

THE ACCULTURATION AND ADAPTATION OF
ADOLESCENT VIETNAMESE REFUGEES IN MARYLAND

Prepared by:
Edison J. Trickett, Ph.D.
Dina Birman, Ph.D.
Irena Persky, M.A.

March 2003

This research was supported by a grant from the Maryland Office for New Americans of the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to understand the acculturation and adaptation of Vietnamese adolescents in a manner comparable to prior reports of Soviet Jewish adolescents. In pursuing this goal we assessed adolescent functioning in a variety of life spheres such as the school, the family, and the peer group, as well as assessing their educational hopes for the future.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study involved a sample of convenience of 159 first and second generation Vietnamese adolescents living in Prince George's County and Montgomery County, Maryland. Adolescents were recruited with the assistance of Mr. Huy Bui, currently Director of NAVASA, the National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies, and we are indebted to him for his hard and successful efforts.

METHOD

Participants were recruited through networks in the Vietnamese community supplied by Mr. Bui and the Vietnamese research assistants he identified to work on the data gathering. These assistants came from different geographical locations in the two counties, were of college age, and had ongoing connections to the Vietnamese community and the relevant public schools attended by Vietnamese adolescents. Once an initial sample was identified, a snowball technique was employed, using recruited participants to nominate others in their community who fulfilled the sampling criteria of being age 12-19. Seventy-five percent of the adolescents were first generation refugees and 25% second generation. Instruments were translated into Vietnamese with the assistance of the Montgomery Vietnamese Mutual Assistance organization, and were back translated by other members of the Vietnamese community. In addition, focus groups of Vietnamese high school and college students were held to insure that the instruments were appropriate for the Vietnamese community. All data were gathered in the homes of the participants by bilingual interviewers.

FINDINGS

For each set of findings we first provide a brief description of the measure when relevant, followed by highlights and then tables presenting the findings in more detail. For each section, findings are presented for the whole adolescent sample and also for the different immigrant generations (1st and 2nd generation adolescents), if there are differences.

Please Note: In the tables, we use the following notation to signify statistically significant differences in the data: * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$, and ⁺ signifies a trend.

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

The sample is described in Table 1. Altogether we gathered data from 159 adolescents, of whom 53% were male. The majority of adolescents, 73%, immigrated with their parents, while 25% were born here. Fifty eight percent were citizens at the time of data collection. Their average age was 16, and 75% had been or were currently in ESOL, where they spent an average of two years and nine months before being mainstreamed into regular classes.

TABLE 1: Demographics – Whole sample

Total Number of Participants: 159

- Males: 84 (53%)
- Females: 75 (47%)

Average:

- Age: 16 (range 12-20)
- Grade Level: 10 (range 7-12)
- Currently in ESOL: 17%
- Ever enrolled in ESOL: 75%
- Months spent in ESOL: 33

Generation Status:

- Arrived to the US with parents (1st generation immigrants): 116 (73%)
- Arrived separately from parents (1st generation immigrants): 3 (2%)
- Were born here (2nd generation immigrants): 40 (25%)

US Citizenship:

- Yes: 92 (58%)
- No: 66 (41.5%)
- No response: 1 (0.5%)

SECTION 2: ACCULTURATION

The process of acculturation represents the overarching task of refugees in terms of their coming to grips with life in their new land. Acculturation refers to changes in behaviors, identification, values, language, and other aspects of one's culture as a result of migration to the new culture. As in prior work, we assessed level of acculturation with respect to both the culture of origin and the new U. S. culture (Birman, 1994).

Measures used:

We used the following methods to assess acculturation to the Vietnamese and American cultures.

1) Overall cultural identity. We used a single item asking participants whether they consider themselves to be more Vietnamese than American, more American than Vietnamese, Vietnamese and American equally, or neither overall.

2) "Language, Identity, and Behavior Scale" (LIB scale) assesses acculturation to Vietnamese and American culture, both overall and in terms of specific aspects of acculturation.

(a) Language Acculturation. The Language Acculturation subscale was adapted from the Multidimensional Scale for Latinos developed by Birman and Zea (1996). It consists of nine items asking respondents to rate their ability to speak and understand Vietnamese and nine parallel items that ask about English. Questions ask how well respondents speak and how well they understand the language with friends, on the phone, with strangers, and in other situations. Ratings are made on a four point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very well, like a native."

(b) Identity Acculturation. This scale was based on items from the American Identity Questionnaire (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1994). In this study we used a shortened version of the scale to assess the degree of Vietnamese and American identity. It included four items, which assessed the extent to which they consider themselves Vietnamese/American, feel they are part of Vietnamese/American culture, and are proud of being Vietnamese/American. Ratings are made on a four point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much."

(c) Behavioral Acculturation. To assess Behavioral Acculturation the present study used a revision of a measure used by Birman and Tyler (1994), which in turn was based on the Behavioral Acculturation Scale (Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978). Eleven parallel items ask about behavioral acculturation to each culture such as: "How much do you watch Vietnamese (American) movies (on TV, VCR, etc.)?"; "How much do you eat Vietnamese /American foods?"; and "How much do you participate in Vietnamese/American community activities?". Items are rated on a four point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much."

3) Expectations of children to maintain culture as adults

We constructed a scale asking respondents how important is it that they, as adults, remain Vietnamese in such areas as the language they speak, books they read, and their marriage partner both in terms of being Vietnamese and practicing the same religion. A parallel scale was constructed asking about American identity. A third scale assessed importance of being Asian with questions asking about consideration of self as Asian, interest in Asian culture and history, and choice of friends.

Findings:

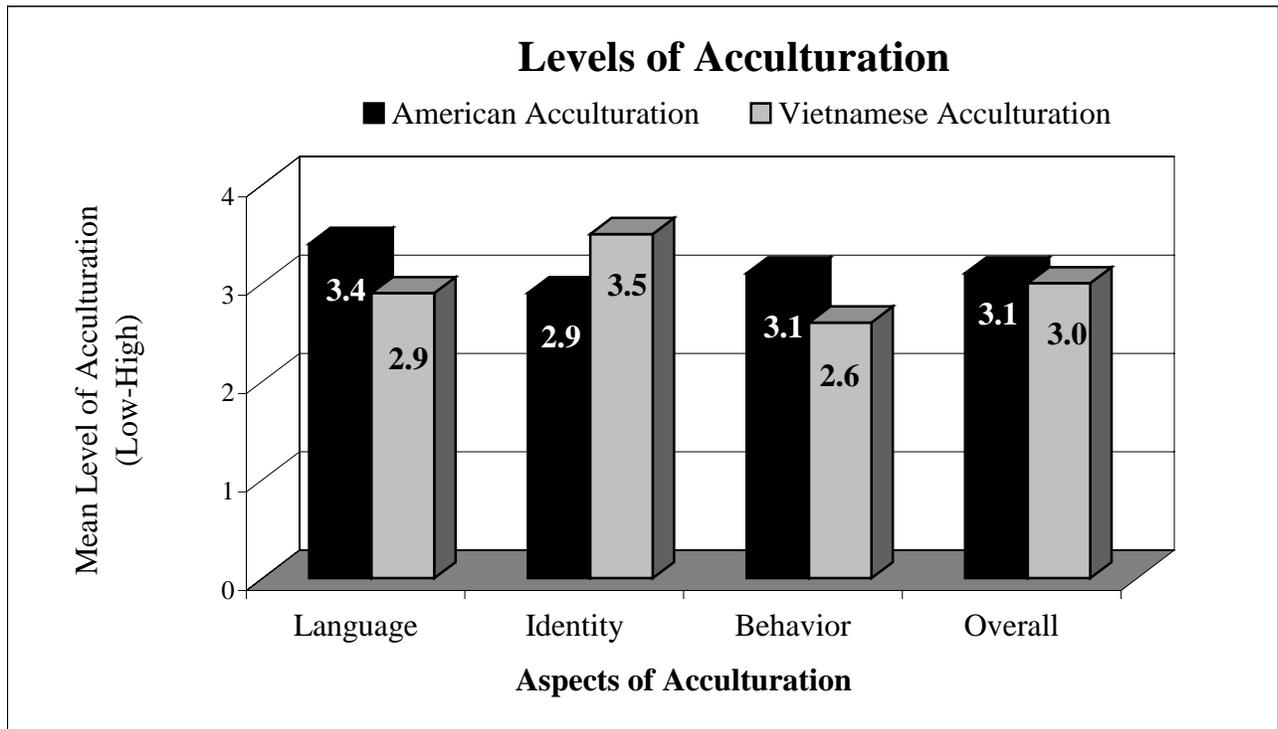
To better understand the acculturation process, we looked at the results for the entire sample and then examined whether there are statistically significant differences between 1st and 2nd generation adolescents.

Overall, 31% of adolescents considered themselves more Vietnamese than American, while 16% considered themselves more American than Vietnamese and 48% considered themselves equally Vietnamese and American or bicultural (see Table 2a). While cultural identification was similar in 1st generation immigrant adolescents, among 2nd generation adolescents, although equally as many identified themselves as bicultural, a smaller percentage identified themselves more Vietnamese than American and a greater percentage identified themselves more American than Vietnamese.

TABLE 2a: Acculturation – Overall Identity			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
Do you consider yourself:	Percentile		
More Vietnamese than American	31%	34%	23%
More American than Vietnamese	16%	12%	28%
Vietnamese and American Equally	48%	48%	49%
Neither	3%	4%	0%
Other	2%	2%	0%

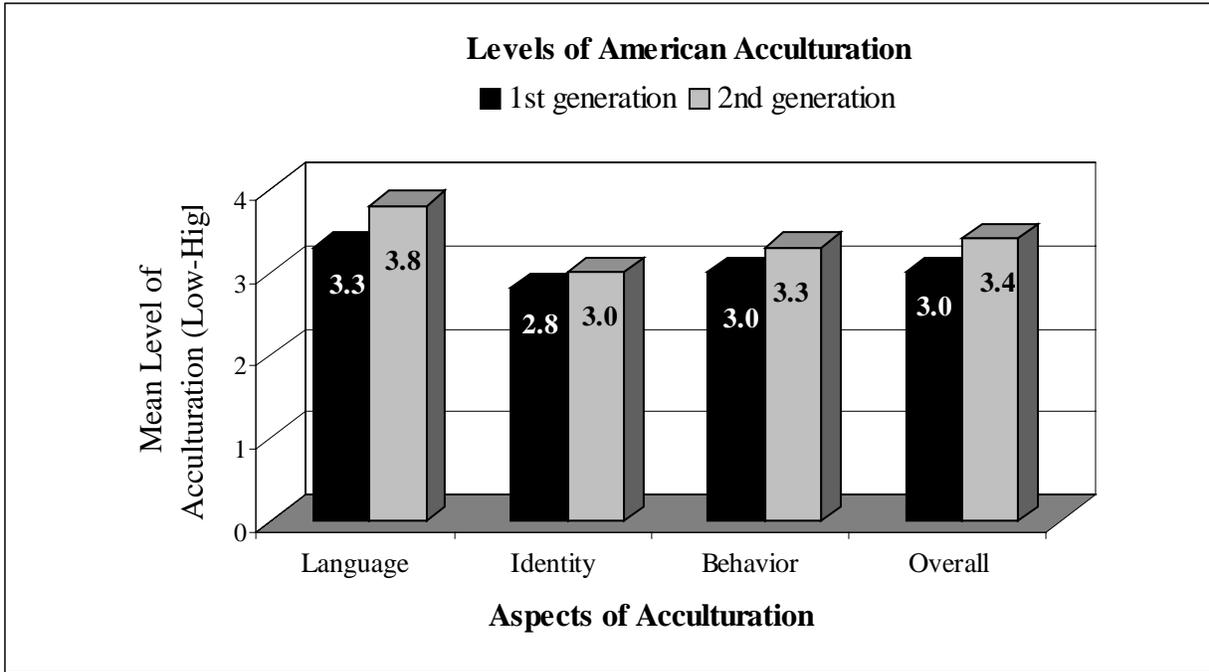
Graph 1a illustrates the results of the LIB measure of acculturation and its differing aspects. For the sample as a whole, acculturation to American culture is significantly higher than retention of Vietnamese culture. However, in terms of the different aspects of acculturation, a more complex picture emerges. Competence in English is rated higher than competence in Vietnamese, and American behaviors are engaged in far more than Vietnamese behaviors. However, Vietnamese identity remains higher than American identity. Thus, the sample is more American in terms of language and behavior, but they self-identify as Vietnamese more than American. Such findings reinforce the importance of regarding acculturation as a multidimensional process, and suggest the importance of ethnic identity in adolescence for this refugee group.

Graph 1a – Acculturation

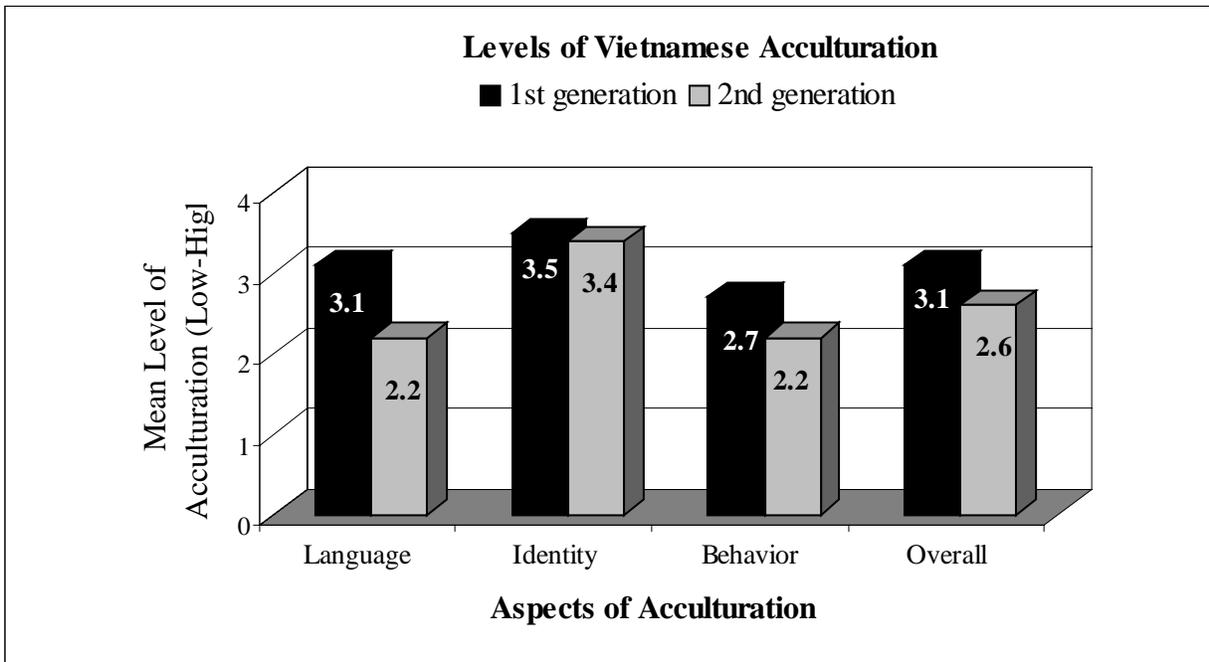


Graphs 1b and 1c illustrate the differences in acculturation between the 1st and the 2nd generation immigrants with respect to American and Vietnamese cultures, respectively. With respect to overall identity, 1st generation adolescents are significantly less Americanized and more Vietnamese than the 2nd generation adolescents. However, when aspects of acculturation are examined, 1st generation adolescents are significantly less Americanized and more Vietnamese with respect to language and behavioral aspects. However, 1st and 2nd generation adolescents are not significantly different with respect to identity, with both generations expressing a high degree of Vietnamese identity.

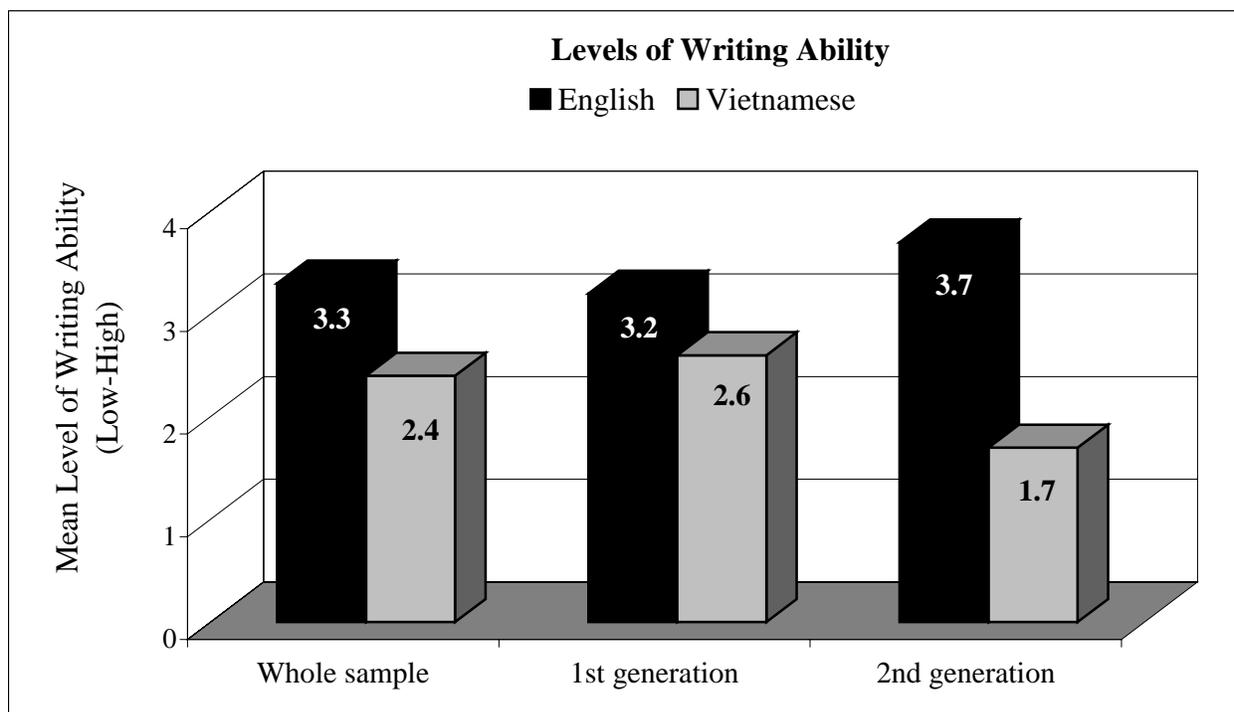
Graph 1b – Generation differences in American acculturation



Graph 1c – Generation differences in Vietnamese acculturation



We also asked about adolescents' ability to write in English and in Vietnamese. For the whole sample, adolescents' ability to write in English is significantly better than their ability to write in Vietnamese. This pattern is observed for both 1st and 2nd generation adolescents. Additional analyses suggest that 2nd generation immigrants are significantly better in writing in English and worse in Vietnamese than are 1st generation adolescents.



In addition, we asked adolescents about the importance of Vietnamese, Asian, and American self-identification as adults (Table 2b). Adolescents indicated that it is equally important to retain both their Vietnamese and American identities, suggesting a desire for a bicultural future self.

	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
As an adult, how important is it for you to be ...	Mean (1=not at all, 4=very much)		
American	3.0	3.0	3.0
Vietnamese	3.0	3.1	2.8**

We also examined the correlations of overall American and Vietnamese acculturation with a number of demographic variables: time in the US, age, age of arrival, and gender (Table 2c). The longer the adolescents are in the US and the younger they were when they arrived, the higher their American acculturation and the lower their Vietnamese acculturation. Younger and female adolescents are more acculturated to the American culture and less to the Vietnamese culture.

	Time in the US	Age	Age of arrival	Gender (1=male, 2=female)
Overall American Acculturation	.44***	-.23**	-.46***	.22**
Overall Vietnamese Acculturation	-.25*	.21**	.34***	.22**

SECTION 3: RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION

With respect to religion, we asked both if adolescents practiced ancestral religion and what religious affiliation they currently have (see Table 3). Overall, over 80% report some religious affiliation, with the greatest percentage being Catholic. While the practice of ancestral religion seems to decrease somewhat across generations, it is still practiced by over one third of second generation adolescents. In addition, there are some generational differences in religious affiliation, with somewhat more second generation adolescents being Catholic and somewhat fewer Buddhist.

TABLE 3: Religious participation			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Percentile who said yes		
1. Practice ancestral religion?	44%	47%	35%
2. Religion practiced			
Buddhist	31%	34%	22.5%
Catholic	48%	45%	55%
Protestant	1%	2%	0%
None	12%	10%	17.5%
Other	3%	4%	0%
Mixed	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%
No response	2.5%	2.5%	2.5%

SECTION 4: SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social Integration:

We looked at social integration among the adolescents in terms of the composition of their friendship networks in different life spheres: at school, outside of school, and in terms of best friends more generally. The pattern of results suggests a balance between Asian and American friends, with white friends being somewhat more reported than black or Latino friends (see Table 4a). Of Asian friends, about half are Vietnamese. This pattern occurs for both 1st and 2nd generation adolescents, suggesting that social integration is maintained across generational status for these Vietnamese adolescents. Second generation adolescents report a somewhat greater percentage of whites than do first generation adolescents across school, out of school, and in terms of best friends. Thus, while there is significant social integration into American culture in terms of friendships, there is also a consistent continuity of friendships with Asian and, specifically, Vietnamese peers across generations.

TABLE 4a: Social Integration			
	Whole Sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Percentile		
In the past 3 months, of the BEST FRIENDS AT SCHOOL:			
% White	22%	20%	28%
% Black	15%	16%	13%
% Latino	11%	12%	9%
% Asian	48%	49%	46%
% That are Vietnamese	51%	54%	42%
% Other	4%	4%	6%
Of the KIDS OUTSIDE SCHOOL EVENINGS OR WEEKENDS:			
% White	16%	14%	22%
% Black	15%	16%	10%
% Latino	9%	9%	12%
% Asian	57%	59%	54%
% That are Vietnamese	67%	70%	52%
% Other	3%	3%	3%
Of your THREE CLOSEST FRIENDS:			
% White	17%	15%	24%
% Black	9%	10%	6%
% Latino	8%	9%	5%
% Asian	63%	62%	66%
% That are Vietnamese	58%	66%	42%
% Other	3%	4%	.5%

Social Support:

In addition to social integration, we asked about the sources of social support provided by different segments of the adolescents' networks. To do so, we assessed the degree to which adolescents found different people in their social network to be helpful with personal problems, when needing money or other things, and finally in getting pleasure from interactions with various social network members.

Table 4b presents findings on the level of social support from different sources averaged across the three situations. Overall, adolescents report a moderate level of support across various people in their network (mean = 2 on a 3-point scale). For the whole sample, parents are seen as providing the greatest support, followed by friends, cousins, aunts and uncles, and then grandparents. These differences are significant, such that parents provide significantly greater support than friends who in turn provide greater support than cousins.

Some generational differences are found as well. First generation adolescents find that their parents provide the most support in their social network. They also find that the parents and friends of first generation adolescents provide greater support than do parents or friends of 2nd generation adolescents. Second generation adolescents, however, report that their cousins provide as much support as their parents and more than cousins of first generation adolescents. That first generation parents should provide more support is understandable in terms of the degree to which the family as a unit is in a transition where mutual support is important for cohesion and survival. We are unclear about the meaning of the social support findings with respect to cousins and parents across generations.

TABLE 4b: Social Support			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM:	Mean (1=no support, 3=a great deal)		
Mother	2.4	2.4	2.2*
Father	2.3	2.3	2.1*
Parents total	2.3	2.4	2.2*
Group of close Vietnamese friends	2.2	2.3	1.9**
Group of Asian friends	2.2	2.2	2.1
Vietnamese kids your age	2.0	2.1	1.8**
Group of non-Asian friends	2.0	2.0	2.1
Friends total	2.1	2.1	2.0*
Cousin(s)	2.0	1.9	2.2**
Uncle(s)	1.7	1.6	1.8
Aunt(s)	1.7	1.6	1.8
Uncle(s)/Aunt(s) total	1.7	1.6	1.8
Grandmother(s)	1.6	1.6	1.5
Grandfather(s)	1.5	1.6	1.4

Grandparents total	1.6	1.6	1.5
Total support	2.0	2.0	1.9⁺

Specific Areas of Parental Support:

In prior research we were concerned about whether or not parents acculturating to a new country would be able to provide their adolescent children support around negotiating specific tasks requiring some cultural knowledge. Here, we assessed the degree to which adolescents find their parents to be helpful in such things as doing homework, finding a job, choosing a career, and resolving an argument with a friend. Table 4c lists the degree of total perceived support from parents as well as the degree of support adolescents receive in various situations.

Adolescents find their parents to be overall moderately helpful with these kinds of situations (mean = 2.7 on a 5-point scale). Adolescents rate their parents most helpful in providing money for them, a task requiring resources but not familiarity with American culture. Future-oriented tasks such as applying for college are also rated considerably above the means and reflect the priority parents place on their children's education. Parents are seen as less helpful in terms of such immediate issues as finding employment, school-specific tasks such as homework, and peer issues. This pattern is observed across both generations. The only statistically significant difference between 1st and 2nd generation adolescents is found in the help they receive in a dispute with a teacher. Second generation adolescents find that their parents are more helpful in that respect than do 1st generation adolescents, perhaps reflecting their increased understanding of how schools in the United States are structured.

	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean (1=not at all helpful, 5=very helpful)		
	Mean (1=not at all helpful, 5=very helpful)		
Total parental support	2.7	2.7	2.9
How helpful would your parents be if you...			
had a problem with getting extra money for school related activities?	3.9	3.8	4.1
had a problem with applying to college?	3.3	3.2	3.5
had a problem with applying to college?	3.3	3.2	3.5
had a problem with applying for financial aid for college?	3.3	3.2	3.6
had a problem with applying for financial aid for college?	3.3	3.2	3.6
had a problem with choosing a career/planning for your future?	3.1	3.1	3.2
had a problem finding a job?	2.8	2.8	2.7

had a problem with doing homework?	2.5	2.4	2.8
had a dispute with a teacher?	2.5	2.4	3.0**
had a dispute with a teacher?	2.5	2.4	3.0**
had a problem with getting involved in extracurricular activities at school?	2.5	2.4	2.6
had a problem with getting involved in extracurricular activities at school?	2.5	2.4	2.6
had a problem with preparing for an exam?	2.2	2.1	2.5
had a problem with preparing for an exam?	2.2	2.1	2.5
had a problem with a disagreement with a friend?	2.1	2.1	1.8
had a problem with a disagreement with a friend?	2.1	2.1	1.8
had a problem with dating?	2.0	2.0	1.8
had a problem with dating?	2.0	2.0	1.8

SECTION 5: CULTURE BROKER ROLE

One of the predictable tasks of adolescent refugees involves helping their family translate American culture, a phenomenon we have called the culture-broker role. In addition to inquiring about social support within the family, we also asked about the extent to which these adolescents serve this role (see Table 5). We measured the culture broker role with a self-developed instrument (Buchanan, 2000) asking about the ways in which adolescents helped their parents or other family members by translating American culture through such behaviors as answering letters, making doctor appointments, and reading legal materials.

Overall, adolescents reported a moderate amount of culture brokering (2.3 on a 4-point scale where 1= do little for parents and family and 4= do a lot). Thus, this is a role they play but, in general, it is not a large role. Adolescents report that they most often help with translating and answering the telephone and the least often help with explaining how schools work in this country and dealing with government agencies.

In this area generational differences are quite consistent and striking, with second generation adolescents playing this role far less frequently than first generation adolescents. For example, second generation adolescents translating less, scheduling family appointments less, and go to appointments less. These findings are not surprising considering that the family of 2nd generation adolescents most likely have been longer in the US and thus do not need as much help from adolescents.

TABLE 5: Culture Broker Role			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation

	Mean (1=do little for parents or other family members, 4=do lots)		
Total culture brokering	2.3	2.4	2.0**
How much do your parents or other family members rely on you to...			
translate for them?	2.7	2.9	2.1***
answer the telephone for them?	2.6	2.7	2.4 ⁺
answer the door for them?	2.4	2.5	2.2 ⁺
schedule or go on appointments with them?	2.4	2.5	1.9**
help them fill out applications?	2.3	2.4	2.0 ⁺
explain how schools work in this country?	2.1	2.2	1.9
deal with government agencies?	1.8	1.9	1.6

SECTION 6: AUTONOMY AND THE TEEN TIMETABLE

One of the differences between American and Refugee families we have found in prior studies involves the age at which adolescents are allowed autonomy to make their own decisions. In general, refugee families are more strict in terms of adolescent autonomy than U.S. born families. Here we were interested not only in how these adolescents thought about issues of autonomy, but whether or not generational status made a difference. We expected, for example, that second generation adolescents would have a less stringent attitude around autonomy than first generation adolescents. To assess this we asked adolescents to complete a 20-item questionnaire asking at what age they think they should be allowed to do certain things and a 4-item questionnaire asking at what age they should be expected to do certain things (the Teen Timetable from Feldman & Quatman, 1988).

Table 6a lists when adolescents think they should be allowed to do certain things. In general, their responses seem to suggest a more restrained response than one might expect of adolescents born in this country to parents born here. For example, on average, adolescents believe that they should be not permitted to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol until after age 21. They believe that they should be permitted to no longer have to tell parents where they are going and come home as late as they want between ages 18 and 20. They believe that when they are 17 or 18 they should be permitted to go out on dates, to do things with friends rather than family, make own doctor and dentist appointments, go on an overnight trip with both male and female friends without supervision, and be able to watch any TV, movie, or video show they want. Between the ages 15-16, they believe they should be permitted to choose their own hair style and what clothes to buy even if parents disapprove, go to girl/boy parties at night, watch as much TV as they want, take a regular part time job, and stay at home at night by themselves when their parents are out.

Generational differences in this area are striking. Across all questions, adolescents who were born here think that they should be allowed to do various things at a younger age than do 1st generation adolescents, supporting our hypothesis that 2nd generation adolescents would have more liberal attitudes toward autonomy. For example, while 1st generation adolescents think they should be permitted to drink only after age 21, 2nd generation adolescents report 19-20 as the appropriate age.. While 1st generation adolescents think that should be permitted to make decisions as to how to spend their money when 15 or 16, 2nd generation adolescents think that they should be permitted to do so earlier.

TABLE 6a: Teen timetable			
At what ages do you think you should be allowed to do the following things? 1 = before age 14 2 = ages 15-16 3 = ages 17-18 4 = ages 18-20 5 = after 21 6 = never	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean		
Smoke cigarettes	5.3	5.3	5.1
Drink alcohol	5.1	5.2	4.7*
No longer have to tell parents where you are going	4.1	4.3	3.5**
Come home as late as you want	4.1	4.3	3.5****
Go on an overnight trip with both male and female friends without supervision	3.8	3.9	3.4*
Go on an overnight trip with friends of your own sex without supervision	3.4	3.6	2.9*
Prefer to do things with friends than family	3.3	3.6	2.6**
Go out on dates	3.0	3.2	2.4**
Make own doctor and dentist appointments	3.0	3.1	2.9
Be able to watch any TV, movie, or video show you want	3.0	3.2	2.4**
Watch as much TV as you want	2.8	2.9	2.5
Take a regular part time job	2.8	2.9	2.5 ⁺
Stay overnight at a friend's house	2.8	3.1	2.1**
Go to girl/boy parties at night	2.7	3.0	2.1****
Choose what clothes to buy, even if parents	2.7	2.8	2.3 ⁺
Choose your own friends, even if your parents disapprove	2.7	3.0	1.8****
Decide how to spend your money (allowance, wages, gift)	2.3	2.5	1.7**
Choose own hair style, even if parents disapprove	2.2	2.5	1.4****
Stay at home at night by yourself when your parents are out	2.1	2.3	1.6*
Stay home alone if you are sick and unable	2.1	2.3	1.6**

Table 6b lists ages when adolescents think they should be expected to do certain things. Adolescents think that they should be expected to prepare their own dinner when home alone, do household chores without being reminded, be responsible for their school clothes, and get up independently to get to school on time all before ages 15-16. When 1st and 2nd generation immigrant adolescents were compared, 2nd generation adolescents believe that they should be expected to do all those things at a younger age. Thus, compared with first generation adolescents, 2nd generation Vietnamese adolescents in our sample thought they should be allowed to make many kinds of decisions at an earlier age and also be responsible for many tasks at an earlier age than first generation adolescents.

TABLE 6b: Teen timetable			
At what ages do you think you should be expected to do the following things? 1 = before age 14 2 = ages 15-16 3 = ages 17-18 4 = ages 18-20 5 = after 21 6 = never	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean		
Prepare your own dinner when home alone	1.7	1.9	1.3***
Do household chores without being reminded	1.9	2.1	1.5**
Be responsible for your school clothes	1.6	1.7	1.3*
Get up independently to get to school on time	1.7	1.9	1.3**

SECTION 7: FAMILY LIFE

To better understand adolescents' relationship with their parents and their family life, we asked adolescents about their family functioning, satisfaction with family, and the extent of disagreement with parents over various issues.

We assessed family functioning with the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES III). FACES III is a 20-item instrument that assesses family functioning by measuring adaptability and cohesion dimensions of family functioning (see Table 7a). Family adaptability refers to the extent of control over children, discipline, leadership, and family roles and rules. Questions that comprise the adaptability scale include: "In solving problems, children's suggestions are followed," "Children have a say in their discipline," and "It is hard to tell who does which household chores in our family." Family cohesion refers to the degree of emotional bonding within the family, family boundaries, interests and recreation, and supportiveness. Questions that comprise the cohesion scale include "Family members feel very close to one another," "We like to do things with just our immediate family," and "We can easily think of things to do together as a family."

Overall family functioning involves the sum of the two subscales of Family Adaptability and Family cohesion. In general, family functioning falls in the average range (2.8 on a 5-point scale with 1= almost never happens, 5= almost always happens), such that sometimes families get along with one another and sometimes they don't, and that sometimes they spend time together as a family and sometimes they don't. Family cohesion is significantly higher than family adaptability. Furthermore, 1st and 2nd generation adolescents report similar family functioning, although there is a trend such that 1st generation immigrants find that their families are more cohesive than do 2nd generation immigrants. Somewhat surprising is the lack of a clear pattern of parental control over adolescents in terms of decision-making in the household.

TABLE 7a: Family functioning			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean (1= almost never happens, 5 = almost always happens)		
Family Functioning Total Scale	2.8	2.8	2.8
Family Cohesion	3.2	3.3	3.1 ⁺
Family Adaptability	2.4	2.4	2.4

However, the overall level of family satisfaction reported by the adolescents is relatively high (see Table 7b). To assess family satisfaction we used the Family Satisfaction Scale (Carver & Jones, 1992), which asks for ratings of family life on a 5-point scale with 5 signifying greatest satisfaction. The scale assesses adolescents' satisfaction with the extent to which parents approve of them and the things they do, amount of freedom given by parents to make their own choices, ways parents try to control their actions, overall relationship with parents, and parents' relationship with each other.

Adolescents' overall satisfaction was 3.2 on a 5-point scale. They are most satisfied with their overall relationship with their parents and their parents' relationship with each other. Adolescents are the least satisfied with the way their parents try to control their actions.

With respect to generational differences, first generation adolescents express more overall satisfaction with their families. Specific areas in which differences between generations are statistically significant are over-all relationship with parents and amount of freedom parents give adolescents to make their own choices.

TABLE 7b: Family satisfaction			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean (1=low, 5=high)		
Overall Family Satisfaction	3.2	3.3	3.0*
My over-all relationship with my parents	3.7	3.8	3.4*
My parent(s) relationship with each other	3.6	3.7	3.4
How much my parent(s) approve of me and the things I do	3.2	3.3	3.0
The way my parent(s) want me to think and act	3.2	3.2	3.0
The amount of influence my parent(s) have over my actions	3.2	3.3	3.1
The amount of freedom my parent(s) give me to make my own choices	3.1	3.3	2.7**
The ways my parent(s) try to control my actions	2.8	2.8	2.6

We were also interested in the degree of conflict present in the families about adolescent issues. To assess this we asked adolescents to report on whether and how often they disagreed with their parents on any of 30 possible issues such as chores at home, how to spend free time, and money. If they reported a disagreement about a particular area, we also asked them to rate how intense the disagreement was.

With respect to whether or not such disagreements arose, our data suggest a considerable amount of disagreement, with an average of 19 reported sources of disagreement out of the 30 possible. Table 7c describes the most and least frequently reported areas of disagreement between adolescents and their parents and the average intensity or level of disagreement.

The majority of disagreements reported by a large percentage of adolescents focused on the more general adolescent issues of chores, school, friends, and family disharmony. Less important issues involved substance use, religious involvement, and work outside the home. Overall, however, it seems that a significant number of disagreements arose. With respect to intensity, however, overall the level of these disagreements was reported to be moderate, with even the most intense being around the midpoint of the 4 point scale ranging from “almost never” to “all the time”. Of the most intense, those involving autonomy (“how to spend free time” and “curfews”) were the highest. In addition, it seems that the level of intensity of the disagreement was unrelated to how often it was reported. Thus, issues reported by less than 50% of the adolescents were rated as intense as those reported by over 80% of the adolescents.

Table 7c: Problems with parents		
	% who reported this as a disagreement	Intensity of the disagreement ^a
Issues over which more than 80% of adolescents reported they disagree with their parents:		
Chores at home	89%	2.4
School grades/homework	85%	2.5
How spend free time	85%	2.7
Money	83%	2.0
Clothes and/or appearance	83%	2.3
Curfews	82%	2.6
Attitudes/respect	82%	2.5
Fighting with brothers/sisters	81%	2.5
Swearing talking back	80%	2.4
Issues over which less than 50% of adolescents reported they disagree with their parents:		
Church	46%	2.3
Outside jobs	45%	2.1
Moving out	43%	2.5
Alcohol	35%	2.6
Tobacco	35%	2.6
Trouble with the law	35%	2.3
Drugs	33%	2.6

Note: ^a Intensity is calculated only for those who reported it as a problem. Intensity is rated on a 4-point scale (1=almost never disagree or get upset over this, 4=all the time disagree or get upset).

SECTION 8: ACCULTURATIVE HASSLES

As in our work with Soviet adolescents, we asked about the kinds of acculturative hassles or minor problems Vietnamese youth experienced in their everyday lives related to being a refugee. To assess this for the Vietnamese, we first went over the acculturative hassles measure developed for Soviet adolescents to see whether or not the same kinds of hassles were relevant to this population. Our focus group on this measure suggested they were, and added an additional item. The final scale included 41 different potential hassles involving parents, peers, school, language, and discrimination in their everyday lives.

On average, adolescents reported 15 hassles that happened to them in the last month. The hassles endorsed most and least often by adolescents are presented in Table 8. With respect to the most frequently occurring hassles, parental pressure to do well in school headed the list, with over 80% reporting it. This was the same hassle reported most frequently by our Soviet adolescent sample as well. With one exception, all of the other hassles reported by over 50% of the sample involved parents, particularly around issues related to retaining Vietnamese identity and the culture broker role.

Hassles that most adolescents rarely experienced were more likely to involve teachers and peers, both Vietnamese and American. These included teachers or administrators treating them unfairly because they were Vietnamese, having to choose whether to socialize with an American or a Vietnamese group of friends, trying to get a date with a non-Vietnamese guy/girl, a parent of an American friend making them feel that they don't like them because they're Vietnamese, and a Vietnamese student putting them down or making fun of them because they were helping an American student.

We also asked them to rate the intensity of the hassles reported, and, in general, hassles were of moderate intensity (means ranging from = 2.1 to 3, on a 4-point scale where 1=not at all a hassle and 5=a very big hassle). As was the case with reported problems or disagreements with parents, the level of intensity of the hassle seemed unrelated to how frequently it was endorsed.

TABLE 8: Hassles		
Problem/Issue	% reported	Hassle intensity for those who experienced it as a hassle
Most frequently experienced hassles:		
Parents pressured to do well in school	82%	2.7
A teacher didn't pronounce their name correctly	71%	2.2
Parents didn't let them do something that an American friends parents' let them do	60%	2.8
Parents told to speak, read, or write in Vietnamese	59%	2.4
Inability to explain something to parents, because they don't understand American culture	54%	2.8
Having to translate for other family members: phone calls, mail, bills, TV	52%	2.1
Least frequently experienced hassles:		
A teacher treated you unfairly because you are Vietnamese	20%	2.7
Having to choose whether to socialize with an American or a Vietnamese group of friends	19%	2.8
Trying to get a date with a non-Vietnamese guy/girl	19%	2.0
Couldn't find something to do because you felt you didn't fit in with either Vietnamese or Americans	14%	2.7
A school administrator treated you unfairly because you are Vietnamese	12%	3.0
A parent of an American friend made you feel that they don't like you because you're Vietnamese	11%	2.7
A Vietnamese student put you down or made fun of you because you were helping an American student	9%	2.4

SECTION 9: SELF-ESTEEM

We assessed adolescents' psychological adjustment using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979), a widely used measure. The Rosenberg scale includes 10 items asking the respondent to rate him/herself in terms of positive feelings about oneself. Sample items include: "On the whole, I'm satisfied with myself," "I am able to do things as well as other people," "I feel that I have a number of good qualities."

Overall, adolescents have a relatively high level of self-esteem (see Table 9). The overall average was 2.9 on a 4 point scale where 4 represents high self-esteem. In addition, there are no differences in self-esteem between 1st and 2nd generation adolescents.

TABLE 9: Psychological Adjustment—Self-esteem			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean (1=low, 4=high)		
Self Esteem	2.9	2.9	2.9

SECTION 10:**CORRELATES AND PREDICTORS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT**

A major goal of the study was to examine how refugee adolescents are coping psychologically with being in a new country. As one aspect of this goal, we sought to understand what factors contributed to successful adjustment. We defined adjustment in terms of level of self-esteem, family satisfaction, and the degree of disagreement with parents about family issues. We then examined which factors were associated with these three indicators of adjustment

Table 10a shows the correlations of these three aspects of psychological adjustment with demographic and acculturation variables. Level of disagreement with parents is not related to any demographic or acculturation variables. Both self-esteem and family satisfaction are unrelated to age and gender. However, self-esteem is related to time in the US, age of arrival and overall American acculturation. The longer the adolescents have been in the US, the younger they were when they arrived, and the more acculturated they are to the American culture the higher their self-esteem. Conversely, family satisfaction is related to overall Vietnamese acculturation; the more acculturated the adolescents are to the Vietnamese culture, the more satisfied they are with their family.

	Time in the US	Age	Age of arrival	Gender (1=male, 2=female)	Overall American acculturation	Overall Vietnamese Acculturation
Self-esteem	.23*	-.09	-.27**	.03	.27**	.06
Family satisfaction	-.07	-.06	.03	-.12	-.05	.24**
Conflicts with parents	-.11	.09	.14	-.10	.10	.01

To assess the independent contributions of different factors to self-esteem, family satisfaction, and level of family disagreement about issues, we conducted regressions (see Table 10b). We entered demographic variables first (time in the US, age, gender), followed by overall Russian and American acculturation.

With respect to self-esteem, higher levels of both American acculturation and Vietnamese acculturation contributed, suggesting that it is useful for these adolescents to retain the identity of their culture of origin as well as acculturate to American culture. In addition, a trend was found suggesting that younger adolescents have greater self-esteem.

In regression analysis assessing significant predictors of family satisfaction and conflicts with parents we also included the culture broker variable, as adolescents indicated it being a hassle and we thought that it might contribute to family functioning.

With respect to family satisfaction, there is a trend only towards Vietnamese acculturation being a unique predictor of family satisfaction.

Conflicts with parents were predicted by age and American acculturation, such that the older and the more acculturated to the American culture adolescents were, the more conflicts they had with parents. There was a trend towards time in the US and culture brokering also playing a role in the degree of conflicts with parents; the less time adolescents were in the US and the more culture brokering they did, the more conflicts they experienced.

TABLE 10b: Predictors of Psychological Adjustment

Dependent Variable	R ²	Significant Predictors	β
Self-Esteem	.23***	Age	-.18 ⁺
		American Acculturation	.36***
		Vietnamese Acculturation	.25**
Family Satisfaction	.08	Vietnamese Acculturation	.19 ⁺
Conflicts with parents	.19**	Time in the US	-.20 ⁺
		Age	.31**
		American Acculturation	.29**
		Culture brokering	.19 ⁺

Overall, then, in terms of specific predictors of psychological adjustment, it seems that both Vietnamese and American acculturation are important in this process, but that they operate somewhat differently in different life spheres. Hence, both contribute positively to self-esteem, Vietnamese acculturation positively to family satisfaction, and American acculturation negatively to level of disagreement with parents.

SECTION 11: SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT AND EXPECTATIONS FOR SUCCESS

An additional focus with the adolescent population involved how they are doing at school. We approached this question in a variety of ways. We asked them about their grades, the degree of involvement they felt in the school (using a measure developed by Goodenow, 1993), and the amount of support they received from school staff such as teachers, guidance counselors, and the principal as well as their peers. In addition, we asked about adolescents' educational expectations and aspirations, and those of their parents for them. We also asked about how much time adolescents spend studying.

In terms of our three self-reported criteria for school adjustment, the overall sample is doing well (see Table 11a). Their average self-reported GPA was 3.41 and their involvement with school was quite high (3.7 on a 5 point scale where 5 = high involvement). In general then, adolescents are doing well academically and feel comfortable and invested in their schools. There are no generational differences in GPA or sense of school involvement.

Adolescents report a moderate level of support from school personnel (Mean = 3 on a 5-point scale) and from peers (Mean = 3.4 on a 5-point scale). First generation adolescents report more support from school personnel than 2nd generation adolescents. No differences in peer support were found.

TABLE 11a: School outcomes			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean		
GPA	3.4	3.4	3.4
Sense of School Involvement (1=low, 5=high)	3.7	3.7	3.7
Support from School Personnel (1=low, 5= high)	3.0	3.2	2.6**
Support from Peers (1=low, 5= high)	3.4	3.4	3.5

Expectations around educational achievement were assessed with an instrument developed by Fuligni (1997). It assesses adolescents' perception of the expectations their parents and they themselves have for educational achievement and the value their parents place on academic success. A sample expectations item is "My parents expect me to be one of the best students in the class". Values-related items ask adolescents to respond to such items as "Your parents would not be satisfied if you received a B+ on the test."

Table 11b summarizes the data on the three scales assessing parental and adolescent expectations. This table shows that adolescents perceive both themselves and their parents to have high expectations in terms of school success (4.2 and 4.4 respectively on a 5 point scale). In addition, they think that their parents want them to be the best child in class (3.7 on a 5 point scale), though not as strongly as the more general expectation for school success. Together, these data suggest very strong expectations for doing well in school both on the part of parents and on the part of the adolescents themselves. There were no generation differences in expectations.

TABLE 11b: School expectations			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Mean (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)		
Parents expect child to succeed in school	4.4	4.4	4.3
Parents expect child to be best child in class	3.7	3.6	3.8
Adolescent expects self to succeed in school	4.2	4.2	4.1

Table 11c describes parental and adolescent educational expectations in a more specific way: that is, how far they and their parents would like them to go in school and how far adolescents expect themselves to go in school. Again, the expectations are very high, with over half of both the parent and adolescent expectations involving post-college education in such fields as law, medicine, or graduate school more generally. Indeed, as seen by adolescents, only about 10% of both parents and adolescents hope for and expect less than a college degree.

Table 11c: Educational Aspirations			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
	Percentile or Mean		
How far <u>Parents</u> would like child to go in school			
1) Finish some high school	1%	0%	3%
2) Graduate from high school	3%	3%	0%
3) Graduate from a 2 year college	1%	2%	0%
4) Graduate from a 4 year college	36%	39%	30%
5) Graduate from a law, medical, or graduate school	59%	56%	67%
OVERALL MEAN	4.5	4.5	4.5
How far <u>Adolescents</u> would like to go in school:			
1) Finish some high school	0%	0%	0%
2) Graduate from high school	3%	3%	5%
3) Graduate from a 2 year college	2%	3%	0%
4) Graduate from a 4 year college	33%	37%	18%
5) Graduate from a law, medical, or graduate school	62%	57%	77%
OVERALL MEAN	4.5	4.5	4.7
How far <u>Adolescents</u> expect to go in school:			
1) Finish some high school	1%	1%	2.5%
2) Graduate from high school	3%	3%	2.5%
3) Graduate from a 2 year college	3%	3%	3%
4) Graduate from a 4 year college	48%	50%	41%
5) Graduate from a law, medical, or graduate school	45%	41%	51%
OVERALL MEAN	4.3	4.3	4.4

We also asked about how much time adolescents spend studying on a typical weekday, Saturday, and Sunday (Table 11d). They reported studying an average of 2.7 hours per night during the week and somewhat less on the weekend.

Table 11d: Study time			
	Whole sample	1st generation	2nd generation
Mean number of hours			
Time Spent Studying on a:			
Weekday	2.7	2.6	2.9
Saturday	1.3	1.2	1.5
Sunday	1.8	1.9	1.8
Total study time	2.0	1.9	2.1

SECTION 12. CORRELATES AND PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL OUTCOMES

As with other important life domains, we also looked for correlates of successful school performance and ran regressions to pinpoint what, specifically, contributed to school success.

Table 12a shows the correlations of GPA and sense of school involvement with a number of demographic variables, overall American and Vietnamese acculturation, social support from school staff and peers, parental and adolescents’ expectations for school success, and study time.

Time in the US, age of arrival and study time are unrelated to school outcomes. Younger adolescents in our sample have higher GPA. Females have higher GPA and a greater sense of school involvement. Overall American acculturation is related positively to both school outcome variables, while overall Vietnamese acculturation is related positively to school involvement, but not GPA. The greater the support from school personnel and peers, the greater the sense of school involvement. Both parents’ and adolescents’ expectations are related to GPA and school involvement. Thus, the higher the expectations, the higher both the GPA and school involvement.

TABLE 12a: School Adjustment – Correlations		
	GPA	Sense of school involvement
Time in the US	-.06	.07
Age	-.26**	-.08
Age of arrival	-.03	-.07

Gender (1=male, 2=female)	.26**	.28***
Overall American acculturation	.26**	.36***
Overall Vietnamese Acculturation	.02	.18*
Support from School Personnel	.17 ⁺	.20*
Support from Peers	.14	.44***
Parents expect child to succeed in school	.21*	.29***
Adolescent expects self to succeed in school	.43***	.32***
Total Study time	.04	.06

To ascertain what factors contribute uniquely to school outcomes, two regressions were run, one predicting school involvement and the other predicting overall GPA (see Table 12b). The regressions included demographic variables (gender, age, time in the US), overall acculturation levels, expectations for success, and support from school personnel.

Sense of School Belonging was predicted by gender, with female adolescents having a greater sense. In addition, the greater the degree of both American and Vietnamese overall acculturation, the greater the sense of school belonging. With respect to self-report GPA, however, only adolescent expectations of school success contributed.

Dependent Variable	R²	Significant Predictors	β
Sense of school belonging	.29***	Gender	.24*
		American Acculturation	.26*
		Vietnamese Acculturation	.21*
GPA	.24*	Adolescent expects self to succeed in school	.56***

CONCLUSIONS

This report has provided an overview of the lives of Vietnamese refugee adolescents across various domains, such as school, family, and social life. Like adolescent refugees from the former Soviet Union, Vietnamese adolescent refugees in our sample seem to be adapting relatively well to life in the United States. Their sense of psychological well-being and school achievement in particular suggest that they are coping well in important life spheres. In addition, they are successfully integrating socially into American culture in terms not only of acculturation patterns, but also in terms of the friendships made with other American adolescents. However, adolescents also value their Vietnamese culture. This is evidenced by their high degree of Vietnamese identity and desire for its retention as adults, as well as by a consistent continuity of friendships with Asian and, specifically, Vietnamese peers across generations.

As with Soviet refugees, academic success is clearly an important goal both on the part of parents and on the part of the adolescents themselves. While adolescents feel considerable pressure from their parents to succeed in school, they find only moderate levels of help and support from their parents in this domain, probably because their parents are not very familiar with the American school system. Thus, adolescents have to motivate themselves to succeed and the higher their expectations of self the better they do in school.

Since in general, adolescent immigrants tend to adapt the values, beliefs, and behaviors of a new society at a faster rate than do their parents, we were not surprised to find that the adolescents reported the majority of acculturative hassles to be with their parents around the issues related to retaining Vietnamese identity and the culture broker role. One striking example of the changes that accompany transition to a new culture is the differences in the degree of autonomy that adolescents desire. Specifically, compared with first generation adolescents, 2nd generation Vietnamese adolescents in our sample thought they should be allowed to make many kinds of decisions at an earlier age and also be responsible for many tasks at an earlier age than first generation adolescents. Thus, while immigrant parents of both 1st and 2nd generation adolescents function in a similar manner, as evidenced by lack of differences in family cohesion and adaptability, adolescents who were born here are less satisfied with their family life than 1st generation adolescents. Overall, however, both adolescents who were born here and those who came to this country with their parents have adapted well across various life domains.

REFERENCES

- Birman, D. (1994). Acculturation and human diversity in a multicultural society. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, & D. Birman (Eds.), *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (pp. 261-284). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Birman, D., & Tyler, F. B. (1994). Acculturation and alienation of Soviet Jewish refugees in the United States. *Generic Social and Psychological Monographs, 120*, 101-115.
- Birman, D., & Zea, M. C. (1996). *The development of a multidimensional acculturation scale for Latino adolescents*. Unpublished manuscript. Washington, DC: George Washington University.
- Buchanan, R. M (2000). *The acculturation gap hypothesis: Implications for the family adjustment of Russian immigrants*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.
- Carver, M. D., & Jones, W. H. (1992). The Family Satisfaction Scale. *Social Behavior and Personality, 20*, 71-84.
- Feldman, S., & Quatman, T. (1988) Factors influencing age expectations for adolescent autonomy: A study of early adolescents and parents. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 8*(4), 325-343.
- Fuligni, A. (1997). The academic achievement of adolescents from immigrant families: The role of family background, attitudes, and behavior. *Child Development, 68*, 351-363.
- Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*, 79-90.
- Phinney, J. S., & Devich-Navarro, M. (1997) Variations in bicultural identification among African American and Mexican American adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 7*(1), 3-32.

Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the Self*. New York: Basic Books.

Szapocznik, J., Scopetta, M. A., Kurtines, W., & Aranalde, M. D. (1978). Theory and measurement of acculturation. *Revista Interamericana de Psicologi*, 12(2), 113-130.