

ACTIVATING AGENCY, CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES: BURMESE REFUGEE
YOUTH NARRATIVES OF LIFE AND EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate how refugee youth from Burma construct their identities while navigating the United States education system and society, through the methods of narrative analysis. To this end, this study focused on identity-making and the learning experiences of Burmese refugee youth, and included research questions such as: “How do refugee youth from Burma narrate their lives, experiences and identities living in the United States?” and “What sources of capital/knowledge do these students describe having?” The data used in this study were interviews conducted as part of a larger longitudinal research project, *Community Voices: Stories of Family, Culture and Education*, investigated by Sofia Villenas, Cornell University. This larger study explores how a community makes sense of racial inequity and social justice within their school district.

Participants for this thesis included four Burmese youth (three female, one male) from two different ethnic groups, three from the Burman ethnic majority, and one from the Karen ethnic minority group; they ranged in ages 15 to 19. These youths discussed diverse “refugee” experiences, which were reflected in the way they self-identified. Their narratives described the acceptance, rejection, and construction of multiple identities as a result of their lived-experiences. As they shared their stories, these youths illustrated numerous cultural and experiential resources that were drawn upon in order to facilitate the process of activating agency. Although each narrative was unique, this analysis attempts to add to our knowledge of the experiences of refugee youth in U.S. schools and communities. Their voices push us to question further what it means to be a “refugee,” or to be “American,” and how we can better incorporate their knowledges and perspectives in the classroom.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alison Remillard majored in Psychology, with minor concentrations in Anthropology and Sociology at Saint Michael's College, where she received her B.A. in 2004. Following her undergraduate degree, Alison worked as a research assistant at the University of Vermont's College of Medicine, in the Department of Psychiatry. During this time she pursued graduate coursework in the area of ethnic studies at the University of Vermont. Alison began graduate school at Cornell University and earned a M.S. in Education in 2012. She currently is a Ph.D. candidate in Learning, Teaching and Social Policy at Cornell University with minor concentrations in Anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since 1975, the United States has resettled more than 2 million refugees (McBrien, 2005). Refugees from Burma (Myanmar)¹ have remained the second largest incoming refugee group to the United States since 2008, when they were the largest (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [USDHS], Annual Flow Report, 2011). Between the years 2000-2011, nearly 80 thousand individuals from Burma have been resettled to the U.S. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2012). Furthermore, 35 percent of all refugees entering the U.S. in 2010 alone were children under the age of 18 (USDHS, Yearbook for immigration statistics, 2011). Consequently, the U.S. education system must be prepared to provide an equitable learning environment that can support the needs of refugee students, and in particular refugee youths from Burma.

Accordingly, equity in education is a major concern for educators, administrators, teacher educators, parents, and students. The term equity has become ubiquitous in education, yet simultaneously produces ambiguity and confusion surrounding its use. For instance, equity has multiple meanings, depending on the context, and has come to represent a variety of causes, often discussed in terms of race, gender, or class. Theorists within the field of education have proposed methods for attaining equity, including the incorporation of multicultural perspectives into curriculum (Banks & McGee Banks,

¹Despite continued political and national contestation over the appropriate use of either the name Burma, with its colonial, as well as pro-democracy associations, or the formal name Myanmar (*myanma*), with its pro-military government associations, as well as ethnic minority preference (Bünthe, 2009), the name Burma has widely been used in academic literature. Therefore, to maintain consistency, I will use the name Burma. Additionally, all the participants included in this study self-identified as originating from “Burma.” The choice to self-identify as coming from Burma as opposed to Myanmar is in and of itself interesting to consider. Perhaps, this serves as an example of how refugees from Burma/Myanmar adapt to the U.S. context where the name “Myanmar” is uncommon and less easily understood (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012).

2001; Neito, 2004), creating inclusive spaces of learning (Olsen, 1997) that focus on the wealth of knowledge students bring into the classroom (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) and ignore deficit approaches to education (Yosso, 2005), as well as building reciprocal, caring relationships among students and with teachers (Todd, 2003).

The reality for refugee and immigrant students, however, is complicated. For example, theorists in the field of multicultural education are divided on approaches for engaging policy makers and educators to include multiple perspectives in their pedagogy and curriculum. Pluralists, such as Ravitch (1990) and Schlesinger (1998), seek an Amerocentric approach to education that focuses on *E Pluribus Unum* (from many, one); a concept Olsen (1997) argues needs contemporary updating. They feel the strength of America comes from a focus on unity rather than a focus on diversity. On the other hand, particularists, such as Bernal (1987) view this framework as an assimilationist approach and argue that students learn best when they focus on their own ethnic histories. Additional researchers, such as Olsen (1997), have documented the drawbacks of an Amerocentric approach to education, citing how policies emphasizing English-only learning, for example, along with those that serve to devalue and further marginalize racial and ethnic minority students, cause more harm than good.

Additionally, refugee students from Burma in particular, confront a historical context outlined with racism and the manipulation of Asian Americans against their African American counterparts. This racial triangulation (Kim, 1999) has led to the view of Asian Americans as the “model minority,” while more recent stereotypes have categorized Southeast Asian youth, Hmong, Cambodian, and Lao refugees in particular, as “blackened,” “delinquent,” and “bad” (Lee, 2001; Ngo, 2010; Wallitt, 2008). In the

classroom, students from diverse backgrounds are faced with exclusive pedagogy and educational policies despite notions of equality and meritocracy embedded in discourses of the “American dream” (McGinnis, 2009).

With this in mind, the present study is concerned with how refugee youth from Burma construct their identities while navigating the U.S. education system and society. Accordingly, the research questions guiding this study include:

Identity/Experience Focused Questions

1. How do refugee youth from Burma narrate their lives, experiences and identities living in the United States?
 - a. How do refugee youth from Burma identify “self” and how was this constructed throughout the interview process?
 - b. How did these participants describe/understand this “self” or “selves?”

School-Based Questions

2. What are the experiences of school like for refugee youth from Burma?
3. How do they describe experiences of inclusion and exclusion?
4. What sources of capital/knowledge do these students describe having?
 - a. Where does this come from? How do they describe this?

By asking the above questions, the goal was to learn how refugee youth from Burma make sense of their transnational experiences, the ways they engage with their multiple, intersecting, and at times conflicting, worlds, and how they navigate this process. In particular, I was interested in the identities they construct as a result of their experiences, the identities they reject, and the context that surrounds this process of identity construction. Throughout their descriptions of identity acceptance, rejection, and creation, I was interested in what cultural and experiential resources these youths from Burma drew upon to facilitate the process of activating agency. The above questions and goals are approached in this thesis through the narratives of refugee youth from Burma, and the method of narrative analysis in particular.

Because refugees from Burma are a relatively new group in the United States, literature is limited in this area. Therefore, I drew from academic literature focusing on the experiences of immigrant and refugee students, paying particular attention to research engaged with Southeast Asian refugees in order to better comprehend and situate the narratives of the Burmese youth interviewed. Although I used research working with diverse populations to help inform my understanding of refugee youth from Burma now living in the United States, I also relied on literature within the areas of Burmese history, culture, and ethnic identity in order to better highlight their unique voices and positionalities. Accordingly, research that focuses on the particular experiences of refugees from Burma, an emerging voice in the U.S. landscape, would add to current literature spanning fields of education, refugee studies, Southeast Asian studies, Asian and Asian American studies.

Theoretical Framework

Through the process of resettlement to a new country, refugee youth occupy multiple terrains. Traditionally, this narrative includes fleeing the home country, living in the country of asylum, often discussed in terms of the refugee camp, and resettling to a new country. This transnational experience exposes refugee youth to multiple cultures and introduces them to different ontological perspectives. From these experiences, refugee youth become proficient in the practices of inequality and knowledgeable about the power structures that guide their daily lives. Consequently, refugee youth accumulate and activate learned cultural resources as they make identity choices.

Accordingly, identity becomes an integral way that youth interact with and make sense of their surrounding worlds (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). For the refugee youth included in this study, identity construction was considerably marked by their school experiences in the U.S. in addition to their transnational experiences. In narrating their identities-in-action, refugee youth make agentic choices as a way of mediating competing cultures in order to gain control over their lives (Holland et al., 1998). Therefore, the founding theoretical frames guiding this research are based in identity and agency.

Identity. In focusing on how refugee youth from Burma navigate their lives in the United States, the construction of identity is central to their narratives. Although identity has been recognized differently across various fields of study, for this thesis, identity will be understood as a multidimensional, multiplicitous, and a fluid construct that is contextually and historically based. Furthermore, the concepts of individual and self are distinguished as two distinct discourses. Individual refers to the autonomous being, while the self is that entity, or entities, which makes up the individual; the self houses the multiple identities distinct to each individual, constructed through history, environment, and context.

Drawing from the dialogical work of Bakhtin, and the developmental work of Vygotsky, Holland et al. (1998) situate identity socially, in terms of the “worlds” individuals occupy and the social interactions that take place. “Figured worlds” encompass the historical and constantly evolving contexts that we enter, the “social encounters” that are marked by social position, are “socially organized,” socially dependent, and are re-created “by work with others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 41).

Identities, then, are “important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). Because of their focus on the way identities are constructed and transformed in conjunction with the cultural and structural (i.e., gender, class, race, ethnicity, etc.) worlds in which they are a part (i.e., “white woman” in one world, and “wife” or “daughter” in another), Holland et al.’s (1998) concept of identity is “situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed ‘worlds’” (p. 7). This perspective is particularly important when considering the multiple, intersecting and complex “worlds” refugee youth from Burma occupy and navigate daily (i.e., “refugee,” “ESL student,” “Karen friend,” “Buddhist brother,” etc.)².

Using a Foucauldian concept of discourse, which will be discussed in detail below, Holland et al. (1998) frame their theory of identity within a social constructivist paradigm. From this framework, “Selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 26). Accordingly, the construction of identity shifts as a person moves in and out of discourses, a perspective that challenges static and essentialized versions of the self. Holland et al., (1998) assert that a social constructivist perspective maintains the influence of discursive power structures, yet allows for acts of agentic resistance.

Viewing the self as socially embedded in multiple, and sometimes competing discourses, a concept Holland et al., (1998) refer to as “sites of the self” (p. 29), allows for the construction of plural selves. When “sites of the self” are situated within cultural

² Some of these auxiliary identities, such as “Buddhist brother” for example, may represent points of cultural intersection; where Burmese conceptualizations of self and interpersonal behavior are met with American discourses that counter these original ideologies. In practice, the performance of “Buddhist brother” may transform into something completely unique through the transnational and global experience (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012).

constructs, it is easy for an extreme view to essentialize the resulting identities as bounded and unchanging (Holland et al., 1998). By finding a balance between the cultural and the socially constructed self, Holland et al. (1998) propose that “subjectivities” are constructed through a process called “self-in-practice, or to use a label inspired by Bakhtin, the authoring self” (p. 32). Furthermore, they state:

This self-in-practice occupies the interface between intimate discourses, inner-speaking, and bodily practices formed in the past and the discourses and practices to which people are exposed, willingly or not, in the present. (Holland et al., 1998, p. 32)

Following a Bakhtinian-sociohistorical perspective, Holland et al. (1998) view this self-identification process in terms of “codevelopment;” that identities are constructed through the navigation of cultural and historically specific worlds, where social positions are classified and ascribed, associated with and resisted (i.e., “refugee” status, “model minority,” etc.).

Theorists such as Homi Bhabha, describe the construction of the self similarly, but however, in terms of subjectification and colonialism; a perspective particularly important for understanding refugees leaving an historical context shaped by its colonial past and entering into a new country with its own history of racial subjectification. The subject, according to Bhabha (1994), is constantly remaking the self in the face of stereotype, or scripted texts and it is through the process of ambivalence that stereotype gains its power. Further, as Bhabha (1994) alludes, and echoed by additional postcolonial theorists such as Spivak, it is through the constant encounter with “other,” or difference, that one constitutes their identity. This is exemplified in Spivak’s “...claim that such fundamentally contradictory and different opponents as colonisers and colonized are seen as mutually defining each other’s basic identities” (Gingrich, 2006, p.

11). However, Bhaba (1994) states that the subject of colonization, both in terms of the colonizer and colonized, is denied “that form of negation which gives access to the recognition of difference” (p. 75). The “recognition of difference,” therefore, would be a liberating process (Bhaba, 1994).

Along these lines, Gingrich (2006) argues for the concurrent existence of belonging and difference within the conceptualization of identity, citing previous anthropological theory that endorsed a definition of identity that incorporated the simultaneity of similitude, “...belonging to a group...,” *and* “difference,” either in terms of individuals or groups (Gingrich, 2006, p. 6); a particularly useful concept when considering refugee groups living in the United States (i.e., being “Burmese,” “Karen,” *and* “American,” for instance). The understanding of identity from this perspective occurs as an alternation between self-ascription and the perception of self, in terms of others.

Pushing the anthropological movement away from the identity/alterity (difference) dichotomy, Gingrich (2006) challenges static constructions of identity by demarcating it as something much more complex,

these identities are multidimensional and contradictory, and they include power-related, dialogical ascriptions by selves and by others which are processually configured, enacted and transformed by cognition, language, imagination, emotion, body and (additional forms of) agency” (Gingrich, 2006, p. 6).

Here, Gingrich (2006) is not only adding depth and richness to the understanding of identity, he is also complicating this understanding through the added element of agency.

Through the addition of agency to the conceptual understanding of identity, Gingrich (2006), as well as Holland et al. (1998), challenge structuralist notions that fail to acknowledge agentic existence. This incorporation of an agentic perspective speaks to

deterministic and overly simplistic theories of identity, such as those that maintain false dichotomies and place identity within the confines of a bounded structure.

Agency. As outlined, identities are socially constructed in response to the “figured worlds” they occupy (Holland et al., 1998). These “figured worlds” are the product of historical context, discursive practices, and hegemonic influences. However, the refugee youth included in this study share narratives of resistance as they enact their agentic selves. For this thesis, agency is conceptualized in terms of resistance via U.S. third world feminism, and by acts of improvisation (Holland, et al., 1998) through the use of vast experiential and cultural resources, including “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005) and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

Holland et al. (1998) speak to the importance of improvisation as a way to “reform subjectivity” in terms of power and positionality. They state:

Improvisations are the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as *habitus*, meets with particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response. Such improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation. (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 17-18)

For Holland et al. (1998), improvisations are the creative and resourceful ways people respond to cultural constraints (i.e., caste, mental disorders, etc.) to which they are bound. Through the use of case studies, Holland et al. (1998) observed powerful examples of how people used “resources opportunistically, as a...*bricoleur* would” (p. 276). In these examples, the act of improvisation provided the opportunity for the construction of new identities.

The Burmese refugee youth who participated in this study narrated the multiple ways in which they activated their agency via their numerous cultural and experiential

resources. Agency was enacted by these youths across multiple contexts and competing cultural worlds. Because this research was focused on the navigation of U.S. schools and society, instances of agentic expression were most pronounced within the home and at school. Accordingly, the work of Yosso (2005) and Gonzalez et al. (2005) provide theoretical insight into cultural resources that students of color have access to.

Yosso (2005), in particular, challenges theories that maintain deficit approaches to education by focusing on the abundance of knowledge and cultural wealth that students of color accumulate in their homes and communities; a perspective that often goes unnoticed within the classroom and unacknowledged by traditional theories of cultural capital. Deficit approaches in education have traditionally held students of color, and their families responsible for poor academic performance, believing that these students “lack” the appropriate (white) cultural knowledge and have parents who don’t care about education (Yosso, 2005). By using critical race theory (CRT), Yosso (2005) rearticulates the perspective of “communities of color” as “lacking” and at a “disadvantage.” Rather, she proposes that the vast array of cultural capital possessed by communities of color be bolstered, supported, and encouraged within the school context. Yosso’s (2005) focus on community cultural wealth is a critique of Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory, which equates the knowledge held by the upper and middle classes with a form of “capital” that can only be gained hereditarily or through schooling. The idea that the “disadvantaged” “lack” the capital necessary to advance in society has permeated the education system, resulting in the deficit approaches described above. Yosso’s (2005) research therefore, transforms the ways we think about students of color, their families and communities, by acknowledging what they have to share in their school

environments rather than what they lack. Specifically, Yosso (2005) lists six forms of cultural wealth possessed by communities of color, which include: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant. These forms of community cultural capital have developed from, and are used to resist oppression and Yosso (2005) urges the reconstruction of U.S. social institutions, such as schools, to reflect these knowledges.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) discuss a similar concept, which they describe as “funds of knowledge.” Funds of knowledge consist of those skills and knowledges gained from life experiences obtained in the home or in the community. Gonzalez et al.’s (2005) “funds of knowledge” challenges conceptions of children as passive agents in their homes and communities, which often gets translated into the classroom. Through their research, Gonzalez et al. (2005), describe instead, how children are active participants in their households, sometimes to the point where their role is integral to family functioning, such as economic production. Gonzalez et al. (2005) seek to eradicate this disconnect between home knowledge and school failure by developing ways in which teachers can use “funds of knowledge” to inform their pedagogy and classroom practices.

An additional and powerful approach in conceptualizing how refugee youth activate and enact agentic selves is through the lens of U.S. third world feminism. Agency, from this perspective, is a conscientious method of resistance born through the experiences unique to those historically excluded because of gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion (see Sandoval, 2000). For instance, Lorde (1979) states, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” meaning that the “master’s tools” might appear to deconstruct the “master’s house,” or dominant ideology, but it is

only a temporary, inauthentic change. If emancipation is the goal, unique forms of resistance are necessary. For example, Sandoval (2000) offers methods of resisting the master with the use of new tools. The use of “antilanguages,” Sandoval (2000) states, is a way to “counter the effects of dominant forms-as-ideology” p. 108). Borrowing from Barthes, “antilanguages” can include silence as a form of resistance, a way to disengage from ideology completely, and the use of poetry to blur ideology to the point of “its natural...meaning” (Sandoval, 2000, p. 109)³.

Structure and Context. It is difficult to discuss refugee youths’ identity and agency without considering the context of the transnational worlds they navigate and the ideological structures that attempt to categorize and label them. Further, because this thesis is situated within the intersecting historical contexts that refugee youth maneuver (i.e., home country, country of asylum, country of resettlement, etc.), employing a Foucauldian theoretical technique steeped in historicity, seeking questions of power, knowledge, and discourse (Foucault, 1965; 1970; 1972; 1995), is important. The meaning of discourse, for the purpose of this study, is a practice or essence that has come to be an accepted and established epistemological and/or ontological stance; whereas epistemology refers to ways of knowing and ontology refers to ways of being. With this in mind, “subjects are formed in discourse, or power-knowledge configurations in the form of systems of ideas and practices” (Hall, 2002, p. 11). Foucault (1972) locates

³ It is important to keep in mind the role of power and language that is a part of everyday experiences for people like refugees and immigrants. Languages, in general, have their own histories associated with various forms of power such as English, Spanish and Chinese for example, which are tied to their imperial/colonial past (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012). In particular, refugees resettled to the United States usually speak a language other than English, and are faced with situations where languages are unequal, adding a layer of complexity to theories of resistance, such as the use of “antilanguages.” A further discussion on language is included in the literature review.

discourses as the production and formation of “objects,” rather than the objects themselves.

This conceptualization of discourse runs tandem with Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, which claims that the ideologies of the powerful majority, the hegemony, insert ideology to the populace, thus producing a “commonsensical” notion in a way that it is neither countered nor questioned. Omi and Winant (1994) discuss Gramsci’s theory of hegemony in terms of “coercion and consent” (p. 67). The powerful majority can rule with force, however this can always be resisted, accordingly, hegemony cannot be achieved without consent. In order for consent to be attained, mere agreement, or “legitimation of authority” is not enough (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 67). It is through the popularization of ideology in everyday social arenas and institutions, such as “education, the media, religion, folk wisdom, etc.” (Omi and Winant, 1994, p. 67), that “common sense” occurs. Further, “it is through its production and its adherence to this ‘common sense,’ this ideology (in the broadest sense of the term), that a society gives its consent to the way in which it is ruled” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 67).

Although the perspectives of Foucault and poststructuralists can be interpreted as causal and deterministic, that “decisions made today” are a direct result of choices that have been made in the past, the purpose of their inclusion in theoretically framing this study is to emphasize the impact history has in shaping *how* some decisions are made over other possibilities, how historical events have both allowed for, and limited certain opportunities, and to further illustrate the need for a contextualized historical grounding. As Chapter 3 will illustrate, in discussing Burmese history and the history of U.S. immigration and refugee policy, the interconnection between identity and history are

inseparable; humans do not enter the world in an ahistorical milieu, but rather enter into a very specific socio-politico-historical context.

When adding the historical contexts of the country being left behind and the new country of resettlement, the consideration of identity and agency grows increasingly complex. Theorists such as Scott (2009), propose an agentic perspective and interpretation of identity construction, and its use, in resisting the subjugation of dominant powers. For example, Scott (2009) argues that living in the context of statelessness is an intentional, agentic choice made by hill peoples in Southeast Asia. With this in mind, how do groups who have a history of living “state-less,” as Scott (2009) describes, adapt to living in a nation, such as the United States, that is characterized by a pronounced national identity, as well as a history of enacting policies to maintain a unified “American” identity among its citizens?

From this perspective, the construction of a nationalist identity leads to the propensity for “outsider/insider,” “us/them,” exclusionary binary perspectives when faced with immigration from outside groups. Further, the phenomenon of individuals identifying with, and joining in support of a nation, is described by Anderson (1991) as an imagined political community:

...it is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings. (p. 7)

With this in mind, it is in the best interest of the governing political body to promote a deep sentimental attachment between a nation and its citizens. Nativism is a prominent

theme in Chapter 3 discussing Burmese history and the history of U.S. immigration/refugee policy.

Literature Review

Because this thesis is concerned with how refugee youth from Burma construct their identities while navigating U.S. schools and society, an examination of literature on immigrant and refugee youth in U.S. schools, paying particular attention to the experiences of Southeast Asian refugee youth, was conducted. Within this body of literature, however, the particular experiences of refugee youth from Burma are severely lacking. While this may be a consequence of their more recent presence in the U.S. landscape, the incorporation of Burmese youth voices into these areas of research is paramount. Accordingly, this thesis builds on current literature by focusing on the unique experiences of refugee students from Burma, moving away from essentialized and dichotomous perspectives of Asian academic experiences (i.e., “model minority” versus “delinquent,” traditional versus modern) (Lee, 2001; Ngo, 2010) and metanarratives of “the refugee experience.”

Situating immigrant and refugee youth experiences in the context of the U.S. public school system, Hall (2002), whose ethnographic study of Sikh youth based in Britain states, “In the public sphere of democratic nations, education, as we have seen, is a critical site for imagining national futures and creating ideal citizens” (p. 87). From the perspective that schools are the sites of knowledge production, a place where specific cultures are learned and reproduced over others, is one reason to situate this study within the school context. Another reason, as indicated by Olsen (1997), is because schools are

one of the few public arenas in the U.S. where people from diverse backgrounds are required to come together and therefore issues of diversity, culture, and power are more pronounced.

Olsen (1997), whose research focuses on immigrant students in California, interrogates the culture of schools as they are situated within an ideological project that perpetuates a national identity of exclusion. She correlates the culture of schools to the past history of immigration and describes the current situation as “the new Americanization project in our public schools” (p. 9). This Americanization process, according to Olsen (1997), is composed of three vital components that immigrant students go through including academic segregation and marginalization, the requirement to leave one’s native language behind and speak English only, and to assume their appropriate role within the U.S. racial hierarchy, which is typically at the bottom. In addition, Hall (2002) outlines two distinct discourses students find themselves navigating daily, the transparent pedagogical and curricular approaches, as well as the commonly referenced “hidden curriculum.” Countering these trends in education, Olson (1997) advocates for the full embrace of the multiplicitous cultural identities of immigrants through inclusive policies, an area highly contested in U.S. politics and education policies.

Literature that has emerged on Southeast Asian refugees in particular has considered the multiple roles navigated both by youth and parents within the school context (Blakely, 1983; Lee, 2001; McGinnis, 2009; McKay & Wong, 1996; Ngo, 2010; Wallitt, 2008). These emerging characteristics offer a more nuanced perspective of refugee experiences, demand that discourse moves away from essentialized notions of

culture, confront universalizing narratives of ethnicity, and counter an acceptance of the assimilation/marginalization binary. Combining the experiences of refugee youth with new movements in multicultural education, in particular, can provide a multiplicitous understanding of diverse student experiences.

The U.S. school context and refugee/immigrant experiences. This section reviews the impact U.S. school culture has on immigrant and refugee students, while highlighting the identities that are maintained, constructed and ignored as a result of these experiences. Research such as the aforementioned Hall's (2002) ethnography focusing on the experiences of Sikh youth as British citizens, highlights the contradicting messages minorities receive; legally protected as citizens, yet categorized as subordinate and different, included *and* excluded. Hall (2002) argues that these experiences culminate in the educational arena where Sikh students have been labeled racially, ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically "different;" the battle for educational equity is an ongoing challenge for these students and their families. Through this work, Hall's (2002) goal is to "demonstrate that the story of immigration is intimately tied to the story of nation formation" (p. 2), while challenging pre-existing narratives of immigration. Hall (2002) equates the process of immigration to citizen, a process she terms "translation," to Lisa Lowe's (1996) "immigrant acts," which are the result of "...both being 'acted upon' by discourses that produce identities and 'acting' or performing—and therein producing—forms of self-identification" (p. 6).

Immigrant and refugee youth identity construction. Cultural psychologists, such as Mahalingam (2006), argue that immigrants seek to enhance their historical pasts in order to compensate for their marginalized status. Mahalingam (2006) states that, "Like

other marginalized groups, immigrants seek a positive cultural identity by locating their roots in a mythical past and claiming a legacy as inheritors of a “richer” civilization” (p. 3). Mahalingam (2006) questions the creation of false or “imagined” identities, which he further translates into “imagined communities,” thus interrogating the individual psyche and the consequences surrounding the presentation of an idealized self, rather than evaluating the structures of power and the systems that keep immigrants marginalized. Research such as Mahalingam’s (2006) fails to situate immigrant narratives in terms of a larger structure of oppression, and his argument focuses on pathologizing the effects of an idealized cultural narrative on the construction of the individual identity.

Luttrell (2003), on the other hand, describes the emotional trauma that occurs when students are pathologized, stigmatized, and viewed as a problem for being “different.” Citing educational researcher Richard Elmore, Luttrell (2003) makes the point that U.S. high schools “are probably either a close third or tied for second as the most pathological social institutions in our society after public health hospitals and prisons” (p. 172). Luttrell (2003) argues that the structure of pathology in the U.S. education system is a result of dichotomous epistemologies and pedagogies that pits objectivity and rationality against “emotional participation and artful engagement” (p. 172). This tension is most pronounced in state required standardized testing that only measures student performances through “objective,” “evidence-based” testing, ignoring a multitude of epistemologies (Luttrell, 2003). Through tracking and labeling students as “high achievers,” “at risk,” or “special needs” for example, based on their scores on such standardized testing, a “normative” group is created that other students are compared to. Further, Luttrell (2003) asserts that these discursive labels influence teachers’

expectations of students, especially “problem” students. Olsen (1997) adds how these labels impact peer relations and student identity. In particular she describes how the “ESL” (English as a Second Language) label centers those fluent in English language and is used in comparison to the commonly referred to “regular,” or “normal” classes. Within Olsen’s (1997) study, this label further resulted in ESL students’ feelings of exclusion and being perceived as non-American.

From this perspective, predominant themes in literature focusing on the educational experiences and identity construction of immigrant and refugee youth include: language, adolescence, discourses of power, gender, and false binary choices, such as “assimilation versus marginalization.” Highlighting these themes provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intersecting positionalities immigrant and refugee youth navigate during their school experiences.

Language. Many factors need to be considered when discussing refugee youth entering into the U.S. school context. One of the most pertinent is language. Hall (2002) discusses language in terms of political rights, as an object to be owned and fought over. Citing Chomsky, Hall (2002) argues that “questions of language are basically questions of power” (p. 71); that the construction of a national identity cannot be conceived without language at its center. In terms of inclusion and exclusion, Hall (2002) takes an historical perspective toward language and reminds us of the power structures that privilege and promote the languages of certain groups over others, particularly in terms of the existence of linguistic minorities within multilingual nations. Hall (2002) discusses a similar concept with bilingual students and explains how they construct identities, cultures, and language that is hybridized, distinctively their own, and contradicts these discourses as

they are assigned to them through educational language policies. Because the use of minority languages by these students are associated with a certain social capital depending on context and social relations, language is therefore “asserted, contested, and negotiated for different purposes and to distinctive ends” (Hall, 2002, p. 75).

Considering educational language policy through this complex lens, helps elucidate how the relationship between language policy and identity construction moves beyond the scope of schools and is essential to larger issues pertaining to equity and social justice.

Olsen (1997) gives a clear and comprehensive description of educational language policy in the U.S. and its impact on immigrant students in her California-based study. Students who lack English proficiency are labeled, “limited English proficient” (LEP), or more commonly, “ESL.” Olsen (1997) points out the dangers of essentializing LEP or ESL students, and speaks to the diversity and range of experiences students have with both English language and academic experience prior to arriving to the United States. On one hand are students, usually from urban, middle-class backgrounds that come to the U.S. with exceptional academic experience. However, Olsen (1997) cautions that these students may still experience difficulty transitioning to the U.S. school system in terms of pedagogical techniques, curriculum content, and school culture. Likewise, there are students who may have proficiency or fluency in speaking English, but struggle with reading and writing. These students are often placed in ESL classes and despite gaining fluency many are kept in remedial classes (Olsen, 1997). Olsen (1997) further notes how these students were labeled “ESL lifers” by the teaching staff in her study.

On the other hand, many students enter into the U.S. with little to no previous academic experience or literacy in their native language, let alone English (Olsen, 1997).

These students tend to be from rural or low economic backgrounds, or are refugees fleeing persecution. Olsen (1997) reports that although the most effective way to address the academic needs of these students is to promote “basic literacy in an accelerated fashion” (p. 153), most schools are unequipped to handle the demands of appropriate curriculum, pedagogy, and teachers skilled and experienced with this population.

More specifically, most Southeast Asian refugees come from refugee camps located in places such as Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, resulting in the language acquisition of not only their ethnic group, but of the dominant language spoken in the refugee camps as well, including, Thai, French, Chinese, or some combination of these with their original language. In these cases, researchers have reported that being an English as a second (sometimes third or fourth) language learner not only impacts education and academic achievement, but the impact on identity and sense of agency is particularly salient. For example, McKay and Wong (1996) state that

...the unevenly distributed right to speak...that is built into most communicative situations is felt especially acutely by these students, who lack proficiency in the dominant language and thus must simultaneously acquire it and negotiate their identities in light of new social complexities. (p. 578)

Although, this perspective may fall short in critiquing current structural determinants accounting for the uneven distribution of power within the classroom that places the refugee or immigrant student at the bottom of the hierarchy due to linguistic incongruence, the experience of students in these circumstances is complex and sometimes painful.

Olsen (1997) also refers to silencing of ESL students, both by teachers and with peers. The immigrant students she interviewed speak of the pain associated with not

being understood in their native language, or leaving it behind, while not being able to communicate in English. One quote she shares from a Mexican immigrant girl is particularly poignant:

I sometimes don't have Spanish words anymore for the feelings I have here, and I don't yet have English words for them either. Or I can't find the English words that explain what I know and have felt in my Mexican life. The words don't work for me. I have become quiet because I don't have the words. I don't even try to use my Spanish. I only wait until I know my English. (Olsen, 1997, pp. 99-101)

As painfully illustrated by the above quote, the process of describing complicated emotions and concepts in one language does not always translate easily into another, and vice versa. Blakely (1983) argues that this is particularly true for Southeast Asian languages. Therefore, an authentic expression of self becomes increasingly complex when negotiating multiple languages and identities after English acquisition.

In addition to the vocal silencing of immigrant students reported by Olsen (1997), was the physical marginality that these students also occupied. From the perspective of social geography, ESL students were physically housed in the periphery of the campus; a common occurrence nationwide that extends beyond the scope of secondary public schools. The impact of such physical marginalization was particularly striking when “regular” students forgot to include ESL students in the school social maps they made for a social studies class (Olsen, 1997). Such experiences not only perpetuate vocal silencing, but also physically remove ESL students, thus continuing their marginalization from school life and beyond.

Despite criticisms of the U.S. education system, and ESL classrooms in particular, some theorists have shed ESL classrooms in a more positive light. For instance, Blakely (1983) reported the lack of resources and information schools receive before learning that

refugee students will be attending their school. One way to combat any potential difficulties resulting from cultural differences and language barriers between parents and teachers was observed in Blakely's (1983) study on Southeast Asian refugees. Specifically, one of the stated goals of the ESL/bilingual program included in Blakely's (1983) study was the commitment to the facilitation of parental involvement with children's schooling. A bilingual liaison team was used in order to address this goal. Juxtaposing the ESL classroom to the mainstream classroom, Lee (2001) proposes that because of class size, curriculum, and pedagogical strategies, the ESL classroom is less intimidating for refugee and immigrant students and therefore provides a "safe space" for academic learning and expression of culture.

Particularly important when considering the role of language in refugee and immigrant youth experiences, is what happens in the home when these children gain English proficiency at a faster rate than their parents. In a literature review conducted on the "Educational needs and barriers for refugee students in the United States," McBrien (2005) reports that the role reversals that occur when refugee youth are required to translate for their parents and perform financial tasks such as paying bills, result in pathological effects for both the child and the parent. However, more recent research, such as Orellana's (2009) ethnography highlighting children's "language brokering," views these experiences in terms of the social, familial, and institutional contributions immigrant children make when they serve as translators and interpreters. Accordingly, Orellana (2009) suggests supporting children in these roles, rather than pathologizing this experience and further questions childhood development theories that emphasize a "normal" trajectory.

Adolescence. Many students enter into the U.S. school context during the Western conception of “adolescence,” characterized by the search for an “identity,” emphasis on social status and friendships, and resistance to parental authority. Therefore, the collision of Eastern and Western cultures is a particularly salient experience for Southeast Asian refugee youth. For some, the lure of this new context is extremely tempting, and when intergenerational gaps and parents exert control in an attempt to preserve cultural traditions become daily norms, immigrant and refugee youth seek alternative means to escape these familial conflicts. This vulnerable context might result in a propensity towards assimilating behaviors as an act of resistance. Lee (2001), who notes that these incidences are more common in second-generation youth, describes the consequences this has had on familial relations

Hmong immigrant parents view the changing family roles, their children’s desire for increased independence, and their children’s clothes as evidence that they are losing their second-generation children to “American ways.” (p. 519)

Similar to reports from other immigrant families and children (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999), Hmong youth report a myriad of roles and responsibilities that are accomplished daily, despite their schooling and homework (Lee, 2001; Ngo, 2010; Orellana, 2009). As mentioned, these students “are responsible for interpreting for their parents, driving their parents to appointments, performing various household chores, and even working to help support the family,” (Lee, 2001, p. 512) activities previously described as “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 2005), and in terms of “language brokering” (Orellana, 2009). Although these identities may, or may not simultaneously coexist within the school context, they are constantly there reminding, awaiting, and influencing identities that are shaped and created throughout the school day.

Discourses of power. McKay and Wong's (1996) ethnography on Chinese immigrant students pushes the complexity of managing multiple identities further by critiquing existing power relations through the juxtaposition of entering the U.S. school context while coming from a non-European, "colonial, neocolonial, or quasicolonial relation(s) with the United states" (p. 530). As stated by the ethnographers, "...understanding the issue of power in second-language learning becomes imperative" (p. 530).

As evidenced, for many recent immigrant and refugee students, the U.S. school experience is limited to the ESL classroom. According to McKay and Wong (1996), the dynamic of the ESL classroom reifies this unequal distribution of power between the newly labeled "ESL learner" and teacher; a dynamic that strips the student of their agency, and recodes the ESL learner into "other," placing them at the bottom of the hierarchy. Consequences of such a discourse are reflected in students' resistance of the ESL label, by pursuing other means of defining their identity, or by seeking existing identities, they are able enact their agency and reclaim their self worth. Maintenance of this discourse is exemplified through the power exerted by ESL teachers in keeping students in ESL or passing them on (McKay & Wong, 1996).

Analyzing the pedagogical practices of ESL teachers, McKay and Wong (1996) report dissatisfaction with the pedagogy and curriculum, specifically criticizing a lack of respecting the ESL learner's previous literacy skills in their native language, and equally important, their agency. This example of epistemic discontinuity devalues the ESL learner's previous academic tradition; a concept Olsen (1997) contributed to U.S. schools' lack of resources. Interestingly, Blakely (1983) describes a different ESL

classroom experience and pedagogical approach. Although the primary goal was to endorse a bilingual transition from “mother tongue” to the dominant language of English, students were taught basic literacy in their native language while simultaneously learning English. However, academic achievement was assessed based on English proficiency only. This unique program was funded with a federal grant lasting three years, after which the native language literacy initiative was dropped.

Explaining the experiences of Chinese immigrant students, McKay and Wong (1996) identify multiple discourses that transcend, intersect, and are situated within the navigation of multiple identities in the U.S. school context. The discourses most distinct for these ethnographers were: colonialist/racialized discourses on immigrants, model minority, Chinese cultural nationalist, social and academic school, and gender discourses.

The colonialist/racialized discourses on immigrants included the acknowledgement of the discourses informing the unequal distribution of power hierarchies between European nations and Third World nations, paying particular attention to Euro- and Amerocentricism (McKay & Wong, 1996). The larger context of this discourse is also located within the historical roles performed by slaves and immigrants shaping the U.S. and how these roles are continuously reproduced in colonialist practices and color prejudices. McKay and Wong (1996) state the present consequences this has on immigrant (and refugee) students,

In U.S. educational settings, colonialist/racialized discourses are often revealed through derogatory remarks and acts toward immigrant students, which typically attack both their general behavior and ability to learn English. (p. 583)

Specifically, findings from this research indicated that non-white immigrant students were pathologized on the basis of culture and motivation, Asian students were ranked

superior to their Latino counterparts, the ability to speak English was an informal way of assessing students' cognitive development, personal worth, modern "sophistication," and level of assimilation, or "Americanization." When this status was not met, a student was labeled deficient and in need of "saving," perpetuating the negative behavior of redemption fantasies spoken of by Audrey Thompson (2003). Perhaps the desire to "Americanize" is a residual effect of colonialism that equates English proficiency with western, or "civilized," and therefore modern and superior behavior; the lack of proficiency in English is viewed as backward in a nation so heavily associated with modernity and progress (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012). These beliefs were particularly reflected in some of the ESL teachers' interactions with immigrant students; those who appeared more assimilated and had less of an accent were treated much better relationally and academically.

Alternatively, Lee (2001) describes a different scholastic atmosphere, yet one that also plays into this discourse. In her ethnography on Hmong students, two distinct groups emerged, first generation and second-generation youth. The first generation students were newly arrived refugees and immigrants who participated in the ESL classroom, while the second generation youth were socially and linguistically experienced in U.S. culture both in and out of the classroom and often referred to by teaching staff, as "Americanized." It is in this separation that the colonialist/racialized discourse becomes apparent. Quoting one of the Hmong bilingual resource specialists, Lee (2001) writes,

We don't have problems with those ESL kids. Because, they are, I don't know, they seem, maybe they're not Americanized, ...so they are still thinking, like they said they are still, let's say, good kids. So they are working hard and try to

graduate from UHS. The other problems, I think the problem that most of the Hmong students face are students who are in the mainstream... (p. 509)

Because the ESL students were still subjected to the unequal power distribution of the ESL classroom, the teachers and staff regarded them as “good colonized subjects.”

Interestingly, McKay and Wong (1996) make a point to address the dynamism enacted by the teachers in their study, stating that at times this colonialist/racialized discourse intersected with portrayals of cultural sensitivity and tolerance.

Or, perhaps an alternative interpretation of these instances could be through the discourse of the “model-minority,” which incorporates a “folk theory of success,” equating education and social mobility (Ogbu, 1993). A relatively recent invention in the U.S., the model-minority discourse surfaced during the 1960s with the widespread success of Asian Americans, while simultaneously contrasting them to Latino and African Americans, who at this time were heavily associated with the civil rights movement and violent protests for equality (McKay & Wong, 1996). The U.S. capitalized on the diligence, compliancy, and work ethic of Asian immigrants, using them as an example of the ideal citizen, one that the “other” (i.e., Latino and African American), “delinquent” minority groups should aspire to. Moving into the present, the rise in economic power of countries in East Asia, including Japan, have amplified the discourse; now academic motivation and achievement are considered cultural narratives induced by Confucian family values. McKay and Wong (1996) further state that, “Asian immigrants in the United States are even sometimes painted as the latest, truest embodiments of American values, which “native” Americans (whites) have unfortunately

abandoned” (p. 586). This essentialized notion of culture does a great disservice to the multiplicitous and intersecting positionalities of refugee youth.

Kim’s (1999) theory of racial triangulation, in particular, expands upon the Omi and Winant’s (1994) theory of racial formation by offering a new theoretical model through which to better understand the positionality of Asians in the U.S. Similar to the above, Kim (1999) discusses the history of the unassimilable “Asian” in the 1800s – 1900s, toward the shifting views of the model minority prospering as a direct result of maintaining traditional cultural values in the 1960-1970s, as ways to illustrate how racial triangulation have been historically persistent in the U.S. Because of this history, Kim (1999) challenges theories that sustain racial hierarchy and stratification placing whites at the top, Blacks on the bottom and “all other groups somewhere in between” (p. 106), stating that the racialization of Asian Americans was created in relation to these other racial groups.

Kim (1999) argues that racial triangulation occurs through the two simultaneous processes of “relative valorization” and “civic ostracism.” Relative valorization results when the dominant group (Whites) uses race and culture to “valorize” a subordinate group (Asian Americans) in relation to another subordinate group (Blacks) “in order to dominate both groups, but especially the latter” (Kim, 1999, p. 107). Civic ostracism is the process through which Whites have excluded Asian Americans (the subordinate group) from civic engagement and participation in the political realm by creating discourses of the “foreign other” who are “unassimilable” (Kim, 1999). Through these process of racial triangulation a normative trajectory is created to reproduce and maintain white privilege and power (Kim, 1999).

The “model minority” myth is therefore another example of the valorization of Asian Americans, and how white privilege and power is maintained in the face of creating contestation among those groups it seeks to keep down while pitting them against each other. Kim (1999) describes how the model minority myth was created due to perceptions of Asian American’s having a distinct culture, which perpetuates historical rhetoric of Asian Americans as unassimilable, therefore apolitical and resulting in civic ostracism. One theory also postulates that the “model minority” discourse, which first appeared in a 1966 newspaper article, was a response to increasing Black political movements, such as “Black Power,” and served as a warning for Black groups to depoliticize, like their “apolitical” Asian American counterparts (Kim, 1999). Further, the model minority myth essentializes Asian Americans, illustrates a false picture of Asian American wealth, makes consequences against Asian discrimination difficult, and exists in relation to Blacks as “deficient” (Kim, 1999).

Alternatively, Omi and Winant (1994) point out a major political stance that Asian Americans took to resist acts of oppression while using the essentialization of Asian ethnic groups to their benefit. Specifically, they speak about this in terms of “collective/common identity,” which differs from national identity in that it emerges from social movements where a cohesive sense of group belonging, such as political affiliation, is achieved. A single person can have multiple common identities that they share with diverse groups, depending on context. One of the most important common identities to emerge out of the 1960s was “Asian American,” which denoted the common struggle of these groups, despite dissimilar political leanings (Omi & Winant, 1994).

The specific experiences of Southeast Asian refugee groups. How has the “model minority” discourse impacted Southeast Asian refugee students specifically? Southeast Asian refugees, historically from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and more recently places such as Burma, have a shorter history of being in the United States, with the first groups of refugees arriving in 1975 (Lee, 2001). Dispersal and resettlement of these groups was based on “a conscious effort to avoid the formation of highly visible ethnic enclaves and to promote ‘integrative’ interactions with Americans” (Blakely, 1983, p. 44). In other words, the goal of the United States historically was to place these refugee groups in areas that would catalyze the assimilation process. Typically, this meant that Southeast Asian refugees were resettled to communities with no members of their ethnolinguistic group, resulting in a “secondary migration” for many (Blakely, 1983, p. 44). Regardless, the model-minority discourse quickly expanded to incorporate this group under its dominion; by 1985 the press had touted Southeast Asian youth as “the new whiz kids” (Brand, 1987, as cited in Lee, 2001). However, this label failed to include Southeast Asian ethnic minority groups such as the Hmong, and instead branded this group, “rural, preliterate, patriarchal, and traditional” (Lee, 2001). With these oppositional viewpoints, the Hmong youth were occupying the borders of a dichotomy chosen for them – the “model-minority” and “delinquent,” a dichotomy that failed to acknowledge the management and navigation of multiple roles and identities performed by refugee and immigrant youth.

However, some of the more recently arrived Hmong students considered themselves extremely fortunate to have the opportunity of receiving an American education. With past experiences of fleeing home and living in refugee camps still

salient, the dual frame of reference used to describe the immigrant experience, is equally pertinent to refugee populations. Researchers in the field cite the dual frame of reference as a way “to persist in the face of difficulties in the new country” (Lee, 2001, p. 511). However, this type of coping mechanism does not appear relevant among second-generation immigrant youth, who cannot relate to their families’ homeland experiences, and “are more likely to compare themselves to their white, middle-class peers than to relatives in Thailand or Laos” (Lee, 2001, p. 520).

Yet, more recent research in this area is finding that cultural factors are appropriated to explicate academic success. Citing this body of literature, Lee (2001) states, “Scholars attribute the success of Hmong American students to the support of the immigrant community, family support, and adherence to the traditional values such as respect for elders” (p. 506). Additionally, McKay and Wong (1996) draw some interesting correlations between the model-minority discourse and Asian immigrants cultural legacy and pride. Many Asian immigrants arrive to the U.S. welcoming the model-minority discourse, unaware of the historical context they are entering into, they further perpetuate this racial discrimination against Asian immigrants and race-relations within the U.S. in general (McKay & Wong, 1996). The major enactment associated with this discourse, as mentioned above, is the emphasis placed on academic achievement.

Lee (2001), however, challenges this essentialized perspective of Asian immigrants and the failure to acknowledge the role of agency among Asian minority youth. The Hmong students that she followed were grouped in dichotomous terms, those that adhered to the “model-minority” discourse, and those that challenged this label.

Students who did not meet the requirements associated with the model-minority identity, were categorized as “delinquents.” Interestingly, discrepancies found between these two groups of Hmong youth were attributed to the length of time spent in the U.S.

“Delinquent” behaviors such as truancy, dropping out of school and gang membership were more commonly found among second generation Hmong youth; characteristics popularly ascribed to a loss of culture and “over-Americanization” (Lee, 2001). Again, this explanation essentializes and oversimplifies behaviors that could alternatively be recognized as a resistance to the particularist perspective that one cannot coexist with an ethnic *and* American identity. The work of Ngo (2010), who focuses on the experiences of Lao American students, reports similar experiences in terms of categorical binaries that label these students. Ngo’s (2010) work however, attempts to move away from understanding the experiences of these students in dichotomous terms, which, as she argues severely limits our comprehension surrounding identity and refugee/immigrant students in diverse school environments.

Wallitt’s (2008) study focusing on the experiences of Cambodian American students from refugee families provides further insight into the impact of an essentialized identity. Because these Cambodian American students were subsumed under the “Asian” racial category, Wallitt (2008) posits that they were overlooked by the school district’s mission to close the “achievement gap” between white and Black students, due to the pervasive “model minority” myth. In reality, Cambodian students have a 40 percent dropout rate, a statistic similar to their Black peers (Wallitt, 2008). The Cambodian American student narratives included in Wallitt’s (2008) speak to experiences of being passed over in math class because they are Asian, that teachers don’t know that they are

from Cambodia and assume they are Chinese, and a “discontinuity between home and school cultures” (p. 5). In conclusion Wallitt (2008) outlines ways of improving the school experiences of “invisible” students, such as refugees whose voices are lacking in education literature, by “providing positive school experiences” through building teacher relationships with students, employing relevant curriculum that reflects the student body, and by allowing schools “smaller educational environments.”

Gender. Intersecting with the above-mentioned discourses is the discourse of gender. From a historical perspective, feminine ideals within the U.S. have been commonly defined in opposition to the immoral (black) woman (Giddings, 1984). Characteristics such as submissiveness, passivity, being quiet, polite, nice and demure constituted the cultural understanding of what the perfect feminine persona embodied; the good (white) girl. Throughout time, the ideal woman was envisioned as pious, devout, fair and docile. Exhibiting traits outside of this discourse resulted in the label of the immoral woman. Looking back over the creation of these feminine ideals, the experiences of marginalized women have been ignored. Throughout U.S. history their life experiences were not comparable to that of middle-class, white women, therefore they could not enact the qualities of the good, “moral” woman.

Contemporary research investigating the experiences of girls of color, and immigrant girls, however, have provided counter-stories to the good girl/bad girl dichotomy that places white adolescent females as moral superiors. For example, Espiritu’s (2001) examination of U.S. Filipina immigrant girls and their families, decenters white normativity through juxtaposing narratives of moral superiority. Describing a cultural conservatism, predicated upon patriarchy, that counters the

licentiousness and promiscuous behaviors characteristic of U.S. culture, these Filipina immigrants were able to construct a moral superior self, that “othered” their U.S. counterparts in a way that, despite existing tensions, bolstered and gave a sense of worth to their immigrant community.

This example challenges a traditional understanding of gender performance in U.S. culture. As diverse narratives of gender are collected, especially among immigrant and refugee girls who have a complex web of intersecting positionalities, this understanding becomes more comprehensive and nuanced. Research on immigrant and refugee girls broadens previous notions of gender discourses by illustrating the multiplicitous roles that are manifested in different cultural settings. Specifically within the school context, immigrant females have described the complexity that comes with having to navigate through multiple boundaries, socially, sexually, and academically (Olsen, 1997). Boundaries that shift as they leave their home and community and enter into unfamiliar school environments fraught with anti-immigration sentiment and policy, racialization, and Americanization.

The Chinese immigrant students in McKay and Wong’s (1996) study faced the challenge of managing their academics while navigating between Chinese gender norms and American ideals. The Hmong youth followed by Lee (2001) faced their own unique set of struggles. For first generation students, the challenge was maintaining their culture. For many girls this meant having to conceal certain cultural traditions, such as early marriage and childbearing, which was met with fear of harassment and open disapproval by the school community and would often times result in young Hmong women quitting school to pursue their families.

Luttrell's (2003), ethnography, which focused on the experiences of pregnant teens in North Carolina, further exposes the stigma and ostracism experienced by pregnant teens in U.S. schools. The stigma of pregnancy, which historically extends beyond the scope of teens in schools, is a visible challenge to the discourse of the "normal," "moral," "good" (white) girl. Within schools, pregnancy challenges the silence of sexuality, disrupts gender norms, and much like ESL students, the pregnant students that stayed in school in Luttrell's (2003) study were labeled as "immoral," "delinquent," "disabled," and pushed to classrooms or buildings at the periphery of the school. Deficit discourses were prominent in the lives of these girls, which place blame on the girl or her family. Luttrell (2003) argues that we need to reshape these discourses to reflect teen girls' epistemologies surrounding motherhood, support the maternal knowledge they report having, and have honest dialogue in schools on topics such as sex, race and class.

Sarroub (2005) provides an additional portrait of immigration and gender in her ethnography based on the experiences of Yemeni American girls. Similar to previous accounts of the school experiences of immigrant youth, Sarroub (2005) highlights the cultural disconnect between home and school for these students. Interestingly, these girls also experienced marriage in high school, however this was not a prominent aspect of Sarroub's (2005) research. In particular, Sarroub (2005) describes the girls in her study as "sojourners," where "home" was a theoretical space involving both the U.S. and Yemen, and whose cultural (Yemen and American) and religious (Muslim) intersecting positionalities shaped their experiences both in and out of school.

Returning to Lee's (2001) study, the pregnant girls that stayed in school were the most likely to be on the honor roll. Perhaps operating under the dual frame of reference described earlier, the girls in Lee's (2001) study reported "the U.S. as a place where they have the chance to gain gender equality" and that "education was one of the only ways for women to gain freedom" (p. 516). In positioning themselves in opposition to the second generation Hmong, one student stated, "We are more traditional. We speak Hmong and know the Hmong culture. The others speak more English – they want to be cool. They don't follow what adults say" (Lee, 2001, p. 510). Shifting through and between these discourses, identities are maintained, constructed, and strategically called upon.

Navigating false dichotomies and multiple selves. Depending on age, navigation through these various discourses pose unique dilemmas, which may be addressed in multiple ways depending on the individual student. For many Asian refugees and immigrants entering into the U.S. school context, a common dilemma is the false dichotomy of assimilating, or risking further isolation, marginalization, or exclusion. For students in middle and high school, this dilemma may be particularly salient due to the importance placed on social status and peer networks. Regardless, choosing one discourse over another comes with unique consequences.

One student followed by McKay and Wong (1996) in particular, performed the American, masculine ideal by choosing an athletic identity over the academic representation of the model-minority discourse. In choosing to do so, this student prioritized the social school discourse and gendered discourse reflecting the influence of the assimilationist approach of U.S. schools. Through open resistance to the label of ESL

learner within the classroom, which simultaneously was a resistance to the colonialist/racialized discourse, this student enacted his agency. Yet this resistance was met with the cost of nearly failing school, particularly in written English, which further perpetuates the colonialist/racialized discourse of power hierarchies by keeping the “other” oppressed through illiteracy. Nonetheless, this student found satisfaction through seeking friendships outside of the ESL classroom, popularity, and athletics.

Lee (2001) noted similar findings with the second generation Hmong youth in particular. For these students maintaining their language and culture was viewed as “old fashioned” and primitive. Labeling the first generation students “FOB” or “FOBBIES” (fresh off the boat), these students were perhaps resisting the colonialist/racialized discourse by becoming Americanized and therefore equal with the rest of their school community, but they were simultaneously embracing the social school discourse. Statements such as, “FOBS don’t care about clothes. They are stingy about clothes. They dress in out-of-date 1980s-style clothes. American-born Hmong are into clothes and cars” (Lee, 2001, p. 511) are complex to analyze but are a reflection of the process of coping and dealing with assimilation. They speak to the nature of adolescents in the U.S. through the emphasis on status, popularity, consumerism, etc., while rejecting the label of “other.”

Hall (2002) also speaks of the ways in which Sikh youth feel torn or caught between two distinct worlds. The Sikh youth she focused on in her study were either born in Britain or immigrated there by the time they were thirteen, and therefore this group was labeled, “second generation.” Although this group of students reinforced the aforementioned dichotomy of either belonging to one culture or to another, they were just

as likely to say that they “never felt completely ‘Indian’ or completely ‘English’” (Hall, 2002, p. 171). The Yemeni American girls in Sarroub’s (2005) study similarly report “failing” at fully embodying both their cultures. In reality, Sikh youth accessed and participated in a rich variety of diverse cultures, while shifting and “playing” with identities across cultural fields. Hall (2002) explains that it is through this “play” that the Sikh youth were able to navigate the dichotomous cultures pressuring them, in a meaningful way that allowed the performance of multiple, “hybrid” identities despite gender and class limitations. Regardless, the question remains, why do these students understand and describe their cultural experiences in dichotomous terms (Hall, 2002)? One explanation is that a power structure remains intact to maintain a socially stratified hierarchy, and although it is experienced as the pull between two contradictory cultures, Hall (2002) reinforces that it is two competing “status systems” that these students are caught between.

The other students followed in McKay and Wong’s (1996) study dealt with entering into the U.S. school context in a variety of ways. Depending on gender, socio-economic status (SES), and parental involvement, students were diverse in their management of the newly imposed discourses. Unlike the example above, the majority of students fell back on the model-minority discourse, accommodating to their “ESL learner” identity. Each student was faced with their own challenges, but one of particular interest was a student who, in China, attended a prestigious middle school and whose family suffered a severe economic depression upon their arrival to the U.S. Despite his previous academic experience and success, which were never acknowledged, this student’s ESL teacher translated answering, “yes, yes” when he may not understand the

question as “moral dishonesty,” without considering this student’s eagerness to learn the language. Academically, this student relied on previous language knowledge while learning English, a strategy that propelled his achievement in writing well above his classmates. Suffering in oral expression contributed to his inability to achieve the model-minority status and further perpetuated the colonialist/racialized discourse as his lack of verbal expression labeled him a “low-achiever” and blinded the teacher’s recognition of his written ability.

Lee (2001), in discussing Hmong American high school students who have been transferred out of ESL and are frustrated with the lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding from the administration, faculty, staff and students, describes a teacher’s perspective on the experience of isolation and exclusion,

...it is all about whether or not they are invited or included in some way. Those are the words. Whether they are angry or whether they are depressed or sad or whatever, those are still the words and the words have to do with being included or excluded. (p. 523)

This relational and social experience, when faced within the hegemonic and dominant structure, particularly when being quickly transitioned out of ESL without appropriate resources or cultural understanding from the school, results in feelings of hopelessness and being silenced. Lee (2001) argues that the lack of culturally relevant curriculum further perpetuates these feelings and results in truancy, labeling of “delinquent” and “low achiever.” Issues of truancy among this population are exacerbated by academic difficulties and lack of support.

Looking at refugee and immigrant parents’ perspectives, we see similar concerns, yet expressed in a different manner. Through Lee’s (2001) ethnography following

Hmong youth, we are also offered a glimpse of parental concerns and experiences. As noted previously, this overall group of students was dichotomized into “good” and “bad” students, this perspective was apparently collectively agreed upon not only by the teachers, but also of the parents of the first generation Hmong youth. This group of parents expressed their fears of losing their children to the American culture, as the second generation Hmong youth had. Teacher and parents agreed that the signifiers differentiating the “good” students from the “bad” students were, “. . .their clothes, their relationship with adults, and their attitudes toward school” (Lee, 2001, p. 510).

Lee (2001) concludes with a theory of academic achievement for the Hmong students. Citing Gibson (1998), she proposes that it is through “accommodation and acculturation without assimilation,” by “cultural transformation” as well as “cultural preservation,” that Hmong youth can achieve academically within the U.S. public education system.

Conclusion. Through an examination of pedagogy, curriculum, and policy within the context of ESL, and subsequently reviewing their influence on identity formations within refugee populations, refugee youth are forcing areas such as multicultural education, immigrant and refugee studies, and identity construction to ask new questions. Furthermore, the traditional dichotomy determined for refugees (and immigrants) upon arrival to the United States: assimilation, or sustain within a marginalized, particular discourse, is not an adequate dichotomy for refugee youth. Once resettled to the U.S., these youths are also caught in false binaries such as “model minority,” or “delinquent.” As research in the field has shown, navigation of the multiple roles, identities, and

discourses by refugee youth require an understanding and acknowledgment of their being situated within multiplicitous and intersecting positionalities.

This thesis will contribute to the current knowledgebase because it pushes the boundaries of traditional, universalist conceptions of culture. As shown in the various ethnographies, it is very difficult to essentialize what an education experience for an immigrant, refugee, or Asian youth looks like. Within the field of education especially, any discourse that serves to essentialize culture must be disregarded and the overall structure needs to move away from reproducing stereotypes, but also should not place unity as the ultimate goal at all cost.

Moreover, literature in the field of multicultural education ignores refugee youth voices in general, let alone the specific experiences of Burmese refugee youth. Literature in the field of refugee studies is limited in its incorporation of youth voices. Accordingly, this thesis provides a vivid account of how refugee youth from Burma navigate their school environment and adjust to life in the U.S. Through these unique accounts, agency is activated as identities are constructed, thus providing us with new ways of thinking about identity, agency, and the experience of refugee youth in U.S. schools.

Hence, in Chapter 2, I will outline the methodology used for this study. Chapter 3 will provide a background of the historical context of Burma and U.S. refugee policy, situating the current study. Chapter 4 gives an in-depth analysis of the individual Burmese youth narratives, and Chapter 5 will give a discussion of overall themes across the participants, followed by a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The data for this thesis was collected as part of a larger research project, conducted by Sofia Villenas, Cornell University, as principal investigator, exploring how a community makes sense of racial inequity and social justice within their school district. In an effort to understand the intricacies and workings of a community engaged in the equity of their schools, this ongoing longitudinal project entitled *Community Voices: Stories of Family, Culture and Education*, specifically focuses on the narratives of community members, teachers, parents, and students residing in “Newtown.” These narratives have revealed the resiliency of families in the face of racial and class exclusion, as well as illustrated the multiple funds of knowledge a community generates, particularly outside of the school environment.

Because of my particular interest in refugee groups from Burma, this thesis focuses on interviews collected with these youth. I personally interviewed all the participants included, with the exception of one, who was interviewed as part of this larger research project. I choose to include this fourth participant, named “Katie” because of her extended length of time living in the United States, which provided a unique experience when juxtaposed to more recently arrived Burmese refugee youth.

Participants

Participants were four adolescent refugees from Burma, three female and one male, three from the Burman majority ethnic group and one from the Karen ethnic minority group; they ranged in age from 15 to 19. Parental or guardian consent was required for the participants under 18, along with participant assent. Two of the participants were recruited by word of mouth through this researcher’s position within the

Burmese refugee community, and two were recruited at a local Youth Bureau. The only criterion for potential participants was their self-identification as originating from Burma. Because interviews were conducted in English, there is an inherent bias in who was included in this study, potential participants not comfortable conversing in English might have otherwise chosen to participate. The inclusion of both male and female, as well as Burman and Karen participants was attempted in order to gain a more nuanced and comprehensive view of their experiences, while moving away from essentialized perspectives of identity construction. Each participant was given a \$25 Target gift certificate upon completion of his or her interview.

Because of the phenomenologicality of this study, characterized by the interest in better understanding the experiences of refugee students from Burma within a particular social and historical context, the inclusion of 4 participants is an appropriate number. Because these 4 participants were analyzed as unique individuals, a goal of this study is not to make sweeping generalizations, but rather to gain insight into these specific cases and learn from their diverse narratives. Further, due to the in-depth nature of this project, coupled with literature outlining qualitative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), this number of participants is sufficient in analyzing narrative accounts. For instance, Cortazzi (1993) states, “The typical narrative research report centres around one or two cases, richly presented” (p.19). Expanding on the work of Bent Flyvbjerg, Riessman (2008) outlines five arguments for case study research, where focusing on a few, specific cases provides a wealth of data for generalizability within the social sciences. Further support for the in-depth analysis of a few individual cases is discussed below.

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant Pseudonym (Gender):	Age	Grade	Length of Time in the U.S. (at time of interview)	Ethnicity	How They Identify Self
Paw Bu Ley (F)	18	10 th	10mos	Karen	Karen/Refugee
Min Min (M)	16	9 th	4yrs	Burman	“Burmese kid”
Sa Pe (F)	19	11 th	4yrs	Burman	Refugee
Katie (F)	15	10 th	10yrs	Burman	“Not a citizen yet.”

Method

Potential participants were invited to interview on a voluntary basis in two distinct formats. For those participants actively recruited within the Burmese refugee community, this researcher made phone calls to their homes to initially discuss the research project and explained the interview process specifically to the student who would be involved. The participants involved agreed that this was something they were interested in, after which an interview was scheduled. For these two students, this researcher met them at their house and discussed the research study again with the participant and their parents or guardians. For participants under 18 years old, informed consent was required by both their parents/guardians and themselves (see Appendix A for adult consent, Appendix B for parental/guardian consent). These interviews were conducted near the participant’s homes, but in privacy from their family members.

The other two participants were invited to interview at the local Youth Bureau. If they were under 18 years old, they were given informed consent paperwork, which they were instructed to discuss and sign with their parents/guardians if they wished to be

included in the study. Interviews for these participants were conducted at the local Youth Bureau, in a private room. All participants were reminded at the time of the interview that their participation was voluntary, that they could quit at anytime and/or refuse to answer any questions, and that their identity would remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were chosen to reflect ethnicity and culture. Additionally, any other identifying markers (i.e., town names, school names, friends, teachers, and family member names) were given pseudonyms in order maintain participant anonymity.

Data was gathered using in-depth semi-structured interviews (See Appendix C for interview guide/questions). This approach allowed for relative coherence across interviews, while maintaining an open framework that kept the participant's voice centered and provided agentic space for their own narrative construction throughout the interview process. Accordingly, not all participants answered all of the questions included in the interview guide, nor did all participants answer the same questions. The purpose of the interview guide was to provide questions relating to the research agenda, and was created in a way that would elicit narrative sharing (Tell me a story about a time you might have felt included at school, like you really belonged?). All interviews began with obtaining biographical information, and set the tone for a linear/temporal construction of self, by asking questions such as, "Tell me about yourself," or "What was your experience like coming to the United States?" All interviews ended by asking the participant to share anything that was on their mind that didn't get covered during the interview, as well as invited the participant to ask any additional questions regarding the research project and their interview.

All of the interviews were audio-recorded, for which additional consent was required and obtained. Interviews lasted about an hour for each participant, and were later transcribed by the researcher. Transcripts ranged in length from 17 to 21 pages, totaling 75 pages of raw data.

Analysis

Qualitative methodology. Qualitative research methodology was employed in the present study. Qualitative research methodology is a way of capturing the detailed and diverse voices of a desired population, while providing a nuanced and rich way of answering particular research questions. Qualitative research methodology is understood, defined and used differently across academic fields and disciplines (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (2007) argue that it is the paradigmatic philosophy of the researcher, guided by their "...basic belief system or worldview..." (p. 17), that dictates the use of certain methods over others. This paradigm, combined with the epistemological and ontological foundation of the researcher, therefore create the context under which research questions are asked, what can be "known" as "truth" and "reality," the roles of researcher and participant(s), and the methods used to analyze and answer such questions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (2004) outline four major competing paradigms within qualitative research that are distinct in their epistemological, ontological, and methodological framework: positivist, post-positivist, critical theory, and constructivism, later adding the paradigm "participatory."

Denzin and Lincoln (2007) situate these paradigms historically, noting that how qualitative research was understood and defined shifted throughout these temporal

moments. As epistemological and ontological perspectives moved away from positivist and post-positivist beliefs of an objective reality, the stage Denzin and Lincoln (2007) refer to as the “crisis of representation,” became prominent. Characterized by researchers struggling to understand their role and influence in the research process, the crisis of representation resulted in the inclusion of reflexivity in qualitative writing. Furthermore, while positivists and post-positivists seek to “explain” in order to “predict and control,” critical theorists aim to “critique and transform” oppressive structures and maintain a commitment to emancipatory progress for social justice, and constructivists seek to “understand and reconstruct” current knowledge in order to progress collectively (Guba & Lincoln, 2004).

With this in mind, qualitative methodology is an interpretive process, from the representations made of the surrounding world and context through field notes, interviews and memos, to the analytic interpretation of how people make meaning of that world. Even the process of creating texts through the transcription of interviews and the writing of “findings,” the reality of lived experiences are transformed and altered (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). Because of this interpretive nature of qualitative methodology, researchers in this field are described at times as “*bricoleurs*,” who adapt and improvise throughout the research process by using the variety of “tools” and “technologies” available to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). This knowledge and ability is learned through the researcher’s personal background and intersecting positionalities of race, gender, class, religion, et cetera, as well as academic knowledge gained across disciplines.

In-depth interviewing. Because the theoretical framework guiding this thesis aims to center those historically marginalized, specifically refugee students from Burma, while striving to gain a better understanding of how they navigate intersecting histories, positionalities, and identities, qualitative methodology that privileges “voice” and “experience” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004) is the most appropriate research method to address this. Epistemologically, the thought that the production of knowledge is a dual meaning-making process between researcher and participant informed this research project. Accordingly, this viewpoint requires a methodological framework that correlates with this epistemological foundation. Because this study is focused on the construction of identity through lived experience, a uniquely complex and deeply individual process, a research methodology equipped to deal with the intricacies of the personal is necessary. Qualitative research methodology provides both the methods for acquiring such “data” and the tools for analysis. Therefore, in-depth interviewing was used and narrative analysis was conducted.

In-depth interviewing was used because it allows the participants to describe in their own words, salient experiences, and thoughts, while providing access to the inner worlds they want to share. More specifically, conducting interviews from a narrative framework takes into account the power of the participant to construct their own storyline, typically via an open-structured interview process; which is simultaneously more likely to elicit narrative accounts (Riessman, 2008). In-depth interviewing allows for a more detailed account of the participant’s experiences by allowing for fluidity and flexibility to explore areas that are important to the participant. Accordingly, this research method attempts to achieve equilibrium of the researcher/researched power

dynamic by shifting the power structure away from the “objectified researched” (Riessman, 2008).

Narrative and narrative analysis. While in-depth interviewing was the method of data collection, narrative analysis was the analytical tool used to interpret the data. Through the narrative process of storytelling, identities are constructed in a social way (Riessman, 2008). Because narratives are not constructed in isolation, they are used to interact with an audience, to convey a part of the self to another. Riessman (2008) states “Narratives are political,” meaning they move beyond the scope of the individual narrator and their audience, to teach or reflect the role of power within their world.

Narrative, from the perspective of narrative analysis, is the term used to describe the oral performance and sequencing of events in order to inform an audience about a subject or topic that is meaningful to the narrator (Riessman, 2008). While certain topics are selected with purpose and are then ordered, typically in a chronological format, others are selectively left out. This, in part, stems from the dialogical nature of narrative, a process Riessman (2008) argues, “...constitutes the autobiographical self, that is, how the speaker wants to be known in the interaction” (p. 29). The understanding of “self” as co-produced between narrator and audience (Riessman, 2008) aligns with theorists such as Bakhtin. Bakhtin argues that the multivocal, dialogical, self is created metalinguistically, prior to the utterance of a word (Wertsch, 1991), and that the socio-historical context between speakers shape the choice and use of given words, which are laden with history, ideology, and meaning (Riessman, 2008).

Similarly, Goffman views the “self” as a “socialized entity,” constructed through the interaction with others, and that through narrative, multiple-selves emerge (Cortazzi,

1993). Narrative from this perspective is therefore the simultaneous expression, construction, and management of a self, or selves, that occurs through the conversational process (Cortazzi, 1993; Riessman, 2008). “To put it simply, one can’t be a ‘self’ by oneself; rather, identities are constructed in ‘shows’ that persuade” (Riessman, 2008, p. 106). Keeping in line with dialogicality and performative nature of narrative, Goffman further defines narratives as moving beyond mere reporting to the “reexperience” of lived events, in a way that engages an audience so that they may “insert themselves into the replaying” (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 39). Likewise, Wortham (2001) describes the experience of “storytelling” as “interactional.”

Narrative analysis, more specifically, is the method of interpreting narrative texts that share “a storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). Narrative analysis examines beyond the content of the story, and questions particularities behind the “*how* and *why*” specific incidents are shared, for what purpose, and for whom (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) argues that there are a multitude of ways narratives can be shared, therefore the specific way a person chooses to share their stories is significant and should be examined more closely. From this perspective, narrative analysis deals with the particular, context is vital and agency is recognized. In order to analyze narrative accounts, audio recordings of interviews are transcribed to form narrative texts.

Riessman (2008) describes the transcription process as an act that transforms a conversational, dialogic process, into a textual object that unfortunately leaves behind or limits the nuances characteristic of speech and language. Additionally, this transformative process is subject to the transcriber’s interpretation, which is dependent on the theoretical framework, guiding methodology, and goals of the research (Riessman,

2008). For instance, the perspective that narratives are constructed in a social, dialogical process where the interviewer plays a vital role in how the narrative is shaped, would transcribe the interview in a way that expresses this relationship, by including both parties' dialogue (Riessman, 2008). Although the final transcription is ultimately an altered product of the original interview, the way that the researcher chooses to transcribe the interview can maintain the integrity of the dialogue. The transcripts for this thesis were typed by this researcher, which included all dialogue by both speakers, and contained all pauses, utterances, and body movements (i.e., slammed fist on table) in brackets, in accordance with the audio recording and notes taken during and after the interviews were conducted.

Thematic analysis, structural analysis, and dialogic/performative analysis.

Riessman (1993, 2008) further explains that just as the participant chooses what stories to share, investigators interpret and construct these stories for a third audience, the reader, who also makes their own interpretations. While there are a variety of methods for analyzing narrative texts, three in particular were used in the analysis of the interviews collected for this thesis. They include thematic analysis, structural analysis, and dialogic/performative analysis. Although each approach is unique and distinctive in its methodology, they are not mutually exclusive, can be combined, and are interchangeable in the application process of analysis (Riessman, 2008). Through the incorporation of these multiple methods, a more in-depth analysis of narrative is achieved and strengthened by this process of triangulation. For instance, thematic narrative analysis focuses on “what” is shared, while structural analysis provides insight into “how” the narrative is spoken, and dialogic/performative analysis takes into account the ways

narratives are performed in an interactive exchange. As mentioned previously, and reiterated by Riessman (2008) these methodologies are “not appropriate for studying large numbers of nameless, faceless subjects” (p. 18).

More specifically, while thematic narrative analysis is largely concerned with the narrative content, practitioners of this method vary greatly in how they apply this analytic tool. As one of the most commonly used types of narrative analysis, thematic analysis in general, maintains a case-based approach to the narrative text (Riessman, 2008). For example, Williams’ (1984) study on individuals diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, uses three case studies to “illustrate the way in which distinctive narrative forms are reconstructed to answer the question of genesis as it arises in different lives” (p. 180). From this perspective, the narrative is interpreted from a more holistic approach, while other researchers employ a form of thematic analysis that is similar to grounded theory coding, where general themes are sought out based on a predetermined theoretical construct and thematic categories are generated across individual cases (Riessman, 2008). Although the use of prior theory is similar in grounded theory and thematic analysis, thematic analysis is distinct in several ways. For instance, in thematic analysis researchers simultaneously look for new concepts in the narrative text and long sequences or storylines are maintained for the interpretative richness it provides, whereas in grounded theory this can vary greatly (i.e., word-by-word, line-by-line, or incident-by-incident) (Riessman, 2008). Lastly, while grounded theory identifies theoretical categories that are maintained across cases, thematic analysis is committed to a “case centered” methodological approach.

Shifting from the thematic content of the narrative, structural analysis focuses on how the story is told, and the two methods are commonly used in tandem to create a more compelling analysis (Riessman, 2008). Riessman (2008) further argues that by adding a structural component to thematic analysis, “topics and voices” might be included that would otherwise go unnoticed. While the definition of narrative in thematic approaches generally refers to the “biography,” or text as a whole, in structural analysis narrative refers to a bounded segment of speech. Like thematic analysis, structural analysis is used in a variety of ways by different researchers. In the field of education, Shirley Brice Heath’s (1983) seminal work connecting the narrative style of children’s storytelling to socio-economic background and racial equity used a structural format to analyze how two different groups of children spoke differently.

Labov, whose background is in sociolinguistics, offers a meticulous approach that focuses on six specific elements that are included in a “fully formed” narrative (Riessman, 2008). These include: 1) an abstract (summary of the narrative), 2) orientation (time, setting, contexts, and participants), 3) complicating action (the plot, or sequence of events), 4) evaluation (commentary by the narrator describing the significance and communicating emotions), 5) resolution (the final outcome), and 6) a coda (ending the story, returning to the present). Gee, on the other hand, by focusing on stanzas, examines the orality of the narrative through changes in pitch, intonation, as well as other linguistic markers (Riessman, 2008). Because Gee’s definition of narrative is more broadly understood than Labov’s, it is more interpretive, and therefore often used in longer periods of speech with a “nontraditional,” nonlinear method of narration (Riessman, 2008).

Despite the benefits both thematic and structural analysis provide when examining narrative texts, neither takes into account the dialogicality of narrative production. Dialogic/Performance analysis takes into account the role of the researcher in producing dialogue, as well as the socio-historical influence on narrative construction. Riessman (2008) states, “stories are social artifacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or group” (p. 105). Wortham (2001) adds that the process of storytelling provides an avenue of agency and resistance to oppressive structures; the sharing of stories can provide instances of counter-narratives that challenge such structures. With this perspective in mind, a dialogic/performance approach attempts to find ways in which culture and societal structures are embedded and reflected in narrative.

Riessman (2008) points out that this is achieved through a theoretical foundation in a social constructionist perspective. She specifically highlights the theories of Goffman and Bakhtin, described previously, as major contributors to the dialogic/performance approach. Because of the “performative” aspect involved in this analytical approach, the question of authenticity may be raised (Riessman, 2008). In order to address this underlying concern, I’d like to highlight Riessman’s (2008) argument, “To emphasize the performative is not to suggest that identities are inauthentic..., but only that identities are situated and accomplished with audience in mind” (p. 106).

To further combat the interpretive nature of this analytic approach, Riessman (2008) suggests combining the dialogic/performance approach with thematic and/or structural analysis. Through the combination of these methods, a single case can provide

insight into how the hegemonic influence of societal structures impacts the individual in how they choose to “perform” certain identities for an audience. Because incorporating a dialogic/performance approach adds an interpretive layer to the analytic process, some researchers prefer not to ask specific predetermined questions of the data, nor analyze it with predetermined theoretical constructs (Riessman, 2008).

The data for this thesis will be presented as an in-depth analysis of each individual participant. The discussion/conclusion section will include an analysis of common themes found across individuals.

Chapter 3: Background: Burmese History and US Refugee Policy

Before beginning an analysis of the interviews collected, it is important to understand the multiple contexts refugee youth from Burma occupy. Therefore, this chapter provides a brief outline of Burmese history followed by U.S. immigration and refugee policies that have shaped the environment for incoming refugee groups, particularly those from Asia. This section is not intended to be a detailed or extensive history of Burma, rather, it will delineate the major themes and historical events, providing a necessary glimpse of this country and its peoples. Although this history is presented in a chronologically linear timeline, it is recognized that there are alternative approaches to understanding and examining Burma, its peoples, and the context leading to the more recent migration of refugees (Selth, 2010). Through this contextualization, a more in-depth understanding of refugee youth narratives can be achieved.

Pre-Colonial Burma

Skewed narratives of the Westernized, white colonizer bringing civility and governance to “savage” societies, have dominated traditional discourse on Burma (Aung-Thwin, 1985). In this same vein runs the belief that prior to colonization, Burma’s history was static, isolated, and relatively unimportant as opposed to the “modern” era following Britain’s rule (Lieberman, 1987). Lieberman (1987), however, illustrates how Burma underwent a range of transformations as a result of trade sharing with other Asian communities. Geographically, the central basin of Burma was divided into the dry zone of Upper Burma, predominantly exposed to the religious traditions of Northern India, and the maritime area of Lower Burma, which included the Irrawaddy delta and was influenced by the cultures of Bengal, Sri Lanka, and Malay, to a lesser extent, through

their commercial relationships (Lieberman, 1987). Lieberman (2003) discusses these two zones as “poles” and describes how political power between them oscillated throughout pre-colonial history.

Although there were many prominent and notable empires throughout the pre-colonial period, the oscillation of power between Upper Burma and Lower Burma during this time primarily concerns the Mon kingdom of the south and the predominantly Burman, Pagan empire of the north. As power fluctuated between these two regions, examples of ethnic superiority alongside examples of ethnic shifting are prominent. For example, although Tabin-shwei-hti, initial ruler of the First Toungoo Empire, renounced his Burman ethnicity by taking a Mon wife and cutting his traditionally Burman hair-knot in an act of “becoming Mon,” by the later stages of the Toungoo Empire, Burman ethnicity was becoming more unified under a strong, central leadership (Lieberman, 2003).

Alternatively, academic debate surrounds the importance of ethnicity in Burma’s past history and some scholars may argue that Lieberman overemphasizes this point in his work (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012). Moreover, scholars emphasizing a Buddhist model interpret the actions of Burmese rulers rejecting ethnicity as an intentional way of establishing their domain as the righteous universal leaders over all groups (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012). For instance, Lieberman (1987) argues that by the twelfth century the predominant ideological thinking being expressed in written inscriptions, proclaimed Pagan rulers as *bodhisattvas*, or future Buddhas, destined to achieve Perfect Buddhahood. Concurrently, Pagan kings became *dhammarajas*, or Kings of Righteousness, meaning that their moral compass

guided the welfare of the people throughout all their (reincarnated) lives (Lieberman, 1987). From this perspective, the kings of Pagan felt authorized to exert their power over all ethnic groups, and further believed themselves to be the rightful rulers of the world (Lieberman, 1987). With this in mind, it is important to also consider that the role or importance of ethnicity may not have had the same bearing in pre-colonial times; that the overemphasis on ethnic divisions was later written into historical accounts from a “British-inspired framework” which may fail to accurately represent the circumstances in Burma as a pre-colonial Buddhist polity⁴ (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012).

Continuing with the British/western narrative, simply put, the Burmans proceeded to enforce their language and encourage assimilation. As a sign of superiority, Burmans began wearing exclusive earrings and distinctive tattoos (Lieberman, 2003). Mons that remained in this area ended up either assimilating or intermarrying with Burmans. The Mon language died with the end of its literary production, and by 1830, once Mon-dominant cities were now ninety percent Burman; a figure that was sixty percent in the 1400’s (Lieberman, 2003). With the essential end of Mon culture in the 1820’s, the Burmans no longer faced ethnic opposition in the lowlands (Lieberman, 2003).

European contact and the precursors to colonialism. As Southeast Asia in general gained European attention for its exports during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the coast of Burma quickly acquired a reputation for its vast supply of hardwoods necessary for shipbuilding (Tagliacozzo, 2004). The British in particular viewed Burma as a strategic place for trade with China, as they witnessed the export and

⁴ Additionally, Burma scholars, such as Aung-Thwin, argue that ethnic divisions were a result of the British, who promoted this narrative.

import of teak, amber, jade, rubies, drugs, raw silk, silver, and gold (Tagliacozzo, 2004). As France gained influence within the Bay of Bengal, Britain grew anxious to establish their authority in this region. Consequently, Britain established a settlement on Negrais Island, off the coast of Burma, via the East India Company, in 1753 (Tagliacozzo, 2004). The East India Company's vantage point on Negrais Island led to the future conquest and colonization of India (Tagliacozzo, 2004).

Colonization of Burma

Britain colonizes in three wars. Britain conquered and colonized Burma over the course of three successive wars, lasting sixty-one years. The first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-1827) resulted in the British occupation of the Arakan and Tenassarim areas, located on the western coast. Aspects of the first war serve as a striking example of Britain's notorious "divide and conquer" military strategy, particularly in Britain's success at attaining the aide of ethnic minority groups to fight at their side against the Burmese (Tagliacozzo, 2004). Twenty-five years later, the British claimed Lower Burma during the second Anglo-Burman war, ending in 1852 (Selth, 2010, p. 403).

The third Anglo-Burman war came to an end when the British seized Mandalay, the capital city in 1885, conquering Upper Burma. The monarch at this time, King Thibaw, and his Queen were exiled to India and formally ended their reign on November 29, 1885. Shortly thereafter, Burma was completely annexed to India under British colonialism and formally declared as part of "Her Majesty's dominions" on January 1, 1886⁵ (Aung-Thwin, 1985).

⁵ The period following annexation, until the 1890's, is often referred to as the period of pacification; a time when the British were receiving revenue from Burmese groups without military resistance, but

Reorganization of colonial territory. As European powers colonized countries in Southeast Asia, issues over territory, geography, and borders became prominent. In Burma, as indigenous conceptions of geography and borders were being ignored, borderlines were redrawn, often in favor of a larger “British” territory (Tagliacozzo, 2004). For instance, in order to possess more teak forests, the border between Upper and Lower Burma was expanded by fifty miles (Tagliacozzo, 2004). By 1892, Britain decided to maintain a “natural frontier” border with China that continued their possession of the trade routes from Yunnan (Tagliacozzo, 2004). Border declarations were similarly made with Siam, particularly in terms of natural frontier borders, while maintaining a significant space between British Burma and French Indochina. Interestingly, with minimal changes, the borders defined at this time are the current borders we see today (Tagliacozzo, 2004).

Organizational and administrative changes. Initially, the British desired to maintain government continuity in Burma and provide merely a supervisory role. In December 1886, however, Burma was reorganized into fourteen districts, with each district under the authority of a British Deputy Commissioner, stationed armed forces, and British police officers (Aung-Thwin, 1985). Aung-Thwin (1985) argues that the primary objective of the new governing bodies were to flesh out British resistance and remove any threats; local officials who aligned with the British were allowed to keep their positions.

Simultaneous to changes in political organization, came the implementation of new policies, including policies aimed at changing cultural traditions, typically aimed at

not necessarily political allegiance (Aung-Thwin, 1985). Aung-Thwin (1985) challenges this label, arguing that the term “pacification” assumes that British rule was accepted after the 1890’s.

Burmans. For instance, shortly after colonization the British established the colonial Village Act, requiring all Burmese, with the exclusion of Buddhist monks, to *shikho* British military and government officers (Charney, 2009). *Shikho* is a gesture of extreme reverence usually reserved for the Buddha, monks, and important elders; the requirement to perform this act to the British was a degrading sign of submission (Charney, 2009).

Despite British expectations of an easy transition, by the end of 1886, many Burmans, as well as ethnic minority groups, continued their resistance in Upper Burma. However, this changed toward the end of the 1890's when the British gained control in areas previously under Burman authority⁶ (Aung-Thwin, 1985). The hill areas inhabited by the Shans, Chins, Kachins, and Karennis, on the other hand, remained relatively cutoff from British control. This was in part due to the terrain and lack of British military power in these regions (Aung-Thwin, 1985). Rather, the British planned to merely replace the role of the Burman king as the recognized overseeing power without using physical force. Aung-Thwin (1985) clarifies that British intentions were to persuade the hill chiefs that "...the scene is the same; the actors only are changed..." (p. 253).

Economics, agriculture, and growing resistance. With the annexation of Upper Burma, and changes in economic policy by the British, the face of rural society in Burma was greatly altered. Beginning in the mid-1850's, the amount of land under rice cultivation had increased six hundred percent resulting in the massive migration of northern villagers south, towards the delta (Charney, 2009). This opportunity led to an increasing class of rural cultivator-owners, a class who were taxed accordingly and would

⁶ The migration of people from Upper Burma to the more peaceful, and agricultural, Lower Burma during this time was a factor in the British gaining control of this area (Aung-Thwin, 1985).

eventually require the assistance of moneylenders to pay for their land⁷ (Charney, 2009). As a result of the Great Depression, moneylenders were forced to collect on unpaid loans, resulting in the loss of land by many Burmese (Charney, 2009).

This economic crisis led to rural rebellions, often initiated by local monks, against the colonial government. A return to pre-colonial physical displays of ethnicity, such as hairstyle and limiting the amount of money spent on clothing and shoes was advocated during this time. British resistance was dealt with harshly by the colonial administration (Charney, 2009).

Burmese resistance and student strikes. Between the years 1872 to 1937, the socio-political climate of Burma, and the capital city of Rangoon in particular, were fraught with tension as Rangoon's Burmese population decreased to less than one third of the total population (Charney, 2009). The Burmese population during this time included immigrants from Upper Burma and seasonal workers employed at the marina and in the surrounding mills, with the majority of the population typically consisting of male immigrants from Southeast India and Southeast China, creating a transnational urban center (Charney, 2009). Although the Chinese population was significant in Rangoon, immigrants from India were a fifty-five percent majority of the population in 1924 (Charney, 2009). During this period, Rangoon materialized into one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Southeast Asia. As a result of the significant Indian presence in Rangoon, the use of Burmese language shifted, and British officials adopted "Hindustani," which denoted the Hindu and Muslim religious origins of the group, as a

⁷ Moneylenders during this time were primarily an Indian caste group called Chettyars and were a significant source of loans throughout rural Burma. Because of their networks in India, the Chettyars easily transferred money between India and Burma (Charney, 2009).

common language within the capital city (Charney, 2009). This decrease in the prestige of Burmese culture resulted in the nonpolitical Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1906. Primarily, this elite group was established as a protection of Buddhism in response to Western culture and the influence of colonial education.

The YMBA became a major player in Burmese resistance following the British-imposed "University Act." Despite the general desire across the Burmese population for a university in Rangoon, the University Act proposed that higher academics in Burma be modeled after British universities (Kyaw, 1993). The University Act resulted in a public outcry against the proposed colonial institution. The YMBA responded to the government's blatant refusal to acknowledge the voice of the Burmese swiftly, and began to discuss ways to protest the University Act (Smith, 1999).

On December 5, 1920 a group of previous participants in YMBA activities successfully organized and staged a University boycott as a nonviolent response to the University Act. Three days later, the student boycotters issued a written statement to the public, which argued that the University Act was "...an instrument, forged by the Government, to keep the nation in chains" (Kyaw, 1993, p. 26). Ultimately, it was this action that set forth Burmese nationalist fervor and was chiefly the first of its kind in Burma (Maw, 1968). In addition, the importance of this day has been marked and continues to be celebrated as National Day.

Selth (1986) argues that as the nationalist cause grew, the people of Burma became more critical in their examination of British colonialism. Nationalist groups began speaking out against British policies, arguing that the ability of the British to

divide the Burmese and have them fight against one another was a constant threat to their country (Selth, 1986). As tensions mounted, resistance throughout Burma grew.

The Hsaya San rebellion. Although the University Act was a major act of resistance for the Burmese, the *hsaya san* rebellion of 1930 is often recognized as the first major armed rebellion in Burma (Charney, 2009). The rebellion was instigated by *hsaya* (male form of teacher) San, a Burmese traditional medical practitioner fed up with the expensive Western medical practices imposed by the British (Charney, 2009). Observing the poverty of the rural class, San joined the General Council of Burmese Association (GCBA, formerly the YMBA). Following an enquiry into the rural areas, San observed the poor treatment of Burmese cultivators by government employees, as well as an overall disrespect for Buddhism (Charney, 2009). Despite recommendations to resist British authority peacefully, San quit his post and instigated an armed resistance against the colonial government on December 22, 1930 (Charney, 2009).

San was ultimately captured disguised as a monk, tried, and executed by hanging at the Tharrawaddy jail on November 28, 1931 (Charney, 2009). Members of his army were also captured; pictures of their decapitated heads were posted throughout Burma in police stations as a deterrent (Charney, 2009). However, this only incited more anger among the Burmese and increased feelings of national unity. As publicity spread through newspapers, the government responded with stricter censorship policies (Charney, 2009).

Dobama Asiayone – We Burmans Association. With the growth of printed materials, the concept of nationalism was spreading amidst anti-British rhetoric. By this time, the nationalist movement was being led by “radicals” such as Aung San and his peers, who formed the group, *Dobama Asiayone* (or We Burmans Society) (Charney,

2009; Selth, 1986). This group was committed to the critical analysis of the impact of Westernization and colonialism on Burma and Burmese culture. As such, they reached out nationally, and publicly voiced their discontent with British colonization and demanded Burmese rights (Charney, 2009). Most notably, the group abandoned the traditional Burmese male prefixes of “Maung” and “Ko” and adopted the term “Thakin,” or master, a term the British mandated Burmese use to address them (Charney, 2009). The switch to “Thakin” was a symbolic gesture to denote that the Burmese were their own masters (Charney, 2009; Selth, 1986).

Although the Dobama Asiayone remained primarily Burman, attempts were made to include members from all ethnic backgrounds and were somewhat successful in recruiting Indians, Mons and Arakanese (Selth, 1986). Selth (1986) postulates that the Dobama Asiayone attracted a low following among the ethnic minority groups because they were concerned about a government ruled by the Burman majority once independence was achieved; Karens, in particular, were vying for their own independent state. In fact, ethnic minority representatives in Parliament were continuously blocking government appeals that would allow Burmans greater authority (Selth, 1986). Additionally, by 1922 the Kachin Hills, the Chin Hills, and the Shan states, were reorganized under a new civil administration called the Burma Frontier Service (Charney, 2009). This organizational structure for the hill areas gave them autonomy and isolation from reforms coming out of the capital in Lower Burma. Charney (2009) also argues that this structure helped to settle the state for future ethnic disputes that are relevant today.

Independence from India. Burma was officially distinguished from India with the Act of 1935, referred to in Burma as the Government of Burma Act of 1935.

Although this Act was not put into effect until 1937, the new constitution and government structure meant that Burma would now be governed separately from India (Charney, 2009; Selth, 1986). Despite British promises to give Burma its independence, a promise thwarted by World War II, it would be nearly a decade before Burma would gain its full autonomy from its colonizer.

The Impact of World War Two. World War Two was a particularly tumultuous time in Burma. Anxious to gain independence, the invasion of the Japanese (1941-1945) provided an opportunity. Looking to gain an ally against the British, coupled with Japan's proposal to give Burma its independence before Britain, the Burman majority sided with Japan following their occupation.

However, under the façade of liberating Asia from European colonialism, Japan merely replaced the British as another colonial power. To keep appearances, Burma “gained more autonomy” and within a year Dr. Ba Maw was designated as the Prime Minister (Selth, 1986). Accordingly the army was renamed the Burma National Army (BNA), and many of the Thakins from the previously mentioned Dobama Asiayone, were given positions in the Cabinet (Selth, 1986). Selth (1986) argues that the period under Ba Maw's leadership was marked with attempts at reunifying the ethnic groups that were divided by colonialism, and the motto, “one blood, one voice, one leader,” was initiated. The minority groups on the other hand, and the Karen⁸ in particular, resisted unification and viewed the new slogan as Burman-centric, with Burmese as the “one voice” and a Burman (Dr. Ba Maw) as the “one leader” (Selth, 1986). The continued allegiance of the hill tribes with the Allies, organized by the British through the creation of separate army

⁸ The Karen in particular suffered greatly at the hands of the Burmese Army during Japanese occupation.

corps to maintain ethnic divisions, further distanced the groups. In fact, many of the hill tribes, the Karen and Kachins in particular, believed that the British would reward them with independent states after the war for their loyalty and valor.

Fed up with the Burmese administration's position as merely a puppet government for Japan, the nationalists led by Aung San, followed by communists, women's groups, trade unions, religious organizations, and even the Karens, plotted rebellion by the end of 1942; this group came to be known as the Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL) (Selth, 1986). After the war, negotiations between the British and the Burman majority-led AFPFL, began promptly. The AFPFL instantly became the representative Burmese organization despite attempts made by the minority groups to schedule meetings with the British; when a delegation, led by Aung San, traveled to London in 1947, no ethnic minority leaders were included (Selth, 1986). Ultimately, the Karen petitioned the British government for independence, without being heard or accommodated (Smith, 1999).

Post-Colonial Burma

When Burma gained its independence in 1948 following the war, it was just recovering from the previous year's assassination of General Aung San (Charney, 2009). The assassination trampled the hopes of many for a profound change in Burma's politics (Frey, 2006). The country then experienced a period of parliamentary democracy that essentially maintained the colonial political organizational structure, under the administration of Prime Minister, U Nu. The Burmese army seized power in 1962, headed by General Ne Win, who nationalized main economic sectors, and by 1969 any

remnants of the colonial parliament structure was eliminated and any multiparty political system was outlawed (Allott, 1994; Iyer, 1999; Lieberman, 1987).

Six months into its independence, the newly named Union of Burma, was fraught with domestic turmoil, including disputes with ethnic minority groups pushing for secession, such as the Muslim Arakanese, Karens, Kachins and Mons, and later followed by Shans and Chins (Allott, 1994; Selth, 1986). In fact, at some point every major ethnic group has initiated a military attack against the Burmese government since 1948 (Selth, 1986). Presently, some insurgencies remain, notoriously characterizing Burma's internal relations (Allott, 1994).

Ne Win and the Burma Socialist Programme Party. Ne Win's government became the "Burma Socialist Programme Party" (BSPP) and subsequently enforced the reform program called the "Burmese Way to Socialism." This program proved to be economically catastrophic as it demonetized currency, resulting in the total loss of savings for Burma's citizens (Frey, 2006). Government control over rice cultivation, which lowered its purchase price significantly, resulted in farmers hoarding rice crops, ultimately doubling the price of rice and other goods nationwide, and caused massive protests and riots by the 1970's (Charney, 2009).

Ideologically, Ne Win sought to impose traditional Burmese culture nationwide, primarily concerned with wiping out Chinese and Indian influences, as well as promoting the spread of Buddhism (Frey, 2006). Consequently, Ne Win's administration quickly became characterized by secrecy and alienation, as foreign journalists and publications were banned, the freedom of the press was nearly extinct, and foreign visitors were limited to areas of government control (Smith, 1991).

Such events characterized Ne Win's twenty-six year military dictatorship, which often exercised martial law against its discontent citizens. As pro-democracy student protests increased, the government responded by shutting down the universities for extended periods of time (Frey, 2006). Resistance against the military government increased further as ethnic minority groups unified under the name "National Democratic Front" (NDF), lead by Karen National Union (KNU) General Saw Bo Mya, who planned a series of insurgent attacks (Charney, 2009).

The 1988 pro-democracy movement and events leading to the present. The situation in Burma reached its apex in 1988 with repeated student demonstrations demanding an end to the military rule. Incensed by a failing economy, lack of freedom and, more specifically, by corrupt police who had killed numerous students without accountability, thousands of students took to the streets (Charney, 2009). The government responded with a military barricade, ultimately killing an estimated one to two hundred students, along with the gang-raping of female students⁹ (Charney, 2009). This however did not prevent students from continuing protests a few months later, and when police killed several children, ordinary citizens began to join their efforts; these series of demonstrations were met with the closing of universities, mass arrests, and mandatory curfews, which extended from Rangoon to Mandalay and Pegu (Charney, 2009). Ne Win resigned shortly following these events and was replaced by General Sein Lwin, who upheld his policies (Frey, 2006).

⁹ The government refused to acknowledge this incident, known as the White Bridge incident, and denied the students' initial call for the investigation of their classmates' deaths by police (Charney, 2009).

Outraged by Sein Lwin's promotion¹⁰, students and monks once again held demonstrations and protests calling for democracy and multi-party elections, this time reaching nationwide (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). The most notable day of violence surrounding these protests was August 8, 1988, when the military, armed with machine guns and tanks, opened fire on the protestors, killing a reported 3,000 in Rangoon alone (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). On August 19, 1988 Sein Lwin was replaced by a close friend of Ne Win, Dr. Maung Maung (Charney, 2009). Maung Maung's first order of business was to relax censorship policies and open up new media outlets in an attempt to ameliorate the dire situation, this included allowing the private sector to publish a diverse range of periodicals, even those critical of the government (Charney, 2009; Iyer, 1999).

Despite these attempts, the country still associated Maung Maung with Ne Win, and demonstrators reached numbers in the hundreds of thousands in Rangoon by mid-August. They gave the new government an ultimatum to resign by September 7th, or they would launch a national offensive (Charney, 2009). Simultaneously, Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San, arrived in Rangoon and quickly became appointed as the spokeswoman and face of the pro-Democracy movement. When Maung Maung's government ignored the ultimatum, fighting ensued. Ultimately, soldiers began to withdraw, refusing to shoot demonstrators, and the government resorted to monetary bribes to keep the army under their control (Charney, 2009).

On September 18, 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) headed by General Saw Maung took over Burma in a coup d'état. As soon as the new military government took control, freedom of speech was once again destroyed. The

¹⁰ The same General held responsible for the White Bridge incident by the public.

SLORC also made Burmanization a priority, officially changing the country's name to Myanmar, and changing all colonial transliterations back into Burmese (Frey, 2006). Thousands of students fled to Thailand and Burma's borderlands at this time, many of those remaining in the country joined ethnic insurgent forces and planned an armed resistance against the SLORC (Charney, 2009).

It soon became apparent that a national political organization was necessary to unify the country. The National League for Democracy (NLD) emerged, ultimately establishing Aung San Suu Kyi as its leader, and alongside other newly formed political groups, the NLD demanded a democratic election (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). As the NLD gained popularity, the SLORC spoke out harshly against the group, and particularly its leader. On July 20, 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest "for allegedly attempting to create conditions dangerous for the state and for attempting to get the Burmese to dislike the Army" (Charney, 2009, p. 167). By November of 1989, the SLORC had arrested 6,000 people associated with the NLD (Frey, 2006).

Elections were eventually held on June 16, 1990, with the NLD winning an astounding 392 of the 447 parliamentary seats (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). Despite General Saw Maung's promise to recognize the winners of the election, who would get to form a new government as well as draft a new constitution, the SLORC quickly stated that the election was invalid due to fraud (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). In an attempt to gain legitimacy and buy time, the SLORC invited leaders of ethnic groups and political groups, including the NLD, to attend a National Convention to write a new constitution together (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). In reality, when members arrived, they found the

constitution already written, debate was out of the question, and ethnic minority members were silenced (Frey, 2006).

By 1992 the SLORC was weakening due to reports of Saw Maung's failing health and mental stability (Charney, 2009). Saw Maung was then soon replaced by one of his most powerful men, General Than Shwe (Charney, 2009). Than Shwe immediately asserted his power, most notably by beginning an offensive against the Karen headquarters, making internal security a priority, and mandating that teachers attend reeducation camps due to their inability to control their students during the pro-democracy demonstrations (Charney, 2009).

The SLORC was replaced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, which was viewed as being a mere name change (Charney, 2009). Despite claiming its interest in reform, the SPDC continued to run a corrupt military government characterized by human rights abuses, transnational criminal activity, including drug and human trafficking, and imposing even more censorship laws and policies (Iyers, 1999). For reference, the Burmese army has more than doubled its since 1988, and with almost half a million soldiers, it is about the same size as the U.S. army (Barron, Okell, Yin, VanBik, Swain, Larkin, Allot, and Ewers, 2007). Burma continues to be considered one of the world's major violators of human rights, particularly in terms of freedom of expression, and freedom of the press.

In more recent history, the U.S. has condemned the SPDC for several offenses including the failure to acknowledge and engage with the NLD; the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi and attacks on NLD supporters resulting in massive injuries and deaths; the horrific human rights abuses by the SPDC that include the use of rape as a weapon

against women, the use and force of child-soldiers in combat against ethnic minority groups; the SPDC's pursuit of ethnic cleansing against the ethnic minority groups; and the SPDC's failure to allow for a free enterprise economy due to the militarization and government control in all aspects of society (Frey, 2006).

These findings, reported by the U.S. Congress, resulted in President George W. Bush signing the Freedom and Democracy Act into law in May of 2003. This law introduced new sanctions on Burma, which included a ban on all trade with the United States, all members of the SPDC were banned from obtaining visas, and all assets of the government in the U.S. were frozen¹¹ (Charney, 2009; Frey, 2006). The Act also set conditions that the SPDC must comply with in order to lift the ban on trade. These included collaboration with democratic political organizations and ethnic minority groups, the release of all political prisoners, and allowing fundamental freedoms, such as speech, religion, and press (Frey, 2006). By 2006, the military junta had not altered its policies and, in August, President Bush signed an extension of the Freedom and Democracy Act. Prior to the extension, in 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared Burma one of the world's "outposts of tyranny," language echoed in President Bush's 2006 State of the Union address, which listed Burma alongside North Korea and Iran as the world's most notorious "despotic systems" (Frey, 2006).

As Burma's struggle for democracy continued without any signs of improvement, the economic situation worsened, with most of the general population living in poverty

¹¹ These sanctions have been controversial given the impact they had on textile industries rather than the SPDC, resulting in the unemployment of 40,000 to 80,000 factory workers. Because most of these workers were female, it is reported that many were forced into Rangoon's infamous sex industry to support their dependent families, furthering the criticism of such sanctions (Charney, 2009).

(Charney, 2009). By 2006, the price of general household items had increased by 40 percent, in 2007, the government raised the price of fuel by between 100 to 500 percent and transportation became nonexistent as bus lines completely stopped running (Charney, 2009). Furthermore, while the people of Burma were struggling daily, members of government continued to prosper, notably the opulent wedding of Than Shwe's daughter was met with harsh criticism. By September 2007, monks throughout Burma initially staged protests in the northwestern part of Burma, where they were beaten for speaking against the government, thus beginning the "Saffron Revolution." When monks staged a peaceful march of protest to the capital, the government responded by shooting into the crowd, defrocking monks, interrogating, arresting, beating and killing many; it is still unknown how many people died during the Saffron Revolution, a topic the All-Burma Monks Alliance have asked the UN to investigate (Charney, 2009).

Shortly after the Saffron Revolution, in May 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated the coast of Burma. Charney (2009) reports that 150,000 people died as a result of Nargis, while 2.5 million were left homeless. As international aid was attempting to get into the country, Than Shwe and his military junta would not permit aid workers visas and kept what goods they allowed into the country locked up for at least three weeks following Nargis, while publicizing that there was no crisis (Charney, 2009). The UN became involved as Western nations threatened to press charges of Crimes Against Humanity against the military junta at the International Court at The Hague (Charney, 2009). With the addition of China's increasing concern about the treatment of the people of Burma, Than Shwe finally agreed to allow international aid.

The history outlined has resulted in many members of Burma's ethnic minority groups living in a state of exile, refuge, and/or transnationalism for decades, while simultaneously, Burman members of democratic organizations have had to flee the country due to their opposition to the government. Although it is difficult to obtain accurate numbers, an estimated over half a million refugees from Burma are living in exile in neighboring countries such as Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and India, as well as hundreds of thousands internally displaced. It is important to note that the sanctuaries displaced persons seek may not always provide the degree of refuge one would hope; refugees are subject to the policies of the country of exile and to the stipulations set by non-governmental agencies offering support (Lang, 2002). For instance, Lang (2002) states

In Thailand, defining "the refugees" is a delicate matter, and a note on terminology is needed. Since the late 1990s, official Thai parlance has referred to "displaced persons fleeing fighting" (not "refugees") and to "temporary shelters" (not "refugee camps"), and official pronouncements have repeatedly confirmed the Burmese refugees' official status as illegal entrants under Thai law. (18)

Lang (2002) goes on to report, however, that in reality Thailand has unofficially recognized the Burmese as "refugees" and that the government will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to these people as long as it is unsafe for them to return home.

With this in mind, although both groups (ethnic minorities and Burman political activists) have had to flee Burma because of persecution and human rights abuses, in terms of the "refugee experience," their narratives have been uniquely different. For instance, many of the Burman democratic activists following the 1988 demonstrations fled to the jungles along the Thai/Burma border. Faced with malaria, hunger, and the reality of the ethnic minorities military conflict against the Burmese government, many

of these young people fled to Thailand. Because Thailand is not party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, these political refugees would only be recognized as such contingent on filing a successful claim of asylum with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Barron et al., 2007; UNHCR, 2012). Accordingly, successful applicants would be granted a small monthly stipend and limited protection (Barron et al., 2007; UNHCR, 2012). This policy resulted in many Burmans living illegally with the constant threat of deportation.

Ethnic minority refugees who fled to the Thai/Burma border due to warfare with the Burmese government, on the other hand, were allowed to develop “semi-permanent” refugee camps in designated areas and were provided support through outside private relief organizations (Barron et al., 2007; Lang, 2002). Approximately 150 thousand people, mainly ethnic Karen (Sgaw and Pwo) and Karenni, along with Burman and diverse ethnic minority groups, live in one of the 9 official refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border, with Mae La refugee camp housing the largest population of over 40 thousand people. The other refugee camps in Thailand include: Umpiem Mai, Nu Po, Ban Kwai/Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Ma Luang, Ban Don Yang, and Tham Hin. The majority of refugees resettled to the United States are from the Karen ethnic group, or a Karen subgroup, the Burman majority ethnic group, and the Chin ethnic group¹² (Barron et al., 2007).

Karen refugees first began fleeing Burma for Thailand after a major Karen military base was taken over by the Burmese army in 1984 (Barron et al., 2007; Lang, 2002). Shortly after, the Burmese government took control of more areas along the

¹² Most of the Chin living in the U.S. were resettled from Malaysia (Barron et al., 2007).

Thai/Burma border and the roughly ten thousand Karen refugees in Thailand were joined by Karenni, Mon, Shan, and other ethnic groups so that by 1990 there were 43,500 refugees from Burma in Thailand (Barron et al., 2007; Lang, 2002). By 1995 refugees in Thailand had reached over 92,000 and the situation became increasingly tumultuous for the Karen resistance particularly when their capital, Manerplaw, fell to the Burmese army, resulting in many of the Christian Karen¹³ fleeing to Thailand (Barron et al., 2007; Lang, 2002). During this period of time, refugee camps in Thailand were attacked by the Burmese army and the Karen political group, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), who were dissatisfied with the Christian-lead insurgency group, the KNU (Barron et al., 2007).

Consequently, the Thai government reorganized the refugee groups by decreasing the number of camps and increasing their size. In 2000, refugee numbers had grown to over 122,000 and by 2007 over 150,00 refugees, mostly Karen, Karennis, and Mon, as well as an estimated over 100,000 Shan who have been living illegally with extended family members in Thailand (Lang, 2002). It is important to note that these numbers reflect only those persons registered in the camps and Lang (2002) reports that an estimated 750,000 economic refugees living as undocumented migrants working in Thailand were from Burma, as cited by the Thailand National Security Council and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. Additionally, it is estimated that roughly twenty thousand women and girls work in Thailand's sex industry.

¹³ Although the exact number varies depending on the resource, Karen refugees make up roughly 80 to 90 percent of the refugees on the Thai/Burma border. The Christian Karen comprise roughly 20 to 30 percent of the total ethnic Karen population (Barron et al., 2007).

The unique positionality of these people not only complicates our understanding of culture, identity, and the construction of self, but also challenges views of nation, nationalism and concepts of citizenship, particularly as these groups enter into different national domains.

U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy

Omi and Winant (1994) define racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). Accordingly, this section provides an outline of the structures that have maintained the racial “othering” of Asian immigrant and refugee groups in the United States, and the potential impact this has on more recent refugee communities, such as the Burmese. Furthermore, this section considers how a history of immigration and refugee policy has been designed to “create” and carve out specific identities and “citizens,” while maintaining white privilege. This is evident in Congress’ first policy on immigration and citizenship; the Naturalization Law of 1790 declared that only “free white” immigrants could qualify for citizenship (Omi & Winant, 1994). This perspective contextualizes and historicizes the situation that current Asian groups, such as refugees from Burma, face when they arrive to the United States.

The Genealogy of U.S. Immigration/Refugee Policy

It is important to maintain a distinction between refugee and immigrant groups so as not to essentialize each group’s experiences. Historically, these two groups have been viewed separately, yet are sometimes used interchangeably in literature. In terms of refugee and immigration policy, “refugee” wasn’t a legal concept until 1948; therefore immigration reform leading to this period will also be considered. Typically, immigrants

are regarded as “persons fleeing economic hardship or otherwise seeking a better life,” while refugees are differentiated as “persons fleeing persecution” (Holman, 1996, p. 3).

In the early history of the United States, no distinctions were made in foreign immigration policies between immigrant and refugee populations (Holman, 1996). Prior to the civil war, individual states took it upon themselves to regulate immigration since federal policy had not yet been enacted. During this time, the reporting of character traits, called “poor laws,” was a commonly required practice in gaining state entry (Neuman, 1993).

The impact of individual state legislature profoundly influenced federal regulations on Asian immigration. Consequently, when anti-Chinese sentiment grew in the Western states, confusion surrounding contradictory racial categorization occurred. This was particularly due to the 1850 California state legislature, which deemed that “no Black, or Mulatto person, or Indian shall be allowed to give evidence for, or against a White man” (Kim, 1999; Omi and Winant, 1994). As a response to this legislation, Chinese immigrants questioned where they fell, and in the groundbreaking case, *People v. George Hall* (1854), California’s supreme court concluded that under the 1850 law, the Chinese testimony against a white man was inadmissible in court due to “alleged racial kinship between the Chinese and Indians,” as well as defining the racial category “Black” to refer to all non-whites (Kim, 1999)¹⁴. Chinese in the U.S. were now racially

¹⁴ Although the purpose of this section is not to explore state versus federally mandated immigration legislation, bearing in mind the key role that states such as California played in Asian immigration policy, this information can play as an important side note. This case in particular, and those following, set the course for the legalized construction of race and further distinguished “white” from “non-white,” while maintaining the former’s power. Specifically cases such as, *In re Ah Yup* (1878) in California, ruled that naturalization was not permissible for the Chinese born Ah Yup because he was “Mongolian” and non Caucasian. *Takao Ozawa v. United States* (1922) went to the U.S. Supreme Court, who stated that because Ozawa was Japanese born and a member of the “yellow” race, he was therefore not white, thus upholding

categorized as “Indian” and therefore not considered “free white” immigrants, thus denying their political rights as deemed by the aforementioned 1790 Naturalization Law¹⁵ (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Page Law of 1875. Initiated by the Pacific coastal states, the Page Law of 1875 was the first federal act of legislation passed by Congress substantiating anti-Chinese rhetoric. The Page Law created greater restrictions on “coolie labor,” which included any “...subject of China, Japan, or any oriental country...” and also banned the immigration of “Chinese prostitutes” (Peffer, 1986, 28). Peffer (1986) reports that between the years of 1876 to 1882, the number of Chinese women in the U.S. decreased 68 percent from the previous seven years, while the number of male laborers increased by at least thirteen thousand; an impact of significant proportion to the Chinese communities in the United States.

As evidenced, the Page Law had a profound impact on the immigration of women from China, resulting in shifting family dynamics, which also led to cultural stereotypes of the “effeminate Asian man.” Although some scholars in the field point to the Exclusion Act for major discrepancies between the sexes in Chinese immigration, the Page Law, which often goes ignored, warrants closer attention. Not only did this law bar the immigration of Chinese “prostitutes,” but also served as the prejudicial platform for further Chinese female immigration, and moreover, as the precursor to the entire exclusion of Chinese immigration, both male and female (Peffer, 1986).

the *In re Ah Yup* ruling (Haney Lopez, 1996; Kim, 1999). Further, in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) the U.S. Supreme Court once again ruled that the Hindu, Thind, although Caucasian by ethnologists, was considered non white due to “common” understandings of race at that time (Kim, 1999)

¹⁵ The racial categories at this time were “white,” “Negro,” and “Indian.” This case is particularly provocative when juxtaposed to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which defined Mexicans as “white” and therefore gave them a free political status (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The first large movements of Asian immigration took place between 1850 to 1860, as a result of the active recruitment of Chinese laborers for cheap labor in California as well as the development of the trans-Mississippi frontier in the south (Boyd, 1971; Kim, 1999). As economic prosperity increased in states such as California, which entered the Union as a non-slave state, the need for cheap labor intensified (Kim, 1999). Chinese immigrant labor posed a solution for this problem, and thus, according to Kim (1999) a second form of slavery began in the U.S. that maintained White privilege and racial dominance. Although the “Mongolian” race, another racializing label, was ultimately valorized as a racial group distinctly superior to Blacks, there are instances where they were “negroized” in cartoons, called “coolies,” and excluded from civic engagement. Further, it was believed during this time that because Blacks were viewed as less intelligent than Chinese, they were “easily taught” and “assimilate more readily,” whereas Chinese immigrants were viewed as “non-assimilative,” and therefore more threatening (Kim, 1999). Further, Kim (1999) cites a newspaper in California that headlined, “We desire only a white population in California” (p. 109), while a white man was reported saying in the context of labor, “One white man is worth two Chinamen; that one Chinaman is worth two negroes, and that one negro is worth two tramps” (p. 111).

As tensions mounted, the fight to exclude the Chinese was blatant in its racism. In 1868, the U.S. Congress announced the human right for migration as “natural” and stated that it fell under the auspices of The Declaration of Independence, that it was an essential right of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Although the purpose was to establish trade agreements in China, the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, stated “the

inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of...free migration and emigration...for purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as permanent residents” (Henkin, 1987). However, as the economic situation worsened and nativism increased, sentiment shifted toward the legal support of the anti-Chinese movement. Lee (2002) argues that this anti-Chinese movement accomplished goals that included the racialization of Chinese immigrants in a way that bounded them to a “foreign,” “alien” identity.

The United States’ response to the growing situation on the West coast was to enact immigration restrictions based on ethnicity and national origin. The first documented into legislation were the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Immigration Act of 1882, which were the first federal laws to exclude a specific group based on ethnicity (Holman, 1996). Further, the Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the naturalization of any Chinese immigrant (Lee, 2002). These laws began with the prohibition of foreign laborers in the 1880s and progressed with the addition of literacy requirements for immigrants during World War I. Although the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was originally intended to be a 10-year term only, it was renewed twice, and then renewed indefinitely in 1904 (Fong, 1998). Restrictions on Chinese immigration at this time were now expanded to cover most immigration from Asia (Holman, 1996). Additionally, not only did the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 discriminate on a racial basis, this legislation discriminated against class as well. Despite the law’s prohibition of Chinese immigration, Lee (2002) reports that, “...merchants, teachers, students, travelers, and diplomats were exempt from exclusion;” demonstrating a distinct class bias (p. 36).

More recent research on the Chinese Exclusion Act has deemed it a “watershed” moment in U.S. history, arguing that its impact and consequences on future immigrant groups, “and American immigration law in general” is significant, while literature in this area remains limited (Lee, 2002, p. 36). Lee (2002) argues that with the inception of the Chinese Exclusion Act into U.S. law, an entirely new way of thinking about immigration and race was introduced to the U.S. public and overall culture, an ideology predicated upon “gatekeeping.” Not only did this gatekeeping philosophy reinforce and legalize the ability to exclude those deemed “undesirable,” but it reduced an entire group of people, based their race, class, and gender, to the definitive point of exclusion. Categories Lee (2002) describes as “...the models by which to measure the desirability (and “whiteness”) of other immigrant groups” (p. 37).

The impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act reverberated beyond the scope of legalese and policy. Exclusionist attitudes fostered a national identity that defined American citizenship through the exclusion of “undesirable” groups. By categorizing the cultural traits of immigrant groups as “undesirable” and “alien,” both legally and in popular conversation, a distinctly European-American identity was idealized and federally legitimated. As Lee (2002) suggests, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, a racially homogenous U.S. was legitimized through the racialization of the Chinese as non-white, and therefore, undesirable “other.” After a series of amendments to the Chinese Exclusion Act, documentation became required for those Chinese already residing in the U.S. prior to the passage of the 1882 bill; the first time in U.S. history this was mandated. These “certificates of residence” and “certificates of identity” were the antecedents to our present day “green cards,” and applied only to Chinese immigrants

until 1928; at which point all newly arriving immigrants received such cards. Chinese immigrants found without such documentation faced arrest and deportation for illegal entry into the U.S. (Lee, 2002).

The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed on December 17, 1943. While some attribute the repeal to positive American sentiment following Chinese allegiance during World War II, it is also speculated that the U.S. was merely paying lip service, as quotas were set at 105 immigrants per year (U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, 2011). Regardless of the reason, the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act was profound with the spread of stereotypes and anti-immigration sentiment to Japanese, Korean and Indian immigrant communities, as well as the racialization of certain European immigrants, such as Italians and French Canadians, in a way comparable to the Chinese (Lee, 2002, p. 47-48).

“Gentlemen’s Agreement” 1907-1908. After the Chinese, the Japanese were the second major Asian group to immigrate to the U.S. and as the Chinese population steadily declined, particularly in the Western states and California specifically, the Japanese population became pronounced. The Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907-1908 was President Theodore Roosevelt’s solution to the mounting tension between the Western states and increasing Japanese immigration (Boyd, 1971). California laborers fed up with the increasing number of Japanese workers, who, like the Chinese, accepted lower pay, ultimately called for the total exclusion of this group. Despite an 1894 treaty with Japan that assured free immigration, Japan agreed to not issue passports to the U.S. for prospective laborers (Aoki, 1999). Although now entering the U.S. via Canada, Hawaii, or Mexico, Japanese laborers continued to increase, and the racial tensions in

California worsened to the point where in 1906 the San Francisco school district called for the segregation of all Asian children. It was at this point that President Roosevelt stepped in and exchanged the reversal of the segregation order for the continued denial of U.S. passports for Japanese laborers, with the addendum that the U.S. could exclude and deport any Japanese laborers entering via peripheral countries (Aoki, 1999). Under this agreement, Japanese non-laborers were still able to enter the U.S. (Boyd, 1971).

“Tydings-McDuffie Act” of 1934. Subsequently, the U.S. turned to its Filipino nationals, who were exempt from immigration restrictions and quotas, as its new labor market. This would change, however, when the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934-1935 redefined what it meant to be Filipino in the United States. Because this Act was supposed to run simultaneously with the Philippines independence from the United States, the Tydings-McDuffie Act stipulated that Filipino status be changed from “national” to “alien” (Wong, 1986). Due to the war, however, the Philippines independence didn’t come until afterward. The Tydings-McDuffie Act also limited immigration to 50 people from the Philippines per year. This time, however, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters’ Association successfully lobbied for a provision that if laborers run short, they would be able to recruit Filipino workers; this provision was used on one occasion, in 1946 (Melendy, 1974).

National Quota Acts are passed. As immigrant quota limits continued to characterize immigration policy, the Immigration Act of 1917 focused on the restriction of immigrants from the area known as the “Asiatic Barred Zone,” which included countries such as Burma, India, Siam, the Malay States, Polynesia, Afghanistan, as well

as parts of Russia (Lee, 2002). This Act also added the requirement for all adult immigrants to take literacy tests.

Immigration regulations took on a new face in the 1920s. With the passing of the National Origins Quota Act in 1921, numerical restrictions were now an everyday part of immigration policy and legislation. This act not only placed an overall quota on immigration to the U.S. (150,000 persons per year), but limited immigration to 3 percent the population of any given nationality already in the U.S. by 1910 (Wong, 1986). The Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, decreased these quotas from 3 percent to 2 percent of immigrants in the U.S. by 1890; no quotas were allowed for China, Japan, and Korea (Wong, 1986). These highly restrictive immigration acts resulted in major decreases in immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe in particular, while they “perfected the exclusion of all Asians, except for Filipinos” (Lee, 2002, p. 52).

The Immigrant Acts of 1921 and 1924 were not altered until 1952, with the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. Wong (1986) argues that this Act mainly served as a “rationalization” of the prior immigration legislation rather than serving as actual reform. The quota system remained intact, but was now divided into quota and non-quota persons; quotas were reserved for skilled workers only, and non-quota persons were characterized as spouses and relatives of citizens or permanent residents (Boyd, 1971; Wong, 1986). Immigration quotas from the National Origins Quota Act of 1924 remained the same for Asian countries; China with 105, Japan was allowed 185 and both Korea and the Philippines,

100 (Wong, 1986). Additionally, the passing of this act allowed Japanese immigrants to become naturalized citizens for the first time (Omi & Winant, 1994).

Increasing pressure on the U.S. government by the civil rights movement resulted in the eradication of the previous quota limitations with the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965. Although restrictions were still a part of this new policy, an Eastern hemisphere quota was set at 20,000, and an overall cap at 170,000. The 1965 amendments focused on family reunification, immediate relatives would not be counted in immigration quotas, and gave occupational and educational preference to immigrants (Wong, 1986). Asian immigrants capitalized on this opportunity and by the 1970s, 80-90 percent of immigrants from Asia entered the U.S. under the family provisions (Fong, 1998). The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments continued to have a profound impact on Asian immigration. Between 1955 and 1964, immigrants from Asia made up 7.7 percent of the overall U.S. immigrant population, from 1965 to 1974 this number rose to 22.4 percent and increased to 43.3 percent between 1975 and 1984 (Fong, 1998). However, it is important to note that despite the increase in Asian immigration, there still appears to be a class bias, with a majority of the population coming from educated, middle to upper class, backgrounds.

The Immigration Act of 1990 increased previous quotas and now provided a world-wide quota of 700,000 immigrants per fiscal year. Additionally, this act attempted to redeem past discrimination by creating a provision for diversity immigrants, particularly for those underrepresented in the past (Holman, 1996). Although quotas more than doubled for skilled workers, quotas were cut in half for unskilled workers, thus greatly shaping the type of immigrant settling in the United States.

Incorporation of Refugee Policy

How did this history of immigration policy take refugee populations into account? As mentioned previously, quotas had not become a part of U.S. immigration policy until the 1920s; because of this, a separate legislation for refugees had not been considered (Holman, 1996). Consequently, refugees were met with the same legal limitations and regulations of entry as potential immigrants. This policy did not change until after World War II when President Harry Truman issued a directive to include “displaced persons” as 90 percent of the immigrant quota during this time. However, the subsequent Displaced Persons Act of 1948, the first U.S. refugee legislation, and the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 authorized a quota for refugees from war-torn Europe and persons fleeing Communist-dominated countries only (Holman, 1996).

U.S. refugee policy continued to define refugees as persons fleeing from Communist countries, and the addition of persons fleeing persecution from countries in the Middle East, came in The Act of September 11, 1957. This policy was incorporated into the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) in 1965 and continued to define refugee populations until 1980 (Holman, 1996). Fuchs (1992) argues that as long as U.S. foreign policy was dictated by the Cold War, so was refugee policy. The Refugee Act of 1980, signed by President Carter, lifted the ban on refugees exclusively from “Communist or Communist-dominated country,” integrated the United Nations definition of a refugee into U.S. policy, and promoted the establishment of congressional consultation and the development of federal programs to assist in the efforts of refugee resettlement (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). This new definition of a refugee can be found in section 101(a)(42) of the INA. It states:

(42) The term “refugee” means (A) any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion...

The definition goes on to include persons within their country of origin who can be granted presidential pardon. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) report that despite the change in paperwork, little changed in U.S. policy toward refugees. The two Reagan administrations witnessed the increase of refugee admissions from Communist countries, particularly from Southeast Asia and from Eastern Europe, while persons fleeing right-winged “regimes,” such as Guatemala and El Salvador, had difficulty entering the United States.

Following the Cold War, the U.S. broadened its admissions of refugees to incorporate a more diverse population (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). More recent trends in U.S. refugee policy include decreased spending on federal programming, assistance, and a lowering of refugee quota.

In comparison to immigrant admissions, refugee admissions have historically, and more recently, been dramatically less. For example, in 2001, 68,925 refugees entered the United States, while 1,064,318 immigrants were granted entry for permanent residence (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). However, following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the number of refugees admitted to the U.S. dropped even lower; in 2002, only 26,839 refugees were admitted to the U.S. (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). One interpretation for the significant drop in this number can be attributed to changes in U.S. policy following the

September 11th attacks that intensified antiterrorist laws. Refugees from Burma were particularly impacted by these new policies.

Post-9/11 and its impact on refugee policy. The main policy in question was the 2001 U.S. Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism), which amended the INA. While the primary objective was to prevent terrorists from entering the United States, the reality of this policy has been grim for refugee groups. For instance, the amended INA allows for immigration judges to use personal discretion when categorizing a group “terrorist,” therefore barring any consistent and systematic definition of this term and who it may apply to (Frey, 2006). Further, under these new policies, a “terrorist” could now be defined as any person who has monetarily contributed to a terrorist organization, or who has used any form of weapon to cause danger, either intentionally or not, to another person or persons, or to their property (Frey, 2006). “Terrorist organizations” were categorized into three tiers, the first tier were groups designated by the Secretary of State, the second tier were groups designated by the Secretary of State in conjunction with the Attorney General and/or the Secretary of Homeland Security; no group from Burma was categorized under either of these tiers (Frey, 2006). The third tier, on the other hand, defined a terrorist organization as any group of two or more people, or a subgroup of people, that engage in any kind of “terrorist activity;” Frey (2006) labels this tier as the “catch-all provision.”

Frey (2006) states that a major criticism of these policies has been the inadequate, unclear, and inconsistent definition of “terrorist.” The provision over monetary support in particular, has been largely misunderstood and because of its broad definition open to

varied interpretation, refugees fleeing from Burma were designated as terrorists and therefore not allowed to enter the U.S. (Frey, 2006). In 2006, the resettlement of over 130,000 refugees from Burma was frozen as a result. To further complicate matters, U.S. administration at this point had deemed Burma's military government a "tyranny" guilty of human rights violations and among the ranks of countries such as North Korea and Iran (Frey, 2006). Refugees fleeing Burma could technically be considered terrorists, or belonging to a third tier terrorist organization, by belonging to an ethnic minority group, including paying taxes or showing support to leaders of this group, and defending themselves against years of human rights abuses; refugees waiting resettlement in the U.S. were caught in a paradox.

However, a waiver was signed later that year by Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State, allowing the entrance of a selective group of refugees from Burma. Refugee numbers from Burma entering the U.S. continued to increase until 2008 and have remained constant through 2010 (USDHS, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2010, 2011). Additionally, in 2010 refugees from Burma made up 23 percent of the incoming refugee population, the second largest group after Iraq (USDHS, Annual Flow Report, 2011).

In sum, the history of race in the U.S. is complicated and extensive; the history of immigration has also been intricate and tumultuous. While this section is not an exhaustive history of race in the United States, it does focus on specific policies that have shaped immigration laws and how this has impacted Asian groups in particular. Examining a brief history of U.S. immigration and refugee policy illustrates how these policies have systemically excluded the incorporation of specific populations, namely

those from Asian countries, from being full participants in the larger scale, U.S. social and political milieu.

Chapter 4: Burmese Youth Narratives—Stories of School and Life in the U.S.

Introduction

The purpose of the current study has been to examine, through narrative analysis, how refugee youth from Burma construct their identities while navigating the U.S. education system and society. Consequently, of particular interest were the ways these youths engage with, navigate, and construct multiple identities, as well as the ways in which they enact their agency and the resources they employ and activate throughout this process. As such, several research questions were generated, including:

Identity/Experience Focused Questions

1. How do refugee youth from Burma narrate their lives, experiences and identities living in the United States?
 - c. How do refugee youth from Burma identify “self” and how was this constructed throughout the interview process?
 - d. How did these participants describe/understand this “self” or “selves?”

School-Based Questions

2. What are the experiences of school like for refugee youth from Burma?
3. How do they describe experiences of inclusion and exclusion?
4. What sources of capital/knowledge do these students describe having?
 - a. Where does this come from? How do they describe this?

Each participant’s story was independently analyzed as a unique account, after which similar themes across individuals were compared for similarities and differences. This chapter is therefore organized with an in-depth analysis of each individual, beginning with a background of their biographical information, and then proceeding with an analysis of their interview data, following a thematic structure with structural and dialogical/performative analysis throughout. For analytical purposes, participants are presented in order of length of time in the United States, beginning with Paw Bu Ley, who has been in the U.S. for the least amount of time.

Paw Bu Ley—Life in Transition: Straddling Transnational Spaces, Navigating Multiple Identities

Biographical/Background Information

At the time of the interview, Paw Bu Ley was 18-years-old, had been in the United States for about 10 months, and was in the 10th grade at Newtown High School (NHS). When asked what it was like coming to the United States from Burma, she shares her story of displacement. Burma is not a place she remembers personally, but knows from her Karen mother that it was a place of conflict between the many ethnic groups and the Burmese government. In 1994, her mother took Paw Bu Ley when she was 3-years old and fled to Thailand. Aside from her mother, Paw Bu Ley only mentions her sister, who is two years younger than her, as a family member, so it is unclear who else might have fled with them from Burma, if anyone. Because Paw Bu Ley was so young at the time, this memory is unclear to her.

After arriving to this initial refugee camp, Paw Bu Ley moves to another camp close by with her family, near the city of Mae Sot, in Thailand. Spending 15 years in this camp was a formidable experience for Paw Bu Ley; it was her past, her reference point for her present, and continued to be an experience she reflected on and tried to make sense of. For example, when asked questions in the interview about her experiences in the United States, Paw Bu Ley would often share a story about her life in the refugee camp. Simultaneously, she would use these past experiences to draw comparisons to her new life in the United States, a topic that will be discussed in greater detail.

Throughout her experience with displacement and fleeing to the refugee camps in Thailand, Paw Bu Ley never mentions her biological father, nor does she refer to him

throughout the entire interview. In 2001, when Paw Bu Ley was 10-years old, her mother remarried. Paw Bu Ley does not discuss this event positively, views her stepfather as controlling both to her and her mother, and talks about him as “violent.” Referring to the fact that her mother is always “relying on her husbands,” in this plural form, it is unclear how many times her mother has been married and what these experiences were like for Paw Bu Ley.

Paw Bu Ley views this period of her life as lacking control from parents, or stepfather more specifically, but also as a time of limitation, static and not one of progression in terms of her education. Education is a major focus and drive for Paw Bu Ley, as such it will be one of the themes highlighted in a later section. Accordingly, she situates herself as an observer of an educational system that was failing her needs within the refugee camp context. Paw Bu Ley sees education as a necessary method for attaining her ultimate goal, to go to medical school and become a doctor. Her life in the refugee camp is discussed as a time when she lacked control over her situation and understood this as a systemic problem. The United States, however, represented a place where she could fulfill her dreams.

In 2009, Paw Bu Ley and four members of her family, including her stepfather, “got a chance to come to here.” She describes the resettlement process to the United States as very long and difficult. In order to be allowed into the United States, Paw Bu Ley lists the obstacles and organizations that she and her family had to navigate for 6 months prior to their arrival. She states that the UNHCR is an organization that “help refugees to come to the other country,” but that they also needed to be considered a refugee, had to obtain the appropriate documentation, go through an interview process,

“and then they decide if you have approval or not.” Paw Bu Ley’s identity as a refugee will be examined in a section below.

Upon arriving to the United States, Paw Bu Ley’s stepfather is arrested after an incident of abuse and is no longer a part of her life. Paw Bu Ley does not go into detail about this event, but describes being more in control of her life in her stepfather’s absence. She prefers to focus on school now that she is in the United States and outlines a weekly routine that is structured around school and coming home to do her homework. On the weekends, when she isn’t helping her Christian sponsors with housework or going to church on Sundays, Paw Bu Ley spends her free time at the library or doing chores around her house such as cleaning, washing her clothes and picking up her room. Paw Bu Ley’s Christianity is not at the forefront of discussion or how she presents herself. Rather, she takes pleasure in school and describes her favorite times as learning math and science.

Analysis

Family. Family is a prominent theme throughout Paw Bu Ley’s interview. It meant different things to her at different times throughout the interview. For instance, she constantly shifted between using the words “parents” and “mom” to talk about family issues. It became more concrete that in instances when she was talking about parents in the plural form to discuss other people, or “Burmese” culture in general, that she was processing her experiences with her stepfather and making sense of “Burmese” culture. The experience of family separation was a salient and pivotal turning point in Paw Bu Ley’s life, coinciding with her arrival to the United States. The new freedom she experienced when her stepfather left her family was a way that repositioned her

“autonomous self,” to reflect on this time in her life. This will be examined in the “Burmese culture and role of parents” subsection.

The “mother/daughter relationship” subsection looks at Paw Bu Ley’s narratives of her relationship with her mother. This relationship was particularly unique and required careful analysis thematically, structurally, and dialogically. While maintaining a holistic understanding of this theme’s evolution throughout the interview, I began to discover how some of Paw Bu Ley’s narratives that weren’t explicitly about family, were being expressed dialogically, through her mother’s voice. Paw Bu Ley’s understanding of her mother is constantly in transition and shifting, but it is the strength she draws from her mother, that gives her the ambition discussed in the following section highlighting narratives of her “autonomous self.”

Burmese culture and the role of parents: A narrative analysis. Early in the interview, Paw Bu Ley sets the context of her family and how she thinks about them. In a quote shared above in the biographical section, Paw Bu Ley states that her stepfather was arrested when they arrived to the United States “because he tried to use violence” on them, resulting in calling the police, and his separation. Immediately following this story, Paw Bu Ley recognizes her audience and inserts me into the continuation of her narrative: “Yeah, but you know, it's like, you know that because you have been in Burma.”

Before beginning the interview, I introduced myself to Paw Bu Ley and told her about my particular interest in refugees from Burma, as well as the trip I had recently taken to Burma and Thailand. During this time, I visited the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand, home to more than 40,000 Karen refugees, which at one time included Paw Bu

Ley and her family. Returning to the quote above, Paw Bu Ley uses this knowledge to situate me as a “knower,” “because [I] have been in Burma.” As such, she constructs her narrative dialogically, as a shared experience.

Simultaneously, Paw Bu Ley is trying to make sense of her experiences with her stepfather and his use of violence. In positioning me as a “knower,” she can view her situation as a “normal” occurrence, one that I can understand because I have been there and seen what its like; she is not the only one this happens to. She develops this further by explaining violence as a cultural phenomenon, rather than an individual problem. In so doing, she also complicates her understanding of culture by stating that while there is bad, there are also good aspects:

Burmese people are all like, you know, they want their kids to be good so they teach them the culture...But if you look at the other side, they use violence [laughs].

One interpretation for her use of “Burmese people,” rather than Karen, is that her stepfather was Burmese. This is unclear because at other times in the interview she corrects herself when she says “Thai” or “Karen,” to mean “Burmese” culture, which could be interpreted as the experience and confusion surrounding transnationalism and occupying multiple spaces by a youth who has spent most of her life living in a refugee camp. Regardless, Paw Bu Ley is using the term “Burmese people” to understand her family, and stepfather in particular, and states that “all” Burmese people are like this, to denote a common experience. Although this may be described as a common experience, shared by all Burmese people, Paw Bu Ley is trying to dissociate herself from this cultural aspect. By using “they” and “them,” Paw Bu Ley is not including herself in this cultural analysis.

Interestingly, she points out the contradiction in the desires of Burmese people, that they want their kids to be good, so they teach them their culture, but “they use violence.” There are several ways this statement can be interpreted. On the one hand, Paw Bu Ley’s statement supplies a cultural critique, indicating the use of violence at large and the hypocrisy of using violence and simultaneously advocating good morals in children, or using violence to teach good behavior. On the other hand, perhaps Paw Bu Ley is making sense of why her stepfather would use violence on her family. His intentions might be good, to pass on his culture and create a “good” child, but his methods are wrong and disconnected from his intentions. Paw Bu Ley is grappling with these thoughts at the present because in the past she wasn’t able to so.

And that is how, is the fact, we want to come here because in the refugee camp we don't have the chance to talk back to parents and even if you did something right or wrong, you don't have the chance to talk back. And if you talk back, you are always considered that you are a bad child.

In this section of the narrative that continued from the previous passage, Paw Bu Ley is using the inclusive “we” to describe her shared experience of being a child of a “Burmese” person. The change from “they” to “we,” runs parallel to the Burmese cultural context outlined in the previous passage to the context of the refugee camp described above, as well as the shift from “Burmese people” to “parents.” This transformation repositions Paw Bu Ley as she is able to talk about her past inability to stand up and “talk back” to her stepfather for fear of being considered a “bad child.”

Paw Bu Ley further describes a culture of control that she associates with living in the refugee camp in Thailand, or to Burmese society in general. Her understanding of parent/child relationships is in transition as she figures out what life in the U.S. is going to be like for her. For Paw Bu Ley, dependence on parents means that you are not

progressing as an individual, something she equates with agency and “self-confidence.”

People deserve, deserve, having more self-confidence because every youth is controlled by their parents, so they have to do what ever their parents says. So they says, “oh...” Like, if you go somewhere else, if nobody tried to control you, then you know, you try to search something, you try to assert your will, right? Like if somebody came with you, like your mom and dad, then you you wouldn't have to search anything, you wouldn't have to do anything. They just tell you, “just go there.” And then, you just go there. So, that is something that make people who live in Thailand, or Burma, or society...

In the first part of this quote, Paw Bu Ley conveys that self-confidence is attained when given freedom and responsibility to figure things out on your own. When you get the chance to “search” for things on your own, you are asserting your free will. This is stifled, however, by doing everything your parents tell you to do, which is Paw Bu Ley’s experience living in Thailand, or Burma.

The combination of cultural constraints, family position as a child, and situation in the refugee camp created a structure of voicelessness for Paw Bu Ley. Her past thoughts reflect the desire for a new place, a place where she could “talk back” and be free of the abusive control of her stepfather; this place was the United States.

But, we took everything into our hearts if we get into the United States one day, then, we have to spread out. I mean, even he, he get here, he didn't do any violence that we'd have to call the police or for... But, he did, that's why we had to call the police [laughs]...

Paw Bu Ley describes her family’s strategic plan to stay together in the refugee camp so that her stepfather may enter into the United States. Although they had decided to “spread out” regardless of Paw Bu Ley’s stepfather’s actions in the U.S., this decision was not taken lightly. This narrative counters the perspective of women and children as weak and vulnerable inside refugee camps (Williams, 1990). Although Paw Bu Ley’s mother did decide to stay with this abusive man in the refugee camp, the decision was

made collectively to separate once they arrived in the United States.

Such incidences of subterfuge are not uncommon among refugee families who are confined to strict bureaucratic policies defining who is a refugee and who is allowed to resettle, in order to leave camp and move to countries such as the United States. While some researchers have described the blurred boundaries surrounding resettlement (Sandvik, 2011) and how families falsify reports in order to gain admittance into a host country, (Zetter, 1991) it is also important to consider how the concept of “family” is different in Burmese, Karen, and Asian cultures than in the United States. While U.S. culture defines family from an individualized nuclear perspective, as evident in immigration/refugee policy limiting admittance to immediate family members, as well as immigration restrictions on family reunification that only allow for spouses and children under 21, Karen, Burmese, and Asian cultures, on the other hand have a more socially expansive perspective of family, that includes living with extended family members and relies on the interconnectedness and support of large kinship networks (Hickey, 1996; Holland et al., 1998).

Paw Bu Ley describes her interpretation of the culture and how parents view their children:

In Thailand, I mean in Karen, Karen society, or in the Burmese society, even they have the kids, over 20 or over 30, but in their eyes, they see, just a little kid. So, they just keep them, and they live in the same home, even when their kid having children. So they feel [close with] their kids. But here, if your kids are 18, and if they marry, they can move to the other house, right?

As she tries to assign this cultural aspect to a specific “society,” Paw Bu Ley recognizes that although her knowledge comes from the physical place she has occupied in Thailand, that this family dynamic comes from a different ethnic tradition. Unable to pinpoint

exactly whether this came from Karen or Burmese society, Paw Bu Ley ultimately compares parent/child relationships with her understanding of U.S culture. Consistent with socially constructed theories of identity that argue how the self is constructed in relation to others (Holland et al., 1998), Paw Bu Ley is making sense of family dynamics by comparing her past experiences and knowledge of Burmese culture, with U.S. culture. By maintaining the use of “they” and “their” throughout this narrative, Paw Bu Ley doesn’t situate herself within either of the two cultures she is analyzing.

Additionally, through the comparison of U.S. culture to Burmese culture, Paw Bu Ley is navigating how age is thought of differently in each culture and how this impacts her. Because Paw Bu Ley has legal knowledge that at 18, she is recognized as an adult in the United States, she is making sense of the culture of her parents, how this will be enacted in a new cultural setting, and where she fits in. The concepts of adolescence and young adulthood are different in each of these settings, in trying to make sense of this, Paw Bu Ley double-checks with me, a “knower” of U.S. culture, to see if her understanding is accurate.

Regardless, the United States represents a place of freedom, where she can do the things she wasn’t able to do in the refugee camp:

You know, after I come to the United States, I have more freedom to be able to do the things I want to do. But when I was in Thailand, I was always told what to do. So... Yeah. Because, you know, as I told you that in Thailand, even you graduate from high school, you cannot rely on yourself. You have to rely on your parents. So, at that time, I would rely on my parent, so whatever they say, I have to accept.

Coming to the U.S. was a major time of change for Paw Bu Ley. Because the interview was conducted when Paw Bu Ley was still relatively new to the United States, her narratives express the intersecting positionalities she occupies in the past, and at present.

The combination of the separation of her stepfather, the transition into a new culture, and her coming into adulthood, are all factors involved with her new experiences with freedom. Coming to the U.S. would have been experienced very differently for Paw Bu Ley without these additional factors, evident in the unique narratives of each student included in this study. In terms of narratives of family, which was common across all individuals, an area that Paw Bu Ley uniquely discussed was her relationship with her mother, a topic that evolved throughout the interview.

Mother/Daughter relationship. Paw Bu Ley began the interview by talking about her mother in definitive terms, as Karen and lacking self-confidence, two things Paw Bu Ley attempts to dissociate with. Paw Bu Ley's perspective is understood through her mother's relationship with her stepfather, as well as through a critique of gender norms:

Even if...but actually my mom didn't say anything, but only my stepfather... Then, because he married my mom in 2001, so...if I want to go somewhere else, then I told, tell my mom. And my mom said yes, but he says no. Then my mom says, my mom also doesn't have self-confidence. She's always relying on her husbands. Then her husbands says no. Then I can't go. And if I want to go, like, I have a serious matter to visit my friend...but if I ask permission, they say, "where are you going? What are you going to do? What's the matter?" [Laughs] you know, like...like those questions. And I was so annoyed to answer those questions.

Paw Bu Ley interprets the disagreement between her mother and stepfather, as lacking self-confidence, a trait that she feels is common in her mother's relationships with men. Research such as Williams' (1990) study on families in refugee camps, examines the changing role of women and family structures while living in refugee camps. On the one hand, women often become the head of families in refugee camps due to men staying behind to fight in wars and defend their homes, while on the other

hand, women become more vulnerable in refugee camps because of isolation from extended family members who were a source of support, as well as incidents of rape, sexual abuse, and personal violence reported in camps (Williams, 1990). Paw Bu Ley's narrative of her mother in this quote reflects her mother's dependency on men during this period in her life, as well as portrays the patriarchal hierarchy of the culture. Paw Bu Ley resists these gender norms through the critique of her mother, as well as through more obvious statements such as, "I'm not interested in cooking" and her convictions that everyone deserves self-confidence.

Once Paw Bu Ley's stepfather is separated from her family in the United States, Paw Bu Ley describes the relationship with her mother differently, almost as if her mother has no influence over her:

Yeah, you know because after he separate from us, my mom didn't tell me anything. I can go, I can go to the library, and I can go to wherever I want. But I know which place is, is, bad for me. And nobody have to tell me to study because I know myself.

Paw Bu Ley understands this freedom and independence in terms of the separation of her stepfather, as well as personal attributes. She can go wherever she wants because she knows what is good for her; she can tell the difference between right and wrong.

Although Paw Bu Ley doesn't explicitly state where this knowledge or perspective came from, as she continues to talk throughout the interview, this is clarified.

Paw Bu Ley's criticism of her mother's lack of self-confidence transforms later on in the interview as she begins to describe the things she learned from her mother. When asked what she felt were some of the similarities between what she learned at home and what she learned at school, Paw Bu Ley responded:

Yeah, because you know, in, my mom didn't swear, she didn't like us to swear, I

feel like when I got here, then people would like too polite, right? That is what I think [laughs] So...that is some things...and...she always [taught me]...persistence...Yeah, persistence...cause, you know my mom wanted me to have more self-confidence. Like, in Thailand, before, when I applied my job at the OPE [Overseas Processing Entity], then, I was scared to go there. And I didn't try to think about work at OPE, but my mom went to there and she came back and told me that, "[Paw Bu Ley], do you want to be an interpreter?" And I said, "Oh no! I don't want to be! [Laughs] that's hard, I can't speak a lot!" And then, but I understand, but if they ask me something and then I don't know it, then they will feel that, then they will feel I annoy them. But, my mom told me that, "go, go ahead." And then she took me to the office and after that she came home. Then I have to fill out some paper and I have an interview, and it was so stressful [laughs]...Yeah, I was so nervous, but I got to that because they need people that can speak Karen, Burmese...Then here, my mom also wants me to, to be like that...She just wants me to keep persisting.

At first, Paw Bu Ley tries to answer the question posed by stating cultural differences surrounding politeness. Rather than answer the question directly about home versus school epistemologies, Paw Bu Ley describes an experience with her mother that is more salient to her. As she begins to think about the things her mother taught her, the voice of Paw Bu Ley's mother is presented through the use of reported speech, and her narrative transforms into a performative story of persistence and gaining self-confidence.

Although it is a personal story of pride and achievement, it is a narrative about her mother teaching her not to give up in the face of fear and challenges. Yosso (2005) defines this in terms of cultural capital, specifically as "aspirational capital," which is the ability to remain resilient and hopeful in the context of oppression. Similar to Paw Bu Ley's other narratives, the contexts of both refugee camp and the United States are given.

The strength and persistence Paw Bu Ley derives from her mother is evident in an extremely individually driven persona she presents. This self is unique and lends itself to what I refer to as an autonomous, adult identity. Although the presentation of this

individualistic, adult “self” might have been influenced by my presence as an adult, “American” researcher, Paw Bu Ley maintains aspects of this identity throughout the interview.

Autonomous Self

While Paw Bu Ley’s individual strength is learned from experiences with her mother in the refugee camp, she simultaneously constructs an identity of independence, responsibility, and ambition that transcends time and space as she chronicles it as part of her past, present, and future. Based on her experiences with her mother and stepfather, Paw Bu Ley’s counter narrative of independence differentiates her self from the culture of her family in the refugee camp. This individualistic self, however, is not necessarily an “Americanized” version either. Paw Bu Ley’s presentation of an individually driven self is for the distinct purpose of going to medical school so that one day she can return to Thailand to work in a medical clinic.

Paw Bu Ley asserts her autonomous identity from the very first question she is asked in the interview. Specifically, when asked to tell me about herself, Paw Bu Ley responds:

Uh, [pause], little, like, when I was a little, and until now, you know, I don’t want to rely on my parents a lot. I want to read. I want to have a self-support, self-control. That’s, you know, that’s how I feel, you know? [laughs]...I don’t want to rely at all on my parents, but I did. But I always keep the feeling in my heart.

Within this quote, Paw Bu Ley describes how she sees herself despite context as she transitions from past, to present, to future. Self-sufficiency and control over her life are her desires, an independent self is who she “wants” to be. Always keeping this “feeling in [her] heart” gives Paw Bu Ley the motivation to progress as an individual. Referring back to the section on family, Paw Bu Ley describes a system of dependency on parents

that doesn't allow for progression in the refugee camp, by breaking from this system, Paw Bu Ley enacts her agency.

Situated within the U.S. context, part of Paw Bu Ley is attempting to reconcile her past and the lack of control she felt over her life. More specifically, Paw Bu Ley offers an example from her past, when she worked as an interpreter in the refugee camp. Through this presentation, Paw Bu Ley establishes an "adult" role she had once filled.

And I used to, you know, there was an organization called "OPE," overseas process entity, I don't know... Yes, that is the office that interviews people to have, to get to the United States. And I worked there for a while, one year!

This sense of achievement, although achieved with the help of her mother, is a source of tension for Paw Bu Ley as she reflects on her past. Simultaneous to this "adult" experience, however, Paw Bu Ley expresses the frustration she felt under the control of her stepfather during this time, when she was "always told what to do," "had to rely on [her] parents" and "whatever they say, [she] would have to accept." This was discussed in detail within the section on family.

Moving into the present, this tension is in transition as Paw Bu Ley states that "after I come to the United States, I have more freedom to be able to do the things I want to do," particularly with her stepfather gone¹⁶. Paw Bu Ley is constantly making sense of her past in relation to her new positionality in the United States, a concept common in refugee narratives (Eastmond, 2007). In examining refugee stories as lived experiences, Eastmond (2007) states that "Past experience is always remembered and interpreted in the light of the present as well as by the way that the future is imagined" (p. 249).

¹⁶ Here, freedom for Paw Bu Ley, is an interesting topic to consider. Although in Paw Bu Ley's narrative it appears that the concept of freedom was something she considered greatly prior to living in the United States, her comment raises questions about how she might have learned about freedom from a very specific U.S. context and how she really thought about freedom living in the refugee camp. In other words, how did Paw Bu Ley think about freedom before she had the freedom to do the things she wanted?

Returning to the present, parallel with Paw Bu Ley's increase in freedom comes an increase in family responsibility as Paw Bu Ley assumes the role of interpreter within her family:

I am the main person who have to talk to America people because...Yeah. So, anyone who comes to house who speaks English, I have to always talk to them, discuss things about them. So...No, I don't feel nervous anymore. I feel that it gives me the experience to be more confident.

Paw Bu Ley's experience with her changing role as the family translator is consistent with a large body of research investigating the lives of immigrant children and families, in general. Specifically, Villenas and Deyhle's (1999) research examining seven ethnographic studies conducted on Latino families and their experiences with education, report the role of children as "translators and cultural brokers for their families" (p. 426). Further supported by research such as Yosso (2005) and Gonzalez et al. (2005), Villenas and Deyhle (1999) view the multiple knowledge bases that are navigated during the bilingual/bicultural process as epistemic wealth, which is often ignored and discouraged within a U.S. school context that privileges "monolingualism and monoculturalism" (p. 427). Paw Bu Ley's last sentence in the above quote, that experience creates confidence, reflects the feeling that can be achieved when bilingualism and biculturalism are bolstered and supported (Orellana, 2009). For Paw Bu Ley, feelings of confidence and pride are supported by her family, who entrust her with the responsibility of translating for them.

Paw Bu Ley's new role in the family coincides with a change in cultural context as she arrives to the United States. Further, Paw Bu Ley is arriving at an age where she feels she is becoming an adult. Looking at how she describes her past, coupled with her desire for independence, Paw Bu Ley is approaching her conception of adulthood in the

refugee camp, which does not correlate with the culture there. Complex and confusing, age and adulthood are topics of current navigation and understanding for Paw Bu Ley, particularly in terms of the legal definition of adulthood from a U.S. perspective.

Yeah! That is the difference. And the other thing is that here, if you're 18, then you can do whatever you want. Like, "oh you're 18, you are an adult. You can do whatever you want." But if you, because you know, if you decide something bad, nobody came in, and you know, feel bad about that. Because you decide that, then you know.

The United States represents a place of opportunity and freedom for Paw Bu Ley.

Comparing the differences between her “Karen culture” and U.S. culture, Paw Bu Ley arrives at the conclusion that in the U.S., at 18 she can be independent.

However, Paw Bu Ley is still processing this understanding, by taking on a nameless voice, Paw Bu Ley dialogically presents a discourse of U.S. culture through an act of ventriloquation. Bakhtin’s concept of ventriloquation is a form of dialogicality or multivoicedness that Wertsch (1991) describes as “...the process whereby one voice speaks *through* another voice or voice type in a social language” (p. 59) and that “...a voice is never solely responsible for creating an utterance or its meaning. It begins with the fact that ‘the word in language is half someone else’s’” (Bakhtin, 1981, as cited in Wertsch, 1991, p. 70). This resonates with Paw Bu Ley’s narrative, her understanding of U.S. culture, and discourse surrounding age, adulthood, and legality in particular, were not learned in isolation. Although Paw Bu Ley uses this definition and understanding of adulthood in the U.S. to pursue a trajectory of independence and control, questions surrounding how this discourse was learned, and in what context, remain unanswered.

Within the U.S. school context, Paw Bu Ley’s construction of an individualistic, autonomous self becomes more pronounced as she equates this identity with being

responsible for your actions. The following quote was generated when Paw Bu Ley was discussing how the relationship with her mother changed after her stepfather left:

You know, if I like failed the exams, nobody feels sad for me, just myself. So... [Laughs] so, so, like my mom doesn't say anything. So, I have more self-confidence.

Paw Bu Ley highlights the importance of self-confidence, which is a common trend throughout her interview. Paw Bu Ley's mother is present, and her silence lets Paw Bu Ley know that she is responsible for herself now, which inspires a feeling of confidence.

Paw Bu Ley further presents herself as individually driven and individually responsible for her academic future. When asked to describe a time when she felt included in school, like she really belonged, Paw Bu Ley responds:

Even if I miss school, even, if I like, because you know like, coming to school, it doesn't matter how your teacher, or your friends feel about you. That's how you feel about yourself, and then you come to school. Then if you missed school, if you don't come to school, then you will have to catch up with other kids...So...But, after you sign in that you will come to the school, I feel like I belong to this school.

In order to understand how Paw Bu Ley makes sense of herself in terms of U.S. school culture, it is also important to understand how she thinks about her past experiences with education in the refugee camp in Thailand. This is discussed in greater detail in the refugee section, but as mentioned previously, Paw Bu Ley discusses the culture of the refugee camp as a perpetual cycle of non-progression. Education is important to Paw Bu Ley, and the U.S. represents a place where she can achieve her educational goals. This individual, personal drive creates a unique perspective of education, also indicative of her age and maturity. While this personal drive was not enough to progress in the refugee camp, it is a motivation for achievement in the United States. What is interesting to note is Paw Bu Ley's analysis and criticism of a structure of oppression in the refugee camp,

while such a critique is not present in the United States. This “dual frame of reference” will be addressed in a brief discussion following Paw Bu Ley’s analysis.

Continuing with this narrative of individual responsibility, I asked Paw Bu Ley where she thought she learned this. Although she replies, “I didn’t learn that from anybody,” as she goes into greater detail describing her personal philosophy, the presence of multivoicedness becomes more apparent:

Because if you, the more you learn, the more you will get. If you skip the school, then you lost your pride. And the results always tell you what you value. Like, if you skip school, then you cannot catch up, people will tell you that you will fall down, that's [unintelligible]. Then, that doesn't mean that you fail exams, it means that other people will have the knowledge. Like they go to the [school] and then they have the knowledge about something, but you lost that knowledge. So...[Laughs] just if you do the best, you will be the best. If you try to be bad, then you will just be bad. Nobody can feel sorry for you because, because just you decide who you are, right? Then, what do I be? [Laughs]

In this quote, Paw Bu Ley strongly assigns credit to personal agency, personal values, and the power possessed by the individual to create their own outcomes in life. It is difficult to decipher the specific outside voices driving Paw Bu Ley, but recognizing her intersecting positionalities as a refugee and as a Christian Karen exposed to Westernized notions of individualism, uncovers a dialogical presence.

Specifically, recognizing Paw Bu Ley’s Christian upbringing and knowing the history of Karen conversion to Christianity leads to a dialogical interpretation of the Christian undertones in this quote, which are similar to populist Christian phrases, such as “God helps those who help themselves,” for instance. Furthermore, Paw Bu Ley’s perspective parallels Max Weber’s concept of the “Protestant Work Ethic.” The Protestant work ethic, which has been popularly associated with traditional American values, outlines four basic tenants that highlight individualism, self-discipline, and

responsibility:

working hard is honorable and is a calling by God, (b) economic success is a sign of God's grace, (c) an individual is responsible for controlling one's actions and living a moral life, and (d) an individual should avoid wasteful materialism that is a result of hard work. (Cokley, Komarraju, Pickett, Shen, Patel & Belur, 2007, p. 76)

From this perspective, Paw Bu Ley is asserting a form of "American" identity, one that subscribes to the belief in equal opportunity through hard work.

However, Paw Bu Ley does not fit neatly into the Protestant work ethic model.

While her narrative reflects the individualism consistent with this concept, Paw Bu Ley's goal is not necessarily the capitalistic goal of economic wealth. In the following excerpt, Paw Bu Ley excitedly and performatively describes her ultimate future goals, drawing me in as her audience through her use of emotions and "asides," a narrative processes where the speaker "steps out of the action to engage directly with the audience"

(Riessman, 2008, p. 112):

Because my mom didn't tell me to go to medical school, but I want to go to medical school because one day I want to return to my home country. But, even though I can't return to my home country, then I want to return to Thailand. And in Thailand, do you know Dr. Cynthia? In Mae Sot?...That clinic! And she is, you know, at first her clinic, she started her clinic with her hands, after a while and she tried to do that. People who are from Burma, they came and they would get the treatment there without any payment, so... I love that! So, I want to, you know, I want to go to medical school and after I become a doctor, or practitioner, I want to return to Thailand, or in that clinic, and then help people.

Although she recognizes "that it is very difficult to go to medical school in the United States...And I don't think that I can expect that," Paw Bu Ley is driven to accomplish this goal. She emphasizes her individual choice in making the decision to return to her "home country" or to Thailand. Specifically, Paw Bu Ley's altruism lies in free healthcare and helping "people who are from Burma."

Life in a Refugee Camp

While Paw Bu Ley constructed her “autonomous self” through narratives of the past, present, and future, she describes her refugee identity as solely in the past, but reflects on it in the present to contextualize and make sense of her current situation. Specifically, it was important to Paw Bu Ley to convey to me, her audience, what life was like in the refugee camp, in order to understand who she *was*, who she *is*, and who she wants to *be*. Although Paw Bu Ley describes what it was like when she was a refugee in an attempt to reinvent her self at present, her goals are to return to Mae Sot to work in the Mae Tao Clinic, which services displaced persons from Burma. Accordingly, Paw Bu Ley’s 15 years of living in the Mae La refugee camp have deeply impressed her; it is her home epistemology through which she sees the world (Cresswell, 2004).

Aside from her experiences with her family and the control of her stepfather inside the refugee camp, the major topic Paw Bu Ley discussed was how growing up in a refugee camp impacted her academically:

Because I spend all my whole life in the refugee camp, and I don't have the chance to go to, like, to high schools and to have a good chance to become a more educated person. And, because in, they, in refugee camp, we have a school, we have a free school, and we have a free healthcare, but, that is not enough for us. And, we don't have the school, you know, that can support us... To be self support... you know? And I saw many people that, they graduating high school's, but they cannot, they cannot, even support themselves.

Transitioning from the use of “I” to “we,” Paw Bu Ley begins with her personal story and adopts a group identity as a refugee. The discourse of “refugee” and refugee camp life for Paw Bu Ley, is the inability to progress. Although Paw Bu Ley states that their basic needs are being met, she advocates that “this is not enough for us,” and positioning herself as an observer with knowledge, she presents the image of a cycle of

hopelessness. This discourse is a persistent theme in Paw Bu Ley's construction of a refugee identity described below.

Despite Paw Bu Ley's criticism of the structural oppression she witnessed, she also discussed positive aspects of her experiences inside the refugee camp. For instance, Paw Bu Ley excitedly described the access she had to learn about multiple cultures through conversations with "foreigners." When specifically asked what it was like to transition from living inside the refugee camp, to living in the United States, Paw Bu Ley responds:

But, I don't feel the United States, the US culture is weird. Because, you know, even when I was in the refugee camp, and some foreigner, they came to visit refugee and I went to them and I talked to them, and I asked them questions about their country and they told me. And [by working at OPE] I know...how the foreign country acts.

Through this narrative, Paw Bu Ley shares how she used her resourcefulness and intellectual curiosity to gain knowledge and navigate international encounters. These interactions, both with "foreigners" and with international organizations, gave her the knowledge and confidence throughout her transition to the United States. Specifically, in stating that she doesn't "feel" that "US culture is weird," Paw Bu Ley insists that her exposure to "foreigners" while in the refugee camp, prepared her for life in a new cultural context, therefore transitioning to the U.S. hasn't been a "weird" experience for her.

"Refugee" identity. The "refugee" identity that Paw Bu Ley presents is unique and particular to her setting within the refugee camp. This identity is distinct from a Karen identity, for example, because, although Paw Bu Ley describes the reason for living in a refugee camp as due to the Karen ethnic conflict, she does not construct an identity based on a pan-ethnic nationalistic ideology. Rather, Paw Bu Ley constructs her

refugee identity based on her group experience of structural oppression within the camp. In this regard, Paw Bu Ley's narrative differs from the narratives of Karen youth reported by Kuroiwa and Verkuyten (2008), who similarly discussed themselves in a way that bolstered and created an ethno-national identity.

Paw Bu Ley's first reference to embodying a refugee identity was through the process of applying for resettlement. It was during this time that Paw Bu Ley and her family had to prove their "refugeeness" via documentation and the interview examination procedure. Once these criteria were met, they had to wait for whether or not they were granted approval, by an outside entity:

And you know, we just move from camp, to the other camp, which is right by there. Then in 2000 (...) 2009, we got a chance to come here. But, it is really hard to be here. And the first day we need to be, we need to be, um, considered as a refugee, um, and we need to have a document. And we have, like, there was an organization, called UNHCR, they help refugees to come to the other country. So, we have that chance. But it take for, take 6 months to get here. Because you have interview, and then they decide if you have approval or not. Something like that (...)

Paw Bu Ley's narrative of assuming refugee status portrays the process of labeling that is a fundamental aspect of refugee lives. While this label allows persons fleeing persecution the opportunity for resettlement and security in a new country, it is a label thrust upon them by a bureaucratic and political process. Zetter (1991) discusses this process in terms of the stereotyping effect this has in determining who is allowed this label and who isn't, in addition to the way this label is understood differently for the institution assigning the label and for the person receiving it; identity becomes realized in terms of policy as the individual is reduced to a "case." Holland et al. (1998) discuss the creation of identity under such circumstances in terms of social constructivist theory where "socially constructed selves...are subject to positioning by whatever powerful

discourses they happen to encounter – changing state policies that dictate new ways of categorizing people in the census” (p. 27).

From a Foucaultian (1995) perspective, at the forefront of Paw Bu Ley’s narrative are issues of power and overt classification. Through the process of documentation, surveillance, and examination via the interview, Paw Bu Ley describes how she has no power in determining her “refugee” identity. Foucault (1995) views the “examination” as a “mechanism of objectification” (p. 187), “. . . a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them” (p. 184). As an object of judgment, Paw Bu Ley is at the whim of hierarchically superior “others,” in this case the UNHCR, who “decide” her life course, whether or not she is “approved” to come to the United States. Accordingly, Holland et al. (1998) state “perhaps they [socially constructed selves] are resistant to such social forces; they nonetheless remain provisionally at their mercy” (p. 27). With these theories in mind, although Paw Bu Ley initially defines her refugee identity within the context of power and in the confines of the UNHCR, she is making identity of her own as she transitions to life in the United States.

Following Paw Bu Ley’s legal understanding of an identity imposed on her, she constructs an individual refugee identity, using the subjective “I” that transitions into a group identity. This is best exemplified in the following quote, which was used previously:

Because *I* spend all my whole life in the refugee camp, and *I* don't have the chance to go to, like, to high schools and to have a good chance to become a more educated person. And, because in, *they*, in refugee camp, *we* have a school, *we* have a free school, and *we* have a free healthcare, but, that is not enough for *us*.

Examining this quote more closely, the shift in the use of the subjective pronoun “I,” becomes glaring. As Paw Bu Ley talks about her identity as a refugee, she repositions herself within the U.S. context, and maintaining the subjective “they,” “in refugee camp,” she moves outside of this group. However, she immediately switches to the subjective “we,” realigning herself and her belonging, to this group. Lastly, Paw Bu Ley ends with “us” to situate her refugee group as objects of oppression. In so doing, Paw Bu Ley establishes a unique advocate identity to describe the dire conditions in the camp, transforming her “refugee” self. Her stance as an advocate is specific to education and creating more self-sufficient people. In order to legitimize her claims, Paw Bu Ley assumes an observer role, often reporting that she “saw” a system that was failing her ethnic group and gave specific examples to support her argument.

As Paw Bu Ley delves further into this “refugee” identity characterized by her intersecting positionalities as refugee, Karen, student, and advocate, Paw Bu Ley’s critique of education inside the refugee camp becomes more sophisticated. Specifically, she cites pedagogical and epistemological differences between the camp and the U.S. education context, such as the use of rote memorization and copying. These pedagogical techniques don’t translate into “knowing” a topic for Paw Bu Ley. Additionally, Paw Bu Ley highlights the fact that teachers inside the refugee camp are young, inexperienced and have limited education, as well as a lack of global knowledge and understanding from being isolated. Paw Bu Ley’s narrative is expressed in the following two excerpts:

Excerpt 1: Oh... In Thailand, I went to school and I learned, I studied that... like here we learn something and we discuss with the teachers about something and if we ask something, we can say. But in refugee camp, it's hard to discuss with the

teachers because, like, the teachers also just graduating school at that refugee camp. So, if the teachers something, if you ask too many questions, they are not likely to have the answer, right? [Laughs] And people who live in there doesn't have, like...the opinion about other things, only people that live in refugee camps. So, they only see their society. They don't see the other societies. So, the teachers write out things, and then we...just copy out of a book. And then we just study quite hard, you know... And...I feel like I was, I was like stupid because I learned things from school, but I didn't know what that means. Like, I can have exams because I just memorize everything, but I didn't know...what is that related to the real-life. That is a difference.

Excerpt 2: ...it is easy because we always have to copy the things... So... We didn't make any progress. But here, we can make progress. And the other thing...Like in the refugee camp, we don't speak Karen, we don't speak English. So, we have to learn English as a second language. But some teachers, they are, they teach [with] accents, and it doesn't make sense. Because, you know, like, you, you learn, you learn Burmese, but you don't speak Burmese and all your neighbors are English. So, how can you do that? [laughs] Like, you always have to memorize vocabularies and the grammar, but here...

Paw Bu Ley discusses her educational experiences within the refugee camp from her position in the United States, and her knowledge of the differences in pedagogical practices. These experiences are so important for her because Paw Bu Ley views education as a means to achieving her goal of becoming a doctor. As such, the inability to progress in terms of education is felt severely by Paw Bu Ley as she describes feeling “stupid” for “not knowing” what she was learning. Paw Bu Ley further attributes her poor education to a lack of “real-life” experience, that learning in isolation from “other societies” limits not only her ability to succeed academically, but to progress as an individual.

Paw Bu Ley enhances the moral of her narrative, the need for quality education and opportunity inside the refugee camp, through performatively engaging her audience. Specifically, she uses “asides” (Riessman, 2008), such as:

Excerpt 1: ...if you ask too many questions, they are not likely to have the answer, right?

Excerpt 2: Because, you know, like, you, you learn, you learn Burmese, but you

don't speak Burmese and all your neighbors are English. So, how can you do that?

In the latter example, Paw Bu Ley specifically engages me as a learner of language in order to relate our experiences. Additionally, Paw Bu Ley uses “repetition” (Riessman, 2008) to draw comparisons between the quality of education in the refugee camp and in the United States:

Excerpt 1: In Thailand, I went to school and I learned...

Excerpt 2: Like, like here we learn something and we discuss with the teachers

...

Excerpt 3: But in refugee camp it's hard to discuss with the teachers ...

Excerpt 4: And here, it is easy because...

Excerpt 5: But here, we can make progress.

Excerpt 6: Like in the refugee camp, we don't speak Karen, we don't speak English. So, we have to learn English as a second language.

Lastly, Paw Bu Ley uses verb tense performatively, as indicated by Riessman (2008).

Although stories are commonly shared using a past experience, switching from the past to the “historical present” during the narrative adds a performative element that engages the audience (Riessman, 2008). For Paw Bu Ley, the alternating verb tenses also reflects switching contexts from refugee camp to the U.S. classroom:

Excerpt 1: In Thailand, I went to school and I learned, I studied that... Just... Like, like here we learn something and we discuss with the teachers...

Excerpt 2: And then we just study quite hard, you know... And... I feel like I was, I was like stupid...

Excerpt 3: ...I just memorize everything, but I didn't know...

As a caveat, it is important to consider that Paw Bu Ley is an English language learner, so at times grammatical changes may be an unintentional part of the learning process.

Regardless, it doesn't take away from the narrative Paw Bu Ley is sharing or how she is conveying it. Through the performative process of enacting a “refugee” identity, Paw Bu Ley is able to transform this identity, originally cast from bureaucratic policy, into

something uniquely her own, a “preferred self” (Riessman, 2008), a refugee advocate for better education.

Education in the United States

As stated previously, the United States represented a place of hope for Paw Bu Ley and her future aspirations. The U.S. was specifically discussed in terms of education, which is extremely important to Paw Bu Ley, and in comparison to her experiences in the refugee camp, as outlined above. As has been evident throughout Paw Bu Ley’s interview was her internal drive to become a doctor and getting an education in the U.S. was a way for her to achieve this:

And I try to come to the United States because if I lived here I have the chance to go to school, and after I go to school, and graduating high school, I have the chance to go to college. And after that, if I work hard, and if I have enough cash, then I can go to medical school. That's how I think about the United States.

When Paw Bu Ley talked about the United States, she did so within the school context as well as her experiences with increased freedom. Specifically, she described the pedagogical practices she appreciated in the U.S. and in terms of freedom, the ability “to do the things I want to do.” Within the U.S. context that Paw Bu Ley illustrates during the interview, two predominant “identities” emerge. These distinct identities include a Karen identity and an eager student identity.

Karen identity. Although the presence of a Karen identity is dialogically expressed at times in Paw Bu Ley’s construction of a refugee identity in the past, Paw Bu Ley begins to explicitly express a Karen identity within the U.S. context. This identity dramatically evolves throughout the interview process. Paw Bu Ley first identifies a Karen identity in terms of something her mother embodies, “because my mom is Karen” and further dissociates with this identity within the past Thailand/Burma context with the

use of the term “they” rather than an inclusive “we”:

I don't remember anything about Burma, but my mom told me that, like, they have a political conflict between, because *my mom is Karen*, and you can see that many ethnicity in Burma, right? So, *they* have a conflict with the government and so *they* cannot stay in Burma anymore. So she took us and came to Thailand and I have spent most of my time in a refugee camp for 15 years.

Paw Bu Ley's knowledge of Burma and what it means to be a Karen is dialogically expressed and understood through the voice of her mother, “my mom told me that...” Although she relates this identity to her mother, Paw Bu Ley's enactment of her own Karen identity emerges throughout the interview.

When Paw Bu Ley first enters the U.S. school context, she experiences exclusion by her “American” peers “who live here” and ignore her. Paw Bu Ley shares this story immediately before discussing that now she has Karen friends. Through the juxtaposition of these two experiences, Paw Bu Ley illustrates the circumstances through which she constructs a “Karen” self.

The first time, like, the people who live here, they talk to each other. But Isat on the seat and listened to them...And I was new so they didn't come and talked to me a lot. But, you know, even though now, I have a friend, all most Karen people...who are the same ethnic as me because, like, who go to the...same class, as American people. But, if you go to the class, then you do not have the chance to talk to each other because...every class you are required to be on time. If you, after you enter, then you have to prepare your school material for study, or something like that...When I get to my class, I just take out my material and look at my homework and try to look at the board, what the teacher wrote, and if anything is written, I copy them. Then the teachers...teach us. So, we don't have the chance to talk to each other [laughs].

Interestingly, Paw Bu Ley specifically identifies other Karen as her friends, rather than, or in addition to Burmese peers that attend the same school. Through making friendships with other Karen students, Paw Bu Ley sees herself in terms of belonging to an ethnic group. This experience simultaneously reflects the culture of U.S. schools that

marginalizes and excludes minority students (Luttrell, 2003; Olsen, 1997).

In the above narrative, Paw Bu Ley expresses that although she has these friendship groups in school, there is little time for socialization. Accordingly, the cafeteria becomes a space of ethnic grouping and lunch as a time for social belonging:

In lunch, we have, I just have Karen friends and we just speak Karen at lunch. Yes. But, there are some Chinese students there and sometimes we speak English. But, all most Karen...

Paw Bu Ley's experiences at lunchtime correspond with research indicating the racial mapping of space in schools where students are socially, ethnically, and linguistically segregated (Olsen, 1997). Additionally, Sarroub's (2005) research on Muslim, American Yemeni girls discussed the cafeteria as a space "where behavior was sanctioned by cultural and religious practices" (p. 47). The girls in Sarroub's (2005) study used the cafeteria as a space to publicly perform and enact their Muslim Yemeni selves, which required that they sit exclusively together. For Paw Bu Ley, although the cafeteria might be a comfortable social situation where she can speak her primary language, however, by first explaining her school "Karen-ness" in light of social exclusion reflects larger structures of power and privilege in U.S. schools.

Paw Bu Ley further explores her Karen identity through the comparison of her experiences in U.S. school and identifies major cultural differences in physical displays of emotion and community social mores:

Yeah, in my culture, Karen culture...If you go to school, then we met with our friends, but we didn't hug each other...We just do shake, that's it. And we talk, and we, but here...I see that people hug, and people kiss. That is different. And, in Thailand...if someone lives near you and then you know them and then you can visit them without asking any permission. Like you just go in, and use the door [laughs].

Previously, Paw Bu Ley refers to her Karen identity in terms of ethnicity, whereas here,

in terms of culture, reflecting the understanding of ethnicity and culture as interconnected. In this quote, Paw Bu Ley is expanding her understanding of culture from an observer position. Situating herself as Karen, through the use of “we,” Paw Bu Ley observers, on the one hand, “Americans” as social and physical, while on the other, closed and private within the community.

Paw Bu Ley’s final narrative of Karen identity during the interview returns back to her mother, and is characterized by shifting back and forth from a Karen to U.S. identity. When asked what cultural values she thinks she’ll practice in the future, Paw Bu Ley responds:

But, you know, like my mom told me that, it seems like they don't care for their parents, but actually I'm not the one like that. But actually, I am a student, and I care for my parent, but I cannot do anything for them, so I just leave. I feel like I ignore them. But I talk about that, after I have a good job, or something like that, then at that time my mom will be getting old and she will be alone. And I don't want her to be, to be like that. So, I will ask her to live with me...If she wants to, that's how I plan.

Reflecting on a conversation with her mother “like my mom told me that,” Paw Bu Ley begins to identify as Karen *and* American through the dialogical process of ventriloquation. In this instance, “*they* don’t care for their parents,” Paw Bu Ley is ventriloquizing her mother’s perception of U.S. culture regarding parental relationships and age while dismissing herself from this cultural aspect by using “they.” By stating afterwards, “but actually I’m not the one like that,” can be interpreted as “but I’m not *American* like that.” In other words, although at times Paw Bu Ley envisions an “American” identity, she wants to be Karen in how she treats her mother in the future.

Student identity. Also within the U.S. school context, Paw Bu Ley establishes a student identity that is “eager,” autonomous and individually driven (see above section),

positive, and motivated, so that she can achieve her future goals. The presentation of this identity may have been influenced by my role in the dialogue, affiliation with the university, and because Paw Bu Ley knew that part of the research was interested in educational experiences. This identity is unique in its specificity to the school and classroom context.

This student identity is predicated upon and used in order to achieve specific goals:

Excerpt 1: But because I have a goal. I have my ambitions. So, I know that those are important. And I didn't learn that in Thailand. So I, the first time I, I fell like, " oh man, math and science are so confusing, so hard." But when I take the math and science class, then I, if you're focused to your teachers, what they said, it doesn't make so hard.

Excerpt 2: Yes, because school is ladder to help me go up. And you know, in school, people doesn't teach us only to study. But they also tell us about the real life, like we study history until, the teachers tell us to compare, and even we study math and we can use them in reality. So, we have an idea...Of what is, what life looks like. Like in science, we talk about, like in our environmental science, and we live in environments, we have environments. But before I joined that class, I didn't know. I just know there are environments, but I didn't know how they work. But until I study a little bit about science, then I have an idea.

Paw Bu Ley's perspective of the U.S. education system and her role as a student, is extremely positive. Compared to the prior education system that she described as failing her, in the United States, Paw Bu Ley believes her goals are being met. "School is a ladder" of success for Paw Bu Ley, and her role as a student extends beyond the classroom, and her epistemological understanding transfers from subject matter to "real life" experience.

Paw Bu Ley's student identity is ambitious and eager to succeed. She presents this identity repeatedly throughout the interview, as demonstrated through the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1: I think that I'm pretty good student because I try to be responsible for, for like study, and I try to be on time everyday.

Excerpt 2: Um, my favorite time is learning math and science. I love them. And I like to read. But, my English is poor, but I try to read some English book [laughs].

Excerpt 3: Yes. I love to be in school and I don't want to be absent! [laughs]

Excerpt 4: I don't have any class that I don't like. I am willing to have even more classes [laughs], more classes as possible [laughs].

Excerpt 5: Maybe history, then ESL... But I know that ESL is important because they teach us to improve our English, but they also teach us the knowledge. But, I told you that I like to learn, but there is nothing that I dislike... [Laughs].

Excerpt 6: Yes, I have a favorite teacher, my math teacher... And I love math because when I get to my math class, then I am always ready to learn. And it's, I feel like it's, like we don't always have to memorize things, like we just have to learn this one in focus. And sometimes, she makes us a diagram that we have to figure out. And I feel like that is just a game, you know [laughs]. Like, sometimes we have a problem, we have to figure out which side is that, but that also makes me happy because I can think it out carefully and do that.

Paw Bu Ley's eager and voracious student identity challenges deficit notions of minority and refugee students' academic achievement and counters narratives that suggest these families don't care about education (Roy & Roxas, 2011; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

From the perspective of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), Paw Bu Ley enacts aspirational and resistant capital. Specifically, Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as the "resiliency to dream beyond their present circumstances" and "creating a culture of possibility" (p. 78), as well as resistant capital as, "those knowledge's and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). As discussed in the section "mother/daughter relationship," Paw Bu Ley learns the strength to be persistent in the face of adversity from her mother.

Language learning in transition. Paw Bu Ley's discussion on language was not a dominant theme when considering her narrative at large, however, it was incorporated into how she presented her past, present and future. In the past, Paw Bu Ley worked as a translator for Overseas Processing Entity (OPE), a subsidiary to the U.S. Department of

State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), which provides the casework necessary for pre-screening and interviewing in refugee camps during the resettlement process, as well as refugee education inside the camps in regards to resettlement to the United States. Despite Paw Bu Ley's initial hesitation to embark on this occupational role, she describes the experience as giving her confidence, persistence, and exposure to the "foreign." Unfortunately, such experiences are rarely taken into consideration within the U.S. school context. Olsen (1997), McKay and Wong (1996), as well as Yosso (2005), illustrate how U.S. language policy, particularly in terms of ESL programs, fail to recognize the wealth of language knowledge and experiences that students, such as Paw Bu Ley, bring into U.S. classrooms.

Although Paw Bu Ley can speak Karen, Burmese, Thai and English, she only associated negative emotions, such as being nervous, when it came to speaking English. At first, she explains how learning English was difficult in the camp because of factors such as the teacher's accent and lack of experience. When Paw Bu Ley discussed her educational experiences with English language in the refugee camp, she talked about it as static, "not progressing." However, when she spoke of her personal experiences, she spoke with confidence, "I know how the foreign country acts." Despite this knowledge and confidence, when Paw Bu Ley arrives to the United States, her attitude initially changes:

Yeah, when I first came to the United States, I feel happy but on the other side I feel, like a little bit nervous because I didn't know, you know, how to...How to live...How to go along with its cultures of its people. And the other thing, is the language. But, when I got here and my sponsors took care of us and... She...She showed us how to go...How to go shopping...

The nervousness she initially felt when arriving to the United States, however, quickly

turns to feelings of confidence as she gains more experience with the English language.

Although the following quote was used above to describe her changing family role, here, it sheds light on Paw Bu Ley's feelings toward English language:

I am the main person who have to talk to America people because... Yeah. So, anyone who comes to house who speaks English, I have to always talk to them, discuss things about them. So... No, I don't feel nervous anymore. I feel that it gives me the experience to be more confident.

This attitude is similarly reflected in Paw Bu Ley's school experiences:

Yeah... And the first time, I feel like... Like... If I go to school, then, am I, like, can I understand the teachers? [Laughs] you know? At first it's hard because they speak so fast [laughs]. But now, it's okay.

At the time of the interview, Paw Bu Ley presented a confident self when sharing her present experiences with English that intersects with her "autonomous self" and "student identity." Her confidence could have been influenced by my presence as a native English speaker, and her desire to be a "good" research subject. Regardless, her narrative is provocative in her confidence and ambitiousness; she never describes herself as "lacking," thus resisting the internalizing effect that an ESL label can have on language minority students (Olsen, 1997).

As Paw Bu Ley learns English within the United States, she transforms an identity as an "English language learner" into an identity that transcends national boundaries and language limitations. After describing how she wasn't making "any progress" inside the refuge camp she states:

Yeah. But here, I feel like, I *learn* language. And I learn the *world* at the same time, you know? [her emphasis]

Leaving behind the isolation of her past, Paw Bu Ley's ELL identity transitions as she gains multicultural experience, and becomes a part of the "world." From this unique

perspective, Paw Bu Ley uses English as a resource in order to transform into a global citizen.

Paw Bu Ley's extreme motivation and ambition was consistent throughout the interview and was present in each of the "identities" she enacted. While this personal determination has been analyzed from the perspective of Yosso's (2005) "aspirational capital," the "dual frame of reference" theory is also an insightful lens to view Paw Bu Ley's narrative. Situated in a transnational perspective (Louie, 2006), dual frame of reference refers to viewing your present condition positively, and with more opportunities for success (Ogbu & Simons, 2008), in relation to your past situation, even when facing current acts of discrimination (Suarez-Orozco, 1987). Suarez-Orozco's (1987) research on Central American immigrant students in the United States bears a striking resemblance to Paw Bu Ley's narratives. In particular, Suarez-Orozco (1987) writes:

Because in most cases they had escaped their country in search of a better tomorrow...recent immigrant students thought the advantages in the new land were self-evident and required little elaboration. For them it was very clear: despite ongoing difficulties there were more opportunities to study, more help to do so, better training facilities... (290)

Paw Bu Ley routinely compared the experiences of her past as "lacking" particularly in terms of education and schooling, where she observed a cycle of non-progression.

Through a dual frame of reference, Paw Bu Ley evaluated her current experiences in light of her bitter past. Similarly, Suarez-Orozco (1987) states, "in thinking about the meaning of schooling and the future, immigrants often paused and made comparative evaluations between the 'here' and the 'there.' And 'here' schooling offered many opportunities for advancement" (p. 291).

Furthermore, Suarez-Orozco (1987) reports

...informants reported that schooling was the single most significant avenue for status mobility...The belief in education as a key mode of status mobility in the host country was often constructed in opposition to the conceived system of status mobility in the country of origin. (p. 291)

Likewise, in the way that Paw Bu Ley viewed English as a resource, education in the United States represented the means through which she could attain her goals. However, Paw Bu Ley's narrative slightly differs from research such as Suarez-Orozco (1987) and Lee (2001), who correlate a dual frame of reference with Ogbu's (1993) "folk theory of success," equating education with social status mobility. Although Paw Bu Ley indicates that her goal is to go to medical school and become a doctor, she does not intend on staying in the United States and ultimately wants to return to Thailand to serve people in need of free medical care.

Paw Bu Ley's aspirational story counters perspectives that pathologize victimized children, particular refugee children that come from a background of family violence and trauma. Literature in this area presents children as traumatized and draws correlations between their family situation, particularly the refugee experiences of the parents, and later mental health problems in their children (Bek-Pedersen & Montgomery, 2006; Daud, Skoglund, & Rydelius, 2005; Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln & Cabral, 2008; Halcon, Robertson, Savik, Johnson, Spring, Butcher et al., 2004). Rather, Paw Bu Ley presents a narrative of resiliency, determination, and persistence, that despite her past experiences, she will overcome her situation and proceed to the future.

**Min Min – “Wandering Bird:” Managing masculinity while being a
“good” student**

Biographical/Background Information

At the time Min Min was interviewed, he was 16-years-old, had lived in the United States for 4 years, and was a freshman at NHS. Min Min describes himself as a “Burmese kid,” never using the term “refugee” to describe himself or his experience. He left Burma when he was in the second grade and understands the situation there as “bad” because “they have a dictator there.” When asked to describe what it was like coming from Burma to the United States, Min Min shares his story of displacement and family separation as he moved to Thailand with his mother to live with his father who had left some years before. Min Min remembers this difficult time with very specific detail about leaving Burma during his second grade final test that both engages his audience and reflects the salience of this time for him. Min Min shares his feeling of being lied to by his father in order to move to the U.S. together. Min Min’s father is barely mentioned throughout the rest of the interview, and this is the only time Min Min talks about his mother, so it is unclear if she came to the United States with Min Min’s father and sisters.

In addition to Min Min’s experience with displacement, family betrayal and separation, he also shared that he didn’t want to come to the United States. In particular, Min Min learns from his female friend about American culture. From this information, Min Min learns that the U.S. isn’t a good place for children, highlighting cultural

differences in terms of gender, and physical differences in terms of landscape¹⁷. Once Min Min arrives to the U.S., he realizes that his experience doesn't match his friend's description. Rather, he highlights the amount of cars, which can be interpreted multiple ways, but nonetheless is a major difference for Min Min.

Min Min arrived to the United States when he was 12-years-old, his two sisters that also came with him got married after living in the U.S. for two years. In the United States, Min Min lived mostly in Texas where one sister remains, until he recently moved to live with another sister and brother-in-law in Newtown. Although he states that his sister "forced" him to move to Newtown because it was a better environment where he could get a good education, he describes Texas as an unsafe place. Despite Min Min's negative perspective of Texas, he didn't want to move from his home there.

Although Min Min talks specifically about the brother-in-law he now lives with in Newtown fondly, and values the Buddhist traditions he is learning from him, the move from Texas to Newtown remained a difficult transition for Min Min, in terms of size, population, and changing schools. In addition to changing schools and making new friendships, Min Min also faced the transition from middle school to high school. Once he moved to Newtown, Min Min described himself as "shy" and joined the high school's soccer team to make friends. At the time of the interview, Min Min was approaching the end of his first year of high school and had a routine that had become familiar to him. In sharing his daily school schedule, Min Min mentions that he is in ESL, which is the only reference he makes to English, or English as a second language, which differs greatly from Paw Bu Ley, for example. Additionally, Min Min is also in the AVID class, which

¹⁷ The topic of cultural gender differences, with a focus on sexuality and relationships, comes up again for Min Min as he describes his experiences in school, which will be discussed later.

stands for “Advancement Via Individual Determination” and is a program geared towards students who are hard working and motivated to attend college, but for some reason do average (B, C, and D grades) in school. Further, this program assists students by teaching them organizational, critical thinking, and study skills. Through the added academic support of tutors from the local colleges, AVID students are typically enrolled in honors and Advanced Placement classes.

Min Min doesn’t discuss his involvement in AVID for the duration of the interview. However, he does illustrate his academic curiosity throughout, stating that he likes to read the news in his spare time, and often asks his teachers and peers questions regarding a range of topics, from science and technology, to their views on religion, and thoughts on being famous. For example, Min Min’s intellectual inquiries lead him to learn more about technology, a topic of interest for him, but one that he pursues independently. Despite Min Min’s interest in science and technology, he is unsure about what he wants to do in the future, and who he wants to be. This uncertainty is presented as a conflict for Min Min and he gives a poignant description of his feelings surrounding this issue, which is discussed in detail in the following section entitled, “Wandering Bird: Narratives of Displacement.”

At the present, Min Min is grappling with the desire to join the Army or to go to college. Although Min Min hasn’t finished his first year of high school, the pressure to know his future plans are constantly expressed throughout our interview. Furthermore, Min Min’s conflict between choosing the Army versus academics is symbolically reflected in various contexts that he describes. Primarily, this tension is presented as a tension between enacting a “masculine” identity (i.e., through discussing the Army,

violence, etc.), and/or enacting what I refer to as a “good” student identity (i.e., doing well in school, getting good grades, etc.). These tensions are discussed as separate “identities” in the sections below.

Analysis

Wandering Bird—Narratives of Displacement. Min Min’s early experiences with displacement, movement, and feelings of betrayal resonate with his narratives of the present, and imaginings of the future. The vivid detail with which Min Min remembers the day he was uprooted from Burma to move to Thailand, is presented performatively through the use of his mother’s direct speech as well as the switching of verb tenses from past to present:

I was only second grade and then my final test was coming up on that day and my mom said, “we gotta move out,” so we moved to Thailand.

Min Min also shares this story with emotion, further engaging his audience in this salient memory, “...so it was hard for me and I didn’t know who was my daddy.” Through the narrative process of remembering these sequences in such vivid detail, Min Min is able to reconstruct the home of his past, “independent of time and space” (Bek-Pedersen & Montgomery, 2006).

Min Min describes these accounts from his past, as well as his current situation, as outside his control. Primarily these feelings surround being forced to move from place to place when he wanted to stay in Thailand or Burma. Specifically, Min Min felt betrayed and lied to by his father to come to the United States and then forced and bribed by his sister to move again once he arrived. In terms of describing his future, Min Min speaks with uncertainty and concern. When asked to describe himself at school, he responds in regards to his future:

Describe (...) One of the person that who got like out of space, not knowing where he going (...) its like, its like a bird, they don't know where they going, just flying outta sky (...) so you just wandering over there over here (...) not the right direction (...) don't know the future yet (...)

Min Min's description is poetic, profound, and provocative. His metaphor of the wandering bird and focus on direction, illustrates Min Min's navigation and feelings of aimlessness. What is particularly interesting is the use of this metaphor to describe himself within the school setting and provides a unique perspective of his experiences in this environment. Min Min's narrative corresponds with research on students of color that has highlighted feelings of marginalization, isolation, and lack of support and inclusion from both students and teachers (Hall, 2002; Luttrell, 2003; Olsen, 1997).

Research on the narratives of refugee youth, on the other hand, point to the exile experience and its impact on children (Bek-Pedersen & Montgomery, 2006). More specifically, this research highlights the importance of home and family in the narrative constructions of refugee youth. From this perspective, the metaphor of the wandering bird could be a reflection of Min Min's past, which was characterized by constant migration, meeting his father as an older child, separation from his mother, and later his father.

Interestingly, Min Min continues the wandering bird metaphor throughout the interview to discuss feeling lost, without a plan, and not knowing what to do, both in and outside of school. The following excerpts are ordered chronologically from the interview to highlight how Min Min constructs this narrative:

Excerpt 1: Nah (...) I don't got no hope (...) just come (...). Just come with my dad (...) just so happen (...) just like that, and I have no hope until now (...)

Excerpt 2: Still don't have it (...) [laughter]. When I become eighteen, I am gonna get a car or a motorcycle (...) that's it (...) that's the only goal I have (...)

Excerpt 3: That's why I'm wondering which way I am going (...) so (...) yeah, I

am lost.

Excerpt 4: I don't know yet, I don't know anything, just like going that way, trying to go that way, and trying that way (...) like, trying everything. I don't know where I am going, just wandering around (...)

Excerpt 5: Cuz I don't. I mean to tell you (...) you know when I was in Texas until now, I don't really have any goal, or that stuff (...) I am still wandering around (...) like a bird. Getting the food for themselves only (...)

Min Min begins this construction with his past, coming to the U.S. with his father. Now that he is in the United States, Min Min has hopes for his future, in regards to legal adulthood at the age of 18, similar to Paw Bu Ley. However, Min Min specifically hopes to acquire a motor vehicle (excerpt 2). Considering Min Min's past forced migration and disrupted "dwellings," hoping for a car or motorcycle, may symbolize Min Min's desire for independence and agency through freedom of mobility. This desire for a "place" of his own becomes more concrete through statements such as, "I don't know *where* I am going," indicating the salience of place for Min Min.

Although the theoretical concept of "place" can refer to concrete geographical locations or spaces, place can also refer to the epistemological and ontological lens through which an individual sees the world (Cresswell, 2004). From this perspective, the concept of "place as home" becomes relevant to Min Min's narrative. Cresswell (2004) highlights the perspective of home as a place with attached meaning, a place "were you can be yourself" (p. 24). Bachelard (1994) discusses home "as a primal space that acts as a first world or first universe that then frames our understandings of all the spaces outside" (as cited in Cresswell, 2004, p. 24). While some feminists have documented that "home" can be a place of abuse and oppression, others, such as bell hooks (1990), have offered the perspective of home as a place of resistance and empowerment. Adding an additional perspective, Massey (2005) challenges static notions of place and identity

construction from a global perspective. Massey (2005) specifically argues for new perspectives of identity and place that are constantly reconstructed and take into account concepts of globalization, hybridity, and plurality. Considering these theories of place adds deeper insight into Min Min's narrative of "wandering," which simultaneously complicates these theories, as well of theories of identity, by viewing "home," "place," and understandings of self, as mobile and global.

Min Min's metaphor of the lost, wandering bird, just surviving off basic needs, transforms into a more concrete focus on the future, as he begins to use specific examples within the school context. Although, Min Min is considering joining the Army in the future, he also discusses his more immediate goals:

Erm (...) maybe, maybe finishing high school, after that getting a job, to make my little bit more, more (...) not wandering around...

Min Min believes that once he finishes high school, he'll have direction and stop wandering. Although one interpretation, from a psychological perspective, might argue that Min Min is in the developmental stage of adolescence, highlighted by the "crisis of identity" (Erikson, 1968), another interpretation might view Min Min's navigational process as a reflection of capitalistic culture concerned with appointing value to oneself in terms of what you produce. Additionally, Min Min's imagining of a future with stability might provide him feelings of comfort and help reconcile his feelings of aimlessness.

Situating Min Min within this socio-economic context also benefits from the cultural knowledge of the city in which he lives, and the public school he attends. As a "college town," this city's main industry is education and Min Min attends a school that, on the one hand has been nationally recognized for its quality of education, while on the

other hand, maintains a culture of racial bias evident in its low graduation rates and disproportionate disciplinary action for students of color. The school's social dynamic is also characterized by "urban" students of color, rural white students, and privileged children of local professors. An understanding of this milieu contextualizes Min Min's narrative:

They have (...) they have rules and all this stuff, "you cannot do this, you cannot do that." And you can do it, but it's gonna be effect on your grade and all this stuff. So students won't do it, or like that make you scare for your grade and college. The high school grades are going to affect you in college (...) and people are scared, and I am scared too (...)

As Min Min expresses the importance of grades and the reality of consequences on his future, he describes an environment that has left him "scared." Although part of this fear is related to how consequences, or grades, are going to impact his future, he is also concerned with not knowing what this future entails:

Yeah (...) I mean when I ask lot of students in high school, I say, "what are you going to do when you grow up?" They always telling me like, "its like a kindergarten question," and they don't have, they don't really have any answer for it. Cuz they don't know where they gonna go after high school, so that questions is like, the big main, important, the big thing, like, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" And I don't have that question too, so...

For Min Min, knowing what he "wants to be when he grows up" is the "big thing." Interestingly, he first asks, "what are you going to *do*?" followed by "what do you want to *be*?" Although the difference in these two questions may seem slight, they point to the connection between identity and occupation, or production, and provide another reflection of the capitalist influence on culture and identity construction.

Min Min's questions point to the future imaginings of what, or who, he wants to be, and feels unsettled and conflicted by not having an answer for them. However, he begins to navigate these questions by asking other students their thoughts, in an attempt

to make sense and find meaning of his own. Min Min interprets his peers' rejection of his inquiry as a "normalizing" incident, where they also "don't really have an answer for it." While Min Min continues to "wander," or grapple with the construction of his future identity, the focus on the future may be interpreted multiple ways. As mentioned, one interpretation could be the influence and reflection of a U.S. culture focused on temporality and production, as well as the combined importance of education in Min Min's family, the culture of the "college town" in which he lives, and the pressure he feels in school to do well.

Buddhist/Burmese Identity

Although recognizable as two distinct entities, being Burmese and Buddhist are experienced as interrelated identities for Min Min. In Min Min's case, when asked to tell about himself, he first states that he is "a Burmese kid." This identity becomes more complex as he begins to identify what it means to also be Buddhist; an identity that he gains a better understanding of once he arrives to Newtown:

Something, you can say both (...) Cuz people were saying in Burma, people were saying Buddhism, Buddhism, and they don't really know anything about Buddhism. And when I was in Burma, it was the same way. Even when I move to Texas, I don't even know anything about Buddhism, they just say Buddhism. I am Buddhism but I don't know anything about Buddhism. But, when I moved here, I know more stuff about it, how to control it, myself...

Min Min demonstrates that this knowledge base is learned and passed down, that just because you may be from Burma, you don't necessarily know and understand the culture. For Min Min, enacting a Buddhist identity requires an active, epistemological understanding of the religion. Min Min's increasing interest in Buddhism may be due to his new home environment and the influence of his brother-in-law, coupled with interests that mature with age.

As mentioned, Min Min indicates the importance of Buddhism to the brother-in-law he is living with at the time of the interview. Further, Min Min learns about Buddhism and Burmese culture from his brother-in-law in Newtown and describes using this knowledge in school to help him stay focused; a unique example of “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 2005) in how Min Min uses his knowledge of Buddhism as an empowering learning strategy that gives him a sense of pride, particularly in relation to his peers that he describes as lacking focus. When asked where he thought he learned how to stay focused in his classes, Min Min says it was his brother-in-law:

Yeah he teach me almost everything, how to meditate. I believe in like Buddhism and stuff (...)

Min Min further articulates the specific cultural values that his brother-in-law passed on:

To listen, to respect, to like everything, to respect adult, and respect even, even if they treat you not nice, don't treat them back not nice, just treat them nicely, as nicely you can. If you cannot control yourself, just deal with it, then go away, and yeah. I've been in fight in school, but I was not able to control myself, that's why (...) I was mad at myself so (...) yeah (...)

Min Min's description of Burmese/Buddhist values is discussed in terms of social interactions and then brought into the school context. These home values focus on maintaining respect for adults, including teachers, which has been confused in U.S. classrooms as being passive and complacent about education. Wallitt's (2008) study on children of Cambodian refugees reports their experiences of disconnect between home and school cultures, which included maintaining respect and silent in class, leading to teacher misunderstandings. Min Min's narrative counters such perspectives and reflects the need for teachers, and teacher educators, to be aware of the home cultures of their students.

Min Min's Buddhist identity is a point of conversation and dialogue with his

peers and teachers. By asking his peers about religion and their beliefs, Min Min tries to further his understanding and identity construction through these interactions.

Additionally, Min Min presents a very curious and inquisitive personality, and playfully describes his experiences discussing religion and Buddhism in school:

No, I try to share with them, but they don't really believe in (...) those stuff. They have their own God and all that stuff... Yeah, I mean I don't share like I don't say, "do you believe in Buddhism?" I don't ask like that. I just ask like, question to them, and they don't have answer for it, and I'm trying to tell them that if the answer, but they don't believe that is the answer. I ask them where the people came from. They say that God created them, that's their answer. And then, and then I said to them, "now, in the 21st century, scientist are creating people, so it can't be God created it," and they say they don't know the answer.

Setting himself apart from "them," his "American" classmates, Min Min describes the cultural tensions between Western Christianity and Eastern Buddhism that exist for him in school. As Min Min uses scientific rationale to challenge Christian beliefs in human creation, he constructs his Buddhist self in terms of science and modernity. This identity challenges historic stereotypes, as discussed by postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1978), that perpetuate the image of the "Orient" and "Orientals" as backward, mystical, and ancient. In fact, this counter-narrative is an empowering experience that provides Min Min with a sense of power and knowledge that is exerted over his peers.

Min Min's narrative and construction of a confident Buddhist self in a U.S. school, provides an additional voice to research such as Hall's (2002) study on Sikh youth in Britain. In particular, Hall's (2002) book on this topic includes a chapter titled, "You can't be religious and be Westernized," where she shares the experiences of Sikh youth who have difficulty reconciling their multiple identities as "Sikh" *and* "British." Hall (2002) argues that despite understanding and describing their experiences in dichotomous terms, these students in fact presented complex and multiple identities on a

daily basis. Although Min Min's background is different from the youth included in Hall's (2002) study, who were second generation British Sikh, Min Min's narrative exemplifies an alternative instance of enacting multiple identities (i.e., Buddhist *and* Westernized scientist).

“Masculine” Identity

While in certain contexts, Min Min identifies as Buddhist, at other times he enacts an identity that I've called masculine because of its construction within a traditional, western patriarchal family context, its focus on physical violence, and its captivation with the military. Although Min Min does not explicitly describe feelings of conflict with embodying these two identities, the way he defines each, his Buddhist self as “peaceful” and “respectful,” and his “masculine” self as violent, presents an inherent contradiction between the two. On the one hand, this “masculine” identity counters stereotypes of the “effeminate Asian male” (Said, 1978), while maintaining a romanticized version of the “warrior” Asian male associated in literature with “tribal” Hmong men (Lee, 1998) and popularized in the media with images such as the Japanese samurai warrior. However, Min Min doesn't present these identities in dichotomous terms, which challenges false understandings of identity in terms of either/or. Further, the construction of Min Min's masculine identity, particularly in light of the Buddhist identity presented above, broadens our understanding of identity and the occurrence of multiple, and at times, conflicting identities.

At home, Min Min maintains a position of power and freedom as “one of the king brothers.” As he discusses this privileged role within his family, Min Min clarifies that this privilege is contingent on getting good grades and doing well in school. Although

Min Min initially talks about his sister in term of power (i.e., forcing him to move) in a way that counters a male-dominated structure, the continued description of his home and position in it, is consistent with traditional patriarchal environments (Hicky, 1996).

While Paw Bu Ley resisted the maintenance of this structure, Min Min enjoys this freedom:

I was like one of the king brothers so I can do anything I want at home (...) I mean like you can do anything, do whatever you want, go wherever you want, come back anytime you want (...) they don't tell me anything to do about it. So, at home when I just like (...) its only you, its your home, you can just do anything you want. Just like that, cuz my brothers and sisters don't tell me anything. I got good grades in school, they don't have to worry about me. Even, even if I go get married or anywhere. They call me only if it's too late, one o' clock in the morning (...) just like that (...) yeah...

Min Min's freedom and ability to "do whatever [he] want[s]," is also based on his relationship with his sister and brother-in-law with whom he lives. It appears that Min Min's father remained in Texas and his mother in Thailand, although this is never made explicit. This family dynamic may also be attributed to Min Min's role and the specific experiences with his family in Newtown. Education remains an important focus for Min Min and his family, evident in Min Min's sister "forcing" him to move to Newtown for a better education. This narrative counters the prominent myth of families of color not caring about education (Roy & Roxas, 2011; Valencia, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Somali Bantu refugee families similarly reported the value placed on education in their counter-narrative storytelling in Roy and Roxas' (2011) study, yet were faced with deficit-based stereotypes by their teachers in the United States.

Min Min's "masculine" identity took on different forms at different times during the interview. For instance, early in the interview, after Min Min describes himself as a wandering bird within the school context, he began to think about his future more and the

following dialogue took place:

R: Some people told me that think about the colleges and all the stuff, and they tell me to go to college, but I don't think I am going (...) Cuz I am a little into Army stuff soo (...) yeah...
I: What's something that interests you about that?
R: Killing people (...)
I: Yeah?
R: Yeah (...) I mean they have big money, so there's no need to worry about it, or your family (...) so, yeah...

I included this excerpt of the interview as a dialogue for several reasons. Because Min Min was very interested in me throughout the interview, I felt at times his responses were layered in meaning, such as in the above dialogue. For example, he states that his interest in the Army is killing people, although this contradicts the Buddhist identity he describes, I believe he is in part, trying to gauge my reaction, and when I remain neutral, he then clarifies his answer by sharing that the Army is one way he could provide for a future family. Min Min's intersecting Buddhist and "masculine" identities, extends our understanding of religion and violence, as well as the multiple forms of enacting masculinity.

Simultaneously, Min Min is curious about this aspect of human behavior as depicted in these two separate excerpts:

Excerpt 1: I mean he is my like best friend from middle school until high school and we never had a fight, and that was just open up my locker and we were just punching around, and I didn't do anything unless I was angry. And then he just do something that made me mad, so I just (...) we just had a little wrestling, not a fight. I didn't punch him, though, my brother-in-law teach me like how to like kill people and stuff, I can kill like nicely (...) but I didn't do that, he got a lot of future stuff, maybe he go to college and all that stuff so, you know? We just had a small fight, not a big fight (...) we get over it (...)

Excerpt 2: I mean, when I like go outside to the mall... When I see a lot of people around, yeah (...) And I see my friend in the mall, they are like I don't know (...) they like (...) I just want to fight, stuff like that (...) but they don't want to, so (...) [I want to fight] to make my skill better (...) I just want to practice though (...) just on a real person, not with the (...) thing, you know they have in the mall

(...) they have all these practice stuff (...) boxing thing (...) yeah.

At the end of the second excerpt, Min Min states that he is practicing boxing in order to join the Army. In these two excerpts, Min Min shares a time in school and out of school where he is interested in fighting with a friend. Specifically in the latter excerpt, Min Min illuminates that his interest stems from practicing boxing, an activity he does with his brother-in-law, and is curious about his ability to perform this in a real-life incident.

Lee's (2001) study on Hmong youth identifies violence and delinquency as "adjustment problems" and "resistant behavior" (p. 506). She further points to research citing such behavior as a result of a cultural disconnect between "over-Americanized" second generation youth and the traditional values maintained by their first generation parents. However, Lee (2001) argues that such perspectives oversimplifies Hmong youth behavior and limits an understanding of their identity choices in terms of "American" versus "Hmong." Accordingly, Min Min's narrative of a physical form of masculinity challenges the perspective of violent and delinquent behavior as culturally resistant or in terms of maladjustment. Additionally, Min Min's narrative supports Lee's (2001) argument by complicating dichotomous views of identity, such as "delinquent" *or* "model minority." Min Min's "model minority" behavior will be outlined further in his presentation of a "good" student identity.

Lastly, Min Min presents an additional form of masculinity during our interview. This form of intersecting masculinity is in defense of his reactions to observations in school surrounding sexuality and presents identity as multiplicitious:

Erm (...) focusing is a problem though. A lot of people are not, a lot of students in high school, when they got a girlfriend, they just miss school stuff, and they miss classes, not on time, wasting with a girl. That's not what I do, so... Yeah (...) I mean I can get them, but I don't like them, just wasting time (...)

By stating, “That’s not what I do...,” Min Min is presenting an identity that is different than his peers. This identity will be discussed below as the “good” student identity. At times, Min Min’s masculine identity is in competition with this “good” student identity, particularly in terms of sexuality and U.S. culture that Min Min describes witnessing at school. Although Min Min makes it explicit that he is not like other students who “waste” their education by losing focus on girls, he also wants to make it clear to me that he “can get them,” therefore enacting a masculinity based on his ability to “get” girls. He also states “but I don’t like them,” which is difficult to interpret in terms of sexuality because there is not enough information to base an analysis on.

Context of current school experiences

Because at the time of the interview, it was Min Min’s first year of high school, he often explained his experiences in comparison to the middle school he was attending in Texas. He states that this transition has been “different” for him, and describes a school environment that despite having a diverse student body, is socially segregated by age and student cliques:

They just stay with their friends, until their friend trying to meet another friend and they get to know each other and they just stick with them, with new friend. But, ermm, I mean, when I was in middle school, the middle school student got to high school and they just talk to ninth graders, they don’t really talk to 10th graders (...) and other, like the 10th graders don’t talk to them, they don’t know them (...) all this stuff (...)

Min Min highlights two main topics when setting up his school context for me, including his perception of teachers and student relationships, especially concerning gender and sexuality.

In terms of the latter, Min Min begins to describe his views on student

relationships in the United States by explaining the differences he observed when transitioning from school in Texas to school in Newtown:

...middle school in Texas, they have, they have lot of way to do stuff, they have to wear a uniform and all that stuff, in Texas. Whereas in here, in middle school, you don't have to wear uniform until high school (...) until you die. I mean, in middle school in Texas, they have to wear uniform, in high school too. But here, its very different (...) no uniform (...) no all these stuff, they even had a club every month, not a club, like dance every month... In here (...) I mean they have a prom in Texas, only prom, they don't have dances and all that stuff (...)

While discussing the concept of school uniforms in public schools, Min Min analyzes the benefits in terms of sexuality and the ability to focus in school. Through this analysis, Min Min establishes himself as “different” than students who behave like this, and grapples with the tension between being a “good” student and enacting a form of masculinity that is preoccupied with females, as mentioned briefly earlier.

Yeah. I mean, that's the way how young people in 21st century, how they like it. No uniform, wear short stuff to make boys look interested, to try to make them attractive...I mean, there's one way good, there's one way not good. Students not focusing though (...) when they try to wear attractive stuff. One way good is, if the girl like, they want someone to fail class and all the stuff, they just wear that stuff and they just do, they do (...) [pause], they do, you know good in class. And if they want their like friend or other people want them fail, yeah (...)

In describing how uniforms help to control behavior in schools, Min Min internalizes some aspects of controlling the body and sexuality through clothing, a new concept for him since moving to Newtown. This perspective follows Foucault's (1995) discussion on punishment and discipline within institutions such as schools, and the “policing functions of surveillance” (p. 173) through the use of the “normalizing gaze” as a “great instrument of power” (p. 184). Further, Foucault (1995) views schools as “a mechanism for training” (p. 172), where bodies are controlled and morality is “imperative.” Luttrell (2003) similarly speaks of the ways in which schools view teen sexuality as morally

corrupt, and equate sexuality and pregnancy with shame. For the pregnant girls in Luttrell's (2003) study, punishment came with further marginalization and separation from "normal" students.

Min Min situates his argument in the "21st century," placing sexuality in terms of modernity and youth attire. Although he doesn't explicitly reference this in opposition to Burmese culture, where males and females dress modestly and typically wear a shirt or blouse with a *longyi*, which is a long sheet of cloth extending from the waist to the ankles, tied differently for men and women, the differences in attire from Burma to the United States, especially for females, has been profound for him. This is particularly true in the significant amount of power he gives to girls in terms of dress and sexuality. As Min Min navigates new cultural contexts, he is making choices about the values and identities he wants to maintain and those he wants to transform.

As mentioned previously, Min Min also focused on teachers and their relationships with students, when describing his school context. Similar to Paw Bu Ley, Min Min's perspective was that teaching was just a job, so his expectations of their role was based on whether or not they were able to help students. Wallitt (2008) reports a similar attitude with Cambodian students, specifically in terms of teachers in the United States, as opposed to perceptions of teachers in Cambodia, who were viewed as a mother figure. When Min Min described his teachers as "nice," he was asked to give an example of how teachers are nice, and responded:

They've been nice, as in normal (...) I mean like, they don't do any special stuff, they just teach, when they finish their teaching, when they need you to come after class, they just call you and say, "you need to come after class," and all this stuff. So, you can get good grade, and extra credit, and all that stuff (...) So they just doing their job, you know?

Min Min's viewpoint of the role of teachers is further illuminated as he explains that he doesn't have a favorite teacher, or think about their role in terms of hierarchical ranking:

Yeah I mean I don't really have, she get a 100 percent, and that teacher have a 50 percent. I don't really do those stuff (...) and then some people don't like social study and they don't like other teacher, other student like, only they like them because they treat them as they want to, so (...) if they wanted something from that teacher...only if they want something from the teacher, then the teacher gives to them, they like that teacher. But, ermm, kind of same, not like them, not hate them, I'm in the middle, 50 percent.

Although in the last sentence, Min Min might seem indifferent to the role of teachers and his relationship with them, a reflection of Burmese cultural values where teachers are highly respected and not to be criticized, throughout the remaining dialogue he is critical of student/teacher relationships that appear superficial.

Understanding the context of public education in Burma, provides one interpretation for Min Min's critical lens examining these social dynamics in U.S. schools. In Burma, due to the crumbling economy and the high proportion of money that goes to the military, sectors such as education receive minuscule government funding. As a result, teachers barely make a livable wage, thus creating a system of corruption in public schools, where teachers have resorted to demanding bribes in return for performing their basic teaching duties (Englehart, 2010). Similarly, Paw Bu Ley references this occurrence in the refugee camp one time briefly. The awareness of corruption in their past education experiences provides a unique analysis of school experiences in the United States.

As Min Min continues talking about his experiences in school, he describes a cycle of discipline among the teachers and students that further contextualize his school environment. It is from this perspective of control and discipline that Min Min constructs

his school identity. Building on Foucault's (1995) theory, Hall (2002) asserts, "schools produce modern subjects or 'useful individuals'" (p. 89). It is with this in mind that I turn to the next section outlining the theme of the "good" student identity that Min Min performed.

"Good" student identity. Within the school context that Min Min illustrates, he enacts an identity that although at times is in competition with the "masculine" identity previously outlined, is constructed in opposition to other, "bad" students who give teachers a hard time and can't focus on their education. Min Min's narratives of embodying a "good" student identity illustrate a refugee youth who cares about his education, wants to please his teachers, and do well in school. Not only do these narratives challenge and complicate the "masculine" identity interested in violence and fighting that is previously presented, but they also counter narratives that stereotype students in terms of race and gender that portray young males, including youth of Southeast Asian refugee groups, as delinquent and uninterested in education (see Lee, 2001; Ngo 2010). Simultaneously, Min Min's embodiment of multiple identities that include both the "masculine" and the "good" student, challenge the false dichotomy perpetuating Asian youth as either the "model minority," or "delinquent" (Lee, 2001; Ngo 2010).

Min Min shares that his first year of high school has "been going well," and that his teachers "respect me as I respect them." When asked how he knows that his teachers respect him, Min Min gives an example of a prior friend who doesn't respect one of their teachers, and distinguishes himself from this classmate, therefore presenting himself as a "good" student:

Cuz they teach nicely and all this stuff (...) cuz one of my friend in my past, they were like talking back to the teacher, saying bad stuff and he say bad stuff, but not me, cuz I don't say to them anything, and they don't say to me anything. When I need help, they help me. Soo, like that yeah...

In this narrative, Min Min defines what a “good” student identity entails by first describing what it does not look like (i.e., “talking back,” “saying bad stuff,” etc.). He also makes it clear that this behavior was enacted by a “friend in my past,” further dissociating himself from “bad” student behavior in terms of teacher/student interactions.

In the following quote, Min Min expands on his definition of a “bad” student and provides further insight into his perspective on teacher/student interactions at Newtown High School. From this unique perspective, a better understanding is gained as to why Min Min maintains distance and remains “indifferent” about his teachers. This excerpt was in response to a question asking for his observations on teacher/student interactions at his school:

Erm (...) I don't see any people talking, I mean, any teacher talking to student. I mean, I see only some bad student, they talking about their grades for next year and all that stuff cuz they not doing good at school, you know, they don't follow stuff and erm (...) Only those kind of student, they talk with teachers so (...) I don't really know them (...) I don't watch them (...)

Min Min's response is a reflection of the culture of his school and teacher attitudes from his specific positionality as a male, Burmese, refugee student. As Min Min observes that “only those kind of student,” by which he means “bad” students, talk with teachers, he wants to present himself differently to his teachers, and perhaps to myself, as the interviewer. This “good” student self gets good grades, does well in school, and follows teachers' directions, while avoiding teacher interaction. Such a perspective is helpful in challenging discourses that equate students of color, particularly from Southeast Asia, as well as English language learners, as “unintelligent” and “passive” learners because of

their silence in the classroom (Olsen, 1997; Wallitt, 2008).

Min Min also distinguishes himself as a “good” student through critiquing other students’ lack of focus. As illustrated in the last quote shared in the “masculine” identity section, Min Min highlights that “focusing is a problem” in terms of sexuality and relationships among “other” students. He is able to combat this aspect of youth culture in the United States, through the practice of Buddhism and meditation, as discussed previously. In the following narrative, however, the topic of focusing in school is raised, but discussed differently:

...Cuz in math class, the teacher’s teaching to everyone, right? And some students are talking. He care that they are talking and he’s trying to stop them, but they don’t stop. So, it’s like I have A on that math class and some student have C, and, and it depends on how you want to learn it. So, if you don’t want to learn, you’re not gonna get a good grade (...) and cuz I’m just focusing on one thing, on, lets say that I am just going to math class, I am doing math stuff. So, it depends on how you learn, and how you focus on stuff. Teachers, all the teachers are nice though, it’s not them, it’s just you that’s who gonna learn those stuff, so (...)

Here, Min Min’s narrative provides an illustrative example of his experiences in math class, while portraying himself as a “good” student. First, Min Min highlights the disrespect of students talking during the teacher’s lesson, followed by an “A” grade in the class, and ending with the desire to do well and the ability to focus. In terms of focusing, Min Min uses his theory to argue that education is the responsibility of the student and not the teacher, coincidentally, a belief similar to Paw Bu Ley’s, described in the first participant analysis.

One interpretation of Min Min’s attitude toward education can be understood from a dual frame of reference, where teachers in his past were viewed as corrupt and his present teachers are viewed as “normal.” Therefore, Min Min takes it upon himself to do

well in school. Accordingly, Min Min presents himself as a “good” student, for instance, toward the end of the interview, I asked him what his specific goals were for next year, which he replied, “to get a good grade.” While the performance of such an identity falls in line with the “model minority” myth, Min Min simultaneously enacts a “masculine” self curious about violence and fighting. These identities, as well as the construction of a Buddhist identity, challenge the dichotomous presentations of Asian students as “model” or “delinquent.” Further, Min Min’s narrative complicates static and passive perspectives of identity, by presenting multiple, co-existing, competing and at times conflicting identities (Holland et al., 1998).

In general, Min Min’s interview was uniquely characterized by his interest in myself as a researcher, both in terms of inserting me into his narratives through asking questions, as well as his curiosity surrounding the research project and my specific objectives. On the one hand, this could be interpreted in terms of participant bias; perhaps Min Min was attempting to play the part of the “good” participant. For example, when asking what my “main goal” in going to college and doing this research was, Min Min asks me, “Do you talk to middle school students?” After telling him that they could be included in the research project if they wanted he further replies:

That’s awesome cuz they might be having a better stuff to say (...) to share (...) I mean with you guys (...)

While Min Min’s helpfulness may be interpreted as trying to please me as a researcher, alternatively, a deeper analysis into the content and context of such statements provides a different perspective. Specifically, such statements present Min Min as curious about college and what that experience is like, while he also appears insecure about his experiences being good enough to include in research. Continuing from the above

excerpt, Min Min further states:

Cuz they (...) they are having a good stuff (...) I mean (...) I don't really focus stuff (...) They have been experimenting with friends, school, teachers (...) like they have answer for you that the teacher they don't like, teacher's they like, I don't have those answer (...) so you cannot represent the classmates at the school (...) this student is not having a bad time (...) So, yeah...

Min Min was concerned that his experiences were not representative of his classmates.

These experiences were in relation to the social aspects of school, which he feels that he doesn't participate in. Also characteristic of Min Min's overall narrative, were his experiences of exclusion in school. Although this will be discussed in detail following the individual participant narratives, it is important to mention here. In tandem with Olsen's (1997) findings, Min Min's experiences of exclusion were met with feelings of being silenced; he didn't feel that his words, his experiences, or himself, were good enough to be heard, collected, or represented in research.

Sa Pe—Redefining Refugee, Reinventing Self: Narratives of Courage and Capital, Resistance and Resiliency

Biographical/Background Information

Sa Pe was 19-years-old and had been living in the United States for close to four years at the time she was interviewed. Although her immediate family did not spend time living in a refugee camp, Sa Pe describes herself as a refugee, “Ahhh, I’m not in refugee camp, but I’m a refugee.” As Sa Pe describes her biography of displacement, her narrative differs greatly from the previous participants’ experiences. The range of these narratives, point to both the wide variety of “refugee” experiences, as well as the privilege status her family held. Sa Pe explains how she and her brother moved between Burma and Thailand during her childhood, living with their grandmother in Burma for a Burmese education and to maintain their Burman culture. However, Sa Pe’s mother missed them, and sent their father to bring them back to Thailand, where her family lived together illegally until they applied for refugee status.

Similar to Paw Bu Ley, Sa Pe understands her refugee status as an identity imposed on her by outside organizations. However, Sa Pe also describes this label as the reason why her family cannot live in Burma, “because we are refugee, we can’t live in Burma,” and further complicates her understanding of this identity through her intersecting “illegal” status. Through vividly narrating these experiences, Sa Pe illustrates her knowledge of the refugee resettlement process as well as an understanding of the privilege that comes with citizenship. Despite her enthusiasm that came with resettlement, Sa Pe describes her past feelings toward living in the United States as tough, particularly in terms of language. Unlike Paw Bu Ley, however, Sa Pe relishes in the support of her family during the process of resettlement and living in the United States.

Sa Pe was just turning 15-years-old when her family (mother, father, and older brother) was initially resettled to Iowa. Sa Pe states that because she was only 15-years-old at that time, she didn't really care about where her family lived and describes this period as difficult, mostly in terms of the language differences and having a sponsor that "didn't really care." Although initially arriving to the U.S. via Chicago, resettlement to places such as Iowa reflect government policy that "...disperse(s) refugee groups away from their points of arrival to facilitate their cultural assimilation" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006).

After spending three months in Iowa, Sa Pe and her family move to Newtown, where her mother's cousins live. When describing this experience, often referred to as a "secondary migration" in the literature (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), Sa Pe shares her parents' concern for her brother's education. Moving to Newtown represented a chance for change, opportunity, and a better education for Sa Pe and her family, particularly for her brother. Similar to Min Min's experience, the reputation of Newtown drew people in for the educational opportunities.

When Sa Pe moved to Newtown during the summer, she remembers attending English classes with her family in extreme detail. In particular, Sa Pe highlights the small details, such as getting the correct amount of change out for the bus ride to class, that were especially salient during this transitional period. Accordingly, learning English was a strong theme throughout Sa Pe's interview, and is discussed in detail in the following section, "Learning English = Learning American."

Although Sa Pe describes her familial and extended Burmese networks in Newtown as extremely supportive, her experiences at Newtown High School have been

overwhelming for her at times. Starting school as a freshman, Sa Pe shares that this time in particular was difficult, because there are so many students new to the school from various outlying towns. Now that Sa Pe is a junior, she says that things are getting better for her, but still describes incidences of exclusion, racism, and bullying. Despite these obstacles, Sa Pe remains hopeful for her more immediate future. Ultimately, Sa Pe dreams about returning to Burma, a place she continues to think about as home.

Analysis

Refugee Identity. Sa Pe's understanding and description of what it means to be a refugee, is particularly illuminating when juxtaposed to the narratives of Paw Bu Ley and Min Min. Sa Pe's narrative of her "refugee" experience challenges static and essentialized images of refugees while adding dimensionality and perspective to people who are often discussed in terms of a refugee group identity. Not only does Sa Pe's narrative complicate our understanding of "the refugee experience," but she also expands our understanding of what it means to be a refugee from Burma.

Olsen (1997) discusses this in terms of the various types of prior school experiences immigrant students have before entering into U.S. classrooms. She describes students coming from urban centers as having a privileged school experience and coming from middle-class or professional families, while students coming from "war-torn" countries have less school experience and come from impoverished backgrounds. Sa Pe's narrative also complicates these dichotomous views in that she was living in Bangkok, had continuous education, and was a refugee fleeing persecution for her family's political beliefs. In line with Olsen's (1997) argument however, immigrant and

refugee students have a range of past experiences and it is beneficial for teachers and administrators to be knowledgeable of their students' histories.

As shared in her biography, Sa Pe clarifies for me, the interviewer, that even though she did not spend time in a refugee camp, she is still a refugee. This identity was important for Sa Pe and how she presented herself to me. Although it was the way she first identified herself and her family to me at present, Sa Pe describes occupying a refugee identity in the past, when living in Thailand and while resettling to Iowa. In terms of temporality, Sa Pe's construction of a refugee identity is similar to Paw Bu Ley's narrative. However, Sa Pe didn't experience life in the refugee camp and her understanding and association with this identity are constructed differently.

Similar to Paw Bu Ley, Sa Pe does discuss the bureaucratic process involved with acquiring refugee status, such as "making a refugee paper" and having an outside entity determine where you will make a new home as illustrated in the biography section:

First time we thought we were going to (...) New Zealand, because my Mom's sister is in New Zealand. But when the answer came out, we got to the United States.

Sa Pe additionally states that it is "because we are refugee, we can't live in Burma."

Although her experience living illegally in Thailand is different than Paw Bu Ley, Sa Pe similarly states that "you can't live like that," sharing in a lived knowledge of basic human rights and the importance of political freedoms.

Sa Pe's narrative of a refugee identity is also unique in how she describes her experiences once resettled to the United States. During this period of transition and resettlement, her refugee identity is shared with her "whole family." Specifically, Sa Pe refers to the paperwork associated with refugee status in the United States, and the

difficulty navigating through policy especially when English is not her family's first language. While talking about her experiences with resettlement and "second migration" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), Sa Pe states:

R: Just, because we are refugee, right, you have to get food stamp, and Medicare, and like section house, or something like that. So (...)

I: So they [sponsors] help with that paperwork...

R: The paperwork, yeah. They helping with paperwork. ... It was a really difficult time. I still like remember...My whole family still remember that time.

Including my dialogue for context, Sa Pe reflects on the difficulty of this time for her family, an experience that continues to be particularly salient. While Sa Pe and her family navigate what it means to be a refugee in the United States, they learn about federal and state policies that dictate their housing, food, and healthcare. Through this process Sa Pe has gained knowledge about systems, structures and organizations that is personal and unique. This fund of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005), although gained through a time of difficulty, provides an illustration of the wealth of knowledge that refugee youth acquire through actively, not passively, navigating structures and the resources that are drawn on during this process.

In particular, social capital (Yosso, 2005) is a major source of help and comfort for Sa Pe and her family as they navigate resettlement to both Iowa and Newtown. From this perspective, a major aspect of Sa Pe's narrative of a refugee identity is the relationships that are formed with sponsors and community members that help her family acclimate to life in the United States. Sa Pe describes her first experience with a sponsor:

When we got to Iowa, we had a (...) I'm not sure with that because I was still young, you know, like 15, so I don't really care...you know? I think we got a sponsor, but it's a guy and he kind of like, you know, don't really care, something like that. Uhh, it was hard when we go to appointment sometimes.

The relationship with a sponsor when first arriving to the United States is a particularly important one, especially in circumstances when there is a power imbalance and the refugee family is left to rely on the sponsor or volunteer to complete daily tasks.

Although Sa Pe initially describes such a relationship, she later shares how through herself and her family's possession of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), they make a friend in the community where they are living in Iowa, who becomes a great resource for them:

You know, we couldn't go because we don't have a car and you can't even ride the bus. We don't know where this bus going to, you know? And, and then finally we met a woman. She's from, I think from Vietnam, but she speak Thai, Laos, American and she speak a couple language, a lot of language. And then also, we speak Thai, so we can communicate by Thai, you know?

Sa Pe's counter-narrative of resourcefulness, linguistic and social capital, challenges static constructions of refugee and immigrant families as passive agents being acted upon. Rather, Sa Pe's refugee narrative illustrates how a family initially overwhelmed and discouraged with their experiences in the United States, made a place for themselves through the wealth of knowledge acquired through their past experiences. Moving beyond their bad experience with their first sponsor, Sa Pe describes the new relationship with the Vietnamese woman, in a much more uplifting and excited way:

She helpful, she help a lot. She help us to go like buy a car, and sometime when she have free time she will come in house, you know, teaching a little bit of English, and it was fun. It was a good time, and not bad because my brother had to work to go to school, two time a day (...) two time a week. That's only two hour for a day, so that's not that helpful for him to learning English, right? And my dad had to work. So my mom, my brother, and my dad had to work, early because they don't know English too.

While Sa Pe describes the dedication and hard work of her family, she also describes her experiences with learning English as "fun." When Sa Pe was in a learning environment where she was also able to speak and use the multiple languages she is more familiar

with, she feels included and supported by her community.

Even in Newtown, where she describes being supported by an American sponsor, named Anne, it is not the same:

Anne who is sponsor of us, and it was fine, and we got her, she was helpful, help a lot, and even everything. When a letter came home for us, she helping us to reading, and then she'll tell us. She American, she speaks slowly [imitates speaking slowly], and then explains what is that meaning, and where do you want to have to sign, about what, something like that.

Although moving to Newtown was a chance for a better education, obstacles remained, primarily around learning English; a more detailed account of Sa Pe's experiences surrounding English will be discussed below. Although Sa Pe and her family had the support of Anne in helping them navigate their new community, Sa Pe refers to the support of her family, including extended members, as being a great resource while settling into Newtown.

Family—Narratives of Gender and Generational Differences

Sa Pe's narrative of family is similar to the other participants in many ways, including the support and strength she gains from their close relationship, as well as an underlying tension for independence from her parents, who maintain a traditional patriarchal family structure. Alternatively, Sa Pe also shares a unique relationship with her family that is different from the other participants. Unlike Paw Bu Ley, who saw the United States as an opportunity for freedom and independence from parents, and Min Min who interpreted his sister as controlling, Sa Pe relies on the support of her family to transition to the U.S., and her brother in particular while navigating the school context.

While there are several reasons as to why Sa Pe's relationship with her family is experienced strongly, factors such as age and positive early childhood associations with

her family, are a couple of interpretations. For instance, and as discussed in the biography section, Sa Pe and her brother lived with her grandmother in Burma to learn the culture first hand. When Sa Pe describes the reason for moving back to Thailand, she states that it because her mother missed them. This experience could have been interpreted in a myriad of ways by Sa Pe, but she chose to express this story to me in terms of the importance of family, place, culture and education.

When deciding to file for refugee status, Sa Pe performs the story of resettlement as a family process. Although included in the biography section, an excerpt of this narrative is included below for analytical purposes:

So we making a refugee paper and my cousin, or my mom's parent's friends, they said, "come to the United States, or come to another country, it would be great, it would be helpful to you," you know? And also, my mom, she was like thinking of future for us, for my brother and me. So, and my dad decide, ok lets go...First time we thought we were going to (...) New Zealand, because my Mom's sister is in New Zealand. But when the answer came out, we got to the United States.

From a performative perspective, Sa Pe creates a "scene" and assigns "lines" to characters as a way to capture her audience. She uses "direct speech" (Riessman, 2008) to situate the narrative context and illustrate her extended family's pleas to get out of their situation in Thailand. Sa Pe also uses "asides" (Riessman, 2008) or moments throughout the narrative where she steps outside the story in order to interact with her audience (i.e., "...you know?" and "...also, my mom, she was like..."). By sharing the perspectives of each of her characters, Sa Pe illustrates a scene that is vivid and easy to envision. She also constructs this scene in a way that presents the decision to claim refugee status and go through resettlement as a family involved process.

Once in the United States, Sa Pe's extended family again helps with Sa Pe's family's relocation, in order for Sa Pe's brother to get a better education. Although Sa Pe

describes an environment where her brother's needs are prioritized, she derives comfort and stability from her family. Rather than criticize the patriarchal structure of her family, Sa Pe wants to be a resource to them as much as they are to her. Particularly in Iowa, Sa Pe states that she is going to school and learning English while her parents and brother have to "work hard" so attending English classes is difficult:

Excerpt 1: And um, and then my brother and my dad, my brother don't speak English at all, but he asks me.

Excerpt 2: And my dad had to work. So my mom, my brother, and my dad had to work, early because they don't know English too. And then, they work kind of hard, so it was hard.

While these excerpts illustrate a family working together to make it in the United States, they also highlight the issue of language, which will be discussed in detail in the following section. Furthermore, when discussing her family structure and their struggle with resettling, Sa Pe consistently uses the inclusive "we":

Excerpt 1: ..., and then *we* have more...

Excerpt 2: So, *we* move to here because...

Excerpt 3: So *we* came here, *we* go to

One interpretation for Sa Pe's use of the subjective pronoun "we" is to describe a shared experience that included all of her immediate family members.

While Sa Pe presents herself as deeply connected to her family, there is also a part of her that is navigating the new cultural environment of the United States. As Sa Pe learns what it means to be "American," she begins to question her family's Burmese culture, in particular the patriarchal structure:

I'd say, um... [laughs] I know that in the United States its all freedom, men, woman, its equal, right? But, my parents [laughs] they're still keeping their culture! So they still like, being kind of picking on me, you know, "you're not allowed to wear that shirt or skirt, you're not allowed to wear that showing something," you know? So you don't really go out at night, you know? You're not equal, you know? In Burma, men will be more bigger than woman, right?

You're not equal, even in this culture, yeah. So, my mom will keep culture and she keep telling us to be like, "don't forget your culture, don't forget your Burmese, don't forget everything!" You know?

For Sa Pe, the United States means freedom, specifically in terms of gender equality. In the quote above, Sa Pe is trying to make sense of her Burmese culture and what that means now that her family is living in the United States. Stating that her parents are "still keeping their culture" she dissociates from them while also dialogically bringing to attention thoughts of hybridized culture, or change in some way to balance traditional Burmese values with new U.S. culture. Sa Pe's narrative of being caught between two cultural worlds is reminiscent of Hall's (2002) work with Sikh youth in Britain, thus lending itself to the general experience of migration on the lives of youth occupying multiple cultural contexts. Alternatively, while Sa Pe's positionality is complex, her narrative of wanting to wear certain clothes, or stay out late, is reminiscent of the general experience of being a youth and parental relationships.

Sa Pe's narrative of navigating cultural tensions also highlights the roles of mothers and daughters throughout the migration and resettlement experience. While the role of mothers as the keepers of culture has been commonly referenced, Hickey (1999) points out the complexity of this position as mothers coming to the United States also seek a better future for their children. Alternatively, Hickey also speaks of how this impacts daughters:

Their daughters, conversely, speak of *opportunities* for women available to them as residents of the United States. This is the point at which most daughters of immigrant mothers sense the duality of their heritage, and the point at which they choose to depart from the teachings of their mother's heritage. (p. 71)

For Sa Pe, the point of contention in straddling multiple cultural worlds comes in terms of gender equity, much like the daughters of Asian immigrants that participated in

Hickey's (1999) study. Clothes become the outward medium through which to experiment and "try on" culture, specifically for Sa Pe this translates into navigating cultural gender norms and what it means to be Burmese living in the United States. Sa Pe's narrative of "Americanization" adds complexity to our understanding of identity construction, particularly when juxtaposed with discourse equating the "Americanization" of refugee/immigrant youth with delinquency (Lee, 2001). Sa Pe's narrative provides another perspective about the identity construction of identity youth:

I: So how do you feel about that, if you want to wear something...

R: [laughs] Sometime, yeah, I was like kind of firing my mom to, sometime, I just want to be like, uh, not too short then, but just want to wear comfortable, right? And um, then my mom said like, "no, that's too much," you know? I was like, "Mom! I'm American, ok? No one cares." "Sa Pe! Don't say that," you know, "still you in Burma," you know, "pretend you're in Burma. Stay like culture, ok? Don't say that. You do not wear that," you know? So, we get mad a little bit at each other.

As Sa Pe vividly and dialogically performs a conversation between herself and her mother, she shares how conflicting and complex it is to occupy intersecting positions. While on the one hand she states that she doesn't want to wear anything "too short" (i.e., "too American"), she also argues to her mother that she is "American." Pretending to be in Burma while being a youth in the United States, is difficult for Sa Pe, who, although views herself as an integral part of her Burmese family, is simultaneously trying to embody a new self.

Furthermore, it is interesting that Sa Pe, the oldest participant included in this thesis, and legally an adult in the United States, does not mention this milestone in her life. This is particularly notable in juxtaposition to Paw Bu Ley and Min Min's narratives of legal adulthood. However, Sa Pe's narrative of independence takes form here, in terms of challenging the gender norms of her Burmese culture. While in terms of

clothing Sa Pe might desire to be “American,” or dress in some way that is a Burmese-American compromise, in terms of language, Sa Pe illustrates the difficulty in having to navigate an English-only speaking culture.

Learning English = Learning “American”—Stories of Resilience and Practicing Resistance

Despite Sa Pe’s vast linguistic capital, speaking Burmese, Thai, and English, it is only in terms of English that Sa Pe sees herself as “lacking.” Before arriving to the United States, Sa Pe’s main fear was the requirement of English mastery; she did not equate such fears with New Zealand, a potential place of resettlement. When sharing her narrative of resettlement and first living in Iowa, a main theme in Sa Pe’s stories was the concept of language, specifically surrounding the difficulty learning English both in and out of school. Sa Pe states of her school experience in Iowa:

And just go there and then sometime you don’t know what they’re talking, right? So its just like sitting there quiet and looking at what to do, you know?

This silencing experience is prevalent in Sa Pe’s narrative of learning English, while simultaneously she uses silence as an act of resistance (Sandoval, 2000) against bullies in school, which will be illustrated later.

When Sa Pe moved to Newtown with her family, her struggles navigating English are narratively shared as she performs riding the bus to school multiple times throughout the interview:

Excerpt 1: Yeah, cause when we came it was during the summertime. So, we go into summer school there...because we live so far away from here, it take about like 30 minutes from here. So, we have to take the bus and then the bus just run only, um, 3 time a day, in the morning, in the noon, and in the evening...So it was just hard for us and...we don’t have money! We don’t speak English! We don’t working...I still want to go to high school because I’m still learning, you know? And I don’t want to miss school, right? And on one day we have no money, we

have only like 3 people, and then one more person have to have money, you know, to go on the bus?...So we looking for coins, you know?...so we have a coin like that and we hold it up like that...And the bus driver, he was making a face, like gosh...

I: So he was looking a little annoyed with you?

R: Yeah, yeah. So, I was like, I was afraid because if he asked me more, I wouldn't be able to answer that...So I pretend that I don't care, but my feelings are still like, "oh my god, I'm so afraid," you know? So I go sit there ...when I go to school and I tell...my family. My mom and dad, well they're learning a little bit, more than us, so they tell the teacher that we need the money for back to home.

Excerpt 2: Yeah...its really hard time because we live so far away, right? And, we have to wake up early...school start at 7:30, or 8 o'clock...And, um, we get to the bus and a lot of people on the bus... We don't know which to we sit, and also we afraid, you know? So, we, the most important thing that we worry, is that we asking us and we won't be able to understand what they asking. And then don't know how to answer them. So, we pretend to be like, "oh don't look at them, whatever they say," we just don't look at them. Even when they picking on us, we try to not, don't know or understand, you know?...I remember on the bus there was a lady, she's cute, and you know she's really nice and...she know us that we don't speak good English, right?...So every time when we came to the bus, she would like always like leave her bag, and she would let me sit there all the time.

Sa Pe's story is engaging, using the methods of performance with "direct speech," "asides," and "repetition" (Riessman, 2008), while serving as an example of how a small task, such as finding the correct change for riding the bus, is felt and navigated by English language learners. Particularly poignant is her fear of having to talk (i.e. "I was afraid...", "I'm so afraid," "the most important thing that we worry..."), and especially illuminating is her use of silence, pretending not to care or understand, and not looking at people, as powerful tools of resistance to a system that marginalizes and judges learners of English. These tools of resistance speak to the power of "the look" (Sartre, 1956), Foucault's (1995) "normalizing gaze," as well as the use of Barthes's "antilanguages" (i.e., silence as a way to disengage from ideology, or to refuse to go along with a certain

categorization) (Sandoval, 2000) and the knowledge that Sa Pe has of these discourses of power and hegemony.

Sa Pe's resiliency and resourcefulness is also illustrated in her narrative of learning how to navigate the cafeteria at school:

R: I couldn't understand at all...especially like cafeteria!...we don't know how to eat American food, so we kind of shy, and like just don't know what is the name of that, the taste of that, and do you have to pay for that, because we don't have money, right? And we don't know anyone, we don't speak English, so we don't know how to order, or to be on the line, you know? Yeah.

I: How did you learn what to do in the cafeteria?

R: For me...by like watching people when they order, you know?...I remember...the first time that I came, I just don't know how to order and I saw a man, I think, a boy, he was order, and then, I want to eat that...but I don't know the name. So, I told...the workers, I wanted that...I just pointed like that...you know? So they know what I'm meaning, so they give me that. And next day came, and still I don't know, but I ask someone to help me, you know? She speak, um, American too, but...I know the chicken, so I said, "chicken," you know? So, she know what I'm meaning, so she order it for me. The next time came, the person who work there, she remember my face, so she know what I'm going to order, just like, "all ready for you."

Although Sa Pe was initially afraid and nervous about not knowing how to order food at school, her story turns into one of inclusion, capital, and resourcefulness. Through Sa Pe's knowledge of how to navigate an environment where she felt she didn't speak the language, a knowledge consistent with linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005), Sa Pe builds social capital (Yosso, 2005) as she is welcomed and included by the cafeteria workers who are understanding of her position.

As Sa Pe's interview continues, she shares more stories of language in school. While some illustrate the power of inclusion in creating a positive and caring learning environment, some also portray the painful feelings resulting from exclusion:

Excerpt 1: I think that when I first came...I love ESL and PE...ESL is like second language for helping people, you know? So, teacher understand how you're feeling and they know that we are not speaking English well. They won't

ask so many questions, besides they helping us. And PE is just like, you just exercise, you know? You just watching them, and you know how to do it...And then for other class, its kind of tough, like history, or chemistry, because you have to be like understanding and know the words and then know what they talking...To be able to answer, or to ask. So, I'm kind of afraid like go to that class, I always be like, "oh my god its time to go, I don't want to go, I don't want to go, I don't want to go!"...Just shy because a lot of people would look at us...you don't know anyone there, I don't have any friends. First year for me, I don't have friend at all. So, just only me and my brother...So, we all like just walk together, we never like sit out with other people, or talking with other people (...) When we in other class, always sit together...So everyone like look at, "who are they? They sit together," you know? "Who are they?" [laughs]...And then they look at us, you know? So they think like bad.

Excerpt 2: The first year...my ESL teacher...sent an email to them like, "oh, this is for being in your class, she's in ESL, she just came, she don't speak English well." So, teacher will be like, "welcome!" They were like, "Ok, welcome, new students!"...Its kind of like, when they welcome us, everyone else looks at us, and, um, they were like really, really nice. They were like helping us a lot and then when after the teacher teaching the other student, they will come back and they will ask like, "do you understand?" and if I say, "no," she will explain it slowly, slowly. But I still don't understand, right?...and for the ESL class, the teacher...sometime she will show the picture, and sometime she using hand...And sometime she tell us to looking in the dictionary to understand the word, you know? And then...teacher will...give you...the picture book...the kid book and then let us to see what is that called...like apple, house, horse...I love only ESL, I think [laughs]. And now...I feel like really afraid even if the teacher nice, but student will be nice to you...they want to pick on someone who can't fight them back, so, I just don't really want to sit among other student...

Excerpt 3: I met a lot of people there, and...they might...know me as the girl who don't speak English, someone might know me like..."oh like she's in my class." Most of them, like, I don't know them exactly, so I feel like...so-so from them. And some people, they just like, they kind of mean. My guidance say that, "you know, Sa Pe, you don't worry about those kids, some kid, they just have a lot of trouble at home, some kid just have a problem, you know? Don't worry...don't be afraid at them, you know?" But I just still. When teachers up there, student want be like more talking...They just not be like patient to teacher, and...I just afraid to sit...by them, because if they...like, "hey, yo!" you know, came in and say like, "hey, where you from"...Its fine to talk like came here, and be friendly, but its ...[being] able to understand them.

Excerpt 4: I had a problem...with a kid. When they see Asian face [laughs], like me, they always thought like, "oh, she from Asian," you know? "She not American, so of course her English will not be better than me"...Last year, I was in a math class and when [laughs] I go to the class, I don't really go out, like using bathroom, or drinking water, because I just want to be in that class. I don't want to move from the desk. I'm afraid that they will looking at me, or asking me, you know? So, on that day I want to go to bathroom [emphasizes and laughs]...and

when I came back, the student...pretended that I smelled so bad. Oh my god!
And I feel like so bad because they were laughing at me!...they were like, “oh my
god, it smells so bad! So stinky!”...So, I just like, I don’t like them. I don’t even
look at them too. And then sometime, when I’m sitting there and they use the, the
feet, you know, to pull the chair?

I: Did you say anything to him?

R: Noooo, I just like pretend I don’t see them...And pretend I don’t hear what they
say. Just walked away. First year like kind of really afraid, second year is
like...you learning...a little bit, but still afraid. But the third year is kind of
learning, but now you understand what they’re talking to you, right?...But you just
don’t know how to fight them back...[I] don’t want to get in trouble...First of
all...I’m going to tell teacher first. But some kid...just want to have a problem,
right? And then, they don’t afraid of anyone, right, beside their parents...If I
using my energy to fight them back, we will get more problem...the problem will
cause more and more

Sa Pe’s narratives of inclusion and exclusion surrounding English in school are powerful
and rich. When Sa Pe speaks of feelings of inclusion at NHS, she refers to experiences in
her ESL class (i.e., “I love ESL” and “I only love ESL”) and specifically points to the
pedagogical practices that make her feel most included (i.e., “teacher understand how
you’re feeling and they know that we are not speaking English well. They won’t ask so
many questions,” “...my ESL teacher for sent an email to them...So, teacher will be like,
‘welcome!’,” “...she will explain it slowly, slowly,” “sometime she will show the
picture...sometime...using hand...And sometime she tell us to looking in the dictionary
to understand the word...And then...the picture book”).

Sa Pe also shares many painful images of bullying and exclusion, interestingly
juxtaposed in her narrative to experiences of inclusion. One of the most particularly
striking examples that I’d like to highlight is how in “excerpt 1,” Sa Pe discusses the
marginalization of language exclusion and her interpretation of people looking at her as
“So they think like bad.” This interpretation is turned around, however, when Sa Pe feels

included by the simple gesture of being welcomed and introduced into a new classroom in “excerpt 2:”

Its kind of like, when they welcome us, everyone else looks at us, and, um, they were like really, really nice.

Her examples of context and the power of the “normalizing gaze” (Foucault, 1995) are compelling; how, when associated with a positive experience, a “look” can create change, from feeling “bad” to “nice.”

Despite the positive experiences of inclusion, Sa Pe is aware of the structures that attempt to categorize, judge, and normalize her. In “excerpt 3,” Sa Pe understands this in terms of language, stating that “...they...know me as the girl who don’t speak English...,” Sa Pe speaks to the categorization, marginalization, and silencing impact that comes with a focus on English-only education in U.S. schools (Olsen, 1997).

Alternatively, in “excerpt 4,” Sa Pe highlights her racial categorization (i.e., “when they see Asian face like me...”) and draws a relationship between nationality and the ability to be proficient in English (i.e., “She not American, so of course her English will not be better than me”). Language is again the focus of Sa Pe’s marginalization at NHS, however, this time she also speaks to the essentialization of race, understanding her embodiment of the “Asian face” in terms of hierarchy and racial ordering.

When asked what were some things she thought might help her gain confidence in her school setting, Sa Pe replies:

[laughs] Umm, maybe like learning more English and being perfect in English. That would be like, um, because, I feel like when I’m talking with someone, I still think my grammar is not enough to, its not good, and also, sometimes I just don’t know how to use past tense...So, I feel like (...) yeah (...) It is, some people say like hard to learn another language, you know? ...It is, its true, yeah...But I’m in United States, so I have to learn about American culture.

Sa Pe's immediate response, "being perfect in English," reflects the aforementioned culture that is created when an English-only environment is prioritized in U.S. schools (Olsen, 1997). In line with Lee's (2001) argument that the ESL classroom provides a "safe space" for academic learning and expression of culture, as previously illustrated, Sa Pe feels the most included in the ESL classroom. Although Sa Pe feels the pressure to "learn about American culture," and at times wants to enact this identity (i.e., through wearing "American" clothes, as outlined in the previous section), she also is resistant and proudly shares her Burman identity.

Burmese Identity

As previously outlined, Sa Pe constructs her Burmese ethnic identity at an early age, moving back to Burma to live with her Grandmother when she was six-years-old to "learn Burmese." Resettling to the United States, Sa Pe's family attempts to maintain their Burmese culture, which leads to disagreement over gender norms between Sa Pe and her mother. Although Sa Pe describes the pressure to be "American" within the U.S. classroom, she also shares narratives of enacting her Burmese identity.

However, enacting a Burmese identity within an "American" school that excludes and categorizes Sa Pe's "Asian face" as "other," is a challenging task. In the following quote, Sa Pe juxtaposes Burmese culture in the classroom context to an experience outlined above at Newtown High School:

My culture is Burma, right? So, we have to polite to adult people. Especially like teachers, teacher is like second mom to you. So we have to be really polite to them and listen when they talk to us, even when you don't understand. You won't be like yelling back at them, or agree with them, you know? Disagree with them.

Sa Pe explains what it means to be Burmese in the classroom, an identity that varies drastically from what she observes in the U.S. classroom, where students don't pay attention when the teacher is talking. For Sa Pe it is important to know her as Burmese, in order to understand how she is as a student. This concept correlates with Wallitt's (2008) study on Cambodian students and echoes their narratives of the role of the teacher from their cultural perspective. Further, such accounts of the "polite" student lead to perceptions of the "model minority," with the potential result of being ignored or "invisible" in the classroom (Wallitt, 2008).

When asked if she was ever in a situation where she had to make a choice between being "Burmese" or being "American," Sa Pe replies:

Ohhh! Um...I keep it in Burmese way, because I'm Burmese, you know? So, I can teach my grandson...and at home, mostly we, we live Burmese culture, you know? But in school, you can't do like, in Asian culture, they will laugh at you, so, I pretend to not be Burmese culture. But, not to be American culture, but just go, go, you know? And not too much action, you know, to show them, you know, I'm Burmese, you know? I want to show them my culture, not like that, and then, not going there, pretend to be, "oh, I'm American!" (...)

In this powerful excerpt, Sa Pe shares her desire to embody a Burmese self in school, an identity she is currently excluded from enacting. Grappling with these tensions, Sa Pe understands that to be "Asian" and perform this identity in school, is something to be ashamed of, something to be mocked and made fun of. Although she "pretends to not be Burmese," she also resists pretending to be something she is not, "American."

Ultimately, from this quote, Sa Pe "wants to show them my culture," to educate her peers and teachers about her culture.

I asked Sa Pe what it would look like, to be able to "show" her culture in school. She replied, sharing an experience of inclusion in one of her classes:

A couple months ago, I present a PowerPoint of Burmese culture in high school...and this was in a theater class...And...one of my friends, she from Yemen, she present her Yemen country in the class. So, I in the class, so I think, "oh, that would be nice to, if, even if they don't know my country, but I still can tell them where I came from..." so they might know, "oh, you know," one day they might met a Burmese girl, woman, and they can say that, "oh, I have a friend," you know, "long ago" (...) So, I present them about Burmese culture, clothes, things, religion...But, I just don't really think I do well because of my English...And they just asking like...because, uh, during that time, is the time that Burmese had a problem...The cyclone...and then after...there's a kind of problem with people sending food and then the government took it, that kind of problem. So, some people, they know about Burmese people, about Burmese country, so they were asking about the uh, the government thing, so (...) I think I'm too, not smart, to answer them, so I just say like, "ummm." I answer them, what I know from the Karen, from the news, from what I'm listening from my parent talking with other friends.

The experience of sharing her culture with her classmates had a profound impact on Sa Pe. The ability to share her Burmese culture, her home identity, and a part of her self, brought feelings of pride and happiness. Because it is difficult to convey through transcripts, I distinctly remember how Sa Pe's face lit up as she "performed" this narrative (Riessman, 2008); a narrative that dialogically extends beyond her student experiences and illustrates the inclusive pedagogical practices of a specific teacher and the impact this had on her, and her friend from Yemen.

Speaking about Burma and Burmese culture in more specific detail occurred toward the end of the interview. This discussion transformed Sa Pe's presentation of self as she reflected on her future hopes:

I wish [laughs]...wish to be there. I think lots of Burmese people, they might thought like me that, "one day," you know, when the Burmese, Burma get better, you know? Things change, they might want to go back and spend their life in Burma, yeah...Its, uh, even you, even like, you came far and then you live here for long time, and then you be more, uh, comfortable in here, you still want to live in where you were born, you know?

Sa Pe's Burmese identity was an important part of how Sa Pe viewed herself, her experiences at NHS, and how she envisioned her future. Feeling isolated in the United States, Sa Pe thanked me for being interested in her Burmese culture:

Thank you to be like interested about Burmese culture, or learning how to (...) I think, um, maybe, I think maybe like, if you like decide Burmese people, no one will be learning about our country, maybe later on we'll be, you know, Burma might be, you know, more talking and no one will be hurting about Burma.

I felt conflicted for being thanked for my interest in Burma and its people because of my position of power and privilege as a white researcher. However, Sa Pe's feelings of exclusion and isolation, of feeling like people in her community can't know who she is because they don't know about her culture, are important to highlight.

Lastly, I asked Sa Pe about how she imagines her future when she moves out of her parents home, and what she thought the culture of her own home would be like. Her response was poignant and powerful:

I will keep that because I think that time I was too young to understand that the culture, but now, I think I understand a lot about the culture. About to keep one's culture is to tell more people about your culture, you know? So, I will keep that and still don't forgot it.

For Sa Pe, the act of telling, speaking back, sharing, is a way to maintain her culture in future generations, regardless of place. Sa Pe is a knower of culture, she also knows through her lived experiences how structures of power maintain and privilege certain cultures, histories, epistemologies, and ontologies. Sa Pe's narratives provide a strong voice of the marginalized, and further teaches us ways of bringing that voice to the center.

Katie – Choosing “American” while being Burmese: Enacting agency and resistance, balancing inclusion and exclusion

Biographical/Background Information

At the age of 15, Katie was the youngest participant included in this thesis; she also lived in the United States for the longest amount of time out of all the participants, for 10 years at the time of the interview. Although I did not interview Katie personally, her interview was collected as part of a larger research project, *Community Voices*, as discussed in the Methodology section. Because semi-structured interview questions were employed, Katie was asked many of the same questions as the other participants included in this thesis. Katie’s interview was included in this thesis to illustrate her unique perspective and experiences that push our understanding of refugee youth, as well as Burmese, Southeast Asian, and Asian students further. For instance, Katie describes herself differently from the other participants, an indication of the length of time Katie has lived in the United States. Beginning with her name, “Katie” is a nickname she used to accommodate to an English language setting where her Burmese name is foreign, and difficult for people to say. Furthermore, Katie does not initially identify herself in terms of race or ethnicity, rather describing herself as “I wasn’t born in America...I’m not a citizen yet.”

Unlike the other participants, migration and resettlement to the United States were not predominant themes for Katie. However, she did discuss memories of her family in Burma before moving to the United States. Specifically, Katie shared that her parent’s divorce when she was around 5-years-old prompted her mother to file for resettlement to the United States, taking Katie and her younger brother with her, leaving their father in Burma. Katie describes this memory in detail and the impact it has had on her

relationship with her father. Particularly, Katie remembers being “daddy’s little girl” and close to her father as a young child, however, Katie is conflicted about going back to Burma to visit her father in the future.

Katie doesn’t share whether or not Newtown was the first place she lived once arriving to the United States, or if her family moved there afterward. However, Katie does share that around three years before the interview, her mother moved to Phoenix , Arizona with her brothers, with Katie now living in Newtown with American friends and guardians. The decision to live apart from her family was difficult, but one made by Katie and her mother so that Katie could maintain her education in Newtown. As Katie continues to share her story, she describes how she moved from one house to the neighbors, John and Tina, who have become a second family to Katie. She shares feeling included and close with her American family.

However, Katie struggles with being apart from her mother and brothers who live across the country. She reports not seeing them in a very long time, due to her school schedule and the cost of travel. Additionally, Katie shares that her mother has been suffering from depression, resulting in her brothers’ placement in foster care, which has been particularly difficult for her.

As Katie shares her mother and brothers’ situation, she describes that since her mother’s treatment for depression, she can now recognize how this has been a struggle for her mother during Katie’s earlier childhood. All that Katie hopes for now is for her brothers’ well being during this difficult time. Although Katie puts on a strong face during the interview, she shares the impact that her family situation has on her, a topic that will be discussed in greater detail in the following section on family narratives.

Despite the pain that is associated with making the choice to remain in Newtown and living apart from her family, Katie clearly indicates that this choice is necessary in order to accomplish her future goals.

At the time of the interview, Katie is focused on her future goal of becoming a marine biologist and believes that staying in Newtown will provide her with the best opportunities to accomplish this, as mentioned above. Education is important to Katie, and views her education in Newtown as a means to achieve this goal. While Katie works hard in her classes and is fully enrolled in “mainstream,” college preparatory classes, Katie is also extremely social in school and describes having a large network of friends. Katie’s perspectives on education and experiences at school are discussed in greater detail below.

Analysis

Family Narratives. As previously mentioned, the theme of family in general, was a prominent narrative throughout Katie’s interview. Through a closer analysis of this topic, it became evident that Katie’s definition and understanding of family expanded beyond common depictions of the nuclear, biological family. In part, this expansive definition derived from Katie’s experiences with family separation and living apart from her mother, father, and brothers. More specifically, at the time of the interview, Katie is navigating the Burmese culture attached to her mother and brothers, while accommodating to the lifestyle of her American guardians. Accordingly, the following sub themes will be discussed in detail below: Living apart and Burmese family, culture, and identity.

Living apart. Similar to the experiences of Paw Bu Ley and Min Min, Katie's narrative of family was also centered on the separation of her parents. However, Katie's experience was unique in that her parent's divorce in Burma prompted her move to Newtown with her mother and brother, followed by her mother and brothers' move out of state.

Although Katie describes living apart from her family as difficult, she discusses this as an agentic process and a choice she made in order to have a better education.

And I'm the only one here who's here in Newtown, and that's really hard. Um, and I'm here mainly because for my education. So it's, I mean, it's kind of (...) kind of, um, complicated.

As Katie continues to narrate her decision-making process for remaining in Newtown, she shares that her mother and brother left the summer before she was to enter into high school. Excited by this transition, Katie dramatized her performance of this story through the incorporation of direct speech (i.e., "I was like, 'Mom, I don't want to go'") and asides (i.e., "...Um, and it was only a one-year thing" (Riessman, 2008)).

So my mom and all my brothers lived here before they moved, uh, and that was the summer b- I was going into middle school – so (...) um a while ago. And... I was like, "Mom, I don't want to go." And my friend Lauren, actually, I lived with her for a while. Um, and it was only a one-year thing. And I had gotten into NHS, and I wanted to go to school so badly. And so my mom was like, "Ok, fine, you can stay here for one year." And, so, I stayed here for one year, it turned into two years.

Examining the above excerpt from a structural analytic perspective, Katie's quote is congruent with Labov's theory of narrative, which is a useful tool in deriving meaning from how a story is sequenced (Riessman, 2008). As outlined in the methodology section, Labov's theory incorporates six major themes that make up a "fully formed" narrative, including an abstract (AB), orientation (OR), complicating action (CA),

evaluation (EV), resolution (RE), and coda (Riessman, 2008). Katie's narrative of living apart from her family contains these components as demonstrated below:

- 01 So it's, I mean, it's kind of (...) kind of, um, complicated... (AB)
- 02 So my mom and all my brothers lived here (OR)
- 03 before they moved, (CA)
- 04 uh, and that was the summer b- I was going into middle school – so (...) um a while ago. (OR)
- 05 And...I was like, "Mom, I don't want to go." (CA)
- 06 And my friend Lauren, actually, I lived with her for a while. (OR)
- 07 Um, and it was only a one-year thing. (EV)
- 08 And I had gotten into NHS, and I wanted to go to school so badly. (CA)
- 09 And so my mom was like, "Ok, fine, you can stay here for one year." (RE)
- 10 And, so, I stayed here for one year, it turned into two years. (Coda)

Through this structural examination of Katie's narrative, a more in-depth perspective is gained beyond a thematic understanding that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. More specifically, Katie sets up her story by pointing out that its complicated living apart from her mother and brothers (i.e., the abstract) and importantly, that this situation is lasting longer than intended (i.e., evaluation and coda).

As Katie continues this narrative, she reveals that the living situation with Lauren didn't work out and 6 months afterward, she moved in with neighbors, John and Tina. Although Katie describes this as a better living environment, the pain of living away from her mother and brothers grows more apparent throughout the interview.

Um yea so (...) I lived with them (...) And yea (...) So, it's been hard, you know, because I go back and forth between Pheonix and here to um visit my mom and stuff. But, I can't go for that long, 'cause (...) it's hard during the school year. And in the summer I guess I can go but (...) My mom has like depression issues. And so she's (...) It's hard like being here and hearing that she's in the hospital and that my brothers have to go to like some care (...) some foster home place. But um but she's better now so, so it's all good...I haven't seen them in a really long time and it's been hard...flying over there is kind of expensive. And I mean, I'm going to go this year, definitely, to see them.

Although Katie initially states that her mother was amenable with the decision to live separately, she later shares the conflicted feelings she experiences when her mother asks Katie to live with her.

Um (...) ha (...) for some reason, every spring I go through a phase, where like last year I (...) my mom was bugging me about, you know, living with her, and it's really hard to make that choice. But I- I think I'm doing the right thing by staying here for the future, you know? And, so, I was kind of stressed out about that.

As Katie discusses conflicted feelings surrounding living apart from her family, an underlying tension between the Burmese culture of Katie's family and the "American" identity she enacts in their absence, becomes unveiled in Katie's narrative. Katie's understanding of her family's Burmese culture and how she navigates this identity is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Burmese family, culture, and identity. Throughout the interview, Katie enacts an "Americanized" identity, using slang and colloquialisms in her speech and identifying herself as "not a citizen yet," rather than Burmese or a hybridized version of Burmese-American. Despite this pronounced presentation to the interviewer, at times Katie narrates what the navigation between two "cultural worlds" (Hall, 2002) has been like for her. In describing this process, Katie shares the cultural traditions valued by her mother and how she understands them from a Western, Americanized perspective.

Situated from the perspective of the "American" family Katie now feels part of, she states:

John and Tina's family has been (...) like they treat me like I'm family, which I am, at - at this point, I am. So, you know. And it's really hard 'cause I also like um go through like cultural things 'cause my mom is like the typical Asian mom who's like "Oh, Katie, you're skin has to be white all the time"...And, she's, she's not like this anymore, but she was. And that's why I didn't really want to

talk to her every week because she'd (...) talk to me about my skin color and stuff like that, but that was when she wasn't doing very well too, so (...)

Katie's description of her mother as the "typical Asian mom," is an example of how she has internalized American systems of categorization; the use of the word "Asian" here is uniquely American (M. Fiskesjö, personal communication, June 2, 2012). Furthermore, while navigating her mother's cultural values, Katie essentializes her experience to that of all Asians; that being "other" and non-white is an inherent and common experience shared across all Asian ethnic groups. Initially, Katie describes her mother and the desire to be white-skinned in terms of her own American experiences. This is achieved, for example, through the pedagogical and curricular depictions of Asians that Katie and her classmates discuss:

I'm trying to remember (...) there were other stuff (...) I mean, skin color was one of them (...) I don't really remember (...) but it was like (...) There are books that we read in school about that, and it's like "Ha! That's my mom." And then I kind of feel that thing, 'cause they're like "Really, omigosh. Is she really that mean?" And I'm like "No, she loves me."

Katie feels that she can personally relate to her school material, however, from a critical race theory perspective, peer/classroom dialogue surrounding the racial complexities of whiteness, hierarchy, and privilege don't appear in Katie's narrative. Furthermore, Katie's statement, "And then I kind of feel that thing..." can be interpreted in many ways, as embarrassment or defensiveness against threats of her mother being thought of as mean, or as an inner struggle to make sense of her mother's cultural understanding of whiteness and power, countered with her own experiences of being an "Americanized" teenager. While Katie's peers hint at the oppressiveness of her mother's statements, Katie counters that her mother loves her, indicating the complexity of this issue and the

range of emotions associated with it, including the ability to feel multiple emotions simultaneously (i.e., love *and* hurt).

As Katie continues to contemplate the meaning behind her mother's actions, she identifies additional examples of how her mother wants her to act white. For example, Katie states:

Because, you know, when my mom expects me to (...) she like, she has this thing where she expects me to take a really long shower all the time, 'cause, you know, "that's the only way to get clean." I'm like "Mom, you know, you can get clean in like 10 minutes if you need to, or 5." She doesn't get that. [chuckles]

When asked by the interviewer why she thinks that her mother focuses on her skin so much, Katie's answer reveals that her mother's understanding is derived from her intersecting experience with gender, class, race, and colonialism.

Because it's like the proper way of being a lady from Burma, you know. And the higher class like (...) not all the higher class people (...) they always had white skin. And they were always like "good," and took long showers, I guess. So (...) it all sounds kind of dumb (...) but (...) you know, according to (...) it's all values to them. And she has to understand that we're not in Burma anymore. And I think she's gotten that now, so (...)

Katie's observation brings an interesting perspective to the social construction of race¹⁸, an understanding of racial categorization and how it is perceived by diverse youth, and offers unique insight for theories such as critical race theory. For example, Katie provides an additional voice through the refugee experience, one that illustrates how the supremacy of Whiteness is perpetuated through the remnants of colonialism and brought to the United States.

¹⁸ Katie's observations of the construction of race are unique in a U.S. setting. Katie positions her observations from a Burmese perspective and relates racial categorization to class. Keevak (2011) argues that in the past, Westerners associated upper class "Asians" as being "white," it was only much later that Westerners viewed "Asians" as "yellow." Whiteness in the U.S. however, is steeped in its own history as a slave state with the use of Africans as slaves and whites as slaveholders.

While Katie's excerpt sits at the crossroads of race, class, gender and colonialism, it also transcends time and space. Through the act of Bakhtin's ventriloquation (Riessman, 2008), Katie speaks of the history of Burma, and in particular the impact of colonialism on the perception of gender. While "good" women were white, clean, and upper class, women of color were therefore dirty and "bad;" a history similarly experienced in the United States where characteristics such as submissiveness, passivity, being quiet, polite, nice and demure constituted the cultural understanding of what the perfect feminine persona embodied; the good (white) girl (Giddings, 1984).

Katie's final statements of resistance in the above excerpt, "And she has to understand that we're not in Burma anymore," leads to the interpretation that the United States is a place that is different, where oppression is absent in the legacies of race, class, and gender. Although Katie fails to recognize the historical baggage associated with race, class, and gender in the United States throughout her narrative, she does believe that it is a place where she, and perhaps her mother can enact their agency and have a fresh start.

As indicated previously, Katie and her mother disagree about cultural behavior in the home. For Katie, the desire to resist and differentiate from her mother's culture is particularly communicated when she describes her ability to speak English "without an accent," meaning she speaks English with an American accent¹⁹. Specifically, when asked by the interviewer about feeling a cultural disconnect at home or in school, the following dialogue ensues:

¹⁹ The concept of speaking English "without an accent" is rather complex, particularly in the United States where regional "accents" can vary greatly. Additionally, in the past Burmese were taught English with a British accent, adding to the complexity of being Burmese and accents when speaking English. Katie's comment therefore can be interpreted as speaking English with an accent similar to her American peers.

R: Not really. It's (...) not really. I (...) I mean, I-I, I blend in, I guess, you know. I don't (...) I don't even have an – I don't have an accent so (...)

I: Do people, like expect you to have an accent?

R: Yea, like Tina. Like Tina, when I first, she (...) when I first met her, she had no idea I wasn't a citizen. I'm not a citizen, and I (...) I mean (...) I don't have an accent. A lot of people are amazed at that. I'm like "Guys, it's really not that interesting." But apparently it is, so (...)

Olsen (1997) describes in detail the impact that having an accent and the inability to speak in slang have on the social capital and academic performance of newly arrived immigrant students. Although Katie is not newly arrived, she is describing the experience of stereotype; how people see her, make assumptions, and expect a certain person. Interestingly, through this description, Katie identifies a relationship between accent and citizenship. While "a lot of people are amazed" that Katie doesn't have an accent *and* isn't a citizen, for Katie the ability to occupy the multiple "figured worlds" (Holland et al., 1998) of foreigner, English proficient, and "American" teenager for instance, is an uninteresting part of her daily life.

Simultaneously, Katie's initial response is congruous with common theories of adolescence focusing on the desire to "blend in." From this perspective, the threat of difference is at the forefront of Katie's statement. Olsen (1997) specifically discusses the connection between accent and exclusion among immigrant and English language learning students:

It is not only a desire to understand that drives these young immigrants to want to learn English, they seek also to adopt the behavior and make the sounds that would not give them away as foreigners and result in being excluded. (96)

Olsen (1997) goes on to describe the difficulty immigrant students face in gaining inclusion into the world of American slang and youth culture. Once basic vocabulary in English is achieved, the next step is to be able to converse in social situations, which,

according to Olsen (1997), comes with the ability to make American teenage friends, a task that was extremely difficult for her immigrant participants. Considering Olsen's (1997) findings in the context of Katie's narrative sheds light on Katie's social capital and social capabilities (Yosso, 2005), which afford her the ability to "blend in," and further provide her with feelings of inclusion within her school environment.

Although Katie has achieved this mark of acceptance and insider status by her American peers and guardians, she simultaneously struggles with the idea of losing her Burmese identity. Specifically, when comparing her living situation at the time of the interview, to her brothers' experiences living with her mother, Katie feels a sense of jealousy and longing to participate in her home culture. The tension Katie feels between the positive and negative aspects of living with her mother and engaging in Burmese culture is expressed in the following exchange with the interviewer:

R: (...) Yea, 'cause they live with her 24/7. I mean, they see her all the time. And... There are some good things about living with her. Like, one good thing is not forgetting my actual language, um, Burmese. And, and it's hard now 'cause she talks to me in English whenever I talk to her on the phone, and, and I don't even remember anything in Burmese. So like at times I'll ask, I'll be like "Mom, can you speak in Burmese for me?" And I'll like barely understand like what she's saying. I can get the gist of it (...) But... they have each other and they have my mom and they're going to definitely be more influenced.

I: So how do you feel that, um, that they're kind of a little bit more exposed to the Burmese culture than you are, at this point?

R: One, I feel jealous, 'cause I (...) I wanna... remember my... language. And the other, I'm just like, you know, there are good things and bad things about the culture, so, the bad things I don't really (...) whatever. The good things, you know (...) I wish that I was there. Like the food – I love my mom's cooking.

Initially, Katie struggles with expressing her feelings toward her mother, her home culture, and the experience of living separate from her biological family. Previously, when discussing Burmese culture, Katie's narratives highlighted the negative aspects (i.e., emphasis on skin color and the reproduction of gender and class biases), and when

assigning this culture to her mother, she dissociated with it. However, in the above dialogue, Katie now uses the possessive “my” to describe the Burmese language, marking her inclusion into this group. For Katie, the loss of Burmese language in particular, is a painful reminder of living apart from her mother and the positive aspects of the home culture that she misses.

Although Katie is living with an American family at the time of the interview, she describes a welcoming home environment where she is not forced to choose between cultures or enact a specific identity. Rather, when asked by the interviewer if Katie shares her feelings about losing her Burmese culture with her American family, Katie states:

They’re like, “Katie, you should ask your mom to talk to you all in Burmese because you don’t want to lose that.” And Tina is awesome. She’s an awesome cook. And she loves Asian food and she always tries to make Asian food for me and stuff. And, and we eat...Italian. We eat everything. And it’s just, it’s a really cool thing ‘cause (...) I’ve experienced so much that I don’t think I’d ever would with my mom because, you know (...)

The importance of language and its relationship to culture is highlighted in the supportive comments of Katie’s American family. While Katie feels supported and included in her “American” household, she is simultaneously exposed to a variety of experiences that she believes would otherwise be inaccessible to her.

Because of Katie’s unique experiences, navigation across distinct cultural terrain is a daily enterprise. Although her narrative echoes the voices of immigrant youth caught in the crossfire of competing cultural contexts (i.e., Hall, 2002; Sarroub, 2005), Katie is also making sense of herself as both Burmese *and* American, rather than either/or. For example, Sarroub (2005) shares an excerpt from one of her participants:

...You try to – you have to make the decision on your own. You have to go beyond just what they say, what they’re demanding and look at it and look at what you want, how do you see it, how do you feel about it, what is the best outcome for you...And being Yemeni, that’s basically, you listen to what they say. Being Americanized is the fact that you can stand up and say, “No,” you know, “This is what I want. And this is the reason why I want this.” (1)

Similar to Katie’s narrative, Sarroub’s (2005) participant speaks to how living as a constant duality allows for a critical examination of the cultures being occupied, and how this duality allows for resistance, choice, and an overall greater cultural understanding. Like the Yemeni girls in Sarroub’s (2005) study, Katie is attempting to “construct an identity that makes sense in the American and [Burmese] worlds she inhabits” (p. 1). While this section portrayed Katie’s navigation of a Burmese self, the following section will highlight her student identity, one that is at times distinctly “American.”

School Experiences

As described in her biographical section, education is important to Katie for her future goals, and was the reason why she stayed in Newton when her family moved to Pheonix . Within Katie’s narratives of her school experiences, she portrays a distinctly “American” student identity, one that focuses on the importance of friendships and speaks vividly about feelings of inclusion. However, parallel to Katie’s narratives of inclusion are instances of exclusion, where she critically examines a structure of inequity embedded at NHS. Because Katie has been in the U.S. school system longer than the other participants, she speaks to her experiences in “mainstream” classes, thus providing a unique perspective into this environment.

“American” (Student) Identity. To clearly define what it means to be an “American” student is complicated, this identity becomes particularly complex for those with a refugee or immigrant background. For students with Asian ethnicity, enacting an

“American” student identity is an individual process, which is understood differently by teachers than by these students. For example, Lee (2001) specifically discusses the experiences of Hmong American students, who have been falsely cast in dichotomous terms through popular rhetoric as “model minority” or “delinquent.” Hmong American students who adhere to the cultural standards of their parents have been deemed traditional, academically successful, and are typically first generation (Lee, 2001). Second generation Hmong, on the other hand, have gained a reputation for gang violence and delinquency, resulting in the classification as “over-Americanized.” Olsen (1997), on the other hand, reports the difficulty immigrant students, and English learners in particular, have in being accepted, included, and viewed as “American” by their peers.

Although Hall’s (2002) study takes place in Great Britain, she describes a similar context in terms of her Sikh participants living in a Westernized world. In order to be accepted by their British peers, Hall (2002) describes how Sikh students had to break stereotypes that dictated how Asians were viewed in their school by gaining “individuality” and becoming “popular” through “acting extroverted and friendly” (p. 108). Hall (2002) further describes this process of moving from being viewed as a category to a person:

Asian students who conform to the normative expectations associated with both the academic and social status hierarchies are more likely to “become individuals” or “become like us.” They are assumed to be “like us” because they “act like us.” They study the same subjects, are interested in the same girls, play the same sports, and frequent the same pubs. They are “trendy” in dress and in lifestyle. Becoming “trendy” is specifically defined as becoming more Western (and middle class) and less Asian for both Asian girls and Asian boys. (109)

It is with this perspective in mind that Katie’s “American” identity becomes transparent.

Although at home Katie feels conflicted about her identity and is navigating Burmese and American cultures, within the school context, Katie aligns herself with an “American” identity, similar to the Sikh students who “acted” Westernized in Hall’s (2002) study. For example, when discussing school with the interviewer, Katie portrays herself as social and her environment as inclusive:

Um, I love to draw (...) um, I love art, that’s why I’m taking ceramics and stuff. And I really like hanging out with my friends, and I love sports, in general. Because um, I don’t have the motivation to go out and do stuff [laughing], but when I’m hanging out with my friends, who go out and play sports, and I like soccer and tennis and all that.

When discussing her classroom experiences and teachers in particular, Katie maintains a polite demeanor, yet is clear that the social aspect of school is what she enjoys most:

Excerpt 1: Um, I like all my teachers, they’re very nice. Um, uh, I guess I don’t really like, like, I like going to school cause I like seeing all my friends and stuff but then you know, classes can be quite tedious and just boring, and you just don’t want to go there. And homework is just extra work that you just don’t want to do. I mean in order to succeed you have to do homework obviously, but it’s not my thing. [Laughing] But I do like stuff...I just wish we could do something fun instead of reading “Macbeth,” I hate reading that book, no offense.

Excerpt 2: Um, I wish (...) I don’t know. Like sometimes I can be quite talkative and stuff cause I’m not interested in what’s happening, I mean it’s not intentional. I don’t mean to be like rude and stuff, I just wish they know that whenever I do do that, like I don’t mean disrespect. You know? I mean...this class should be more fun. But I don’t want to diss them and stuff cause I know that, I always care about what other people think of me, even though that’s not always the best way to go, but I don’t want teachers to think you know, I’m always bad. Which I’m not, I’m a good student.

Katie’s overall attitude, focus on “fun,” use of colloquialisms (i.e., “no offense;” “I don’t want to diss them”), and repeated use of the plural “you” (i.e., “...you just don’t want to go there;” “...extra work you just don’t want to do”) engages the interviewer as an active participant in Katie’s story (Riessman, 2008), and adds a performative element to strengthen her portrayal of an “American” student. Furthermore, Katie’s narrative

counters stereotypes of the traditional, obedient, first generation Asian student (Lee, 2001). As Lee (2001) argues, false dichotomies and inaccurate stereotypes fail to recognize the multiplicitious and nuanced experiences of Asian and Asian American students. Accordingly, within this narrative, Katie dismisses either/or perceptions of identity by ultimately concluding that it is possible to be a “good student” despite behaving “badly” at times.

Importance of friendships. A prominent component of Katie’s “American” student identity is the emphasis and importance she places on her friendships. The importance of friendships during adolescence has been extensively documented, particularly in psychological literature (Berndt, 1982; Buhrmester, 1990; Claes, 1992; Kon & Losenkov, 1978), and as specifically important for girls (Apter & Josselson, 1998; Brown, 2003; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Daubman & Thomas, 2001). Although the concept of adolescence might be culturally relevant and distinctly Western, given the length of time Katie has spent in the United States, it is an appropriate term to interpret this period of her life. For Katie, the importance of friendships is intricately tied to her social attitude and provides a source of comfort and inclusion throughout her school experiences.

As Katie discusses her experiences at NHS, she describes having an extensive network of friends. This network is especially interesting in light of research such as Olsen’s (1997) where distinctly bound “cliques” are the social norm of school settings across the country. Alternatively, Katie presents herself as a highly social and outgoing person, and accordingly has friendships that span across the NHS student populace. Katie explains to the interviewer:

R: I mean, it's just really awesome. And I have friends (...) I have that group, that's like my main group that I hang out with (...) a lot of the time, and then I have other friends that are, like, outside of that group.

I: Do they ever all hang out?

R: No, no, not really. 'Cause I have friends who are like, who, who are like (...) who act like they're all ghetto and stuff. And I'm just like "Oh, my god it's you guys." And, and then I have friends who are, like, totally smart. I have friends who, who are just like (...) deadbeats. [chuckles]

I: What do you mean by deadbeats?

R: Like, like they don't really do, they don't really do their homework that much. And, I have a lot of friends and it's nice to say that because, you know, not everyone wants to be a like a total hermit.

Katie's narrative provides insight into the social structure of her school (i.e., "ghetto," "smart," "deadbeats," etc.) and the importance these relationships bring to that experience (i.e., "it's just really awesome"). Simultaneously, Katie's narrative also illustrates the ability to occupy and navigate multiple worlds, providing another example of support for Lee's (2001) argument against the false delinquent/"model minority" dichotomy.

Additionally, Katie's narratives of friendship offer a strong example of the social capital (Yosso, 2005) she has acquired while being a student at NHS. While these friendships give Katie social capital, they also supply Katie with a sense of support and provide a way to process and make meaning of school events:

I love lunch [Laughing]. Cause I mean, I'm sure a lot of kids say that, it's so much fun chatting with all my friends, and talking about our school, or what we just experienced two seconds ago and so yeah, it's just fun talking to them about all this stuff.

Katie is able to derive a sense of support through her friendships because she understands these relationships in terms of mutually shared experiences. For example, Katie uses the inclusive "we" ("...we just experienced...") in order to insert herself into the common experiences she shares with her friends, and uses the possessive adjective "our"

(“...talking about *our* school...”) to imply ownership and belonging in relationship to NHS.

Inclusion. In tandem with Katie’s statement of belonging are her feelings of inclusion. For Katie, narratives of friendship and inclusion are not necessarily mutually exclusive. During the interview, Katie does discuss her friendships outside of the school context, however, this is minimal in comparison to the narratives she shares of her school experiences. Accordingly, Katie expresses deep feelings of inclusion when she describes her experiences at NHS and her narratives of inclusion are distinctly connected to her friendships, sociability, and “American” student identity. For instance, Katie states:

In school (...) Um (...) I always feel included with my friends. Uh (...) I don’t know, like I always walk into school every morning and they’re always like, “Oh Katie, how’s it going?” and I’m like “It’s going good.” You know, I always feel included. Sometimes (...) sometimes I just hold back a little more than other times. But...I guess I put myself out there. And so (...) a lot of people (...) that’s what my friends say “Oh Katie you put yourself out there. You have so many friends.” I mean, I don’t have a ton of friends, but I know a lot of people so (...)

In this quote, Katie describes how her social capital results in feelings of inclusion. Particularly, Katie’s ability to “put herself out there,” or in other words to socially expose herself, produces meaningful friendships that foster a positive and inclusive educational environment for her.

Katie’s feelings of inclusion are not limited to just her experiences with her friends, however. Katie also describes feeling of inclusion when she talks about school in general, or specific classroom experiences and positive teacher interactions. The following excerpts highlight the sense of belonging and community Katie feels by being a student at NHS:

Excerpt 1: I love NHS and um, I think there are times when it's just like "Oh my god, kind of a weird place," well not a weird place, like I don't know. But at times I get kind of annoyed at all the people because some people are really rowdy and annoying in the hallways but I mean other than that, when we go to games and stuff I'm so happy to be a part of NHS and stuff, cause it's just cool.

Excerpt 2: Yes, definitely, definitely. Cause we're all like, I mean everyone in the school is like part of this like NHS thing, like, I don't know how to explain it but it's just like really cool.

Excerpt 3: Like two Fridays ago, I don't remember really exactly when, but it was homecoming day and stuff and at night there was a game and I went to the game and it was really fun and at school we had this little pep rally (...) it wasn't really a pep rally, but I mean we just, you know, we had all the kids outside on the track they were all in the bleachers and all the sports kids walked out on the track and stuff, and it was really cool cheering for them. It was kind of boring, but it was really cool watching them all come out and stuff.

Despite Katie's minor annoyances (i.e., "...at times I get annoyed at all the people because some people are really rowdy and annoying..."), she repeatedly describes feeling connected to NHS, specifically declaring her membership as "a part of" this larger group. Being "a part of" this larger phenomenon leaves Katie with the inability to verbally express her feelings of inclusion (i.e., "...I don't know how to explain it..."). Analyzing these narratives structurally, it is interesting to note that these three separate excerpts relate a similar "moral," or message, indicative in the final codas (Riessman, 2008), which articulates that being "a part of" NHS is "cool."

When describing instances of inclusion within the classroom and with specific teachers, Katie provides experiential narratives, rather than citing distinct pedagogical techniques or personal attributes. Consequently, Katie describes the *feelings* she associates with inclusion and positive learning environments. She describes:

Excerpt 1: I love art. I love ceramics cause you walk in and it's just calm and stuff and we have a student in the class who's kind of funny, um his name's Pierre, and he has the funniest laugh and so out of nowhere he'll start laughing and everyone will start laughing cause it's so funny. It's not like in a bad way, it's kind of like this cute laugh, but it's like loud. It's so funny, anyways yeah.

Excerpt 2: Um, I have a lot of teachers that I really, really like. Um one of my teachers, Ms. S, she's the teacher for my ceramics class. She's really young, she's like 23 right now and she's just so funny, she puts on music, you know, modern music and she dances to it. And it's so funny watching her dance. And she also has a really funny laugh. So it's great being in that class. And I also really like my math teacher, Ms. Patters, she's really, she's just really nice.

Although Katie is describing the same class in each excerpt, with the exception of her math teacher at the end of “excerpt 2,” the first excerpt focuses on the classroom experience, while the second excerpt highlights teacher behavior. In comparison to Sa Pe who, for example, distinctly remarked on pedagogical tools of inclusion (i.e., introducing and welcoming her to the class, speaking slowly, exercising patience, using a dictionary or picture book, etc.), Katie emphasizes the feeling (i.e., “...you walk in and its just calm...”) and ambiance created by the inclusive practices of a specific teacher. As a result, Katie reports a “fun” learning environment.

Experiencing exclusion and exposing inequity. Despite Katie's vivid accounts of inclusion at NHS, Katie also shared compelling stories of exclusion, particularly in terms of exposing a larger structure of inequity. Compared to the other participants, Katie's narratives of exclusion were uniquely different. For instance, rather than expressing the explicitly racial exclusion and bullying that was felt by Sa Pe, Katie describes a systemic encounter with racism, that transitions her role beyond the personal into an observer. Katie prefaces her narrative of exclusion by providing the background of how she moved from the top of the academic hierarchy to the bottom:

Yeah (...) English (...) and Global. Cause I was in combined, like really hard. It goes “Regular,” Honors, to Combined for 10th graders. And combined was extremely hard, we had tons of homework every night, and it was just like “Oh my goodness.” And they were actually thinking about making an AP course except that we were suffering through it and we were going to get like honor credit, so um then I moved down to Honors but they didn't have any room in Honors Global so they put me in “Regular,” so it's so boring to be in that class,

cause there were some kids who didn't even know what "pilgrimage" meant...I guess it's kind of mean...And it's really distracting to be in that class cause they all talk at once and the teacher's just up there. There's no respect for the teacher whatsoever.

In the above quote Katie outlines the system of academic tracking at her school and how she was excluded from maintaining an honors track because there was "no room" for her.

This experience reflects a larger, national issue with tracking in public schools.

Specifically, research examining the consequences of academic tracking report racial discrepancies, with minority groups disproportionately occupying the lower track in comparison to their white counterparts (Carger, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Investigating literature in this area through the lens of CRT, Villenas and Deyhle (1999) suggest that such educational approaches and policies provide the rationale that lead students into different career trajectories and serve to maintain white privilege. Beginning with a story about her own personal experience with racism and structural inequity, Katie's narrative makes a distinct turn that opens into a critical analysis of a larger culture of inequity that exists in her school.

Initially, Katie feels frustration toward the "Regular" students as she acutely describes in the previous quote, however as Katie continues to distinguish Honors and "Regular" classes through the narrative process, her perspective becomes more critical of the teacher's role. When the interviewer asks Katie what the difference was between Honors class and "Regular" class, she replies:

Honors, there's like so much more respect for the teachers. Like you walk in, and it's quiet. Like the teachers talking and everyone's listening to the teacher...sometimes it's kind of boring to listen to the teacher all the time. But everyone's quiet and they do all their work cause in "Regular" like the kids, he has to ask the kids to do their work. He has to be like "You guys please do your work, you have to turn it in tomorrow..." Whereas in honors, they expect you to do it. And it's kind of sad, but the teachers kind of expect that in "Regular," that

the kids won't do it. I think that's really half the reason that the kids aren't doing it, because there's low expectations, and I feel bad for the kids, cause they're always put down. I mean maybe not like straightforward, but like put down by the teachers, he doesn't mean it, but it's kind of like um, for example, it's kind of like when someone walks, someone has their bike and they're afraid to leave it outside because someone might, they think someone else who is like kind of poor and stuff, might take it...I don't know how to explain it, you know what I mean?...they expect that the kids are like dumb, and doesn't know this and that and it's just on both ends, students and the teachers, it's just not a good environment.

Katie's description of these class differences and their corresponding teacher expectations is powerful. Katie's description of low teacher expectations for the lower tracked students correlates with deficit approaches to education. Deficit approaches to education are primarily based on the perspective that students of color and their families are at fault for poor academic performance (Yosso, 2005), rather than examining the structure of schools, or society in general (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Further, research highlighting the school experiences of students of color reports the impact of low teacher expectations on students, particularly in terms of the students' cognizance of their teacher's attitude and the low quality of education they were receiving (Carger, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valdés, 1996; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

Similarly, Katie describes a perpetuating cycle of teacher's low expectations, resulting in "Regular" students' low expectations of self. In the following dialogue between Katie and the interviewer, she states:

R: But yeah, but I feel that's a huge, not a good thing. I feel that as a Honor's kid, I'm succeeding as I go along, I'm getting better and better as I go along in school, but "Regular" kids are getting worse and worse cause they're getting more and more behind cause the teachers are not expecting enough from them. I highly doubt that's the reason, but a fraction of the reason that the kids feel like "Oh well the teacher doesn't believe I can do it, so why do it anyways?" You know?

I: What do you think are other reasons, if not teacher expectations?

R: Home (...) their environment around them, um, other like their classmates that influence them to do like bad things and stuff. Peer pressure.

Katie's narrative of low teacher expectations provides an additional testimony to the impact of deficit approaches to education and to society at large who maintains this structure. In sharing this observation, Katie poignantly provides a metaphor of the bike, as a way to illustrate how this student bias isn't displayed as "straightforward" prejudice; in other words, it is ingrained into the school culture. Furthermore, the teacher's lack of awareness (i.e., "he didn't mean it"), that these expectations are "commonsensical," can be interpreted via Gramsci's theory of hegemony. From this perspective, the teacher has "consented" (Omi & Winant, 1994) to the ideology of the powerful, as a way to maintain white privilege. Moreover, the power of hegemony is profound in Katie's final statement. Katie ends her narrative by doubting her previous critical analysis, and in turn, gives into her own deficit approach, blaming the home culture for student failure.

Conclusion

An in-depth analysis of the individual participant narratives has illustrated the nuanced and varied experiences of Burmese refugee youth as they navigate life in the United States. Paw Bu Ley's narrative, for example, illustrates the impact of growing up in a refugee camp and how this experience has shaped her perspective of the world. This experience has afforded Paw Bu Ley with the aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) that is helping her to succeed now and will be a continued resource she draws upon to achieve her goals in the future.

Paw Bu Ley's narrative is simultaneously indicative of the length of time she has spent living in a refugee camp, while in contrast, Katie's narrative reflects her prolonged American experience, particularly in terms of her social capital (Yosso, 2005), vast social

networks, and feelings of inclusivity at school. While education is greatly important to both, it is discussed very differently. Paw Bu Ley displays a thirst for knowledge that is insatiable. Through a “dual frame of reference,” Paw Bu Ley views her academic experiences in the U.S. generously, as compared the inadequate conditions of her refugee past (Ogbu & Simons, 2008; Suarez-Orozco, 1987). Katie, on the other hand, provides a poignant critique of a fallible education system. Despite these differences, both Paw Bu Ley and Katie clearly convey that education is a mean to achieve future goals.

Min Min also provides a counter narrative to deficit stereotypes that characterize students of color and their families as lacking the academic rigor to successfully progress in U.S. schools (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Roy & Roxas, 2011; Valencia, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Additionally, his narrative offers an example of how multiple, and at times conflicting identities co-exist, therefore challenging false dichotomies and expanding how we think about identity. Sa Pe’s narrative similarly includes aspects of the aforementioned, while demonstrating the strength of family support, the power of sharing culture, and the use of agentic strategies, such as silence as an alternative method of resisting racist attitudes and instances of bullying.

The individual examination of these participants has uncovered profound narratives that can only be captured through an analysis of the personal (Riessman, 2008). The “small stories” that are captured through individual analysis provide detailed insight into the lived, everyday experiences, and would otherwise go unnoticed (Riessman, 2008; Sprekels, 2008). For instance, Sa Pe’s story about finding correct change when riding the bus speaks to the daily occurrence of racial microaggressions (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009) that accompany refugee status. While these

individual analyses have been invaluable, I now turn to a discussion on similar themes that were found across the participants, followed by concluding comments.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion: Similar Themes Across Participants

Similar themes were found across the four participants. While these themes speak to common narratives shared by four unique individuals, they are not intended to define the experiences of all refugee youth. The themes highlighted in this section were generated based on the commonality of narratives shared by all the participants (Riessman, 2008) and considered in terms of the central research questions listed at the beginning of Chapter 4 and in the introduction. Consequently, the main themes shared across the four participants include: narratives of resettlement/migration, narratives of Burmese identity/culture, Burmese American identity (being Burmese in the United States), narratives of inclusion/exclusion, and narratives of cultural resources.

Narratives of Resettlement/Migration. When describing the experience of what life was like now living in the United States, the participants commonly shared narratives of what the process was like migrating from Burma to the United States. Although for Paw Bu Ley and Sa Pe, these narratives related to a refugee experience or refugee identity more specifically, when looking across all four participants, these narratives spoke to the process of resettlement in general. One interpretation is that narratives of resettlement might be an important way for refugee youth to make sense of their current living environment by remembering and contrasting it to their past (Ogbu & Simons, 2008; Suarez-Orozco, 1987); it may also be an illustrative way to share the experience with an outsider/researcher. Furthermore, Riessman (2008) suggests that by engaging in the narrative process with an audience, individuals co-construct an understanding of “self,” while making meaning of the stories shared.

Interestingly, all four participants sequenced their narratives of resettlement/migration into three major groupings: life in Burma, or moving from Burma to Thailand; the process of resettlement; and life upon arriving to the U.S. Despite these commonalities, each story was nuanced in light of the larger “metanarrative” they shared. For instance, although all participants recounted life in Burma, both the content of their experiences and how they described this period were different. Paw Bu Ley understood Burma in terms of her ethnic group and political conflict; Min Min described it as a place he was forced to leave to live with his father in Thailand; Sa Pe portrayed Burma as the place of her cultural roots yet conveyed that her refugee status meant that she couldn’t live there anymore; and for Katie, Burma represented the memory of her father and the relationship she had with him before she left with her mother.

The process of resettlement was also shared, and uniquely expressed across participant narratives. Paw Bu Ley specifically and concisely outlined the application process for refugee status and resettlement. For example, after stating that she had been living in a refugee camp for too long, she states how her family needed documentation proving their refugee status, followed by an interview, and a subsequent waiting period, after which “they” decide whether or not her family’s request was approved. Sa Pe similarly described the application process in terms of filling out paperwork to determine her family’s status, followed by waiting until an outside entity decided that they were going to the United States. Although Min Min states that filling out an application was part of the resettlement process, this is not the focus of his narrative. Rather, Min Min’s narrative emphasizes his father’s deception in forcing him to go to the U.S. when he didn’t want to move. Katie’s narrative was the only one void of the bureaucratic process

involved when resettling to a new country. Considering the age when Katie moved to the U.S. (5 years), as well as Min Min (12 years), may account for the lack of emphasis placed on this aspect of resettlement. However, the application process was a salient memory for Paw Bu Ley and Sa pe. Interestingly, it was also these two participants that strongly identified with a refugee status.

Life in the United States was also experienced differently for each participant, which might be indicative of age and/or family context prior to resettlement. For instance, Paw Bu Ley understood the United States as a place of hope and where her dream of attending medical school could be realized, a dream that couldn't be achieved in a refugee camp. Min Min's initial experience with the U.S. was in terms of gang violence in Texas, resulting in his sister "forcing" him to move to Newtown for a better education and quality of life. Likewise, Sa Pe had the experience of moving away from her initial place of resettlement, also in the hopes of better education. Both Min Min and Sa Pe's experiences correlate with the "second migration" discussed by Portes and Rumbaut (2006).

Within these varying narratives of resettlement, the impact of family and education are prominently illustrated. All participants spoke to some degree of family separation. While some literature describes family separation as a pathological experience for refugee youth (Berman, 2001; McCloskey & Southwick, 1996; Servan-Schreiber, Le Lin & Birmaher, 1998) and also view changing parental roles once arriving to the country of resettlement (i.e., children translating for their parents) in terms of a deficit understanding (McBrien, 2005), the youth included here provide a sharp contrast. It may be that instances of family separation are a part of "the refugee experience" for

some youth, but this doesn't necessarily mean that these youth are ill equipped for the transition to life in the United States or are not resilient and resourceful once they arrive. In fact, the importance these youth and their families placed on attaining a quality education is one indicator of their aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) and desire for academic achievement in the United States (Roy & Roxas, 2011).

Furthermore, these narratives of resettlement provide a supplementary perspective in the area of refugee studies, where the voices of children are minimal (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010) and where metanarratives of "the refugee experience" essentialize the individual experiences, which are often unique and nuanced (Eastmond, 2007; Malkki, 1995). When refugee children are portrayed in popular ideology, they are often depicted as passive victims in order to gain sympathy for humanitarian causes (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Malkki, 1995, 1996). The stories shared by the four participants included in this thesis provide an alternative account to these popular depictions. Although at times these youth described situations that were out of their control, they simultaneously portrayed themselves as active agents who understood their situations, found resourceful ways to navigate their circumstances, and made difficult decisions regarding their own future.

Narratives of Burmese Identity/Culture. Although each participant self identified differently (i.e., Karen/refugee, "Burmese kid," refugee from Burma, and "not a citizen yet"), each identity they conveyed shared a common Burmese past. Importantly, the way each participant constructed and understood this Burmese "self" developed and transformed throughout the narrative interview process. In the narrative act of sharing stories of their Burmese identity and culture, the participants were able to grapple with

and shape their understanding of what it means to be Burmese. Because the narratives were told in the context of the “historical present” (Riessman, 2008) situated in the United States, stories of Burmese identity and culture were thus influenced by the U.S. context.

As evidenced, narratives of Burmese identity and culture were a common and vital component of each participant’s experiences. Within these narratives, each participant described an aspect of control related to this identity. However, control meant different things. For instance, Paw Bu Ley’s Burmese (and Karen) identity is understood as obedience and submission to parental authority, they are in control of her. For Paw Bu Ley, this cultural aspect is stifling, restrictive, and she resists it. Similarly, Katie regards the Burmese “values” her mother enforces (e.g., taking a long shower) in terms of antiquity, the past and is vocal about her resistance. Conversely, Min Min discusses control in terms of Buddhism and controlling yourself. From this religious perspective, Min Min chooses to respect others, even in the face of adversity, and continuously strives to achieve this cultural value.

Although Sa Pe equates the parental control of her Burmese culture with respect and courtesy in a similar way as Min Min, she not only accepts this part of her culture, but she hopes to pass it on to her future family. Further, Sa Pe views culture as an abstract concept, beyond the tangibility of objects and places, and conveys an understanding of the temporality of identity (Holland et al., 1998). For Sa Pe, culture is kept and passed on in a social way, through the process “telling” identity is maintained and culture is remembered.

From this perspective, the participant's narratives of Burmese identity speak to the theoretical by illustrating the transformative nature of identities (Holland et al., 1998). Accordingly, this was observed in the way participant's construction of identity shifted and altered throughout the interview process. This was evident in the temporal sequencing of Burmese identity throughout the interviews; Paw Bu Ley in particular viewed this identity as part of her past. Context also influenced the performance of Burmese identity; Sa Pe states how she couldn't be Burmese in school because of bullying, indicating the disconnect between home and school cultures (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Villenas and Deyhle, 1999; Wallitt, 2008) and the occupation of multiple "figured worlds" (Holland et al, 1998). For example, alongside descriptions of Burmese identity and culture, were narratives of Burmese/American identity, or what it is like being Burmese in the United States.

Burmese American Identity. Transitioning from narratives of Burmese culture and identity, are narratives of being a Burmese youth in the United States, what I refer to as a Burmese American identity. This theme differs from the previous one because these narratives highlight the intersection of Burmese and "American" identities, focusing on the specific experiences of being Burmese in the United States. In other words, these narratives illustrate the embodiment of being both/and, rather than either/or. Again, this perspective adds to the work of scholars such as Lee (2002), Hall (2002), and Ngo (2010) who challenge essentialized and dichotomous descriptions of Asian youth experiences.

For Paw Bu Ley, being Burmese American meant academic opportunity, more responsibility and autonomy (see discussion of "autonomous" identity in Chapter 4), while simultaneously inciting a distinct Karen ethnic identity. Being Burmese in the U.S.

was similarly experienced by Min Min, through the enactment of multiple identities; of note were his “Burmese Buddhist” identity, “Westernized scientist” identity, and “masculine” identity. Although in school Sa Pe doesn’t want to “pretend” to be American and can’t be Burmese, at home with her mother Sa Pe wants to dress in a way that challenges her home traditions and aligns herself with an “American” identity. For Katie, the transition to a Burmese American identity has been experienced with a loss of her Burmese culture and an increase in an “American” self. Mostly, Katie is saddened by her loss of Burmese language.

For both Sa Pe and Katie, home was a contested space for being both Burmese and American. In particular, it was the mothers of both these girls that challenged their “American” identity constructions, correlating with Hickey’s (1999) study of immigrant mothers and daughters (see Sa Pe’s analysis in Chapter 4). For Paw Bu Ley, however, it was once her stepfather left, that she enjoyed the freedom to navigate her identities as she chose. Min Min, on the other hand, describes his esteemed family position as a “king brother” affording him the ability to enact his agency unfettered. Viewing Burmese American identity from this gendered position, places home as a site of struggle and a site of liberation (hooks, 1990). A more in-depth discussion of “place” and the concept of home was discussed in Min Min’s analysis in Chapter 4.

Narratives of Inclusion/Exclusion. Narratives of exclusion varied within single participants, as well as across all four and focused on instances in the classroom, as well as in the community. Narratives centered on experiences in the classroom highlighted racialized structures of inequity, including the “hidden curriculum,” and of racial stratification as a result of the hierarchical “tracking” of students (i.e., Katie’s example of

being placed on the “Regular” track and her observations). On the other hand, narratives such as Sa Pe’s and Min Min’s, provided a detailed account of the lived experiences and the “racial microaggressions” (Yosso et al., 2009) encountered daily.

Additional narratives of exclusion spoke to federal policy and national ideology that perpetuate white privilege by maintaining a focus on an English-only culture. For example, throughout her interview, Sa Pe felt the impact of living in an environment where English mastery is a social requirement, by consistently describing her “lack of English,” or referring to her English as “no good.” As a consequence, Sa Pe felt unsure of herself academically, as well as in social interactions. The emphasis on English language in U.S. schools and its silencing impact on English Language Learners (ELL) is described in detail by Olsen (1997). For Sa Pe, being able to “show” her classmates what it means and looks like to be Burmese, an identity not reflected in her school experiences, would be a step toward creating an inclusive and equitable school environment for her.

Other narratives of exclusion were also contextualized within the classroom, but were generated by interactions with students. Again, Sa Pe’s narratives provide detailed insight into these more overtly aggressive experiences of exclusion. Similar to her experiences, the impact of being “othered” is painfully storied by Min Min when describing his experiences with his classmates:

...they don’t treat me really nicely as like their friends (...), they don’t treat me as normal people (...) they treat me as I’m like a creepy guy (...) When I go to school...I don’t want to look around people (...) I don’t want them to look at me, so I just wear [a] hat to cover my face.

Like Sa Pe, Min Min emphasizes not wanting to be looked at and wants to physically cover his face. Despite Min Min’s attempt to escape his classmates’ gaze, he is labeled as “creep,” and is left feeling not normal.

Although the shared experiences of exclusion are painful to hear, they inform us about the lived experiences of refugee students in U.S. schools and provide us with insight into how we can create more inclusive and caring spaces. Alongside narratives of exclusion, these students also experienced moments of inclusion, which varied drastically. For example, while Katie emphasizes the importance of friendships, Sa Pe's most salient experience of inclusion was when she was able to share with her class about Burmese culture, an event that brought her happiness and confidence.

For Paw Bu Ley, inclusion was described as something she had control over as a result of choosing to be included, particularly in terms of her U.S. school experience. She enrolled at NHS, and therefore signed her name to be a member of that community. By using her aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) as a tool for inclusion in the classroom, specifically with teachers, Paw Bu Ley felt excited about her learning experience. Paw Bu Ley's narratives of inclusion are particularly interesting to consider in terms of individual choice and societal structure.

Additionally, Sa Pe and Katie provide specific pedagogical techniques that facilitated their inclusion in the classroom and fostered caring learning environments. For example, giving adequate time to work and providing additional learning materials, as well as incorporating group work into the class structure were described favorably by Sa Pe and Katie. Additionally, it meant a lot to Sa Pe when her ESL teacher emailed her other teachers about her arrival to the school and notified them of her limited English proficiency. Teacher characteristics, such as exhibiting patience and understanding, talking slowly, and being good-natured were synonymous with positive learning experiences.

Narratives of Cultural Resources. As indicated throughout Chapter 4 and the above discussion, a particularly striking theme found across the participants was their narratives of cultural wealth and resourcefulness. The cultural resources participants drew from as they navigated life in the U.S. included Gonzalez et al.'s (2005) "funds of knowledge," Yosso's (2005) cultural capital, as well as participant's own experiential and cultural knowledge.

Paw Bu Ley, for instance accessed her linguistic resources and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), which was learned via her mother's drive to "persist" despite the circumstances, to navigate and motivate her both in school, in the refugee camp, and in U.S. society. Min Min's "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez et al., 2005) provided him with self-managing techniques to control himself at school. Sa Pe and her family provide a strong example of the benefits of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) as they navigated bureaucratic policies and the use of her experiential knowledge help Sa Pe at school. Lastly, Katie provides an account of how access to social capital (Yosso, 2005) produced feelings of inclusion and an enjoyable school experience.

Upon examining the vast cultural wealth these participants display, the relationship between the general theme of cultural wealth, and choice, becomes apparent. Particularly, it is through the use of these resources that agency is facilitated. In accessing and then making the decision to utilize the resources they've accumulated, these youth describe a sense of control and mastery over lives, a particularly important experience given the aforementioned constraints they simultaneously report.

Concluding Remarks

Examining how refugee youth from Burma construct their identities while navigating the U.S. education system and society has provided profound insight into the emergence of multiple identities and the way that cultural and experiential resources are activated in order to assert agency. While some of these narratives provided detail of the individual, daily experiences, other narratives addressed discourse, structure, ideology, and policy. Throughout these accounts, competing, conflicting, and coexisting worlds are traversed and mediated, co-opted and countered. The youth included in this study are active agents of the worlds they occupy and as they continue to make identity choices, they create spaces that are uniquely their own.

Implications and limitations. The narratives of these youth from Burma challenge and complicate how we define “refugee” and how we think about “the refugee experience.” Particularly illuminating was the way these participants, described, framed, and understood the resettlement process. While Paw Bu Ley’s experience in the refugee camp framed the way she described her refugee self, it was also a clearly a part of her past and not an identity she associated with in the historical present, or future. Sa Pe, on the other hand did not have the experience of living in a refugee camp, yet simultaneously strongly identified herself as a “refugee;” living illegally in Thailand shaped her refugee experience. Katie’s narrative provides a strong contrast when compared with the other participants; she did not identify as a refugee and positioned herself in terms of future U.S. citizenship.

Because of the popular imaginings (i.e., the traumatized, poverty stricken child), educational categorizations (i.e., ESL student, special needs student, etc.), and political ramifications (i.e., welfare, Medicaid, low-income housing, etc.) that come as a result of

the refugee label, through the narratives of four diverse Burmese youth, this current study suggests the need for an updated and multiplicitious understanding of refugee youth, their experiences, and how they identify themselves. Such a perspective has particularly strong implications for U.S. classrooms and how teachers and future teachers are educated about their students.

In this vein, while deficit approaches are currently a part of the underlying U.S. school culture, case studies of students such as those included in this study provide an array of counter narratives. The vast and rich experiences that are a part of these students' transnational lives have provided them with a wealth of knowledge that goes unrecognized and unsupported in their school environments (Yosso, 2005).

Incorporating their diverse voices and unique knowledges into pedagogy and curriculum, would benefit not only to these students and their classmates, but society in general as well.

In addition to the wealth of knowledge these students display, are the cultural resources they've accumulated from their experiences. As evidenced in this study, these cultural resources, including Yosso's (2005) cultural capital and Gonzalez et al.'s (2005) "funds of knowledge," have served as agentic tools called upon while navigating the resettlement process and adjustment to life in the United States. These narratives depict refugee youth as resourceful, resilient and as active agents responding to and shaping their "figured worlds" (Holland et al., 1998). Sa Pe's narrative of using silence as a form of active resistance is a particularly compelling example. Accordingly, these stories of activating cultural resources offer new ways of viewing refugee youth as agentic beings, rather than as passive, ambiguous entities that have no control of their life outcomes.

Knowledge about the cultural resources refugee youth activate to enact agency would be helpful for teachers and social workers, for example, to support and bolster these students as they navigate their complex worlds.

Lastly, the multiple identities these Burmese refugee youth narrate as part of their lives in the United States contradict popular paradigms that dichotomize their identity into either/or categories. Consequently, these youths illustrate ways of being Burmese *and* “American.” When refugee and immigrant students are described as “Americanized” in literature and popular discourse, images of “ghettoized” or “delinquent” youths are pervasive. The multiple identities described by the refugee youth in this study challenge this perspective while providing a more comprehensive and nuanced way of thinking about an “American” identity. Accordingly, this has vast implications for theorists in the field of education, education policy, and teacher education, where the inclusion of the diverse perspectives of students is particularly important.

Despite these implications, this study was not without its limitations. A major caveat of the study was that the interviews with Burmese youth were conducted in English. This not only limited and potentially excluded youth uncomfortable conversing in English who might have otherwise chosen to participate, but three of the four participants were English Language Learners, which raises questions about the authenticity of their narratives. In particular, the translation of complex feelings and emotions may have been expressed differently had the interview been conducted in the participant’s home language. Additionally, the use of narrative analysis with English Language Learners adds a layer of complexity, particularly in terms of verb tenses for example, that requires a comprehensive understanding and careful listening of what the

participant is sharing. While these limitations don't detract from the powerful narratives shared, they are important to consider in this study and for future research.

Contributions. These narratives build on work of Lee (2001), Hall (2002), and Ngo (2010), in particular. As stated, this body of work challenges false dichotomies that are used to categorize Asian youth. By focusing on the voices of refugee youth specifically, a different way of thinking about categorization becomes apparent when considering the intersection between a transnational past of exile and a new beginning in the country of resettlement. For example, through the encounter with the “American,” or American ideology and discourse surrounding and defining Asian and Asian American students, research investigating the experiences of refugee youth bring to attention the categorizations that are part of the “American package.” A Karen refugee youth who has spent their life in a refugee camp in Thailand, for example, has never heard of the American-made “model minority” categorization. However, by encountering these sets of systems, refugee youth are labeled and stratified in the U.S. context. Yet, through this experience these youth also learn what it means to be “American” in a way that most Americans take for granted. Olsen (1997) adds that immigrant students and English Language Learners learn these American categorizations through the culture of the school, from the playground to the classroom. Accordingly, the current study moves away from essentialized depictions of the “Asian” experience, as well as the “refugee” or “immigrant” experience, by adding another set of unique voices, those of refugee youth from Burma and explores the resourceful ways they navigate the American constellation.

Additionally, this study adds to literature in refugee studies where the voices of youth are limited (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Malkki, 1995) and refugee experiences in

general, are essentialized (Eastmond, 2007; Malkki, 1995). Commonly, when the voices of refugee youth are reported in literature it is either to illustrate dire situations where humanitarian aid is needed (Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Malkki, 1995, 1996) or to pathologize their situation in terms of mental health problems and maladjustment (Bek-Pedersen & Montgomery, 2006; Daud et al., 2005; Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln & Cabral, 2008; Halcon et al., 2004). The narratives in this study add nuance and promote positive adjustment to life in the United States by highlighting refugee youths' stories of strength, courage and resiliency.

Lastly, the current study contributes to research in the field of education that has focused on immigrant youth school experiences without incorporating the unique perspectives of refugee students. In addition, the narratives highlighted by the refugee youth in this study add to the body of literature on identity by challenging and complicating our current understanding of identity construction through their transnational experiences. Despite these contributions, more research in this area would help to push our current understanding further, in the hopes of providing more equitable learning environments and caring communities for everyone.

APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Community Voices: Narratives of Family Knowledge and Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion in the Local Schools

You are invited to take part in a research study about family life and schooling. We plan to collect stories that document local knowledge about work, learning, leadership and education. We also want to collect stories about how and when families, youths and educators feel included and excluded in the [Newtown] School District. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before you agree to participate in the study.

The purposes of this study are as follows:

- 1) To allow prospective teachers to learn directly from community members about issues related to diversity and inclusive education
- 2) To contribute to ongoing discussions about educational equity in [N]SD by providing portraits of community members' cultural lives and experiences with the local schools
- 3) To share the findings with current teachers as a contribution to their professional development
- 4) To join a nation-wide dialogue about the particular dynamics and challenges of diversity and equity in multicultural and progressive college-town school districts

This research project gives Cornell University students the opportunity to serve as investigators who are learning about diversity and school achievement in the course EDUC 503 *Diversity in the Classroom*.

If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about learning, education and work in the family and community, and your experiences with the [Newtown] School District. The interview will take between 1 to 1.5 hours to complete. With your consent, the interview will be tape-recorded.

There are no anticipated risks for your participation in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Student researchers will benefit by connecting parent, youth and teacher stories to their course learning about teaching in a diverse world. The wider community will benefit by engaging in rich discussion and sharing their experiences. You will receive a Target gift card with a value of \$20.00 (twenty dollars) for your participation in this study.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Cornell University. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within a year of its taping.

If you have questions: The principal investigator for this study is Dr. Sofia Villenas. You may reach her at sav33@cornell.edu or by calling 607-255-5263. You may also contact Service Learning course assistant Jisun Yoo (jy226@cornell.edu) or the

Project Team Coordinators: Alana Butler (acb242@cornell.edu) and Alison Remillard (amr92@cornell.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 607-255-5138 or access their website at <http://www.irb.cornell.edu>. You may also report your concerns or complaints anonymously through Ethicspoint or by calling toll free at 1-866-293-3077. Ethicspoint is an independent organization that serves as a liaison between the University and the person bringing the complaint so that anonymity can be ensured.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature

Date _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview *tape-recorded*.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on April 8, 2009.

APPENDIX B

Parental Permission Consent Form

Community Voices: Narratives of Family Knowledge and Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion in Local Schools

Your child is invited to take part in a research study about family life and schooling. We plan to collect stories that document local knowledge about work, learning, leadership and education. We also want to collect stories about how and when families, youths and educators feel included and excluded in the [Newtown] School District. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before allowing your child to participate in the study.

The purposes of this study are as follows:

- 1) To allow prospective teachers to learn directly from community members about issues related to diversity and inclusive education
- 2) To contribute to ongoing discussions about educational equity in [N]SD by providing portraits of community members' cultural lives and experiences with the local schools
- 3) To share the findings with current teachers as a contribution to their professional development
- 4) To join a nation-wide dialogue about the particular dynamics and challenges of diversity and equity in multicultural and progressive college-town school districts

This research project gives Cornell University students the opportunity to serve as investigators who are learning about diversity and school achievement in the course EDUC 503 *Diversity in the Classroom*.

If you permit your child to take part in this study, we will conduct an interview with your child. The interview will include questions about your child's learning in the home and community and their experiences with the [Newtown] School District. The interview will take between 1 to 1.5 hours to complete. With your consent, the interview will be tape-recorded. Your child will receive a Target gift card with a value of \$20.00 (twenty dollars) for his or her participation in this study.

There are no anticipated risks for your participation in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Student researchers will benefit by connecting parent, youth and teacher stories to their course learning about teaching in a diverse world.

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your child may skip any questions he or she doesn't feel comfortable answering. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to take part will not affect your current or future relationship with Cornell University or with your child's school. If you decide to allow your child to take part, your child is free to not do the survey or to skip any questions. You are free to withdraw your child at any time without affecting your relationship with the University or your child's school.

Your child's answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed and analyzed, which we anticipate will be within a year of its taping.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sofia Villenas. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Sofia Villenas at sav33@cornell.edu or at 607-254-5263. You may also contact Service Learning course assistant Jisun Yoo (jy226@cornell.edu) or the Project Team Coordinators, Alana Butler (acb242@cornell.edu) and Alison Remillard (amr92@cornell.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 607-255-5138 or access their website at <http://www.irb.cornell.edu>. You may also report your concerns or complaints anonymously through [Ethicspoint](#) or by calling toll free at 1-866-293-3077. Ethicspoint is an independent organization that serves as a liaison between the University and the person bringing the complaint so that anonymity can be ensured.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed)

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview *tape-recorded*.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study and was approved by the IRB on April 8, 2009.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL:

How would you describe yourself?

At school? (with friends)

At home? (with family)

What was the experience like coming from your country of origin to the U.S.?

What were your fears?

What were your hopes?

What was your experience like entering into the school system?

What were your experiences like with the teachers?

What were your experiences like with peers?

Describe a time when you were conflicted between choosing your values at home or choosing the values of your friends, or U.S. culture in general.

How do you see yourself as similar or different from those in your community?

In general, what has it been like for you at your school?

What are your favorite times at school and why?

Who are your friends?

How would you describe your friendship group?

How would you describe student relationships in general at your school?

How does it make you feel when you see students hurting each other either physically or verbally at school? What do you do? What do your friends do?

Tell me a story about a time you might have felt included at school, like you really belonged? Now tell me a story about a time you might have felt excluded at school?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

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