherman. I make enough money for us to live, but I worry all the time. My wife, her English is not good, and she cannot work. So, I want my daughter to go to school so that she and her future family will not have these problems. My daughter is good, so she will do what I say and her life will be better than ours.

Fathers struck a clear note when discussing their desire for their daughters to do well in school – namely, the expectation that education would make a young woman an appropriate match for a relatively high-status husband. Several fathers outlined these contrasting scenarios. In Viet Nam, an uneducated woman had no options other than marriage into a working-class or peasant family; in the US, an uneducated woman would face a similar option, and she would have a hard time finding a husband with good prospect. In the minds of most fathers, pushing daughters toward academic achievement did not subvert traditional gender roles, but rather affirmed those roles under changed circumstances. As one father explained:

I want my son-in-law to be a doctor or an engineer. A doctor or an engineer does not want a wife whom he has to be ashamed of. Say, nursing would be a decent job for my daughter; and she would work with doctors. If she found a husband who’s a doctor, she would help him in his job. I always tell my daughter to study hard so that she will be someone who can be part of a good family.

Furthermore, Vietnamese fathers expected personal and familial rewards to accrue from their daughters’ successes in school. How daughters did made little difference as long as education was largely limited to men, as in Viet Nam. But the very availability of education to women in the US made the education of daughters a matter of status competition for the fathers. The educational
accomplishments of sons and daughters reflected on the fathers themselves. With daughters there was actually a keener edge; expecting higher levels of obedience from girls, the fathers were more likely to take personal responsibility for their daughters' successes or failures in school. With sons, in contrast, fathers generally took a more laissez-faire approach, treating them as individual actors rather than as dependents. One father said:

The daughter of my neighbour finished college last year. I would feel ashamed before him if my daughter had not also finished college. If my daughter does less than the daughter of my neighbour, that means I am a less good father than my neighbour.

On the issue of relative control over sons and daughters, another father explained:

Of course I want both my son and my daughter to do well in school. But my son, he is a man, and if he does not do what I want him to do, others will understand. But my daughter, she must do what I tell her to do, and how can I explain if she does not do good?

Overall, Vietnamese fathers whom we interviewed voiced support for their daughters' educational pursuits for three important reasons: (1) educated daughters have high earnings potential and can thus contribute to the incomes of their future families; (2) educated daughters can make suitable wives to relatively high-status husbands and ensure quality child-rearing; and (3) educated daughters can be status symbols for their birth families.

Mothers' perceptions

Fathers were generally presented as the spokesperson of Vietnamese families and it was generally easier to interview them on family matters. Mothers were willing to talk with us when their husbands were not present, and many of their perceptions were similar to those of their husbands, but the mothers often saw things from slightly different angles. Like fathers, the mothers we interviewed saw their daughters' education and eventual employment as an affirmation, not a rejection, of traditional Vietnamese gender roles. Whereas fathers stressed educational achievement as an outcome of the obedience they required from the daughters, mothers usually perceived education as a means of enhancing opportunities and thereby improving their daughters' bargaining position within traditional gender roles. The mothers stressed the importance of academic achievement as did the fathers, but they went even further, linking women's education to a version of the Vietnamese image of feminine virtue as modified by the encounter with American culture.

The mothers we interviewed desired independence for their daughters, understanding that dependence on men was not good for their daughters growing up in America. They generally held the idea that men should hold more power in the family than women, but they felt that women should get more involved in family decision making than they did in Viet Nam. These mothers reasoned that education would increase their daughters' earning potential and thereby improve their status within the family, while remaining within traditional gender roles. One mother remarked:

If my daughter no have good job and she marry, the husband can go off with other woman and do what he like. Maybe he good, OK, but if my daughter go school, get good job, make money, then she no have to put up with anything husband do, and he have to be good.

Other mothers whom we interviewed commonly echoed this view. They did not seem to seek complete independence for their daughters, nor did they hope that their daughters would abandon a Vietnamese identity. They universally expected that their daughters would marry and maintain what was seen as Vietnamese culture through their roles as mothers.

Mothers also shared fathers' views that daughters required greater control than sons. They accepted the sexual double standard and the part that it played in determining the marriageability of young women. One mother reflected a view similar to that of the father cited earlier:

My daughter must be a good girl. That means she must do good in school and she must not go out alone at night with boys. Sometimes my son is bad, but not very bad. He can always do better. But if a girl is bad, people will always see her as bad, so it is very important to be careful with daughters.

Mothers seemed to not only accept but even to expect a certain amount of acting up from their sons. One mother told us that if a boy was "too good," that is, never rowdy or disorderly, she would worry that he might suffer from lack of spirit. Parents indulged unruly sons, even at a very early age. As we observed, mothers allowed little boys to play and run around public places, at church functions, or in shops, only admonishing them when their play became excessively energetic. By contrast, little girls and young women often showed a quiet self-discipline, inculcated by parental control. Such parental control may stem from fathers, who are seen as the chief authority figures in Vietnamese households, but exercised primarily by mothers, who have the immediate responsibility for raising children.

Perhaps the different expectations of mothers for sons and daughters may be seen most clearly with respect to housework. In the older generation, women were almost exclusively responsible for housework. When wives worked outside the home, their paid work was usually simply added to their household responsibilities; and these dual responsibilities were carried over to the younger generation, since mothers looked to their daughters for help with the housework.
In Versailles Village, as in other Vietnamese communities, when girls came home from school, they are expected first to help with the housework and care of younger siblings and then do their studying (Muzzey, 1989). Unlike boys, who were allowed to participate in relatively uncontrolled activities outside the home, girls often had to stay home doing household chores. Thus, mothers’ expectations kept girls more tightly bound to their mothers and to the domestic sphere, ensuring that young women spent more time under the control of the family.

Young men’s perceptions

Vietnamese adolescent men in Versailles Village generally agreed with a strict gender separation and accepted the gender double standard that expects young women to be morally superior. Our field observations of young men and young women in the schools and in the community indicated a strong tendency toward gender-segregated friendship groups. One young man expressed a common attitude:

Yeah, sure, girls are more good than boys. Everybody knows that. Not too many girls smoke or drink. So sure they act better in school and get better grades. It’s different [for boys and for girls].

Though often preferring traditional ways, the young men whom we interviewed seemed more flexible in their ideas about gender roles than were the older men. They were acutely aware of the tensions between Vietnamese ideals presented to them by their elders and American ideals they adopted from the popular media and exposure to their non-Vietnamese peers. The young men also frequently expressed allegiance to both sets of ideals. They wanted girlfriends who would dress fashionably and who would be fun, not stodgy. But as wives, they desired sexually inexperienced women who would place priority on motherhood. One young man put it this way:

I guess I want a girlfriend who is very American but a wife who is very Vietnamese. I think girls can be both of these things, though. They can wear okay clothes and listen to okay music and still be Vietnamese inside.

Young men also explicitly associated the “Vietnamese-ness” of young women with better school performance. They generally agreed that a “good girl” should do well in school; they also thought doing well in school was more important for girls than for boys, reasoning that girls could not afford to have a “bad name”. Thus, the women’s identity as Vietnamese has a unique twist. Unlike their mothers and grandmothers in Viet Nam, the young women were encouraged to acquire an education, and this encouragement was reinforced by strong family control and pressures from the surrounding community, including those from their male peers.

Young women’s perceptions

It is not surprising that the young women themselves showed greatest awareness of the contradictions, complications, and frustrations inherent in the changing meaning of appropriate gender roles. Like their mothers, many young women voiced general acceptance of traditional gender roles but felt that role expectations were perplexing and frustrating matters, complicated by pressures to conform. Some young women sought to rebel but found it very difficult to do so, given the authoritarianism of many families and the nature of tightly knit communities.

Almost all the young women with whom we spoke told us that parents enforced discipline more strongly among girls than among boys, even in the use of corporal punishment, a form of parental discipline permitted and commonly practiced in Viet Nam. While corporal punishment was considered appropriate for all children, almost all the young people we interviewed who said that they had been spanked or beaten at home were young women. By contrast, the only young man who said that his father had tried to use corporal punishment also reported that he had actively resisted his father’s attempt at force.

One young woman, aged 16, whom we spoke with in school and later interviewed in greater depth by telephone, explained that her father allowed her to speak with the interviewer on the telephone because he knew that the interviewer was a non-Vietnamese researcher (also a substitute teacher in the girl’s school at the time) who was attempting to learn about Vietnamese people. Cooperating with an outside researcher was seen as working with someone who represented authority and school. Had the interviewer been a young Vietnamese man calling on her socially, she would not have been allowed to speak with him. This girl made it clear that her social life was tightly controlled at home. She was permitted to visit with female friends in their homes but not allowed to “hang out” in local restaurants or other public places. When she disobeyed her father or did anything that did not meet with her father’s approval, corporal punishment would follow. If she had a non-Vietnamese neighbour to whom she could complain about her father’s beating, or if she had called 911, her father might have been jailed for child abuse. She did not consider corporal punishment as abuse, though, and was therefore unlikely to report it. When asked how she felt about corporal punishment, she said that she did not like it but that she understood that there were many dangers facing Vietnamese girls in America and that her father used it for her own good. While it is difficult to gauge how common the use of corporal punishment of girls may be in Vietnamese communities in the US, the fact that girls are subjected to it more often than boys is an indication of the stricter social controls imposed on young women. These controls exist because of the importance of the Vietnamese ideal of “the virtuous woman”, which calls not only for passive obedience but also for living up to higher behavioural standards than are expected of men.
However, these higher behavioural standards have generated greater pressures for academic achievement. One high school teacher, an American Viet Nam War veteran who had close ties to the Vietnamese community, candidly discussed the grades of his students with us during an interview. He commented on one particular young Vietnamese woman who almost never made grades below an A. "She has to," he explained. "If she brings home a B, her father beats her."

Young women were often frustrated by the stricter parental control to which they were subject and the higher moral standards expected of them. A common complaint was that parents were "old-fashioned" or "too Vietnamese". One girl complained to the interviewer:

It's just not fair. My brother can stay out all night with his friends and they [the parents] don't say anything about it. But for me, I have to tell them where I am and what I'm doing all the time, and they get real mad at me if I don't.

Another girl added:

They don't understand about life here. They want us to do everything the way they did things when they were in Viet Nam. And it isn't the same.

Though uncomfortable with their parents' cultural expectations, our young female interviewees were not prepared for open confrontation with parental authority. But they were ready for—and indeed often embarked on—challenges of an indirect sort. For example, most of the young women whom we interviewed reported that their parents disapproved the American custom of dating. Many said that rather than rebel openly against their parents, they would leave the house with a group of female friends and then later go off alone with a young man.

Parents, of course, are not the only source of social control, and they are not the sole object of this frustration. If neighbours and other social contacts do not back up parental authority, young people will be more likely to rebel. But adolescents generally go along with their parents' expectations when the surrounding community endorses these expectations. Many young women spoke about the effect of public opinion in their tightly knit little community. A young woman said:

It's so easy for girls to get a bad reputation here. You really have to watch everything you do. There's gossip all over the place. All my neighbours know everything. They even know some things that never happened.

This observation helps explain why young Vietnamese women accept gender role expectations that they see as unfair, and also why young Vietnamese in general often conform to the expectations of their elders rather than to the expectations of their American peers. Young Vietnamese do not live in isolated families, nor are they surrounded by an alien culture. Instead, they are embedded in a complex system of Vietnamese social relations that reinforces and also enforces parental expectations.

CONCLUSION

Why is it, then, that young Vietnamese-American women not only equal young men in scholastic performance and ambition, but may even show higher levels of achievement? Our data, from surveys and interviews, indicate that it is not because the women are liberating themselves from traditional gender roles in order to avail themselves of the opportunities of American society. Instead, the socio-economic conditions of the new land place a new emphasis on education for both men and women. Immigrant families see the importance of education as an avenue of upward mobility for their children and encourage educational achievement. Precisely because traditional gender roles lead families to exercise greater control over daughters, young women are pushed toward scholastic performance even more than are young men. The conflict between custom and adaptation to a new socio-economic environment is not to be seen as a matter of mutually exclusive alternatives, but as a dialectic leading to a new resolution. Ultimately, it may be that patriarchal norms will lead to their own undoing. As Vietnamese women achieve upward mobility through education in increasing numbers, they may be freeing themselves from one of the very forces producing this mobility.

NOTES

1. This article was presented as a paper to a workshop on East Asian Immigrant Women - The Other Half of the "Model Minority"? Vassar College, New York, 14-15 March 1998. It is based on data presented in Zhou and Bankston (1998). Direct all correspondence to Min Zhou, Department of Sociology, 2201 Hershey Hall, Box 951551, Los Angeles, CA, 90095-1551, US.
2. Qualitative data came from fieldwork in Versailles Village, the Vietnamese community of New Orleans. It began in April 1995 and continued through the spring of 1996. Two surveys elicited information from Vietnamese students in grades 9 to 12 attending public high schools in the study area (N1=198 and N2=402). For a detailed description of the study, see Zhou and Bankston (1998: 15-19).
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TABLE 1

THE GENDER GAP IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG ADULT VIETNAMESE (AGED 25 OR OVER) BY PERIOD OF ARRIVAL, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arrived in 1985 or later</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school (per cent)</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (per cent)</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college (per cent)</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate (per cent)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2,397</td>
<td>2,451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arrived before 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school (per cent)</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (per cent)</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college (per cent)</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate (per cent)</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>4,480</td>
<td>4,816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census of Population and Housing, 1990, 5 per cent PUMS.

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TABLE 2

THE GENDER GAP IN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE AND CURRENT COLLEGE ATTENDANCE AMONG YOUNG VIETNAMESE BY MARITAL STATUS, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school dropout (aged 16 to 24) (per cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently enrolled in college (aged 18-24) (per cent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census of Population and Housing, 1990, 5 per cent PUMS.
### TABLE 3
THE GENDER GAP IN EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND GOALS AMONG VIETNAMESE YOUTH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of educational performance and goals</th>
<th>Female (per cent)</th>
<th>Male (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average grades</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (per cent)</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B to B+ (per cent)</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+ to B - (per cent)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C or lower (per cent)</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward college attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely do not want to go to college (per cent)</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important (per cent)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important (per cent)</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### TABLE 4
LEVEL OF IDENTIFICATION WITH VIETNAMESE ETHNICITY OF MALE AND FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low ethnic identification (per cent)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate ethnic identification (per cent)</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ethnic identification (per cent)</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### TABLE 5
EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF ADOLESCENT VIETNAMESE WOMEN BY LEVEL OF ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of ethnic identification</th>
<th>Low identification</th>
<th>Moderate identification</th>
<th>High identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (per cent)</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B to B+ (per cent)</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+ to B - (per cent)</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C or lower (per cent)</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$X^2 = 70.30869, p < .0001$

LA PRESSION FAMILIALE ET L’EXPERIENCE EDUCATIONNELLE DES FILLES DE REFUGIES VIETNAMIENS

Le présent article examine la question du changement de rôle, tel qu’en font l’expérience les jeunes Américaines d’origine vietnamienne, sur la base de notre étude ethnographique du village de Versailles, une communauté ethnique à faible revenu de la Nouvelle Orléans, aux Etats-Unis.

Nous examinons de quelle façon les écolières vietnamiennes du cycle secondaire supérieur gèrent l’antagonisme entre l’attitude résolument traditionnaliste des parents et l’aspiration des enfants élevés aux Etats-Unis à plus de liberté, et la manière dont elles négocient les rôles attribués à chaque sexe à la maison comme à l’école et dans la société.

Un examen approfondi de l’expérience scolaire des jeunes Vietnamiennes révèle qu’elles sont non seulement l’égal des garçons sur les plans de l’ambition et des résultats scolaires, mais que leurs résultats sont même parfois supérieurs. D’après nos constatations, cela n’est pas dû au fait que les femmes ont entrepris de se libérer du rôle qui leur est traditionnellement attribué pour tirer parti des opportunités qu’offre la société américaine, mais plutôt au fait que les conditions socio-économiques du pays d’accueil font mieux ressortir l’importance de l’éducation tant pour les femmes que pour les hommes.

Les familles immigrées perçoivent l’importance de l’éducation comme une possibilité d’ascension dans l’échelle sociale pour leurs enfants et encouragent la promotion par l’éducation. C’est précisément parce que le rôle traditionnellement attribué à chacun des deux sexes conduit les familles à exercer un contrôle accru sur les enfants de sexe féminin que les jeunes filles font, plus que les jeunes hommes, l’expérience d’une pression accrue en termes de performances scolaires.

PRESIÓN FAMILIAR Y EXPERIENCIA EDUCATIVA DE LAS HIJAS DE REFUGIADOS VIETNAMITAS

Este artículo examina la cuestión de los cambios de función por sexo, a que tuvieron que hacer frente jóvenes mujeres vietnamitas americanas, en el contexto de nuestro estudio etnográfico de Versailles Village, una comunidad étnica de bajos ingresos en Nueva Orleans, Estados Unidos.

En este artículo se examina cómo las estudiantes de bachillerato vietnamitas encaran los conflictos entre el tracionalismo inflexible de sus padres y el deseo de libertad personal que tienen los hijos criados en los Estados Unidos y la manera en que negocian sus funciones por sexo en el hogar, en la escuela y en la sociedad.

A través de un examen exhaustivo de la experiencia escolar de estas muchachas vietnamitas, encontramos que no sólo igualan en rendimiento y ambición escolar a los muchachos, sino que a menudo obtienen mejores resultados. Nuestros datos señalan que no se debe a que las mujeres se estén liberando de las funciones tradicionales atribuidas a los sexos a fin de poder aprovechar las oportunidades que les ofrece la sociedad americana. Más bien son las condiciones socioeconómicas del nuevo lugar que fomentan la educación tanto de los muchachos como de las muchachas.

Las familias inmigrantes, conscientes de la importancia que reviste la educación para abrirse campo, alimentan a sus hijos a tener éxito en sus estudios. Justamente en razón de las funciones tradicionales de los sexos, las familias ejercen mayor control sobre las hijas, y por ello se incita aún más a las muchachas que a los muchachos, a tener un mejor rendimiento escolar.