

ABSTRACT
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF 1.5 GENERATION
CAMBODIAN AMERICANS

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During the 1980s, an influx of Cambodian Americans resettled in the United States due to the Cambodian genocide. Those Cambodian refugees who came to the United States as either infants, children or adolescents are members of the 1.5 generation. This thesis examines the educational trajectory of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans in the context of family, school, and community from their time of resettlement in the United States to adulthood. Using a narrative approach, I examined how the eighteen participants in the study overcame certain challenges to attain success and how they negotiated their cultural and ethnic identity in relation to their academic aspirations. The data was analyzed using the concepts of Tara J. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory, Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) cultural and social capital, Arjun Appadurai's (1995) concept of ethnoscaples, technoscaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples, and Stuart Hall's (1990) concept of cultural identity. Findings revealed the amount of support the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans received from their family, school, and community influenced their level of success and the participants were active in seeking out resources to meet their needs. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on Cambodian students by highlighting the impact of cultural and generational differences they faced to achieve success.

Keywords: 1.5 generation, Cambodian American refugees, education, Southeast Asian students

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CAMBODIAN AMERICANS

BY

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DEDICATION

For my family, who will always be my light at the end of the tunnel.

Thank you for teaching me how to bloom like a lotus that rises, shines, and stands tall.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My thesis examines the impact of the educational experiences on later success in adulthood of those Cambodian Americans, members of the 1.5 generation, who were infants, children, or adolescents when their family immigrated to the United States. I also include individuals that self-identify as a member of the 1.5 generation Cambodian American group. This thesis aims to explore the educational attainment, experiences, and success in the context of family, community, and school in relation to cultural and ethnic identities and generational differences in the diasporic community of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans in Long Beach, California. This group of Cambodian refugees was discussed over thirty-five years ago by scholars researching on refugees, such as Portes and Rumbaut (2001). These scholars discussed the educational trajectory of Cambodian refugees and attempted to predict that they will be unsuccessful in the future. They argued Cambodian refugees are displaced in inner-city neighborhoods, so they lack the opportunities to succeed. However, recent literature on Cambodian refugees focus on how students used assets that were once viewed as a deficit to attain academic success (Tang et al. 2013; Yosso 2005).

My thesis focuses on the 1.5 generation Cambodian refugees who attained educational success and their journey from resettlement in the United States from childhood to adulthood. In terms of education, I refer to both formal and informal education. Formal education includes schools or universities that use a systematic process of learning and teaching. Informal education

is simply the unsystematic form of acquiring beliefs, skills, knowledge, and habits. In both formal and informal educational settings, the participants gained certain skills that they would not have learned in other settings. For example, in a formal education setting, students learn how to speak proper English, but when they are outside of the school environment, they learn how to speak colloquial English from watching American television shows or listening to American music.

I will address two main research questions in this thesis:

1. How are educational choices and experiences influenced by family, community and school?
2. How does the processes of ethnic identity negotiation and formulation in the United States system influence the educational choices and experiences of this group of Cambodian Americans?
 - 2.a. How does the refugee population negotiate their academic aspirations with their ethnic identity?
 - 2.b. What are the shared experiences of this group of 1.5 generation of Cambodian Americans in relation to challenges and opportunities in the context of educational experiences that may or may not promote later success in adulthood?

To address these questions, I analyzed the data using a range of conceptual and theoretical frameworks including: Tara J. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory, Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) cultural and social capital, Arjun Appadurai's (1995) concept of ethnoscaples, ideoscaples and mediascaples, and Stuart Hall's (1990) concept of cultural identity. Data analysis of the eighteen interviews revealed three overlapping themes: support system, cultural and

generational differences, and self-motivation.

Participants used aspirational, familial, and navigational capital to overcome discrimination and racism they encountered in their school and greater community. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain motivation towards accomplishing one's goals despite challenges (Yosso 2005:77). Familial capital is the cultural knowledge that fosters the kinship ties of the members in their ethnic community (Yosso 2005:79). Navigational capital refers to finding resources around American institutions. Navigating around the American system with the support from family, friends, peers, teachers, counselors, and community members enabled the Cambodian American participants to gain both soft and hard skills. Participants also used an updated version of cultural and social capital¹ that moves away from the traditional usage of cultural and social capital. Yosso (2005) refers to cultural capital as the knowledge, skills, and abilities that marginalized societies uses as assets (Yosso 2005:68). Social capital includes the networks of relationships that "can provide both instrumental and emotional support" (Yosso 2005:79).

This thesis also used Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capital in addition to Yosso's definition of capital, to expand the analysis section. Bourdieu views cultural capital as a person's knowledge on how to act, walk, speak, dress, and other behaviors that are learned through socialization into a certain class, which a person is born into and attain later in life (Bourdieu 1990:124-125). Cultural capital is the unconscious set of knowledge and skills that emerges from socialization which everyone possesses. Middle-class Americans create the norms

¹ Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges the traditional view of cultural and social capital emphasized by Bourdieu, in regard to social class. According to Yosso, Bourdieu focuses on the cultural assets and characteristics possessed by privileged groups that are viewed as being valuable to society. In other words, the traditional view of cultural and social capital assumes that non-White middle-upper class groups lack the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities for social mobility (Yosso 2005:70-76). CRT views cultural and social capital as the knowledge, skills, and abilities of marginalized communities

of society and the cultural capital they possess creates capital value. The participants' Cambodian cultural capital may not be seen as valuable in American society by others, but they can gain American cultural capital through formal education which is achieved through degrees and professional credentials. Examples of cultural capital include earning a degree or license as a symbol of having specialized knowledge. An aspect of cultural capital is social capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as kinship and the social network of individuals that provide available and potential resources, information, and knowledge. Individuals must spend time to create and maintain social capital for it to exist (Bourdieu 1990:35, 291).

Language skill is one of the key cultural and generational differences many Cambodians encountered between themselves and their parents. To understand why those type of differences exists, Appadurai's (1995) concepts of ethnoscaples, technoscaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples are useful for the study. Ethnoscaples are the spaces filled with various types of people, so the ethnoscaples the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans encountered include other Cambodian refugees, American students and teachers, and different ethnic groups in their community. Those 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans have their own ideologies on how they perceive the world, which typically are American values of freedom and individuality. Ideoscaples are closely linked with mediascaples. Mediascaples are platforms and processes that transmit ideologies. The 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans who watched television, listened to American music, and have parents that watched the local news, are informed of American ideologies, current events, and popular culture. Cultural and generational differences occur when the participants choose to explore their identity.

The other concept that was analytically applicable to cultural and ethnic identity was Hall's (1990) concept of cultural identity. Hall defines cultural identity as being separate from the

individual level and proposes two aspects of cultural identity. The first aspect is the collective historical experiences shared amongst members in the culture. For example, the shared ancestry of being Khmer and the shared history of having family that experienced the Cambodian genocide are some commonalities of the 1.5 generation Cambodian American group. The second aspect of cultural identity is the process of becoming through differences and discontinuities which are influenced by politics, memory, and desire (Hall 2003:225). Identity is not fixed and is constantly evolving with new experiences. The media and constant interactions with others influence a person's identity. Cambodian refugees form hybrid identities, so they can use their Cambodian, American, Asian, and refugee identities creatively. Hybridity allows Cambodian refugees to negotiate their identity in different situations and choose an identity that is advantageous for them in a particular moment or context.

The methodology I employed for the study was an unstructured narrative interview approach to understand the Cambodian Americans' processes of learning. As a former intern for various Cambodian organizations and volunteer in the Long Beach Cambodian community since 2015, I have established rapport with community members, which helped me with access to participants for the research. I also employed reflexivity as a methodology for the study to ensure that the findings are unbiased and valid. Given my close relationship to the topic as a Cambodian American, I was aware of my role as a researcher to reduce biases. As Erlinda Palaganas et al. (2017) argues, during the coding process of data analysis the researcher should always present precise and accurate data that highlights the participants' stories while detaching their own beliefs, experiences, and knowledge (2017:431).

Over the course of four weeks during the winter break of 2018, I conducted twelve interviews in Long Beach, California. From my previous study, I collected six interviews so

there is a total of eighteen interviews². The interviews took place at the participants' homes, office, or place of their choice. Two interviews were conducted over-the-phone. Interviews lasted from 1.5-3 hours and were sometimes done in two sessions with each session lasting an hour. Handwritten notes were taken during the interview. I also recorded the interviews once I was given permission to do so. I had an interview guide to begin the interview that has six sections: background, family, school, community, cultural and ethnic identities, and generation³. Since most of the participants shared their stories openly, I referenced the interview guide to make sure the six sections were covered throughout the interviews.

The thesis contributes to an understanding of the multiple identities refugee immigrants encounter in their home, school, and community. This can help to deconstruct negative stereotypes that oppresses immigrant students from fully participating in the American educational institution (Asher 2008:18). The stereotype of Asian Americans as the model minority⁴ ignores the challenges different Asian ethnic groups face coming into the United States. The diversity of different ethnic groups in America has changed with the increasing rate of immigrants from Asia and South America in the 21st century (Lukes 2015:3). Immigrants leave their home countries and enter the United States either for economic or political reasons. Immigrants who leave their home country for work or school are considered voluntary immigrants, whereas refugees who resettle in a new country due to fear of living in their homeland and forced exit are considered involuntary immigrants. The historical context of

² My previous undergraduate study explores the same topic on the educational experiences of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans as this study.

³ See Appendix A: Interview Guide

⁴ The model minority myth is the belief that Asians are the ideal minority group because they succeed easily in academia and have a high socioeconomic status (Wallitt 2008:3).

refugees fleeing their war-torn country into new places of resettlement with little to no resources creates challenges and barriers for them to thrive in their new environment (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:62-64).

One population of refugees that escaped their war-torn country to resettle in the United States was the Cambodian population. Cambodians were escaping their home country due to the Cambodian genocide that took place during 1975-1979. An estimated two million Cambodians were killed under the Khmer Rouge due to starvation, disease, and murder. When Cambodian refugees arrived in the United States, they came with little to no resources to help them resettle in their new home. They were displaced in cities throughout the United States that exposed many Americans to Cambodians, an unfamiliar Asian ethnic group. The resettlement also exposed Cambodians to Americans, whose government bombed their country. In the school environment, many teachers were unfamiliar with their Cambodian students' historical background and culture, which caused them to misunderstand their students' aspiration for academic success. For instance, teachers assumed that Cambodian students were disinterested in learning because they did not participate in class, whereas, in Cambodian culture children are taught to respect their teachers and only answer questions when asked (Wallitt 2008:6).

This thesis contributes to various fields of studies on Cambodian refugees who resettled in the United States. It contributes to the limited literature of Cambodian Americans and the growing literature of Cambodian students' experiences in academia. The study contributes to Asian American and Diaspora studies by focusing on Asian stereotypes, such as the model minority myth and how it influences the identity of Cambodian Americans. The study also focuses on the cultural challenges Cambodian Americans are confronted with while aspiring for educational success. The study contributes to educational studies of Southeast Asian American

students in education because it focuses on the educational trajectory of Cambodian students. The study also contributes to refugee studies by highlighting the impact of cultural differences between children and their parents and the challenges posed by resettlement in America.

Scholars studying immigrants, such as Portes and Rumbaut (2001, 2006), predicted the success levels of Cambodian refugees over thirty-five years ago into their adult life. They focused on the potential lack of success. In contrast, this thesis focuses on the agency of the 1.5 generation Cambodian refugees as they attained success in this population. The study expands on Vichet Chhuon's (2010, 2014) work on how ethnic identity negotiation influences educational attainment and achievements of Cambodian students by focusing specifically on the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans and examining the challenges they faced growing up in their pursuit for success. The research contributes to a broader understanding of issues that shape the life trajectories of the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans who resettled in the United States, as well as an understanding of the struggles of Cambodian refugees to achieve academic success.

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter one is the present chapter where I introduce the purpose of the study, an overview of the methodology and frameworks I used, and the structure of the thesis. Chapter two focuses on the review of relevant literature from refugee studies, including a brief history of the Cambodian genocide, Cambodian refugee resettlement process, concepts of identity, and educational outcomes of Cambodian Americans. Chapter three presents the methodology and analytical approaches used to guide the study. The first half of Chapter three begins with outlining the research design of the study. I describe using reflexivity as a Cambodian American researcher, the recruitment process, and data collection. The second half of Chapter three provides details on the analytical approaches used to guide the study. My analysis uses the concepts of community cultural wealth, social and cultural capital, ethnoscaapes,

technoscapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes, and cultural identity from the analytical frameworks that guided this study.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants' background regarding their resettlement process in the United States and living conditions within their community and family households. The remainder of Chapter four presents data on the participants' search for acceptance and belonging and their encounters with discrimination and racism. Next, I provide variables of educational expectations, the roles of gender and age, language, family, and self-motivation situated in cultural and generational differences. Chapter five provides an analysis of the findings grounded in the conceptual and theoretical approaches of Yosso's community cultural wealth, Bourdieu's cultural and social capital, Appadurai's 'scapes, and Hall's concept of cultural identity. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of agency. Chapter six concludes the thesis with key findings, further discussion of the findings, contribution of study, recommendations for practice, the limitations of the study, and the implications for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the literature in refugee and educational studies in terms of resettlement, identity, and educational attainment of Cambodian Americans. I will provide a brief history of Cambodia which includes the Cambodian genocide and Cambodian cultural values. Next, I will review the literature on the refugee resettlement processes that focus on assimilation, communities, and citizenship. I then review the applicable literature on the concept of cultural identity. Lastly, I review the limited literature on the educational outcomes of Cambodian Americans.

Historical Background of Cambodia

The Cambodian civil war, from 1970-1975, officially began when Lon Nol overthrew Prime Minister and former King Norodom Sihanouk. According to Historian David Chandler (1991), the United States-Cambodia relations weakened when Sihanouk allowed the North Vietnamese to set up bases in Cambodia (1991:8-9). The bases were used as a supply line for food and weapons to support Vietnamese resistance troops in the South. In 1969, President Richard Nixon approved the United States Air Force to bomb the North Vietnamese supply line through Cambodia (Smith-Hefner 1999:1). On April 10, 1970, Lon Nol led a successful coup to overthrow Sihanouk and placed Sihanouk in exile. After Lon Nol took control of the country, he proclaimed Cambodia a republic. While in exile, Sihanouk formed an alliance with the

Communist Khmer Rouge party under the leadership of Pol Pot giving the movement royalist legitimacy. The Lon Nol regime led an anti-communist campaign and anti-Vietnamese rhetoric and programs, which attracted American support (Ayres 1993:22). The American troops supported the Lon Nol regime which led to open warfare with the Khmer Rouge, who recruited the peasants in the countryside and North Vietnamese troops. Lon Nol and American troops invaded Cambodia in an attempt to disrupt Vietnamese supply lines and bases. In 1973, American troops withdrew from the Cambodian Civil War. Roughly a year later, on April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge captured the capital city of Phnom Penh and overthrew the Lon Nol regime.

In 1976, Pol Pot became the leader of Cambodia and formed the state of Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge imposed the idea of “year zero” to start society over again from a revolutionary base. Historian, Ben Kiernan, argues that Pol Pot’s national movement was due to the belief that Cambodian culture and identity were on the verge of extinction (Kiernan 2004:18). Therefore, to restore Cambodian greatness Pol Pot envisioned Kampuchea as a Marxist agrarian society that was free from hierarchical status and unequal gender roles. The idea was intended to return the country into a rice production based economy as it had been in the Angkor period from over two-thousand years ago. Chandler argues that China’s Great Leap Forward influenced Pol Pot to form a collective communist ideology (Chandler 1991:237-245). From 1977-1979, Pol Pot ordered the Khmer Rouge to commit mass killings of Cambodians in a series of progress, searching for defiant traits within the revolution, known as the Cambodian genocide.

The Khmer Rouge troops referred to themselves as *angkar*. *Angkar* took many measures to prevent Western influence from encroaching on their vision of transforming Cambodia into an

agrarian society. To achieve their goal, they first classified Cambodians into categories based on their class, ethnicity, and religion with the mentality of “us” versus “them”. People in the “us” category were rural Cambodians who were mainly farmers. Urban city dwellers and intellectuals who had exposure to Western beliefs represented the “them” or “enemy” (*Kmang*) category (Carney 1986:174). The urban population of the middle-class was considered the most undesirable group because they were seen as the bourgeoisie class enemy. Other classifications of “them” included the intelligentsia, professionals, skilled workers, and anyone with an education. Those who were part of the former regime, as well as ethnic minorities: Cham Muslims, Vietnamese, Thai or ethnic Chinese also fell under the “them” category. *Angkar* killed those who were under the “them” category or forced them into spreading campaigns of purges in specific regimes of the country and eventually across specific networks within the Khmer Rouge ranks itself.

All urban residents were driven to the country sides and forced from the elites into agricultural forced-labor. The reeducation program taught children to spy on their own parents and family members and to join the revolution including military training. Prior to the Khmer Rouge, traditional education revolved around teaching rules of proper social behavior, hierarchical status, and social relationships revolving around Buddhist beliefs (Ayres 2000:17). The *wat*, temple, was the most common educational institution. Buddhist practices were forbidden by the Khmer Rouge and Buddhist values of morality was partially discarded as some people distrusted each other to stay alive (Ong 2003:47). During the Khmer Rouge period, formal education was abolished and many educated Cambodians were killed under *angkar* (Ong 2003:34).

On January 7, 1979, Phnom Penh was liberated from the Khmer Rouge rule by the Vietnamese who proclaimed the end of the Cambodian genocide. An estimated two million lives were lost due to starvation, disease, and murder under the Khmer Rouge. There were a relatively small number of Cambodians who were fortunate to escape Cambodia during 1975-1979 by evacuating with Americans or by escaping before the Khmer Rouge closed the borders. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, hundreds of thousands crossed the border into Thailand. Many of these Cambodians chose to seek asylum in a third country. Cambodian refugees were displaced to various countries around the world such as Australia, France, and the United States. The American government established processing centers in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines to familiarize Cambodians, who will be accepted to resettle in the United States, with American culture (Chan 2004:69-75). Cambodians spent up to six months at one of the processing centers to learn English, survival skills, and how to work with modern appliances, such as the television and refrigerator before arriving in America. Many of those who stayed in a refugee camp by choice or because they were not accepted for resettlement, spent a decade or more until the camps were closed with the United Nations peacekeeping mission in 1992-1993.

Refugee Resettlement Experience

During the 1980s, there was an influx of Cambodian refugees who fled their homeland to resettle in the United States due to the aftermath of the Cambodian genocide. There are three migratory waves of Cambodian refugees in the United States. The first-wave of Cambodians arrived during the first two years of the Khmer Rouge rule (1975-1977). The 6,000 first-wave Cambodian refugees were typically educated, urbanized, and middle-class. Since they were familiar with urban life and the English language, they had an easier adjustment to American

lifestyles than Cambodian refugees of the later waves. Some first-wave Cambodians received assistance and support with their resettlement from their ties to the few Cambodians that arrived in the United States before 1975. The second-wave of Cambodian refugees arrived in America in 1979. The 10,000 Cambodians of the second-wave were rural farmers who were uneducated and were unfamiliar with urban lifestyle. Second-wave Cambodians escaped the country before the Khmer Rouge took control of the country by crossing the border to Thailand. They stayed in refugee camps in Thailand before being approved to resettle in the United States (Mortland 2010: 79). First and second-wave Cambodian refugees were fortunate to not experience the atrocity of the Khmer Rouge. The third-wave of Cambodian refugees came in the United States post-1980. The third-wave of Cambodians were genocide survivors. Third-wave Cambodian refugees were less educated, unaccustomed to urban lifestyle, and came from rural backgrounds, like the second-wave Cambodian refugees.

When the first group of third-wave Cambodians resettled in the United States, the country was in the process of shifting its policy from a welfare state towards a state of self-reliance. The American government was encouraging citizens to rely less on the state for assistance. During their arrival, the Refugee Act of 1980 was enacted, which repealed the quota of 50,000 Southeast Asian refugees to enter the country. From 1980-1986, a total of approximately 122,000 Cambodian refugees resettled in the United States (Ong 2010:70). The Refugee Act allowed refugees legal standing, eligibility for welfare, and the right to work.

Assimilation an Analytical Paradigm

For Americans, refugee resettlement placed the assumption that refugees would assimilate to the dominant American culture. Consonant assimilation, also known as straight-line

assimilation, was the dominant approach of assimilation prior to the influx of refugees from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and other war-torn countries in 1965. Consonant assimilation is when a migrant abandons their parent's ethnic culture for the culture in their new place of resettlement (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:54,145). The predicted outcome of immigrants who integrated into American culture was that they would move upward in social mobility after each succeeding generation (Waters et al. 2010:170). During the early 21st century, American Sociologists (Portes, Rumbaut, and Zhou) were researching the new second-generation, those who were born to parents that came in the United States post-1965 and their integration into American culture. Portes and Rumbaut used ethnographic works of Anthropologists (Gibson and Ogbu 1991; Suarez-Orozco 1989) and their own studies that examined immigrants' school performance to develop the concept of segmented assimilation (2001). Segmented assimilation acknowledges that assimilation is not a straight-line process, but rather is a process of various segments with different trajectories that can lead to three different outcomes: upward assimilation, downward assimilation, and upward mobility combined with persistent biculturalism (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:145).

Segmented assimilation theorists suggest Cambodians will have a better chance of socioeconomic mobility if they are embedded in their own ethnic community while assimilating some aspects of American culture (Portes and Rumbaut 2005:54). Findings from their study suggest that immigrants who participate in the counterculture, which goes against the White middle-class, social patterns have a higher chance of downward assimilation since they attempt to confront the issues of racial discrimination and oppression on their own. However, recent studies suggest the type of acculturation do not predict the level of socioeconomic outcomes. In some cases, "maintaining ties with educated and middle-class members in the ethnic group who

help children of poor immigrants” will increase the likelihood of upward social mobility (Waters et al. 2010:1189). As discussed below, newer analytical frameworks replaced the “assimilation” models that dominated early migration and refugee studies.

Cambodian refugees and other Southeast Asian refugees arriving in the United States post-1965, were expected to adapt to American culture. The United States federal government established an assistance program called the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) under the Refugee Act of 1980. The purpose of the ORR program was to run the mechanics of resettlement and to integrate refugees into American culture, so they could become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The program provided refugees with English language courses, vocational training to help them find employment, and cultural orientation courses to teach them American behaviors and values (Mortland 1994:82; Ong 2003:85-88). Refugees were also provided with limited financial assistance.

Some states, such as California and New York, used federal funds to provide financial assistance to those Cambodian refugees who participated in the ORR program. The ORR policy deliberately displaced Southeast Asian refugees to different cities around the United States to prevent the formation of ethnic “ghettos”, assuming it would speed assimilation and reduce refugee visibility (Smith-Hefner 1999:9; Mortland 2010:84). Cambodian refugees were expected to speak proper English, participate in American activities and traditions, and strive to become economically successful and self-sufficient. Southeast Asian refugees post-1980 were pressured to assimilate to the middle-class American lifestyle, so they can become deserving American citizens. Americans viewed refugees as good citizens based on how much they assimilated in American culture and become economically successful.

Citizenship and Governmentality

The works of Aihwa Ong (2003) and Eric Tang (2015) reveal that Cambodians resisted their confinement by a secondary migration and were constantly moving. Their studies critique the assimilation concept which assumes immigrants, such as refugees, will become fully American and abandon the culture of their country of origin. Ong (2003) writes on Cambodian refugees' adjustment experience and the political aspect of becoming an American citizen in her book, *The Buddha is Hiding*. Ong views citizenship as not confined to the conventional definition, but as a social process. By citizenship, she refers to the process of various stages, starting from flight, refugee camps, sponsorship, welfare dependency, church influences, and to employment, ending with self-sufficiency. This is Ong's concept of assimilation on the path to attain citizenship (Ong 2003:76-85). Ong borrows Michel Foucault's ideas about governmentality, which is the idea that various forms of bureaucratic systems (state, local authorities) use their power to control and morally regulate individuals to follow the dominant ideological beliefs. In the case of Cambodian refugees, the American ideological beliefs are freedom and individualism. Ong suggests that citizenship is not based on the force of governmentality but on the Cambodians' relationship with institutions, individuals, and practices of American culture. Therefore, the notion of citizenship for the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans is a struggle between finding a balance between their own aspirations to attain freedom and the demands of the government.

Tang (2015) also writes of governmentality in terms of the government controlling the movement of Cambodian refugees who were displaced to a hyperghetto neighborhood in the Bronx, New York, in his book, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto* (2015:41-43). The Bronx is an urban borough of New York City comprised of mainly African

Americans and Latinos. The term hyperghetto refers to an abandoned and neglected neighborhood where people are contained and controlled. Tang argues that Cambodian refugees were used as a tool for liberalism. To make his case, he recounts the life of a Cambodian woman named Ra¹. Many Cambodian refugees like Ra's family arrived in the United States during an unstable, economic period of liberal warfare². It was a time when the 1980 Refugee Act had recently been passed as a humanitarian action to help refugees seek asylum in the United States and provide them with assistance during the resettlement process (Ong 2003:50-53; Tang 2015:38). The displacement of Cambodian refugees to the Bronx, as Tang coined it, is a case of *refugee exceptionalism* where they are "in it, but not of it" (Tang 2015:63-66). The Cambodian refugees are racialized based on their dark-skin color and low socioeconomic status³ (SES) and are positioned to reinforce the blame on the African American community for living in poverty. In contrast to an "undeserving black underclass", refugees are supposed to be "saved" by liberalism and be self-sufficient despite the lack of opportunity and oppression in the hyperghetto. Even though Americans pressured Cambodian refugees to assimilate into an

¹ Ra is the name of the Cambodia woman in Tang's study where he makes his case on Cambodian refugees being used as a tool for liberalism and refugee exceptionalism.

² Liberal welfare was a response to the legislation act known as the War on Poverty (1964) that was passed to reduce state dependency and high rate of poverty mainly among the African American community. Thus, liberal welfare is the creation of welfare programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, and public housing as an act of social justice by liberalists but was a subtle attack on the African American community for still being welfare-dependent and living in poverty despite the government assistance programs (Tang 2015:16)

³ Socioeconomic status (SES) is a composite measurement of an individual's education, income, occupation that determines their economic and social position in relations to others (Ruben et al. 2014:196).

American lifestyle, their poor living conditions in the hyperghetto where they were displaced make it impossible to achieve upward mobility and attain full citizenship⁴.

Communities

Cambodian refugees arrived in the middle of a political shift and an economic downturn and received an unfriendly welcome from many Americans, who were still recovering from the recent loss of the Vietnam War. Cambodians were an unknown Southeast Asian ethnic group to most Americans before their arrival. The unfamiliarity of Cambodians led some Americans to treat them with ambivalence, disdain, discrimination, and hostility. Jeremy Hein (2006) writes about the different views of Americans towards refugee newcomers in the Midwest in his article, *Small Town Hospitality and Hate*. Many Christian families in the Midwest welcomed the newcomers because they saw the refugee arrival as an opportunity to assist them with adapting to American culture by providing them with resources and services. In contrast, many Midwesterners disliked Cambodian refugees since they viewed them as welfare dependent and taking away jobs from Americans. Despite Americans who either liked or disliked Cambodian refugee newcomers, Americans viewed Cambodians as dark-skinned, poor, uneducated, and “psychologically ruined victims who needed to be taught how to live in America” (Mortland 2010:80).

Many Cambodian refugees lived in inner-city neighborhoods, grew up in poverty and faced hardships, such as discrimination, marginalization, and being stereotyped. Scholars researching refugees in the past argued that Cambodian children were at risk of remaining in

⁴ I use full citizenship with reference to Ong’s definition of individuals finding a balance between their own aspirations to attain freedom while meeting the demands of the government to become self-sufficient.

poverty. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001:60-61), refugees are unable to attain socioeconomic growth because they were resettled in urban communities that lack the opportunities for educational and socioeconomic growth.

However, refugees analytically have a better chance of socioeconomic mobility if they are embedded in their own ethnic community while adapting some aspects of American culture (Portes and Zhou 1996:212-218). Ethnic communities assisted Cambodians with the resettlement process because they were comfortable being in a space where their traditional way of thinking was accepted and not challenged in the community. Cambodian refugees' knowledge on how to behave and think about their new space is embedded in a shared set of learned cultural knowledge amongst members in the community (Bennardo 2009:339). Many Cambodian refugees viewed the first city they were displaced to as unwelcoming, so they underwent a second migration⁵. One of the largest Cambodian communities in the United States is Lowell, Massachusetts. Lowell attracted many Cambodian refugees to relocate there as their second migration site for three main reasons. The first reason is better job opportunities that provided sufficient wages. The second motivating factor to move to Lowell was because it was an attractive place for the growing Southeast Asian community. The community had familiar Asian grocery stores, networks of Southeast Asian associations, and temples. The third reason for secondary migration were "policies and programs of state and local government (educational system, self-help programs)" (Phyle 2007:28). The social-services for education and local organizations helped Cambodian refugee newcomers to integrate into American society. Other reasons for secondary migration included being closer to family members or for warmer weather,

⁵ Secondary migration is when refugees move from initial location of resettlement to a new city or state.

in addition to finding better job opportunities and services (Mortland and Ledgerwood 1987:305-306).

Cambodian refugees challenged the government's attempt to control their movement through secondary migration. Policymakers scattered Cambodian refugees across the United States to prevent the formation of ethnic enclaves. They also scattered the refugees to minimize their presence in the host communities, so their sponsors would assist them with assimilating to American culture (Chan 2004:90). Many Cambodian refugees migrated from their original place of resettlement to resettle in a city with other Cambodians. As ethnic enclaves were growing, the government soon realized the social and psychological importance of ethnic enclaves. Under the partnership of ORR, the Cambodian Association of America (CAA) and the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service established the Khmer Guided Placement Project, also known as the "Khmer Cluster Project" (KCP) (Chan 2004:97; Smith-Hefner 1990:252). Twelve "cluster" cities were chosen as a demonstration project of KCP to encourage self-sufficiency amongst Cambodian refugees. The twelve cities were: Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dallas, Houston, Jacksonville, New York City, Phoenix, Richmond, and Rochester. Between 300 to 1200 Cambodians were displaced to each city. Cities were chosen based on ample entry-level job openings, affordable housing, and a low population of Cambodians (Chan 2004:97-99). The existing Cambodian population in the community was meant to serve as the basis of developing a medium-sized Cambodian community. However, the program was unsuccessful in preventing secondary migration because Cambodian refugees felt forced to comply with unfeasible requirements of the program, felt separated from their family and friends, and/or did not receive sufficient assistance.

Many Cambodian refugees made a family decision to migrate to a city with a large Cambodian community, such as Long Beach, California, Lowell, Massachusetts, or Seattle, Washington. Cambodians who migrated to Long Beach joined the largest Cambodian community in the United States. Long Beach is a port city that is part of Los Angeles County. The city is 51 square miles with a current population of around 470,000. From the 1940's, there were a few Cambodians who came to work and reside in Long Beach when the city had plentiful job openings in the naval shipyards and aerospace industry (Chan 2010:54). The economic downturn of the 1973-1975 recession in the country led the city to develop a new general plan in 1978. One of the main goals of the new general plan was the development of affordable housing, which was achieved over the years. From 1978-1988, the city constructed 18,500 affordable housing units which contributed to the city's 13% increase in population, but the new housing units disrupted older neighborhoods (Land Use Element of the Long Beach General Plan of 1988). During the early 1990s, Long Beach had an influx of Cambodian refugees who occupied the affordable housing units. The units were also rented by other low-income families of color.

The Long Beach Cambodian community known as "Cambodia Town" is a one-mile corridor that runs through Anaheim Street between Atlantic Avenue and Junipero Avenue⁶. The neighborhoods located in Cambodia Town, included vacant commercial and retail strips, few industrial companies, various types of businesses, and a mix of housing units. The neighborhoods were located in a deteriorated area that lacked recreational spaces. There were major problems with the neighborhoods such as high crime rates, being over-crowded, and high rates of unemployment. Many Cambodian refugees living in Long Beach or a city in California

⁶ Long Beach is the research site for the study.

during the late 20th and early 21st century relied on welfare and had to meet the new requirements of the California Welfare Reform Act of 1997. Welfare recipients were provided with financial assistance for up to five years under the requirement that they attend the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program and obtain a job within the end of their fifth year of financial assistance (Quintiliani 2014:5). The GAIN program was unsuccessful in preparing Cambodian refugees to join the work force and instead created a “new underclass of welfare dependents” (Quintiliani 2014:2; Tang 2000:12).

These works (Ong 2013, Quintiliani 2014, Tang 2015, Smith-Hefner 1999) provide a background about the refugee resettlement process that many 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans experienced growing up. When they were displaced in the United States, they depended on welfare, had low-wage paying jobs, and did not have the opportunities for upward mobility. Cambodian refugees were faced with many challenges as newcomers, including: being marginalized from Americans who were unfamiliar with Cambodians, being caught in the web of American politics on refugee and welfare reform, and for some Cambodians, struggling with mental and physical health issues due to the trauma of the Khmer Rouge from 1975-1979 (Museus et al. 2011:72; Mollica 2006:198; Rumbaut 1989:100). Some of the older first-generation Cambodian refugees who have poor health are the parents of the 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee participants in the study. Moreover, Cambodian refugees saw resettlement as an opportunity to attain freedom and regain power that they had lost during the war. They persevered to achieve their own definition of academic success while negotiating the government’s attempt to control their behavior and movement. Hein, Mortland and Tang critique the confinement of refugees being displaced to the Midwest or the hyperghetto based on class or

state-based analysis. These latter analytical models reject simplistic assumptions about assimilation and give a more critical view of relations of power and racism in American society.

Identity

The Cambodian refugees' experience of adjusting to their new diasporic lives in the United States has shaped their cultural and ethnic identity. When they first arrived in the United States, they were faced with cultural differences that challenged their known attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, ideas, and norms. There was a generational conflict between the first-generation and the 1.5 generation Cambodians due to their varying knowledge of American and Cambodian culture. Many first-generation Cambodians continued practicing traditional Cambodian customs in the United States. In contrast, the 1.5 generation Cambodian refugees was caught between two different cultural styles, where their upbringing and family dynamics of their Khmer culture differed from American culture.

Nancy Smith-Hefner (1999) writes about the identity of Cambodian Americans in a diasporic community in Boston, Massachusetts in her book, *Khmer American*. She discusses the tension between parents and children surrounding cultural values, ideas, and traditions between Cambodian and American culture. Since the Khmer Rouge destroyed much of Cambodian culture, many first-generation Cambodians felt responsible to pass on the cultural knowledge they still remembered to their children. One cultural tradition was having an arranged marriage for their daughters. The parents would decide on their daughter's spouse because they would make the best choice in choosing a spouse that would provide security and safety (Smith-Hefner 1999:172-178). Cambodians were concerned that if they lose their culture, then their identity will also be lost. Cambodian identity centered on the idea that "*to be Khmer is to be Buddhist*"

(Smith-Hefner 1999:62). The core beliefs of Theravada Buddhism revolve around *karma* and *merit*, which influence the behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of Cambodian refugees (Smith-Hefner 1999:35-36). Karma is defined as the actions in one's previous life which determines a person's status and current situation based on their merit. Merit is the good actions in opposition to demerit bad actions. If a person is successful, Cambodians believe it is due to the merit they have accumulated in their past lives. Some ways to gain merit is through acts of compassion, charity, equanimity, and seeking wisdom, such as respecting elders, giving offerings to monks, and knowing one's place in relationship to others (Smith-Hefner 1999:58; Ebihara 1974:323-227). Theravada Buddhism has been argued to emphasize individualism based on merit making, but this argument ignores the collective actions of individuals to promote social solidarity through the morality of community life (Keyes 1977:165-166). Therefore, Buddhism incorporates individualism on the religious level and collectivism on the societal level.

Another aspect of Cambodian culture is the embedded socio-moral relation of family and community life, which consists of maintaining face, status, and family (Smith-Hefner 1999:17, 86). Cambodians believe that a child is born into a family with a certain status and has a moral obligation to maintain their family's status. Parents are responsible to teach their children how to behave appropriately to uphold the family's face and not cause embarrassment. "Face" is a concept where the family gains respect from community members. For example, the child must know their place in Khmer society to appropriately greet an older or younger person through status-marked vocabularies. There is also the gender expectation of a woman to be respectful towards her husband, talk softly, and act virtuously to maintain "face" (Ledgerwood 1994:128). Cambodian culture has a hierarchical structure based on a person's age, generation, and gender that determine a person's status in the family and greater society (Keyes 1977:117, 163-164).

Parents also have a duty to help their children discover the character and personality they are born with. However, it is ultimately up to the individual child to know one's self and place in society (Smith-Hefner 1999). Once the child develops self-knowledge, they will realize and accept their debt to their parents and respect them by taking care of them when they get older and offering them a nice funeral (Ebihara 1974:327, 334). Another family responsibility and familial obligation is the prescribed role of siblings. The role of the older sibling is to help his or her parents to provide guidance, support, and protection to their younger siblings. The younger siblings must act respectfully and be obedient towards elders (Ebihara 1974:327-328).

As the parents try to preserve Cambodian traditions and values by teaching their children proper Khmer behaviors, they are concerned that their children will imitate American youth behaviors, such as doing drugs (Mortland 2010:94). The 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans struggled to find a balance between living an individualistic and collective lifestyle for personal and familial reasons, seeking ways to fit in with American youth culture and also satisfying their parents (Mortland 2010:95). The second-generation Cambodians are more assimilated to American culture and lack an understanding about Khmer traditions and values. Smith-Hefner highlights the continuous connections and balance of engaging with both Cambodian and American cultures within the Cambodian family and community.

Furthermore, Carol Mortland (2010) highlights how English language skills differ between and within generations and shapes an individual's identity. For example, she addresses how first-generation Cambodian parents that participated in the ORR program and found a job that required using English continued to learn English, while most first-generation Cambodians that worked in a Cambodian-owned business stopped learning English (Mortland 2010:83). The 1.5 generation Cambodians who had their education disrupted as a child during the Khmer

Rouge learned the English language in a remedial English class in school once they arrived in the United States (Rumbaut 1996a:328). There is a presence of a language barrier in the household of the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans between parents and children. The parents have low English language proficiency and the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans have low Khmer language proficiency; thus, they have difficulties communicating with each other. A common experience amongst many immigrant families and an experience that many 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans share is a role reversal in the family. Role reversal is where the children take on the role as parents due to having a better English language acquisition than their parents. They help their parents to fill out paperwork their parents cannot complete due to their limited English skills (Foner and Dreby 2011:548; Rumbaut 1996b:128). According to Zhou and Bankston (1998), children attend school which enables them to learn English at a faster rate than their parents, creating a role reversal between parents and children and identity confusion and generational conflict (1998: 86,109-113).

In the perception of refugees, American culture includes of speaking English fluently, practicing the Christian religion, finding jobs associated with mainstream economy, and the belief in democracy which values freedom of expression (Zhou and Bankston 2016;65-66). Peers, teachers, and the educational system exposed Cambodian refugees to American culture. For some of the 1.5 generation Cambodians, their peers showed them how to act like an American youth by spending time with friends outside of school during leisure time. For Cambodians, being a child meant putting effort and time into work ethics and learning moral behavior. Cambodian refugees are continuously negotiating their identity and aspects of Cambodian and American culture to redefine what it means to be part American.

In the school setting, Cambodians were introduced to the values of individualism, equality, and democracy. Those values are the opposite of Cambodian values that emphasizes collectivism and hierarchy. In the context of family, there are differences between generations with regards to cultural understanding and language comprehension. For example, when the 1.5 generation Cambodians adopted the American idea of free speech in the household, they began to talk back to their parents, which caused family tension to occur since it is disrespectful for children to talk back to their elders in Cambodian culture. In terms of language barriers, as Ong, Portes, Rumbaut, and Smith-Hefner discussed, since the 1.5 generation have low Khmer language proficiency and parents have low English language skills, family tensions arise and affect the children's and parents' identities. In the context of the community, the 1.5 generation Cambodians are confined to poor, unsafe neighborhoods that are populated with gang members. Long Beach's Cambodia Town consists of other ethnic groups of color, in addition to Cambodians. The Cambodians in Long Beach grew up with African Americans and Hispanics who viewed Cambodians as a threat to the community (Needham and Quintiliani 2010:68-69). In the school environment, the 1.5 generation Cambodians were assigned to the hyperghetto status or a new underclass status, by the teachers, staff, and peers as discussed by Chhuon, Ong, and Tang. Many teachers did not apply the model minority stereotype to Cambodian students because they viewed them as low-achievers and uneducated. This acknowledges that East Asian ethnic groups are academically successful and well-off in comparison to Cambodians.

Educational Trajectory

Cambodian American students are overlooked in education policy because they automatically get classified into the category of *Asian* instead of being recognized as their own

distinct Asian ethnic group (Wallitt 2008:3). The conglomeration of Cambodians into an overarching category of Asian stereotypically assumes that all Asian ethnic groups are academically successful and do not need academic support. However, disaggregated educational data on Asian Americans reveal a clear distinction between the level of academic success between East Asian Americans students⁷ and Southeast Asian American students⁸, who came as refugees. According to Chow in Lee et al.'s article (2017), "Academic Needs and Family Factors in the Education of Southeast Asian American Students: Dismantling the Model Minority Myth", East Asian American students demonstrate academic success, whereas Southeast Asian American students demonstrate academic failure (2017:4). Typically, East Asians are voluntary immigrants who came in the United States for better educational and job opportunities. For example, Chinese and Japanese immigrants during the 20th century migrated to America for job opportunities. Since these two Asian ethnic groups have been in the United States for many generations, they have more cultural, economic, and social capital than Southeast Asian (SEA) refugees. Chinese and Japanese Americans that are at least fourth-generation Asian Americans have the knowledge and opportunities to successfully navigate the educational system. Yang (2003) lists four reasons why SEA American students do not meet the model minority myth: "1.) limited English skills, 2.) miscommunication between students, parents, and teachers, 3.) discrimination, and 4.) feeling of alienation from schools" (Vann 2015:30).

Southeast Asian Refugee Students

Over thirty-five years ago, scholars researching refugees, such as Portes and Rumbaut, have discussed the educational trajectory of SEA refugees. SEA refugees that came in the United

⁷ East Asian students refer to Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, and Taiwanese.

⁸ For this study, Southeast Asian students refer to Cambodian, Laos, Hmong, and Vietnamese students who resettled in the United States during the 1980's.

States post-1980 were viewed as academic failures due to their lack of social and cultural capital. They lack the cultural capital due to the absence of the knowledge and skills of American culture. This highlights how scholars viewed refugees through a deficit lens, where they assumed refugees lack the resources to become successful since they have higher levels of poverty and lower levels of higher education in comparison to voluntary immigrants (Museus et al. 2017:162-163). Zhou and Bankston discussed how Vietnamese refugee students are able to attain academic success based on cultural and structural institutions (1998:93,235). Vietnamese parents, like other SEA refugees resettled with few resources, lacked English language skills, and had limited educational background. Many Vietnamese refugee families were displaced to urban neighborhoods where their children attended urban public schools. Urban public schools lack basic resources such as updated textbooks and equipment for classrooms, advanced-placement (AP) courses, and after-school programs. In comparison, Vietnamese refugees who have family members in the United States often had better access to school. According to Rumbaut and Ima (1988), a main cultural difference between Vietnamese and other SEA refugee groups is their religious belief in Confucianism instead of Buddhism (Zhou and Bankston 1998:78-81). Vietnamese refugee students value the Confucianist belief of harmony within the family and society and adhere to the instructions and expectations of elders. Despite the Vietnamese religious belief in Confucianism, Cambodians are also family and community oriented and respect their elders.

The ORR released a report in 1988 on the adaptation of SEA refugee youth. The report attempted to predict the assimilation trajectory of the 1.5 generation Cambodian high school students in San Diego, California (Rumbaut and Ima 1988). The older 1.5 generation Cambodians, who resettled in the United States as adolescents were more resistant to

maintaining traditional Cambodian values and beliefs. This resilience was predicted to assist them in attaining a high level of SES. Rumbaut and Ima (1988) predicted the younger 1.5 generation Cambodians were on the path of dissonant acculturation. Their prediction comes from Cambodian youths being the most acculturated Southeast Asian groups that participated in the *new wave* counterculture⁹ (Rumbaut and Ima 1988:120). Those Cambodians spent more time acculturating to American youth culture, such as attending parties and going to the mall with friends, than studying and completing school assignments. How they managed their time impacted their level of educational attainment (Lee 2007:474). In other words, assimilation theorists predicted immigrant students that spent more time assimilating to American culture and abandoned their cultural values most likely hindered their chance of academic success (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:80;103; Zhou and Bankston 2016:162). The 1.5 generation Cambodians were predicted to have blue-collar jobs once they entered the work force and remain in the lowest social and economic segments of society (Rumbaut and Ima 1988:47-51; Portes and Rumbaut 2001:56-59). These findings suggested that Cambodian refugee students would be high school dropouts and low academic achievers.

Cultural Explanations of Academic Achievements

Many first-generation Cambodians believe that school is a site for children to continue their moral training they learned at home from their parents. Prior to the war, boys were sent to the temple, to get educated by monks, *sangha*, while the girls stayed home to help their mother with work around the house (Keyes 1977:160). Cambodian parents viewed teachers as second

⁹ The new wave counterculture received its name from the new wave genre style of music which was popular amongst American youths during the early 20st century, especially during the 1980s.

parents, so they expected their children to be respectful towards their teachers. This entails children following the teacher's orders and not asking questions since it challenges the teacher's authority, who have a higher status level. As part of Khmer Buddhist beliefs, parents believe teachers are moral educators who assist their children with finding their potential in life (Smith-Hefner 1999:129-132). In other words, Cambodian parents believe it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure their children become moral citizens. Teachers, like parents, are expected to not praise or indulge students for good behavior, but rather correct errors and bad behaviors. Cambodian parents allow teachers to use physical punishment if their child is misbehaving.

In comparison, American culture expects students to actively engage in class discussions and ask questions for clarification. The goal of formal education in America is to make students become critical thinkers. Parents expect their children to stay quiet in class as a sign of respect which conflicts with teachers expectation of their students being actively engaged in class discussions (Smith-Hefner 1999:142-143). Another barrier towards achieving academic success is the lack of parents' involvement in their child's education (Wallitt 2008:7). American families have conversations during dinner time, which allows parents and children to discuss and exchange information on how their day went. Children will typically share their experience in school with their parents. Cambodian children are unable to have the same opportunity to communicate with their parents over dinner because Cambodians do not talk while they have dinner (Wallitt 2008:6). Sina, a participant in Wallitt's study, mentioned the added pressure to do well in school to maintain "face".

Cultural clubs on campus are an important factor of academic achievements. Tang et al. (2013) examined the role of culture, in addition to family and peers in Cambodian students' educational experiences in the article, "Role of Family, Culture, and Peers in the Success of

First-Generation Cambodian American College Students". Ethnic-based student organizations on campus allows Cambodian American university students to embrace their culture, learn their heritage language, and become engaged in school (2013:10). For example, students who performed at culture shows and events on their campus community felt accepted and connected to the campus. Similarly, Chhuon and Hudley's (2008) article, "Factors Supporting Cambodian American Students' Successful Adjustment into the University", suggests an ethnic-based club is an important turning factor for Cambodian students because they are surrounded with other Cambodian students who provide them with social and academic support (2008:23). Parents allowed their children to join programs related to Cambodian culture, but they did not understand the importance of extra-curricular activities that were not related to Cambodian culture (Chhuon and Hudley 2008). Extra-curricular activities provide students with soft skills such as time management, communication skills, leadership roles, and teamwork.

Cambodian parents viewed education as a means of upward mobility, so they encouraged their children to do well in school (Xie and Goyette 2003:472). As discussed above, Smith-Hefner (1999) notes Cambodian children are expected to give back to their parents when they get older. Therefore, education is a pathway to earn a college degree and obtain a good career, so the children can give back to their family. Refugee parents also expect their children to have a better life than them, so they can live a comfortable lifestyle (Teranishi 2010).

Systematic Explanations of Academic Achievements

Ong notes that SEA refugees are not viewed like East Asian immigrants who are deemed as deserving citizenship because they work hard and are self-sufficient (Ong 2003:11-17). East Asian immigrants are an exemplary case of the model minority myth, which is the belief that

Asians are the ideal minority group because they supposedly succeed easily in academia and have a high SES. This is a racist stereotype that is used in a political context to highlight that African Americans are allegedly welfare-dependent and rely on the government for support, whereas Asians are self-reliant (Lee 2007:473-474; Tang 2003:16, 63-65). Many Cambodian refugees came with little to no resources, lack an understanding of American culture, worked in low-paying jobs, and have low academic attainment (Mortland 2010:82; Portes and Rumbaut 2001:80, 267). This highlights how the model minority myth is irrelevant to Cambodian refugees and suggests they form a new type of racialized underclass. Ong compares the Cambodian refugees to the black underclass where both groups lack the skills to have high position jobs, are poor and welfare dependent due to their status, and are living in poor inner-city neighborhoods (Ong 2003:70-77).

Yet, some school teachers often still view Cambodians who were born in the States through the lens of the newcomer hyperghetto status, who are unable to adapt to American culture. Similarly, to Tang's findings Chhuon's findings in *I'm Khmer and I'm Not a Gangster* (2014), reveal how school teachers viewed the Cambodian students as gangsters, low achievers, and high school dropouts because of the hyperghetto status that Cambodians were associated with instead of recognizing that the education system is broken (2014:247). Tang mentions Ra's¹⁰ 1.5 generation immigrant children had better grades and graduated high school in contrast to her own American children who are second-generation Cambodians. He suggests the difference in academic success exists due to the 1.5 generation Cambodians and the second-generation Cambodians contrasting sense of refugee time (Tang 2015:168-170). The 1.5

¹⁰ Ra is the participant in Tang's case study.

generation Cambodians are aware of their parents escaping from the Khmer Rouge, understand their identity as a refugee, and the familial responsibility to achieve academic success to attain upward mobility. In contrast, most of the second-generation Cambodians are low-academic achievers because they only understand life in the hyperghetto and do not understand or relate to the experiences of their refugee family. Even after three decades of resettlement Cambodian refugees are still struggling to attain upward mobility and freedom.

Roberta Wallitt's (2008) writes on Cambodian American students' experience of feeling alienated in the school setting, in her article, *Cambodian Invisibility: Students Lost between the 'Achievement Gap' and the 'Model Minority'*. The school board focused on the educational achievement gap between White students and African American students with low SES. Census data from the American Community Survey (2013) revealed that for Asian students between 16-24 years old the high school dropout rate was 2%, while for the subgroup of Asian, Cambodian it was 6%. (Museus-Gillette et al., 2016:78-81). The dropout rate of Cambodian high school students is closer to the 8% dropout rate of African American students. Since educational data are aggregated based on racial categories, Cambodian students are placed into the general category of Asian. As Lee (1996) discusses, the aggregated data of Asian level of educational achievement assumes that all Asian students do not need support because educators believe they meet the model minority myth (Wallitt 2008:3). This stereotype causes educators to ignore the historical background of Cambodian students as genocide survivors and refugees in the United States. Cambodian students feel alienated when educators are unaware of their lived experiences and teachers show no appreciation.

The quality of education students receive is a structural barrier towards academic success. Wayne Wright et al. (2011) report, *Southeast Asian American Education After 35 Years of Initial*

Resettlement, discusses the quality of teaching and learning SEA American students received in underfunded schools. Underfunded schools have higher rates of gangs, segregation amongst peers, unmotivated teachers and counselors, and are overcrowded (Wright et al. 2011:22). The students reported they had unqualified and unmotivated teachers which decreased their aspiration in learning. The role of teachers is to teach the course curriculum and ensure that the students learn the class materials.

To ensure a better quality of education, policy change is needed for schools to be equally funded, reduce class size, and hire qualified teachers (2011:23). Cambodian parents' lack the knowledge on how to navigate the educational system, so they are unaware that schools vary in the quality of education. Wallitt (2008) and Wright et al. (2011) suggest structural recommendations to assist Cambodian American students in attaining academic success. Some of the recommendations include: enhancing positive relationships with educators, inclusive curriculum on SEA and Cambodian history, decreased classroom size, heritage language programs, and advocacy for SEA students by forming relationships between students, legislators, and ethnic community organizations (2008:7-9; 2011:44,52).

Little is known about the case of successful Cambodian refugees that came in the United States post-1980 because scholars in the past focused on underachieving Cambodian students. They used a deficit lens to understand the educational attainment of refugees because they lived in marginalized communities which lacked opportunities for educational growth. In addition, Banks (1989) and Gay and Gilbert (1985) viewed students as deficit learners because their language, ethnicity, class and gender did not align with the dominant white, middle-class norms. The recent literature on Cambodian students in education reframed this view about academic trajectory through a deficit lens. Instead, scholars researching SEA American students in

education more recently focused on how students use available assets from their home and community to attain academic success (Tang et al. 2013:3). Census data (2011) revealed that 35% of Cambodians do not complete high school and 66% of Cambodians do not complete post-secondary education (Museus et al., 2017:163). These statistics illustrate Cambodian students as underachievers who do not meet the model minority myth. Behind these statistics lay the obstacles Cambodians encounter to achieve academic success. *The Invisible Financial Barriers to College Access for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders* (AAPI) (2016) report argues for the need of disaggregated educational data because it can reveal the education gap between different AAPI ethnic groups. Disaggregated data can reveal rates of high school dropouts, access to higher education, levels of math and English proficiency, and financial constraints (2016:8). This thesis attempts to fill in some of the literature gaps to understand what factors affect the negative academic outcomes of Cambodian students through examining potential cases of successful Cambodians. The thesis also fills a gap by connecting the existing literature on Cambodian refugees from almost forty-years ago to understand where these Cambodian refugees are now in their lives.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

I employed a qualitative approach of narrative interviews to answer my two research questions discussed in the introduction. Narrative interview is the verbal collection of descriptive accounts of a person's past experience. In the first half of this chapter, I will discuss the methodology used in the study by outlining the research design, recruitment process, and data collection. In the second half of this chapter, I will focus on the analytical approaches and various concepts and theories used to guide the study.

Design

I chose to focus on the 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugees because they are a population that is underrepresented in current academic studies. I was interested in revisiting the predictions of scholars studying refugees during the late 20st century that predicted Cambodian refugees would have an unsuccessful future and remain in poverty. To find out if those predictions were correct, I needed to understand where the 1.5 generation Cambodians are in their lives and what they are doing now that they are adults. In doing so, I utilized a qualitative method of unstructured narrative interview for the study. The narrative interview is the most effective approach to understand the participants educational trajectory over the course of almost forty years since resettlement. A narrative approach is a method that helps to understand

meaningful human experiences through individuals constructing their life-history in a way where they can frame themselves in an embedded relationship to others (Anthias 2001:850). The unstructured format allows participants to speak freely and share stories about their lives. This approach can reveal meaningful information that the participants believe are the most salient details of their educational trajectory and identity formation. Their descriptive accounts of their lived educational experiences during specific socio-historic context, time, and space can allow for potential themes to emerge. This method transforms memories into words for narrative accounts to emerge allowing participants to gain insight into their identity. The narrative approach allows the participants to reflect on their experiences growing up and encountering barriers and opportunities towards their educational success. Narratives are subjective autobiographical accounts that are reinterpreted as the narrator's identity is continuously being retold, rediscovered, and reimagined. The narratives represent how the participants understand and make sense of their past experiences.

In addition, I used reflexivity to ensure credibility of the findings of the study. According to Powell (2006), reflexivity is examining "one's personal biases, views, and motivations to develop self-awareness in interactions with others" (2006:10). This self-reflection is imperative for the study since I am Cambodian American and grew up in Long Beach, California. To mitigate the effects of distorting data or by being too close to the field, I was highly aware of my dual roles as a Cambodian American and a researcher throughout the study.

Research Site

The site for this study takes place in Long Beach, California, which is the largest Cambodian community in the United States. Long Beach is within driving distance of the beach

and mountains with annually warm weather. The Long Beach Cambodian community known as “Cambodia Town” is a one-mile corridor filled with Cambodian owned-businesses ranging from donut shops to Cambodian markets. The site was selected for the study because the population size of Cambodians would allow for ease of access to gain potential participants during the recruitment process.

Recruitment

I used the same recruitment process that I used in my previous undergraduate research. I sent out recruitment emails for potential participants among my personal contacts of family, friends, and colleagues. The recruitment email included the criteria for being a potential participant, the risks and benefits of the study, the participants’ right to withdraw from the study at any time, and my contact information if an individual was interested in participating in the study or had any questions or concerns. Once potential participants contacted me via email and expressed their interest to participate in the study, we arranged a time and a place to meet on a date that accommodated both of our schedules for the interview. The most effective recruitment method was the snowball effect, where participants that were interviewed recommended a qualified participant who they believe was willing to be interviewed for the study. A couple of my colleagues made Facebook posts to various Cambodian groups about my study. However, using Facebook was an unsuccessful method of recruitment.

I faced unexpected challenges with recruiting participants for the study, even though I used the same recruitment process as my undergraduate research. I expected my personal contacts of Cambodians that I have developed over the years as a former volunteer for various Cambodian organizations in the community to assist me with recruiting potential participants. I

realized I conducted six interviews over the course of three-months for my undergraduate study, whereas for this study, I only had one month to conduct an additional fourteen interviews.

Despite the extra two months I had in my previous study, the challenge of finding participants was due to the timing of my research taking place during the holiday season. There were individuals who were interested in participating in the study but were leaving town during the holiday break. It was difficult to find a date and time to meet that accommodated both my own and those potential participants' schedules, so we agreed to have an over-the-phone interviews¹.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study includes participants from my undergraduate study, which is Institution Review Board (IRB) approved through California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) on the same topic about the educational experiences of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans due to my limited time to reach the goal of conducting twenty interviews. My previous data consisted of six participants from the Long Beach Cambodian community. The participant criteria for this study is slightly different than my previous study. During the recruitment phase of my undergraduate study, I encountered individuals who were interested to participate in the study but did not meet the criteria due to age or place of birth. The criteria for qualified participants for this study changed from “came to the United States as a child or adolescent” to “came to the United States as an infant, child, or adolescent and or identifies as a 1.5 generation Cambodian”. Over the course of one month, during the winter break of 2018, I collected an additional twelve interviews with two over-the-phone interviews, so I was unable to

¹ I conducted sixteen in-person interviews and two over-the-phone interviews.

meet the goal of conducting twenty interviews. Overall, I obtained eighteen interviews for the study.

Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, offices, or other convenient places for them. The interviews took approximately 1.5 hours, but varied from 1-3 hours, depending on how much information the participants wanted to share. Prior to the day of the interview, I sent the participants a copy of the consent form via email to understand and sign. On the day of the interview, I had two copies of the consent form for the participants to sign. I kept one of the copies and the other copy was given to the participant. I allowed the participants to read over the form and ask any questions before signing. The two participants who had the interview conducted over-the-phone were also sent a copy of the consent form to look over and sign. Those two participants emailed me a digital copy of the signed consent form. Once I obtained the participants' signature, I asked if I could record the interview with a phone recording app in addition to written notes. All but one of the participants gave me permission to record the interview. For anonymity purposes, I asked the participants to choose a pseudonym to be used in the study and gave pseudonyms to participants who were adamant of letting me use their real name, despite explaining my role as a researcher to ensure both anonymity and confidentiality for participants.

I utilized an interview guide with a set list of questions to begin the interview.² The interview guide consists of six sections: background, family, school, community, cultural and ethnic identities, and generational information. The questions I asked were open-ended, which allowed the participants to speak freely about their educational experiences growing up in the

² See Appendix A: Interview Guide

context of family, school, and community in relation to their continuous identity development. Some of the participants that I personally knew began their interview with excitement and shared endless stories with me. There were some interviews, typically from participants that I did not personally know, that started off as a structured interview, which made it challenging for me to talk less and for the participants to share more. When relevant, I shared personal family stories that were similar to some of the experiences the participants shared, which made the participants feel more comfortable sharing their stories with me. After I gained the participants' trust, they became more engaged in the interview and eventually ended up doing most of the talking while I did most of the listening. During the interview, most of the participants either asked me if their responses were the correct answer I was seeking or they made statements that their responses were most likely not a good response to the question I asked. In addition, there were several participants who showed me physical items that related to the stories they were sharing with me during the interview. A few of the participants excused themselves from the interview for a few minutes to grab past documents of college essays on their experience as a refugee and genocide survivor, diplomas, college certificates, former work cards with the title of their job position, and an in-process autobiography of surviving the Khmer Rouge. There were two participants that showed me physical items they were carrying on them. One of the participants pulled out a Buddhist necklace made out of jade around her neck and the other participant turned to his side and showed me a tattoo of his mother. There was one participant who wanted to show me a family slideshow, but his computer was out of battery, so he ended up emailing it to me after the interview. The video was a six minute slideshow that he and his siblings made for their parents' 56th anniversary who have been together from 1960-2016. At the end of every interview, I asked

the participants if they have any suggestions or recommendations to preserve Cambodian culture for the current and following generations of Cambodian Americans in the United States.

Analytical Frameworks

I draw from four theoretical frameworks to analyze the data in relation to my research questions discussed in the introduction. The four analytical frameworks I used to guide this study are the works of Yosso (2005), Bourdieu (1990), Appadurai (1996), and Hall (2003). Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory and Bourdieu's (1990) cultural and social capital concept addresses the first research question on how family, community, and school influenced the educational choices and experiences of the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans. I also used community cultural wealth theory to analyze data from my undergraduate study. Appadurai's (1996) 'scapes and Hall's (2003) concept of culture are the two frameworks that address the second research question on identity formation and negotiation in relation to academic success.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Theory

Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth is a critical race theory that moves away from viewing marginalized communities from a deficit perspective. Yosso's theory applies cultural and social capital as the unexpected cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks that were once viewed as cultural disadvantages of marginalized communities. The theory sheds light on how students of color have the capacity to achieve academic success in creative ways. They can draw upon their strengths and capital from their home and communities they already have into educational settings to address social inequalities (Yosso 2005:69,82). Her framework

focuses on the agency of marginalized communities to highlight how individuals are active actors that can overcome challenges to achieve success.

Yosso lists a minimum of six capital that marginalized communities can draw from: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant as shown in Figure 1³ (Yosso 2005:77).

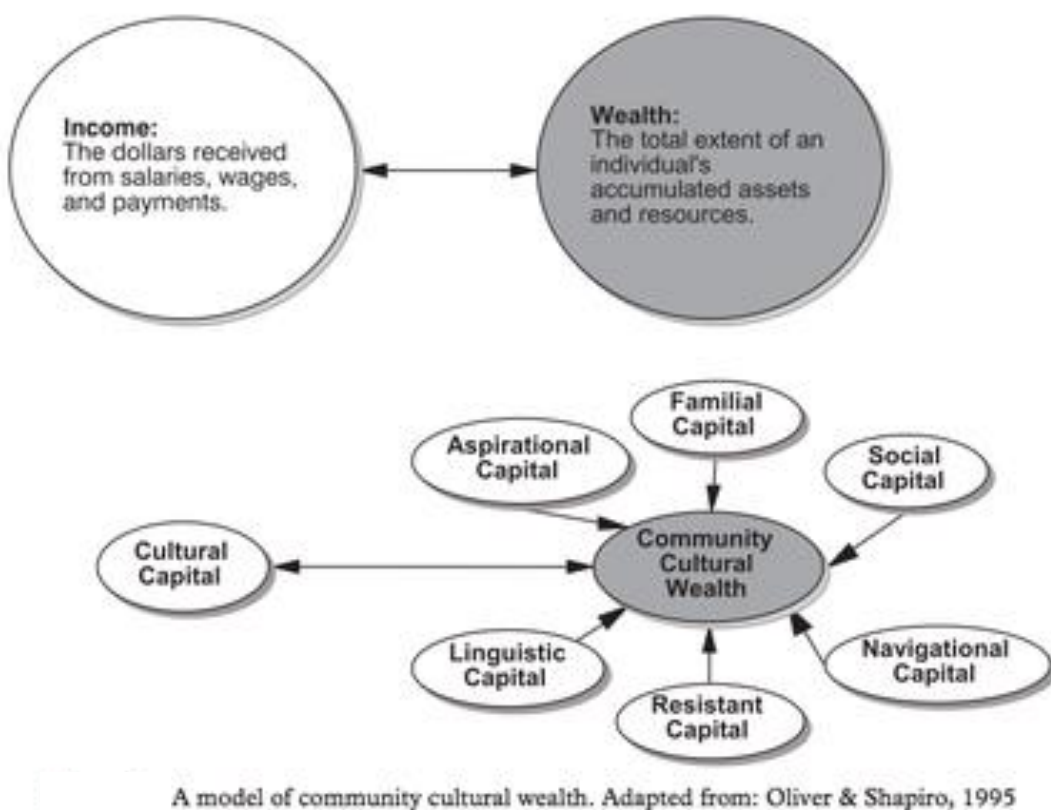


Figure 1: Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth

³ Figure 1 is adapted from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth article.

Aspirational capital is the ability to remain optimistic and hopeful for the future in the face of challenges and barriers. Individuals dream of achieving what may seem impossible to achieve in their present circumstances (Yosso 2005:78). Familial capital is the ability to recognize the strengths and contributions of family kinship. Family is viewed as a community which is based on the shared history, experiences, and cultural resources of immediate and extended family. Linguistic capital is the ability to develop intellectual and social skills from communicating in multiple languages (Yosso 2005:78). Yosso argues many students of color engage in various forms of communication, including: a storytelling tradition, music, and poetry. Storytelling requires certain skills such as memorization and attention to details which can help students to increase their intelligence. Social capital is the network of people and community resources that provide both emotional support and advice on navigating institutions. Navigational capital is the ability and strategies to navigate hostile, social institutions, and environments. Strategies to navigate racism in schools includes sustaining aspiration for academic achievements despite challenging situations and resiliency. Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills gained from resisting race, gender, and class inequalities. Students can engage in oppositional behaviors through using their cultural knowledge that challenge the norms of society. These six forms of capital can provide insight into the forms of support the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans used to achieve academic success.

Bourdieu's (1990) Cultural and Social Capital

Yosso's theory focusing on students of color possessing unexpected capital expands on Bourdieu's traditional view of cultural and social capital used in the educational context. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital reflects the accumulation of valuable cultural knowledge

possessed by privileged groups⁴ which become the norms of society. According to Yosso, disadvantaged students of color who are not born into privileged groups lack valuable knowledge, social skills, networks, and resources (Yosso 2005:70-77). However, Bourdieu, argues that individuals, regardless of their social class, possess cultural capital since every culture has their own set of knowledge, beliefs, traditions, language, and other distinct cultural characteristics. The participants' Cambodian cultural capital may be viewed in a negative light by some American educators and community members. Yet, American cultural capital can be gained through formal education.

Bourdieu views capital as the resources individuals are born into. Cultural capital is a person's knowledge and resources that are learned and obtained through socialization into a certain class (Bourdieu 1990:124-125). Individuals are unconscious of their ways of speaking, writing, and awareness of how society works. In other words, cultural capital is the unconscious set of knowledge and skills that emerge from socialization into a certain class. There are three forms of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Embodied cultural capital are the qualities of mind and body that considers cultural practices and integration within each of us. Examples of embodied cultural capital include having interest in certain style of music, speaking a certain way, and interest in a particular style of art because it is the cultural resources inherited through socialization over time. Objectified cultural capital is the physical representation that displays one's social status. Examples of objectified cultural capital include material belongings such as published books, paintings, and owning a car. Institutionalized cultural capital is the symbolic displays of specialized knowledge and qualifications of

⁴ Yosso refers to privileged groups as the upper and middle-classes of White men and women who are the norm group in American society.

competency (1990:150). Having specialized terms before and after a person's name, such as MD (medical doctor) or Dr. (doctor), are examples of institutionalized cultural capital. Having a certain degree, such as a PhD degree, is another form of institutionalized cultural capital. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital provides an understanding on the type of knowledge and skills participants inherited from their Khmer family and individuals from school and their community.

Bourdieu defines social capital as the relationship between members in their social network that exchange capital with each other (1990:105). Having high social capital will allow individuals to build up cultural capital since their connection with members in their network provides them with cultural resources, information, and knowledge. In other words, social capital is using one's social network, such as kinship network, to gain actual resources and potential resources. Participants in the study used their family and friends as resources for protection, support, and information on careers to attain educational success.

Appadurai's (1990) 'Scapes

Another theory that highlights how Cambodian refugees have agency in the decisions they make is Appadurai's concept of "ethnoscapes". The concept considers the relationship between five types of scapes to understand how we have become more interconnected due to the speed of globalization (Appadurai 1996:33). These five scapes are cultural flows that overlap with each other: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes. Ethnoscapes refers to the flow of people who constitute the world in which we live and occupy, such as immigrants, refugees, exiles, tourists, etcetera. Ethnoscapes highlight how the Cambodian refugees are not tied to a single locale, but are transnational, so they are able to

connect with their families and friends back in their home country after resettling in the United States. Ethnoscapes allow the Cambodian refugee newcomers to fill political spaces in their communities.

Technoscape is the flow of technology moving across boundaries that allows us to be connected. Appadurai defines technoscape as:

the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries. (Appadurai 1990:34).

It is often the result of complex relationships built on flows of money, politics, and labor.

Mediascapes are the distribution, consumption, and exchange of information that provide images to the world of itself. Mediascapes refers to:

the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspaper, magazines, television stations, and film-producing studios) ... provide large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed. (Appadurai 1990:35).

Mediascapes allow for the exchange and production of information. However, it causes the line between reality and fictional landscapes to become blurred. For instance, Steve was unhappy with the negative discourse created by PBS that depicted Cambodians as poor and academic failures. Technoscapes and mediascapes intersect with each other because technological devices, such as radio, televisions, computers, and phones, are platforms of mediascapes. For instance, technoscapes and mediascapes allow Cambodian refugees to learn about American culture, current news in the local community and across the world, the English language through the internet, television shows, news stations, and radio stations on mobile devices, computers, or television. Therefore, technoscapes and mediascapes allow for the exchange of images of the world, depending on the mode of media, technological device, the type of audience, and the

interests of those who control the media (Appadurai 1990:35). Ideoscapes refers to ideologies born out of the Enlightenment Period such as ideas of freedom and democracy in Western societies. Different cultures have their own interconnected ideologies of the world that they carry with them. Financescapes is the dispositions of global capital, global currencies, and stock exchanges. Financescapes is applicable to this study when parents of the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans wire money back to their home country to relatives.

Appadurai's framework helps to understand how exposure to certain aspects of Cambodian and American culture through the various forms of scapes will influence the participants' identity and educational experiences. I will focus on four of the five scapes for this study: ethnoscapes, technoscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes. Ethnoscapes is useful for describing the negotiation of cultural identity the participants hide as well as identity negotiation. I will use technoscapes and mediascapes to understand how family and friends who live far away gain information and connect with each other through the internet, social media websites, television shows, radio stations, newspapers, social media, films, and images. I will also use mediascapes to understand the cultural influences conveyed through the media that reinforce the dominant discourse on Cambodian refugee stereotypes and the refugees' reaction to these stereotypes. Lastly, I will use ideoscapes to understand the values and ideas of Cambodian and American culture that conflicts with each other. As Appadurai notes, culture is not confined to a marked boundary, but expands across boundaries. Thus, the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans are not tied to a single locale or culture which helps them to form hybrid identities.

Furthermore, Appadurai suggests that the five scapes are the foundation for imagined communities, which is a concept he borrows from Benedict Anderson (Appadurai 1990:33-35). Appadurai extends Anderson's "imagined communities" from being only as real as is perceived

in the minds of community members to the creation of culture as part of “imagined worlds”. Members use these “imagined worlds” to make sense of their lives and “imagined worlds” are the flows of culture constituted by the “historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the globe” (Appadurai 1990:31). Given the speed of information, the role of the imagination in social lives, as Appadurai terms “imaginaire”, is the collective fluid landscapes as a social process. This theory is relevant to studying the group of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans because members in the group may never meet each other, but remain connected through shared commonalities such as ideologies, experiences, and aspirations.

Hall’s (2003) Concept of Cultural Identity

Another framework I used to guide the research is Hall’s (2003) concept of cultural identity. As Smith-Hefner (1999) notes, Cambodian refugees in the United States form a diasporic community. Cohen defines diaspora as individuals that are displaced and cannot return to an idealized homeland due to fear (Anthias 2001:632). In a diasporic community, it is common for its members to create a bi-cultural identity with one identity being their homeland and the second identity being their place of resettlement. Hall discusses diasporic identity as understanding the home country and new place of resettlement, but not completely being part of either place (Hall 2019:192). Hall employs the term hybridity to describe the combination and selection of certain aspects of two or more cultures that an individual chooses to form their cultural identity (Hall 2003:222). He defines cultural identity as being separate from the individual level and proposes two aspects of cultural identity. The first aspect is the collective historical experiences shared amongst members in the culture which is based on similarities such as shared history and ancestry. The second aspect of cultural identity is the process of becoming

through differences and discontinuities which is influenced by politics, memory, and desire (Hall 2003:225). The similarities and differences that form an individual's cultural identity suggests that a person's identity is fluid, constantly in flux, and relational. The hybrid identity of the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans allows them to position themselves in different contexts and negotiate what is culturally appropriate and advantageous for a given situation. Jordan York (2011:166), argues that Cambodian Americans can use their hybrid identity as a tool to gain opportunities. This ability to be aware about cultural appropriateness allows individuals to adapt to new experiences. On the collective level, the Cambodian Americans' hybrid cultural identity plays an important role in defining membership to the 1.5 generation of Cambodian Americans based on the members collective history, which creates a sense of togetherness.

Some of these theories and concepts including Yosso's idea of community cultural wealth, Bourdieu's idea of cultural and social capital, Appadurai's idea of ethnoscaples, Cohen's idea of diaspora, and Hall's idea of cultural identity have a more positive view of refugees, arguing that the diasporic condition allows for greater creativity and agency as individuals position themselves differently in different contexts and situations. These concepts' emphasis on agency guide my understanding of the tools the participants used to shape their educational experiences and identity development.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION

Over the course of four weeks I collected data on the educational experiences of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans. This chapter presents the findings of the two research questions that guided this study:

1. How are educational choices and experiences influenced by family, community and school?
2. How does the process of ethnic identity negotiation and formulation with the United States system influence the educational choices and experiences of this group of Cambodian Americans?
 - 2.a. How does the refugee population negotiate their ethnic identity aspiration with academic success?
 - 2.b. What are the shared experiences of this group of 1.5 generation of Cambodian Americans in relation to challenges and opportunities in the context of educational experiences that may or may not promote later success in adulthood?

The similarities and differences regarding the educational and identity trajectory experiences amongst the eighteen participants varied depending on factors such as searching for acceptance

and belonging, discrimination and racism, educational expectations, family, gender and age in relation to family, language, agency, and self-motivation. To understand these variables in relation to the research questions, I begin this chapter with a general background of the participants to contextualize their environment growing up in Cambodia, refugee camps, and America. I provide tables to demonstrate the background of participants¹ and variances of factors across the eighteen participants.² I end the chapter with a discussion of the variables presented in the tables.

Background of the Participants

Channeth is the only participant that completed his Kindergarten-12th grade (K-12) education in Cambodia. There were other participants, such as Lee and Sara, who attended school in Cambodia as a child before the Khmer Rouge took control of the country. Interestingly, those participants began their interview with a history of the Khmer Rouge, then discussed what their life was like before the genocide, and their experience escaping to the border of Thailand. Channeth and Sara discussed how the United States Air Force dropped bombs on the countryside of Cambodia, so they could destroy the Vietnamese communist supply lines. The older participants all gave specific dates of historical events that occurred in Cambodia. They mentioned the Cambodian civil war occurred from 1970-1975, the Khmer Rouge took over the capital city of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975, and the Vietnamese liberated the country from the Khmer Rouge control during the first week of January in 1979. Those participants mentioned memories of being separated from their family and “doing anything to survive”.

¹ See Table 1: Background of Participants

² See Table 2: Variations across Participants

Furthermore, Channeth and Sara both described that prior to the Khmer Rouge rule, Cambodians were friendly and cared for each other. Sara gives an example of the relationship between Cambodians prior to the Khmer Rouge and after the Khmer Rouge. Prior to the Khmer Rouge, Sara argues if a Cambodian person living in a rural village saw a stranger walking back home past evening, the Cambodian villager would invite the stranger to stay for dinner.

Sara argues that today if Cambodian villagers encountered the same situation, they will not open their home to strangers because they have become greedy and selfish. Similarly, Channeth blames the current government for being corrupt which sets a bad example for Cambodian citizens:

How can you not be selfish when the government is corrupt and take everything?... they (the government) teach you to be corrupt.

Rith, Sam, and Sophie described how they came from affluent families prior to the genocide. Sophie's father was a general in the military and her family lived comfortably in the capital city of Phnom Penh. Rith's father worked as a secretary for the government council. Sam's family owned a television in 1971, which was an item of status during that time. Both Sam and Sophie attended private primary school until the Khmer Rouge took over the country and closed all formal educational institutions. Sam returned to Cambodia so he could pay his father respect with a memorial ceremony. His mother did not want to accompany him on the trip because she believes there is nothing there for her anymore. Similarly, to Sam's mother's viewpoint of returning to Cambodia, Sophie shared it will be too painful for her to visit Cambodia because all the good things in her life are gone, such as her parents, her social status, and the country's physical environment.

Table 1
Background of Participants

| Pseudonyms | Highest Level of Education | Current Career | Married, number of children | Cultural and Ethnic Self-identification | Generational Self-identification |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Aurora | Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) | Web Designer | Yes, two children | French American; Multi-ethnic | 1.5 |
| Bunthy | Master of Science (M.S.) | Director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services | Yes, three children | American; Cambodian American; American citizen | 1.5 |
| Cassidy | PhD. | Regional Project Manager California Census | Yes, two children | Cambodian American; Khmer | 1.5 |
| Channeth | Associate's degree (AA) | Machinist Leadman | Yes, two children | Khmer; Khmer American | First |
| George | High school diploma | Community Health Outreach Coordinator | Yes, one child | Cambodian American | 1.5 |
| Grace | Medical Doctoral (MD) | Medical Practicing Practitioner | Yes, two children | Khmer American | 1.5 |

(Continued on following page)

Table 1. Continued.

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Jason | In process of completing B.A. | Community Program Coordinator | | Cambodian American | 1.5 |
| Lee | Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) | Director of Youth Community Program | | Cambodian American | 1.5 |
| Rith | Bachelor of Science (B.S.) | Director of Information Technology at Private University | Yes, two children | Khmer; Khmer American; Cambodian American | 1.5 |
| Sam | Masters of Business of Arts (MBA) | Director of Information Technology at Public University | | Khmer | First |
| Sara | Associate's degree (AA) | Parent Coach Supervisor | Yes, two children | Khmer | First |
| Star | Masters of Arts (MA) | Program Coordinator for Community Arts Academy | | Cambodian Laotian American | Not first, not second |

(Continued on following page)

Table 1. Continued.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|---|-------------------|--|---|
| Steve | Associate's degree (AA) | Aviation Assistance | | Cambodian American; Cambodian Chinese Asian American; Multiethnic | First, 1.5, and second - depending on context of time and place |
| Survivor | M.A. | University Counselor | | Cambodian American | 1.5 |
| Sochad | Associate's degree (AA) | Medical Entrepreneur | | Cambodian American | Second |
| Sophie | B.S. | Social worker | Yes, two children | Khmer American | 1.5 |
| Vincent | High school diploma | Youth Coordinator for Tabaco Prevention Program | | Cambodian American | 1.5 |
| Virak | B.A. | Local News Broadcaster | Yes, two children | Asian American; Cambodian American | Second |

For most of the six participants that are genocide survivors, they shared minimal experiences of their life during the years of the Cambodian genocide. The extent of the information they shared was life being difficult and hard because they were overworked, starving, and “doing anything to survive”. Seven of the participants were born in refugee camps in Thailand, so they are unable to recall growing up there. Lee’s mother shared with him how he was a good newborn because he did not cry while they were in the jungle escaping the war. After the refugee camps the participants went to a training center either in the Philippines or Indonesia for a few months up to a year as they awaited their acceptance for resettlement:

They have programs in Indonesia because they want you to learn the U.S. custom. They build a model home like they have refrigerator, toilet, and so forth. Well the reason they did that, that they put us in the second camp in Indonesia is, my wife, the first-wave that come to the United States they don’t know about U.S. custom. They don’t even know how to operate the gas stove.

In addition to Rith’s experience, quoted above, of learning how to use modern technology at the training centers, he also mentioned the center had English classes. Rith enjoyed attending the training center courses because it was the closest opportunity to formal education he had at the time. Sara learned English by being a translator at one of the refugee camps in Thailand. Since she already knew French, learning English was easy for her, except for English grammar. Over half of the participants were sponsored by a church and a few participants received government sponsorship. For instance, Bunthy was sponsored through the Refugee Act of 1980. The rest of the participants received sponsorship from their extended family members. Sophie’s aunt had paid a person to locate her and her siblings during the Khmer Rouge genocide and take them to Thailand, so her Aunt could sponsor them. Almost all the participants lost some members of

their immediate family, including their pet dog¹, and all the participants lost some extended family members.

Resettling in the United States

Participants resettled in various cities throughout the country. Participants who received sponsorship from the church or the government resettled in small towns that had a small Asian population, if any. For instance, Lee was resettled in Arizona where he lived in a trailer-park neighborhood with Caucasian and Mexican neighbors. Vincent was resettled in Indiana and Star was resettled in Iowa. These participants grew up in a community that was predominantly Caucasian and practiced Christianity. Vincent's family attended church with their Caucasian and African American neighbors every Sunday. Vincent identifies as being Buddhist but mentioned that his family attended church to show respect and appreciation for receiving help from their church sponsor. Another American activity a participant experienced growing up in a small town include Star playing Little League² when he lived in Iowa.

Some participants were sponsored by their extended family or a Cambodian family and resettled in major cities, including: Chicago, Illinois; Houston, Texas; Lowell, Massachusetts; and New York, New York. Other participants who were sponsored by their family resettled in cities throughout Southern California, such as Gardena, Long Beach, Orange, and San Bernardino.

Sam mentioned the challenge his ailing mother faced resettling into a non-Cambodian community in America:

¹ One of the participants referred multiple times to losing her pet dog during the Khmer Rouge.

² Little League is a local youth baseball organization.

My mother would have to take a bus to buy a bag of rice and you know she has to push the cart and put groceries in it. There's not a lot of Asian stores. There's only 2 or 3 Asian markets. You had to take a bus, maybe 10 miles or something to go to a Vietnamese store to buy supplies. I remember when it was just one Korean store that sold bean sprouts and you could walk to it.

Since Sam and his older brother did not like the taste of American food, their mother went out of her way to make the family Khmer food. Khmer food has different aromas and uses different ingredients than American food which several of the participants found unpleasant and foreign. Sara recalled feeling as if at home back in Cambodia when a Cambodian family in the apartment invited her family over for dinner and served Khmer food. Sara was one of the few participants who had a negative experience with her sponsorship. She never met her sponsor, but heard it was a Cambodian woman. Her sponsor never gave her family money³ that she was supposed to give for sponsoring them. The money from the government was meant to help refugees resettle in the United States, so they can pay rent and buy groceries.

Another challenge that participants faced living in a non-Khmer community was access to temples and Cambodian services. Lee and George mentioned that due to their father's medical condition they moved to Long Beach for better opportunities and services. Many participants living in a predominantly Caucasian community ended up feeling uncomfortable with their surroundings or did not receive enough financial assistance, so they migrated to multiple cities throughout California before resettling in Long Beach. The only participant that never resided in Long Beach is Sam. The participants' parents learned about the large Cambodian community in Long Beach through word of mouth from their family, friends, or other Cambodians. Star migrated from a small town in Iowa to an industrial city, Torrance, California. He noticed that

³ Sara was referring to the government money the sponsor received to help her and her refugee family but kept for herself.

there was a diverse group of students at his middle school in Torrance in comparison to the Caucasian students at his former school in Iowa. Survivor's family migrated from Houston, Texas to Los Angeles, California for better medical resources. Her family stayed with their extended family in Los Angeles for a year, then resettled in Long Beach. There were even participants who had multiple migrations returning and leaving Long Beach. Cassidy and Grace both left Long Beach for several years because their parents or a family member had a better living condition for them in another Californian city. Cassidy and Grace eventually resettled back to Long Beach or the surrounding suburbs after graduating from college. Grace still volunteered for her church community on a regular basis when she was attending a college that was over one hour away.

Living Conditions

Cambodians in Long Beach lived in impoverished neighborhoods that had high crime rates and gangs. The apartment complex the participants lived in were comprised mainly of Cambodian families or a mix of Cambodians, Hispanics, and/or African Americans. Steve said he grew up in the East Side of Long Beach, which is where Cambodia Town is located. The participants' parents did not want their children to attend K-12 schools in their school district because they were afraid their children would encounter the wrong group of friends or get picked on for being Cambodian. Many of the parents wanted their children to attend another Long Beach Unified School Districts (LBUSD) school outside of their neighborhood, so they could be in a safe neighborhood surrounded by American students that valued education. Survivors' parents understood the safety issue living in Cambodia Town, so they saved enough money and moved to Lakewood, a suburb on the outskirts of Long Beach.

Aurora received different educational qualities depending on the location of the school. She recalls attending middle school in an inner-city neighborhood where she had a negative encounter with her seventh grade science teacher. Her science teacher did not teach the class, but had assigned the students to silently read the textbook while the teacher took care of the boisterous students in class. Aurora realized that she had a better learning experience from her one year attending a school outside of the inner-city neighborhood during elementary school because the teachers taught the students and ensured they learned the material being taught. Despite the negative experience with her seventh grade teacher, she aspired for academic success and was the valedictorian of her middle school. However, Aurora argues that experience is the reason why science is her weakest subject. Participants who received their K-12 education outside the LBUSD had earlier exposure and interactions with different ethnic groups. They lived in decent neighborhoods that were safe and free from gangs.

Furthermore, most of the participants shared similar housing conditions when they first resettled in America. They lived with their immediate family in a small apartment or lived with their immediate and extended families in a house with other Cambodian families. For instance, Jason grew up in a seven bedroom house with seven families and each family had their own room. Steve grew up with his immediate family, which consisted of seven people, including himself in a small apartment. Given their overcrowded living conditions, some of the participants developed a close relationship with their family, which gave them the opportunity to learn Cambodian values and traditions from the adults in the household. Virak shared being aware about Cambodian music since his parents did karaoke and played Cambodian songs on the television or radio in the living room. The crowded living conditions also caused family tension when family members were inconsiderate of sharing space and certain resources with each other,

such as the television or bathroom. For instance, Cassidy grew up in a house with three bedrooms and one bathroom with thirty-five people from four families. Her household had a strict shower schedule with the maximum shower time of ten minutes. Cassidy's shower time was at 5 AM and she tried to keep her shower less than the maximum time, so her other family members can all have a chance to take a shower.

Searching for Acceptance and Belonging

The participants tried to identify themselves as a member to various groups within the formal education system of school and the informal education systems of family and community. In the formal school/university setting, friends and teachers helped the participants feel acceptance and belonging. Participants who attended the high school in Long Beach with a predominantly Cambodian student population went into detail on how they used their friends as a resource to navigate the racial tensions and fights that occurred on campus. They spent time with other Asian students during lunch time, so they could be together and protect each other from racial encounters. The participants that attended schools outside of the LBUSD had less encounters with racial tensions amongst their peers and classmates. Those participants described having a diverse group of friends which consisted of African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians.

Some participants joined the Cambodian club on their school campus because they were interested in connecting with other Cambodians on campus. Lee and Survivor were cabinet members of their high school Cambodian club, which provided them with the opportunity to gain leadership skills. The other two most common clubs the participants joined were the international club and a foreign language club. Aurora joined the French club in high school and college since

she was interested in fashion design, given Paris, France is the fashion capital of the world. It was imperative for her to know the French language. Her extra-curricular activity joining the French club was beneficial for her when she studied abroad in France and met her husband in France. Jason joined the German club in high school because he wanted to translate German songs from a German band he liked. In addition, Jason mentioned that most people try to understand their cultural identity from understanding different cultures as a reference point. For Jason, German culture was a way for him to understand Cambodian culture. Bunthy and Grace took part in their middle school student council and ran for elections. They both won a seat in the school's cabinet because no one was running against them. The position as a student senate member made them feel accepted in school. Grace was a member of her high school Women's Leadership club.

Several of the participants formed their group of friends based on their interest to do well in school and aspirations for academic achievements. Grace, Rith, and Sam mentioned how they competed with their Vietnamese classmates to see who could earn the highest test score. This "friendly competition", as Sam calls it, motivated them to achieve academic success. Most of the participants' friends are Cambodian or other Asian ethnic groups. Grace shared that she aligned with her Vietnamese friends because they also spoke broken English, shared a similar background as a refugee, and had academic aspirations to do well in school. A few participants formed group of friends who were interested in American activities, such as having similar interests in a certain genre of music or playing video games. Jason shared that he grew up having primarily Cambodian friends up until high school because he had a new interest in "emo" music. Music was an outlet for him to express his feelings that he could not verbally express at the time. His group of friends enjoyed the same music as him. Jason's friends were virtual friends where

they communicated with each other in chat rooms, sharing information about bands and songs on a social media website called Myspace. Steve is the only participant that mentioned he was friends with Cambodians “the (ones) parents did not want you to hang around” who are gangsters. Steve was never in a gang, but the neighborhood he grew up in on the East Side of Long Beach was filled with Asian and Mexican gangs. He mentioned being friends with Cambodian gangsters and their siblings, because they provided him with protection from the Mexican gangs in his neighborhood.

Grace shared a positive experience with her ESL teacher in high school who made her feel like she belonged in class and accepted her for who she is.

I remember in ESL, he (ESL teacher) always taught us the song “anything you can do, I can do better”, you know so that was pretty cool and he taught us the John Lennon *Imagine* song. Cause, you know, the song was kind of based on what we go through.

She felt that her teacher understood her background as a refugee by the songs he played for the class. Her teacher created a safe and welcoming space for her and her classmates to learn. When she transferred out of the ESL class to a regular English class, she was afraid of her American classmates teasing her for having an accent. Her teacher reassured for her that she was proficient in English and could visit him if she needs help with English or wants to talk with someone.

Grace’s ESL teacher provided her with the confidence and support necessary to achieve academic success. Bunthy’s peers and classmates assumed he was smart because he is Asian and Bunthy agreed with them because he recognized his intelligence. The affirmation that he was smart boosted his confidence to do well in school and to participate in class discussions. Bunthy is half Chinese and half Cambodian, so his light complexion makes people assume that he is full Chinese. Sam also had a high school teacher that understood his background as a refugee in America. His physics teacher was a former Vietnam pilot who experienced the trauma of the war

and was aware of the cultural differences between American and Southeast Asian cultures. The close relationship Sam developed with his physics teacher inspired him to earn his Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Physics.

Unlike these participants who had positive support from their teachers, several of the male participants thought that their K-12 teachers and counselors did not accept them as a successful student with potential; instead perceiving them as not belonging in school, “but on the streets”. The participants shared how their teachers and counselors viewed them as high school dropouts, gang members, and not interested in school. They shared similar experiences of their high school counselor withholding resources regarding merit academies in high school. In their perception, they were discriminated against for being a Cambodian male. Vee discussed how “the same white students in middle school would always win [academic] awards” which made him feel invisible in school. He also felt invisible when he went to high school. His feeling of invisibility in high school was different than his experience in middle school due to the high school’s predominance of Cambodian students. George also expressed the feeling of invisibility when he saw his teachers and counselors providing academic and emotional support to the athletes, Caucasian students, and accelerated students. George mentioned that “the counselors did not care about us (1.5 generation Cambodian American) common people”. The participants’ feeling of invisibility led them to assume that their teachers and counselors did not see academic potential in them, supposedly preferring to instead spend their time and effort on students who had the aspirations and potential for academic success. Aurora felt different from her peers while attending college at one of the universities in California, which was located in an affluent neighborhood and had a predominantly affluent Caucasian student population. The large number

of students at the university included individuals from different race and ethnicity and SES background, which made Aurora realize she was different.

Jason viewed his community college counselor as a role model because she was a mother figure and provided empathy, but as a counselor Jason felt she was not helpful. When Jason realized he used up all his financial aid he told his counselor that he was going to temporarily leave school to earn another source of income that would cover the tuition and fees for college. His counselor advised him to continue with school despite his financial situation. Jason expected his counselor to be empathetic towards his change of academic plans and thought she would advise him on “how to return back to school, how to navigate outside (of school), how she (counselor) is going to help (him)” with his educational journey towards success. When Jason transferred to a four-year university, he felt like he belonged and was accepted on campus. On the day of student orientation, the university counselor provided him with an outline of the required courses that he needed to take each semester so that he could graduate on time. All the participants that attended university believed that being informed by their counselors and professors about the free resources on campus, such as the tutoring center and writing center, made them feel cared for and set them up for success. Survivor and Cassidy mentioned that their advisors and committee members provided them with guidance and checked in on their writing process for their thesis and dissertation and provided moral support.

Discrimination and Racism

The following adjectives are common names the participants have been called or believed how other individuals viewed Cambodians: “lazy, high school dropouts, gangsters, chinks, blacks, cambo-soup, stupid, helpless”. For many of the participants that grew up in Long Beach,

walking to the bus stop with their Cambodian friends and neighbors to navigate around gangs and racial hate crimes in their community provided a sense of security. Some participants even joined an after-school youth program or spent their weekends in the church community to avoid racism from Americans. For instance, Vincent explains that “back then when we [Cambodians] walk, we like... we skip this corner, we don’t go through this block and stuff” to avoid gangs.

The racial profiling Vincent feared growing up continued into his adulthood.

Even though it’s many years later I still don’t go through some neighborhoods. And now, I can feel like I can walk down (one of the streets he avoided growing up). But before I don’t think I can do that.

The stereotype of young Cambodian males interfered with the male participants’ life on a daily basis. They did not feel safe walking in their own neighborhood because the police racially profiled them as gang members and the Hispanic gang members assumed that they were members of an Asian gang for simply being a Cambodian male. Some of the participants encountered times when police officers questioned them for walking in their neighborhood past a certain time. In addition, if they wore a certain color of clothing the police officers profiled them as being affiliated with one of the Asian gangs. The fear of facing discrimination made it difficult for participants to take the bus to school and back home.

According to George “the most dangerous part about going to school was waiting for the bus”. George wanted to participate in sports during high school, but he realized that he had the challenging choice of either putting his life in danger riding the bus at night to return home after practice or not joining one of his high school sports teams. Many of the participants rode the bus for almost the first decade of their lives in the United States before their family purchased their first car. The parents were also faced with a difficult choice of having their children attend a better-funded school further away from their house or having their children attend an

underfunded school closer to home. Vincent's parents wanted him to attend a high school in a predominantly white neighborhood because they believed it would decrease his chance of gang exposure and increased his chance of being recognized as an American. George was satisfied that he went to a high school close to his house instead of attending a high school further away from home because he was tired of waiting for the bus in his unsafe neighborhood. There was a time when George was in middle school and tried to catch the bus that was about to leave, but he missed the bus because an older "Mexican kid just got a screwdriver and stabbed me just for being Cambodian".

Participants encountered higher rates of racial hate crimes when they navigated their neighborhood alone. On one instance, Sophie rode the bus from school to home by herself and a couple of African American students grabbed her backpack and threw it out of the bus. Another time, when she was walking home alone, a Caucasian male tried to grab her, but she ran as fast as she could to escape him. The experience of being grabbed by Caucasian males also occurred with Sara when she lived in Maine and walked home from night school. The quickest route home from school required her to pass a building with Vietnam veterans at night. She switched her route to go home when the veterans made joking remarks asking if they can pay her to have sex with them and at times even chased her in the snow demanding sex or yelling at her for being Asian. Sara faced so many of those negative experiences that she ended up changing her route home to avoid the discrimination and racism from the veterans. The new route took longer for her to return home. Nevertheless, Sophie and Sara faced sexualized stereotypes about Asian women.

Lee shared that there was constant segregation among the students in his K-12 school campus growing up, which forced him to hang out with other Asians. In Cassidy's PhD cohort

she was the only Cambodian student out of the five or six other cohort members who were all Caucasian. She shared feeling embarrassed that her cohort members might think she is incapable of writing a dissertation because she is a refugee that lacks English language skills.

Another social institution where the participants encountered discrimination and racism was at work. Some of the participants' coworkers had little knowledge of Cambodian's work habits, so they applied a general stereotype of Asians as being hard workers, quiet, reserved, and passive. Rith surprised some of his coworkers when he was one of the first employees to receive the annual benefits of having their tuition paid for by their work for a year. He was surprised that his coworkers expected him to be unaware about the work benefits. Grace encountered racism and marginalization for being an Asian female medical doctor:

Here [in the United States], women can be anything we want to be and even in this country, I think as a woman you still aren't getting value or [being] respected as we should be. And for me, like for example, they [her trainees] see me as a Asian women as short, a nurse, or whatever... I remember rounding up with my interns and doctors and stuff, cuz their Caucasians or their Hispanics and they were my followers. But they would think that they are my leaders, like they [are] leading me.

Despite the discrimination, racism, and marginalization they faced, they were still proud to be Cambodian. Cambodians made their annual presence known in the Long Beach community when they celebrated Cambodian New Year's by having a parade on the one-mile strip of Cambodia Town and having picnics at El Dorado Regional Park. They all went to the temples to celebrate *Pchum Ben*, a religious holiday festival to pay respect to their ancestors. These events were a way for the Cambodian community to come together and share their culture with the greater Long Beach community. They prepared special dishes for the events consisting of noodles, various types of meats, and vegetables such as: morning glory, bok choy, and bitter gourd.

Language

A major difference between Americans and Cambodians is language. The Khmer language reflects the value of hierarchy as seen in parts of the Khmer vocabulary that distinguish the age, gender, and status of the interlocutor. Cassidy mentioned that she encountered many first-generation Cambodians in the Long Beach Cambodian community who came from rural backgrounds and could only speak and listen in Khmer, thereby lacking Khmer reading and writing language skills. However, most of the participants' parents are proficient in all four Khmer language skills. A quarter of the older participants knew English prior to arriving in America because they either learned it from their older sibling or the refugee processing center in Indonesia or the Philippines. The older participants and the younger participants' parents enrolled in English language courses through the refugee resettlement program when they arrived in the United States. They eventually found jobs that required the use of English on a regular basis. Survivor's father worked as a translator for the school district, Aurora's father worked for a factory, and Channeth worked for an insurance company. Their English language skills were better than the participants whose parents did not work in a Cambodian owned-businesses.

A common narrative most of the participants encountered was struggling with the English language. It was difficult for the participants to learn English in school while speaking to others in English outside of the house, where their parents expected them to speak Khmer. Grace mentioned that the church helped her to retain the Khmer language because she would sing, write plays, and listen to sermons in Khmer, in addition to speaking Khmer in the household. She also discussed the difference between the type of Khmer vocabulary used in different contexts:

So, like church language I'm good at, colloquial home language I'm not really good at...some Cambodians do curse or have derogatory terms when they're talking and I'm not used to that cuz in the church environment we don't talk like that. And plus, I think sometimes in our culture some people don't choose to talk like that because they think it's something like low class. But then some people choose to speak like that because it's their way of expressing or they curse to show that they are close or something, different sub-cultures.

Grace highlighted how the Khmer language reveals aspects of Cambodian culture, such as SES and how Cambodians expressed their emotions. The Khmer speaking participants that understood the cultural nuances in the language encountered less language barriers than those participants with minimal Khmer language skills. Some of the younger participants mentioned that their parents never said "I love you" like the parents in American television shows. Their lack of knowledge on how Cambodians express emotions made them believe their parents did not love them.

Some parents encouraged their children to speak English in the household, so their family could become Americanized. When Lee spoke Khmer to his parents they responded back in English and suggested he should speak to them in English. Similarly, Aurora's father made her and her siblings "speak only English to acclimate into American culture". Lee and Aurora's language experience with their parents are unique from the other participants because most of the participants' parents spoke to them in Khmer.

Many of the participants encountered having language barrier issues with their parents since they have better English language proficiency. Some of the participants learned colloquial English through their peers and television shows, which also exposed them to American values. The most common language barrier issues the participants encountered was the role reversal in their family. Role reversal is where the children take on the role as parents due to their better English language skills. Almost all the participants mentioned how they filled out emergency

cards for school, translated documents for their parents, and took their parents to doctor appointments because their parents had minimal English language skills. They described the challenge of balancing time with school, while taking on some of the adult responsibilities in the family. Now, as adults, they realized that they had developed many skills for assisting their families with tasks that required using English.

The second most common language barrier issue that a quarter of the participants mentioned was the struggle of learning English as an adolescent. Those participants expressed having to work harder than their classmates who were proficient in English. It was a challenge for them to understand the daily material in class because they needed extra time to grasp the topic their teacher taught. Rith and Sam enrolled in summer school for three years during high school to catch up with the knowledge their classmates had. Another challenge the participants faced with learning English in school was their classmates teasing them for having an accent and mispronouncing words. Despite those challenges, they persevered with learning English because they had a personal goal to graduate from high school and attend college. Rith and Sam graduated high school a semester early since they attended summer school. They spent their last semester of high school taking community college courses.

Educational Expectations

Cambodian and American cultures have different outlooks on the expectations of education. American teachers are expected to encourage their students to participate in class discussions and ask questions for clarification. The role of the teacher in the American educational system is to challenge their students to become critical thinkers. In contrast, the role of the teacher in Cambodian culture is to discipline the students so they can become moral

individuals. Behaving morally includes respecting elders and not questioning them. In other words, traditional Khmer parents expect their children to be students who are quiet in class and follow their teacher's orders. When Cambodian parents send their children to school the teachers are allowed to hit their children if they misbehave in class. Channeth shared how his teacher in Cambodia hit his hand with a ruler for giving the wrong answer to a question the teacher asked. Vincent recalled being disciplined in the traditional Khmer style from a Cambodian teacher in America:

In middle school I had Khmer class and I learned nothing! The teacher was too busy beating us up...they got a ruler and beat you. I'm glad that class was over.

This form of discipline is not tolerated in the American school system since it is seen as a form of child abuse. Another cultural misunderstanding many Americans viewed as child abuse is skin coining, *kohrs khajal*. Skin coining is a traditional therapeutic method Cambodians used to treat minor illnesses, such as a cold or headache. The technique involves rubbing a coin with an ointment balm vigorously on the skin which produces streaks of red marks. Virak commented that a common experience the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans faced was "going to school and having to explain to the teachers what *kohrs khajal* is, when they coin you".

Moreover, the participants' parents were typically absent in their schooling because the parents believed the teacher is responsible for teaching their children to learn the class materials. Once, Lee received a D on an exam and his mother lectured him on the value of education for a whole day. That experience made him realize he had disappointed his family because he did not meet his familial obligation to do well in school, which led him to put more effort in his school work.

Several of the participants discussed their aspirations to join a sport team or after-school activity in high school but their parents wanted them to go home after school ended. Jason mentioned how he asked his parents if he could join his high school track and field team since he could run a mile in less than six minutes, but his parents did not allow him to join the team. He attributed his parents' request for him to come home once school ended due to their fear that he would encounter the wrong group of people on the way home if he stayed out late. The following quote by Rith captures some of the participants' explanations for why their parents did not allow them to participate in extra-curricular activities:

We don't have the transportation, we don't have the means, I mean the means of transportation to take us and drop us off. And also, we don't want to fall behind of our academics. Because language is a barrier.

Grace shared another reason why her guardians did not allow her to join a sport team and after-school activities:

I think it was some kind of generational gap or whatever you might call it. But they don't understand the importance of extracurricular activities. They say, what- what do you mean school, school is already done, why do you need to stay? To me, uhh: I would get- I would get into words with them like I would say other kids are doing this and I want to do it because of its importance. I always wanted to do more, it was important for building resume or whatever. You can't do just good grades, you need to go meet people. I like the leadership role, but they- they- they have problem understand [that] why don't you study, why do you have to join these clubs.

However, there were several participants who were active in clubs, team sports, and after-school programs. Survivor was one of two participants who had the opportunity to join one of her high school sports team. She was on the badminton team during her freshman and sophomore year in high school, which exposed her to different ethnic groups and new friends. There were three participants who joined an after-school program, which will be referred to as Cambodian Community Based Project (CCBP) for this study. The program was aimed at Cambodian male

youths to become health advocates for other young Asian males in the community. Since there were other Cambodian youths in the program their parents allowed them to join CCBP. Their parents viewed the program as an opportunity for them to learn about their Cambodian culture and embrace being Cambodian since they were around other Cambodian American youths. Sara volunteered in the Cambodian community in Portland, Maine and Long Beach, California which gave her the opportunity to find her career interest. During her extensive community work, she realized there was a common experience of family disruption amongst first-time mothers in the community. To address the problem, she found a career as a family coach for first-time mothers.

Several of the participants expressed the American value of individualism once they turned eighteen years old. They became more engaged in their campus community, which they did not have the opportunity to do during K-12. All the participants who attended college ended up joining campus clubs and participating in school events. College allowed the participants to enjoy the American value of freedom and individualism since they had the opportunity to choose their own class schedule and be responsible for attending class. Rith mentioned that he loves America because it allowed him to do multiple activities while working. For example, he described his college experience revolving around doing group projects with his classmates and studying for exams with them, while working full time, and starting a family. Campus engagement was an opportunity for the participants to explore their potential interests and to become involved in a community where they felt a sense of belonging.

Family

All the participants are family oriented. Their educational choices were influenced by their family's expectation of them to become successful in life and give back to the family.

Those participants' parents that received their associate's degree, had sufficient English skills, and found middle-class jobs, constantly emphasized the value of higher education. Their parents did not pressure them to earn a degree in a specific field but wanted them to at least have a Bachelor's degree. The parents wanted their children to do better than them, so they could have comfortable lives. Grace, who is now a practicing medical doctor, discussed how her guardians never told her to become a doctor but encouraged her to do well in school. Even the participants whose highest level of education is a high school diploma had parents who encouraged them to complete school. Many of the participants understood their parents' aspirations for them to have a better life than them and knew that formal education was the key to making that possible. Steve mentioned the mentality of "you want to do better than your parents, you don't wanna work at a donut shop your entire life" which inspired most of the participants to earn their college degree.

Participants that had family members with a college degree looked up to them as role models to achieve academic success. The college graduates in their family helped them with their college application and informed them about the free services on campus. Those participants used their family members that have gone through the college experience as a source of motivation to finish college even when college became challenging. The amount of support the participants' received varied from family to family based on their background in Cambodia and their value on education.

As part of Cambodian gender and sibling role, the participants who were the oldest male in their family expressed they had completed one of their familial responsibilities by being a positive role model for their younger siblings. Lee's older sister did not set a good example for him or his younger sibling because she moved in with her boyfriend after she turned eighteen years old and only earned a high school diploma. Lee took the opportunity to be a role model for

his younger sibling by showing her the value of education. He attributed his aspiration to attend college due to his role as the oldest son in the family, as well as his parents seeing the potential in him to succeed in academia. George and Vee, who are the oldest son and sibling in their family, became the father figures in their family in their role as the oldest son and sibling to help support their single-parent mother. They both managed to graduate from high school while working part-time jobs and taking care of their younger siblings. Virak had a different experience on achieving academic success than George and Vee as the oldest son and sibling in his family. Virak's parents did not pressure him to set a good example for his two younger sisters to do well in school, but they always encouraged, expected, and supported him to attend college.

Participants' who are one of the younger siblings in the family asked their older sibling for homework help but received no help from them. Rith and Aurora had negative experiences when they asked their older sister for homework help. Rith's sister was impatient with him when she helped him with his homework, so he ended up learning to do his homework on his own. In Aurora's case her older sister told her to "ruff it out because she had ruffed it out". Interestingly, Sophie asked her younger brother for help with her math homework since math was his strongest subject. Sophie received homework help from her younger brother who was proud to assist her.

All the participants' described their family providing them with food and shelter as their form of support because that was all they could provide at the time. Spending valuable time together as a family was important for the participants because it made them feel cared for and appreciated. Many of the participants spent family time having picnics at the park and going to the beach together. Once the family became busy and the children were growing up there was less family time. All the participants shared memories of having dinner with their family sitting on a traditional Cambodian woven mat. They shared how there was always food on the table

when they returned home from school. When Grace moved out of her family house and lived in the dormitory during college, she ate ramen for most of her meals because her scholarship did not cover the extra expenses and college fees. One night in college, Grace snuck into her oldest Aunt's apartment for food while her Aunt was not there. Her aunt happened to come home early and caught Grace going through the refrigerator, so the Aunt made her a meal without asking her any question. When the family purchased their first car it gave the participants more time to study and less time walking or riding the bus to school. A few of the participants reflected on how their parents bought them shoes for over \$100 because they wanted them to fit in with their peers. Several of the participants recalled wearing the same puffer jacket they were given during their arrival in the United States for almost a decade. A couple of the participants even wore shoes that were too tight for them and gave them blisters because they could not afford to buy shoes. Sara shared how she wore a brown puffer jacket during the summer time when she lived in Chicago and thought it was strange that the pedestrians passing her were wearing shorts.

Gender and Relative Age in the Family

George, Sochad, Vincent, and Virak are the four participants that are the oldest male child in their family, so their parents expected them to take the responsibility of caring for their younger siblings. Vincent shared how this cultural value applied to him since his parents expected him to help his younger family members with their school assignments. In addition, George took on his father's role when his father passed away, leaving behind his wife and ten children. When he first took on the new role as father, he disciplined his nine siblings to act properly the same way his traditional Khmer father disciplined him:

I believe in discipline, but sometimes it could be child abuse... I'm not gonna lie. Dad was putting the cable wires together and beating the shit out of you. And sometimes you need it... Like, hey dude, you gotta calm down. So, it passed down you know. He hit me, so I hit my brothers and sisters. But you learn from it. You don't do that anymore. He (his father) didn't know any better.

George's role as the "new" father in his family was to ensure his siblings were well disciplined and he "made sure [his] siblings would clean and cook for [him]". It was important for his siblings to be disciplined, so his family could maintain "face" after his father passed away. "Face" is a concept where the family gains respect from community members. George also had a part time job during high school to financially support his family and help his family to keep "face". When George graduated from high school, he was unable to balance work and college. He had to make a choice between earning a college degree or supporting his family. He ended up choosing the latter because he was family oriented and placed his own needs second.

It was difficult for the participants' families to maintain "face" when the children grew up in America and are exposed to more American values than Cambodian values. For instance, Virak's marriage with a Caucasian woman caused his family to lose "face" because he did not marry a Khmer woman and did not have a traditional Khmer wedding. Virak expressed how he disappointed his parents in terms of familial duty as the oldest son in the family because his grandmother and mother expected him to "keep tradition going and marry a Khmer woman who can raise kids properly" by teaching the children Khmer language, music, dance and other aspects of Khmer culture. Virak was even surprised at himself for marrying a Caucasian woman since he grew up with the mentality and cultural influence to marry a Khmer woman.

The female participants also experienced having to challenge the traditional Khmer gender roles as they embraced American values. Cassidy discussed how she embraced the American value of freedom since it gives her a voice to choose her own partner to marry. She

views arranged marriages as repressive for females. She argued that the typical outcome of arranged marriages ends up in divorce because the wife and the husband never had the chance to know if they share any common interests. All the females who are married ended up choosing their own partners and had a traditional Khmer wedding. Aurora married a French man and they had a small Western wedding style in France with only her husband's side of the family attending. Since Aurora is the first daughter to get married in her family her mother planned her a traditional Khmer wedding. Aurora did not want to have a Khmer wedding but chose to have one so she could please her mother. Grace mentioned that she enjoyed playing volleyball with her church friends. In traditional Khmer culture females are expected to not engage in contact sports. Aurora and Survivor were members of one of their high school sports teams and their parents allowed them to join the team because they valued extracurricular activities. The main Cambodian gender role that the female participants challenged was obtaining an education. Almost all the female participants, except Sara, completed their bachelor's degree and some participants even pursued education further. Grace shared a story she overheard from members in the Long Beach community about a Cambodian female who held a high ranking position for one of the Cambodian organizations. That Cambodian female ended up quitting her job because "the men were given more status, more respect than her", and she was disliked for being outspoken as a Khmer woman. Grace also mentioned that she noticed a generational difference between the 1.5 and second-generation. According to Grace, the 1.5 generation Cambodians were pressured to meet gender role expectations, while second-generation Cambodian Americans are more outspoken and have less pressure to meet gender role expectations.

Self-Motivation

The participants attributed the main source of their academic achievements to themselves. Even though they received support from their family, school, and community, there was a common narrative that they went out of their way to seek support from them. There were many times when they sought help from their family members, counselors, or other Cambodians in their community but did not receive the help they sought. In the case of Jason, his counselor did not provide him with the guidance he was hoping for when he mentioned taking a leave of absence. Jason ended up creating his own educational path that aligned with his financial circumstances at the time. He worked full time to save enough money to pay for college. "I knew I was going to go back to school, but I just needed time". He eventually returned to school, completed community college, and transferred to a university for his Bachelor's degree in Communications. Grace recalled that she constantly visited the counselor's office in high school to ask which classes she needed to take and if there were any scholarships available. Her active approach reaching out to counselors, in addition to her own motivation to earn straight A's paid off since she received college scholarships. When Steve applied for a college scholarship, he had to write a statement of purpose essay, so he positioned himself as being a child of genocide survivors, the first person in his family to attend college, and a young male who grew up in "the hood". He ended up receiving the scholarship which paid for his college tuition and fees for a year. Steve shares his experience of positioning his multiple identities with the youths in the Long Beach Cambodian community he volunteers for. He tells the youth to use their Cambodian identity and their family's history as a tool that can open many doors.

Friends and peers provided the participants with the motivation to complete high school. However, they argued they were active in choosing their friends that valued education like

themselves. Virak states his success in life is due to his parents' value on education and having friends that cared about education. All the participants mentioned receiving limited assistance navigating the education system and being committed in seeking resources to navigate the education system so they can achieve academic success. Lee shares a common experience of being a self-starter, which resonated with the other participants:

You have to work your way around just knowing the system and stuff. We didn't have the mentor or support, you had to do it on your own.

The participants were self-motivated who sought support to guide them towards educational success. Grace had the mentality "to study smart and use the free assistance centers on campus" such as tutoring centers and programs for first generation college students. When the participants' teachers and counselors did not provide them with resources, they sought external support from their community and family. The barriers of their parents being unfamiliar with the American educational system and teachers viewing them as academic failures did not prevent them from graduating high school and obtaining a college degree.

Cassidy emphasized how imperative it is for Cambodians earning higher education to reach out and seek support from their support groups since college can be demanding. She argued that academia is challenging for Cambodian students because they lack role models that have gone through the experience of higher education. After Sam earned his B.S. in Applied Physics, he reached out to the first-wave of Cambodian refugees in the United States that worked in the aerospace industry for advice on how he should approach applying for a job and pursue a career. They told him he was too young to start a career and should stay in school. When Lee was in college, he encountered difficult courses and felt like giving up. He reminded himself that his parents had come so far to rebuild their lives in the United States with their limited English

skills and he wanted to be the first person in his family to graduate from college so he could make his parents proud. His persistence to earn his B.A. in Sociology was possible when he placed himself in his parents' position and understood the future that they wanted him to have.

Participants were also self-motivated to learn about their family's history. Many of the younger participants, such as Jason, Grace, Aurora, and Steve, discussed learning the history of the Holocaust multiple times during their formal education years but never learned about the Cambodian genocide. Some participants were interested to find out about their parents' experiences during the Khmer Rouge so they could understand their parents and themselves better. They watched documentaries, such as *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Fields*, *First They Killed My Father*, and read books ranging from autobiographical accounts or historical novels on the Khmer Kingdom under King Jayavarman. Virak felt connected with the protagonist of a novel called *Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick because the protagonist reminded him of some experiences he has gone through. Jason and Steve mentioned how Public Broadcasting Studio (PBS) released a short documentary called *Pass or Fail in Cambodia Town* that depicts Cambodians struggling to achieve academic attainment. Steve was upset that the media keeps portraying Cambodians in a negative light. He has some friends that were once part of gangs growing up and graduated from high school, so his experience shows a different side of the documentary. All the participants wanted to hear people talk more about the richness of Khmer civilization instead of the failures of Cambodians.

Now that most of the participants are adults and even have families of their own, they are being the kind of role models for their children that they wish they had growing up. Their self-motivation to give back to the next generation comes from their experience of navigating the educational system on "survival mode" with few resources, feeling lost and in doubt, at times,

However, George felt excluded from his family because he felt pressured to meet the demands of his family, which felt like a job more than a family responsibility. Grace, Star, Jason, and Sara felt like they did not belong in their family because they did not spend a lot of time with their but they remembered their roots to keep them grounded. All the participants, regardless of place of birth said they are Khmer because of blood. The participants who were born in Cambodia identified themselves as Khmer in the soil and in blood. The key experience and characteristic of being a member of the 1.5 generation Cambodian American group is resiliency. Resilience to change the narrative of what it means to be a successful 1.5 generation Cambodian American refugee.

Conclusion

I will discuss variations among my participants and their experiences which are summarized in Table 2: Variations across Participants. There are nine categories in table 2 that presents the results for the eighteen participants. The first six categories refer to how the participants believed they felt growing up from resettlement to when they started their career. Acceptance refers to the feeling of having their ideas and values validated. Belonging is the feeling of inclusion.

The first category is family acceptance and belonging. All participants felt their family accepted them except for Steve. Steve was the only participant that associated with Cambodian gangsters growing up. His parents, like the rest of the participants' parents, expected their children to have good friends that would not get them into trouble. Steve did not discuss having any encounters with the law because some of his friends were former gangsters. The rest of the participants felt their family provided validation of their educational choices.

Table 2a
 Variations across Participants: Categories 1-5

| Pseudonyms | Category 1 Family Acceptance and Belonging | Category 2 School Acceptance and Belonging | Category 3 Community Acceptance and Belonging | Category 4 Discrimination and Racism | Category 5 Educational Expectations |
|-------------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| Aurora | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y | Explore interests |
| Bunthy | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/Y | N | Earn a college degree and become self-sufficient |
| Cassidy | Y/Y | N/Y | Y/Y | Y | Earn a college degree to provide resources for ethnic community |
| Channeth | Y/Y | | Y/Y | Y | Work full time to become self-sufficient |
| George | Y/N | N/N | Y/Y | Y | Counselors and teachers expected to provide resources |
| Grace | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y | Earn a college degree to provide resources for ethnic community |
| Jason | Y/N | Y/N | Y/Y | Y | Explore potential interests |
| Lee | Y/Y | Y/N | Y/Y | Y | Counselors and teachers expected to provide resources; |

(Continued on following page)

Table 2a. Continued

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|---|--|
| | | | | | Earn a college degree to provide resources for ethnic community |
| Rith | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/N | | Learn material on own |
| Sam | Y/Y | Y/N | Y/N | Y | Learn material on own |
| Sara | Y/Y | | Y/N | Y | Learn English and work full time |
| Star | Y/N | Y/N | N/N | | Explore potential interests |
| Steve | N/Y | Y/N | Y/Y | Y | Gain skills through informal education to prepare for real life encounters |
| Survivor | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/Y | N | Parents involved with child's education |
| Sochad | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/Y | N | Explore potential interests |
| Sophie | Y/Y | Y/N | Y/Y | Y | Expected teachers to teach and learn materials |
| Vincent | Y/Y | Y/N | Y/N | Y | Counselors and teachers expected to provide resources |
| Virak | Y/Y | Y/Y | Y/Y | N | Learn to balance time effectively |

*Y is for yes and N is for no

*Empty cells not mentioned by participants

(Continued on following page)

Table 2b
 Variations across Participants: Categories 6-9

| Pseudonyms | Category 6 Support of Family | Category 7 Age and Gender in Relation to Family | Category 8 First Language | Category 9 Agency: Self-Motivator |
|-------------------|---|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Aurora | Y | Female; second oldest out of 5 children | English | Y |
| Bunthy | Y | Male; only child | Khmer | Y |
| Cassidy | Y | Female; second oldest out of four children | Khmer | Y |
| Channeth | Y | Male; third youngest out of 10 children | Khmer | Y |
| George | | Male; oldest child out of 10 children | English | Y |
| Grace | Y | Female; only child | Khmer | Y |
| Jason | | Male; middle child out of 5 children | English | Y |
| Lee | Y | Male; middle child out of 3 children | English | Y |

(Continued on following page)

Table 2b. Continued.

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|--|-------------------|---|
| Rith | Y | Male; second youngest child out of 5 children | Khmer | Y |
| Sam | Y | Male; youngest out of 2 children in the family | | Y |
| Sara | | Female ; only child | Khmer | Y |
| Star | N | Male; second to youngest child out of 7 children | English | Y |
| Steve | | Male; second to youngest child out of 4 children | English | Y |
| Survivor | Y | Female; only child | English and Khmer | Y |
| Sochad | | Male; oldest child out of four children | English | Y |
| Sophie | Y | Female; second youngest out of 10 children | Khmer | Y |
| Vincent | N | Male; oldest child out of 4 children | English | Y |
| Virak | Y | Male; oldest child out of 3 children | English | Y |

There were five participants that felt like they did not belong in their family growing up. George felt accepted by his family because they relied on him for assistance as the oldest male in the family. Grace spent her time studying, Star spent his time exploring his interests alone, Jason spent time on the internet to connect with his virtual friends, and Sara spent her time working during the day and going to school at night.

The second category, school acceptance and belonging, resulted in two participants that did not feel accepted and eight participants that felt like they did not belong in school. George and Cassidy did not feel accepted in school because they believed their behaviors were different than their peers. They were raised with the knowledge of respecting teachers and believed their timid behavior was not accepted in their class when they saw their peers misbehaving and disrespecting their teacher. Sam, Lee, Vincent, George, Star, Steve, Jason, and Sophie did not feel like they belonged in school. They were the participants that had less student-teacher interactions during their K-12 school years. Out of the eight participants, Sam was the only participant that grew up outside of the Long Beach community, so he had less encountered with discrimination. However, he was one of the few Cambodians at his school which explains why he felt like he did not belong in school. For the other seven participants they did not believe they belonged in school due to racial segregation on campus. Channeth and Sara spent a minimal amount of time in school and vaguely discussed their experience in school.

The third variable was community acceptance and belonging. Two participants that did not feel accepted and three participants that did not feel like they belonged in their community. Star dissociated himself from the Cambodian community because he wanted to have a separate identity from the Cambodians that were gangsters. Cassidy felt like the community did not accept her because she enjoyed doing activities that went against the traditional gender role. The

rest of the participants who believed their community accepted them had strong relationships with members in their community. Sam, Rith, and Star did not feel like they belonged to the community because they did not spend time in the Cambodian community. Sam and Rith grew up in a city outside of the Long Beach Cambodian Community and did not have the transportation to go there.

The participants used the terms discrimination and racism interchangeable. Eleven participants mentioned encountering discrimination and racism growing up. Sara encountered being discriminated against when she lived in Maine. The Vietnam veterans harassed her with inappropriate sex jokes for being an Asian female. Channeth experienced racism at work when the group of Hispanic workers called him “chino”. Channeth explained that they used the term for anyone that was Asian. Sam, Rith, Star, Virak, Survivor, Sochad, and Bunthy are the seven participants that believed they did not encounter discrimination and racism growing up. Star kept himself isolated which explains why he did not encounter discrimination and racism. Bunthy and Virak viewed themselves as smart and motivated to graduate high school, so they knew the stereotype of Cambodian students did not apply to them. Sam, Rith, Virak, Survivor, and Sochad grew up in a community outside of Long Beach, so they did not directly encounter discrimination and racism.

The fifth category, educational expectations, had various responses. Four participants expected to explore potential interests during their education. Four participants expected to earn a college degree to gain the knowledge and skills to provide resources for the Cambodian community. Three participants expected their counselors and teachers to provide them with resources on becoming successful students. Two participants expected to learn the educational materials on their own and receive no assistance.

There were seven educational expectations that were mentioned once:

- Learn English and find employment
- Learn to balance time effectively
- Earn a college degree to become self-sufficient
- Gain skills through informal education to prepare for real life encounters
- Parents to be involved with their education experiences
- Teachers teach and ensure the students learn the materials
- Work full time to become self-sufficient

The sixth category is the support of family. All participants acknowledged their parents provided them with food and a place to live as a form of support. So, this category refers to other forms of support. Eleven participants felt their family supported them and seven participants did not feel their family provided support. The eleven participants that felt supported had family that was a source of motivation and checked in on them to make sure they completed their school assignments. Five participants did not feel supported by their families because their family expected them to attend college, but their family did not motivate them to do well in school. Sochad's family did not support his move to Long Beach after community college because his parents intentionally moved to a city a couple of hours away from Long Beach, so he would not associate with Cambodians in Long Beach.

The last three categories are factors that explain the variations in the participants' responses to the former six categories. The seventh category is gender and relation of age in the family. There are twelve male and six female participants. Five children in a family is the median when calculating the number of siblings in each family. There are four males that are the oldest

child in their family. Four participants are the only child in their family. The eight category is the participants' first language. Eight participants' first language was Khmer, nine participants' first language was English, and one participant grew up with both English and Khmer. The last category is agency: self-motivation. All participants felt motivated to learn and achieve success. Despite lacking the resources and knowledge on how to navigate the academic and career system, the participants used the assets from their family and community available to them. They all used their assets in creative ways to benefit their needs. All participants revealed vast examples of having agency throughout their educational trajectory.

The eighteen participants for this thesis described their educational experiences centered around having agency to overcome barriers and gaining opportunities. In the next chapter I provide an in-depth analysis of the data based on the analytical frameworks that guided the study. The concepts of Yosso's community cultural wealth, Bourdieu's capital and social capital, Appadurai's 'scapes, and Hall's cultural identity are used to discuss how the findings align with the literature.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a more in depth analysis of the issues that are raised in chapter four. The chapter focuses on situating the concepts of community cultural wealth, cultural and social capital, ethnoscaples, and cultural identity on the three themes that emerged from analyzing the data. The three themes are 1.) support system, 2.) cultural and generational differences, and 3.) exploring identities. For the first theme I focus on the six capital of Yosso's community cultural wealth theory and Bourdieu's social and cultural capital to understand the educational aspirations and achievements of the participants based on the amount of support they received. For the second main research question I will utilize the concept of ethnoscaples, technoscaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples to understand how cultural and generational differences the participants encountered shaped their educational choices and processes of ethnic identity negotiation. I will then use Hall's concept of cultural identity to answer the second sub-question on the shared experiences that define membership into the 1.5 generation. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on the analytical findings focusing on agency and how the conceptual frameworks intersect each other to reveal what the educational experiences of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans are from the time of resettling in the United States to the present.

Educational Aspirations and Achievements: Support through Capital

Chapter 4 presented the types of supports the participants did or did not receive from their parents, siblings, friends/peers, teachers, and counselors. There are four types of support the participants received from their support group, which are appraisal, emotional, informational, and instrumental. These types of support relate to the six capital from Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory, as well as Bourdieu's (1990) cultural and social capital.

Aspirational, Familial, and Resistant Capital

Aspirational capital is the ability to remain optimistic and hopeful for the future in stressful circumstances (Yosso 2005:78). The participants who are genocide survivors and participants whose parents are genocide survivors were hopeful in staying alive under the Khmer Rouge rule. Lee's mother and Sophie risked their lives to escape Cambodia since they crossed the jungle filled with landmines to reach the Thai border. During the Pol Pot Era formal education was abolished, so Sam, Rith, and Bunthy were hopeful to have formal education once they received sponsorship to resettle in a different country (Ong 2003:34). When the participants received sponsorship, they were faced with many challenges as refugee newcomers, including: a language barrier, racism, financial constraints, and differences in cultural values and behaviors. The findings are consistent with the literature on the challenges refugees faced during their resettlement process (Ong 2003; Chan 2004).

The language barrier was a common challenge for participants who resettled in the United States as adolescents. Once the participants enrolled in high school, they were placed in an ESL class and eventually moved into a regular English course. As Sophie and Grace

mentioned their peers teased them for having an accent and mispronouncing words, but they still aspired to learn English because their family expected them to do well in school. For Sam and Rith English was a barrier to learning because they felt vulnerable falling behind in class. They used aspirational capital to enroll themselves in summer school so they could have the same level of knowledge as their peers.

There are differences in the qualities of teaching and learning between underfunded and funded schools. Aurora had a negative learning experience at the underfunded middle school she attended. Her seventh grade science teacher did not teach the course curriculum and did not make sure the students learned the course materials. Instead, her teacher made the students learn the material on their own, so she can supervise the students that were misbehaving in class. Aurora's experience confirms Museus et al. (2011) findings on the low quality of education students from underserved schools received. Despite the poor quality of education that Aurora received, she used aspirational capital to earn an A in her seventh grade science class because she was hopeful that she could meet her family's expectations of her to do well in school. Findings on Cambodian students drawing upon their family as aspirational and cultural capital confirms the studies of Chhuon and Hudley's (2011:696) and Tang et al. (2013:7).

Familial capital is the ability to recognize the strengths and contributions of family kinship, as well as gaining cultural knowledge of their kinship community to enhance resources (Yosso 2005). Participants such as Sophie, Channeth, Rith possessed familial capital since their family sponsored them to come in the United States. Their family provided them with resources to assist with their resettlement process. Most of the participants resettled in crowded living conditions. The small living space family members shared allowed the participants to gain familial capital because family members were constantly encountering each other. The

participants learned Cambodian values and traditions from hearing the adults in their household speak Khmer, eating Khmer food on the woven floor mat, and celebrating Cambodian New Years.

The participants were even a source of familial capital for their parents. Parents were aware that their children developed English language skills faster than them because they learned it through formal education (Zhou and Bankston 2000). Lee and Aurora's parents made them respond to them in English growing up. The literature suggests that parents had their children speak English in the household to improve their English skills. In addition, Lee's and Aurora's parents believed that by their children speaking English would lead to them becoming Americanized. Their parents' expectation of acculturating to the dominant English language confirms the literature on American expectations for refugees to speak English (Smith-Hefner 1999; Mortland 2010).

The participants used both familial and aspirational capital to remain in college when school became difficult (Tang et al. 2013:12). For instance, Lee reflected on his family's history and the sacrifices and challenges his parents overcame to rebuild their lives in America. This reflection encouraged Lee to persevere with earning his college degree. Participants used their family members with a college degree as familial capital. The college graduates in their family were role models for the participants to achieve academic success (Chhuon et al. 2010:38). The college graduates in their family were also a source of familial capital since they provided resources and knowledge on the college process. It was more common for the participants to have role models outside of their family that possessed a college degree. Sam reached out to the first-wave of Cambodian refugees in the United States for advice after he graduated with his B.S. in Applied Physics. The first-wave Cambodians Sam approached are middle-class and worked

for the aerospace industry, which aligns with Mortland's (2010) characteristics of first-wave Cambodians in the United States. Sam asked the first-wave Cambodians how to navigate the career pathway given his degree, but they told him to return back to school. This finding agrees with Waters et al. (2010) argument on refugees increasing their chance of upward mobility if they maintain ties with educated and middle-class members in their ethnic group.

Education allowed families to enhance their social status within the community. Therefore, participants aspired to do well in school to maintain and/or gain "face" in their family. The literature suggests Cambodian parents were more concerned with losing face if their children went against Cambodian norms instead of earning their college degree (Smith-Hefner 1990:155,185) For instance, Virak's family was more concerned that he made his family lose "face" when he married a Caucasian woman instead of appreciating the college degree he earned.

Resistant capital is the ability to persist and resist negative stereotypes, discrimination, and other negative dominant narratives as a tool for motivation. Almost all the participants used resistant capital to challenge the government controlling their movement through secondary migration, which Ong refers to as Foucault's concept of governmentality. The participants' reasons for second migration confirms the literature on secondary migration, in that, it occurred for participants to have better job opportunities, suitable weather, access to ethnic services, and to be near family (Mortland and Ledgerwood 1987; Phyle 2007). George and Lee's family migrated to Long Beach for better medical services, while other participants migrated to be near family and a Cambodian community. Many participants had multiple migrations before they settled in Long Beach or a city on the outskirts of Long Beach.

The participants also challenged American expectation of assimilating to American culture and becoming self-sufficient, successful citizens (Smith-Hefner 1999; Mortland 1994). Sara and Sam discussed their preference for Cambodian food over American food. Since they both resettled in a non-Asian community, they had to go out of their way to buy groceries at the nearest Asian market. Participants also resisted the stereotype of Cambodian students as low achievers, trouble makers, academic failures, high school dropouts, and gangsters (Chhuon 2014; Chhuon and Hudley 2010). They did not let the negative stereotypes define their aspiration for academic success. As Chhuon (2014) discusses in *I'm Khmer and I'm Not a Gangster*, teachers stereotyped Cambodian males as gangsters, underachievers, and high school dropouts. The male participants in this study encountered the same stereotypes Chhuon discusses in his study from their K-12 teachers and counselors. This stereotype impacted the participants' ability to learn since they faced discrimination, segregation, and racial profiling in the school setting. The male participants that encountered being stereotyped as gangsters and high school dropouts attended an underfunded school in an inner-city neighborhood in Long Beach. Those male participants attended an inner-city school that aligns with the characteristics of underfunded schools in an inner city discussed in Museus et al.'s (2011) report. The male participants who grew up in Long Beach used resistant capital to resist the Cambodian stereotype being applied to them. Their forms of resistances were the opposite of what others expected of Cambodians. They resisted through not joining a gang, doing well in school, and earning their high school diploma.

Cambodian students, regardless of gender, faced the stereotype of Cambodian students being academic failures and underachievers. When Grace moved to a high school with a predominantly Vietnamese high school population, she aligned with being Vietnamese because they are known to have better academic achievement than Cambodian students (Zhou and

Bankston 1998). Bunthy embraced the stereotype of Asians being smart to resist the Cambodian student stereotype. Bunthy's usage of racial identity instead of his ethnic identity provided him with confidence to achieve academic success because his peers and teachers expected him to meet the model minority stereotype. Bunthy, like Grace, participated in class discussions and raised his hands often which goes against the idea of Cambodian students being quiet in class (Smith-Hefner 1999; Wallitt 2008). The model minority myth assisted Bunthy with achieving academic success. However, the model minority myth is a misconception since it does not apply to all Asian ethnic groups. The historical context in relation to the cultural and social capital between East Asian Americans and SEA Americans varied. SEA Americans recently arrived in the United States with little to no socio-cultural capital, which made it difficult for them to thrive in America (Lee 1994:416). Yang's (2003) findings presented in Vann's (2015) dissertation and Chow's (2017) article discussed East Asian Americans having more knowledge and resources to navigate American institutions than SEA students (Chow 2017:4). Findings from the study confirms Chow, Lee, and Yang's argument that the model minority myth masks the historical, socioeconomic, and cultural differences of Cambodian students.

Furthermore, the participants used resistance capital when they and other Cambodians throughout Southern California gathered together annually to celebrate Cambodian New Year's at El Dorado Regional Park in Long Beach. With the rise of racial gang fights in Long Beach which occurred when Cambodian refugees arrived in large numbers, the city was portrayed as dangerous. Therefore, many members of the greater Long Beach community disliked Cambodians for portraying their city in a negative light. Despite being unwelcomed and unaccepted from their community Cambodians used resistance capital to make their presence known when they celebrated Cambodian New Year.

Cultural and Linguistic Capital

Cultural capital is what individuals know and have from socialization into a particular class. According to Bourdieu, “cultural capital is the instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (1990:125). For the purpose of this research I present cultural capital of American and Cambodian culture. In both cultures owning a television is a form of cultural capital because it is a resource owned by the majority of society who are part of the middle-class. Therefore, Sam’s family had cultural capital growing up in Cambodia since his family owned a television during the 1970’s. The television provided Sam with American cultural knowledge. Many of the participants were unfamiliar with American culture before their resettlement. As they awaited sponsorship for resettlement, the American government established processing centers in Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines to familiarize refugees with American culture. The training centers taught refugees some of the basic norms of American culture including English language and knowledge on how to use modern technology. The literature confirms Rith’s description of the training center at the processing center for resettlement in America being aimed at providing refugees with American cultural capital.

Many of the participants lacked American cultural capital when they resettled in America. They lived in inner-city neighborhoods which restricted upward mobility (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Vincent’s parents wanted him to attend a predominantly White high school located in a safe neighborhood, so he could be surrounded by Caucasian students that could assist him with gaining cultural and social capital. Aurora, Bunthy, and Lee are some of the participants who lived in an inner-city neighborhood that lacked opportunities to gain academic success which

confirms Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) study. However, those participants achieved academic success regardless of where they attended school since they used the capital Yosso defined in her study (2005).

The participants gained American cultural capital when they dressed in the latest style of clothing. For instance, some of the participants mentioned that their parents bought them expensive shoes, even though it went over their family's monthly budget. It was uncommon for participants to maintain their cultural capital of attire while growing up because of financial constraint. Other participants lacked cultural capital when it came to knowledge of American attire. Sara was unaware that there are different clothing styles based on seasons. She wore a thick jacket in the middle of summer while Chicagoans were dressed in shorts and short sleeve shirts.

The participants discussed differences in cultural knowledge between American and Cambodian forms of discipline. Cambodian forms of disciplines are regarded as child abuse for many Americans. Cambodian parents lack cultural capital on the concept of child abuse. They allow teachers to hit their child if they misbehave in class and parents even hit their own children for misconduct. When George took on the role as the father in his family after his father passed away, he used the form of discipline he had learned from his father on his siblings. He used to hit his siblings with a wire as a discipline method, but later realized his form of discipline was child abuse once he gained American cultural capital on that topic. Thus, George's Cambodian cultural capital of discipline used in America is viewed in a negative light. Contrastingly, Americans are unaware of coining which is a traditional form of medicine used by Cambodians and other Asian ethnic groups. Coining causes red marks on the skin, so many Americans believe the red marks are caused from child abuse. Virak notes Cambodian students who arrived

in school with red streaks on their skin from being coined had to explain to their teacher that the red marks came from coining.

Smith-Hefner (1999) notes the 1.5 and second-generation Cambodians have Cambodian cultural capital in the Bordieuan view of capital because they are aware of traditional Khmer values and customs including: language, arranged marriage, traditional weddings, and gender role expectations. Most of the participants that are married have cultural knowledge of Khmer marriage. The participants possessed Bordieuan cultural capital because they were socialized as children on the various aspects of an appropriate Khmer wedding. They ended up marrying a Cambodian partner and had a traditional Cambodian wedding since it was expected of them as a Cambodian child. Virak and Aurora are the two participants that had an American style wedding and married a non-Cambodian partner. Virak is married to an American woman and Aurora is married to a French man. They both were unaware of what a Khmer wedding entails and did not see the value of having a traditional wedding. Aurora ended up having two weddings, one in France and one in America. Aurora's mother wanted her to have a Cambodian wedding to follow Khmer traditions, as well as missing her daughter's wedding since it was in France. Aurora was not interested in having a traditional Khmer wedding, but agreed to have one, so she could meet her mother's request.

Khmer language differs from English because it reflects Cambodian values of hierarchy and respecting elders (Keyes 1977; Mortland 2010). Khmer vocabulary denotes age, gender, and status. For instance, Grace mentioned there is a difference between formal and colloquial Khmer language that reveals one's social status. She argued that colloquial Khmer language includes cursing which is used to express closeness. Participants who were unaware of how Cambodians express their emotions through language assumed their parents did not care for them. Thus, those

participants did not possess Cambodian cultural knowledge on how emotions are expressed. This assumption is invalid because the children lack cultural knowledge on how their parents express emotions.

Linguistic capital is the ability to develop intellectual and social skills from experiences communicating in multiple languages (Yosso 2005:78). Sara used her linguistic capital of knowing French to help her learn English quickly. She mentioned her listening and verbal English skills are sufficient but her writing skill is below average. As Bourdieu notes (1990:67, 102-108) grammar can be learned through formal education which increases cultural capital. Foreign language clubs provide club members with a deeper understanding of the language culture, in addition to having extra time outside of the classroom to practice the language. Aurora was interested in fashion design and given France is the fashion capital of the world, she enrolled herself in French language courses during high school and college. Learning the language and understanding the culture allowed her to navigate her time in France during her study abroad trip there. The German club provided Jason with linguistic capital because he could translate German songs.

Since children have better English language skills than their parents it causes a role reversal in the family (Foner and Dreby 2011; Rumbaut 1996b). The children end up taking on the role as parents which disrupts the Khmer value of hierarchy since parents have higher authority based on age. Most of the participants used linguistic capital to be an English translator for their parents. Some of the participants such as Lee, Vincent, Jason, and Bunthy discussed filing out emergency cards for school, translating documents for their parents, and writing absence notes for schools since their parents have low English language skills. This finding confirms the literature (Ong 2003; Rumbaut and Ima 1988; Smith-Hefner 1999) on refugee

children taking on parental responsibilities because their parents lack English language skills. In hindsight, the participants mentioned the role reversal benefitted them since they gained soft skills, such as learning to balance time, communicating with parents, and improving their speaking and writing skills.

Navigational and Social Capital

Navigational capital is the ability and strategies to navigate hostile, social institutions using skills to negotiate microaggressions. Counselors and professors are forms of navigational capital that assist students with information to navigate the higher education system (Tang 2013). Cassidy felt that members in her PhD. cohort believed she could not complete her degree because she lacked English writing skills as a refugee student. She used her advisor as a form of navigational capital to assist her with the writing process of the dissertation. She asked her advisor to provide an example of how to write a dissertation. Her advisor provided her with an example of a former dissertation along with other resources to help her complete her dissertation.

Steve mentioned how his friends, who are older than him, helped him to fill out his college application and the financial aid application. His friends provided advice on how to navigate community college effectively. Lee's older sister did not attend college after she earned her high school diploma, so Lee was the first person in his family to earn his college degree. He mentioned one of the reasons he went to college was to be a role model for his younger sibling. He wanted to be a source of navigational capital for his younger sister, so he could help her navigate the education system in a way similar to the participant, Navy, in Chhuon et al.'s study (2010), titled *The Multiple Worlds of Successful Cambodian American Students*. At the workplace, Rith used navigational capital to be one of the first employees in his workplace to

sign up for having his college tuition paid for by his workplace. Rith used his navigational skill to find financial resources that supported him in achieving his academic goal of earning a college degree.

Jason expected his community college counselor to be a source of navigational capital. He expected his counselor to provide him with advice on how to navigate the career pathway while he temporarily leaves college, until he could save enough money to return back. Instead, his counselor suggested that he remain in college without considering his financial situation. Jason's university counselor was a form of navigational capital since he provided Jason with a roadmap of courses that he is required to take every semester if he wants to graduate on time. Many of the participants' main form of navigational capital during their educational trajectory in college came from their university professors, tutoring and writing centers, and advisors. The support from various members and programs at the university created a space for the participants to feel accepted.

Social capital includes the networks of social contacts that provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate social institutions (Yosso 2005:79). Bourdieu's definition of social capital is the relationships of kin relation, friends, and other influential networks used to obtain or maintain power (Bourdieu 1990). The role of siblings is an important source of social capital in Cambodian culture (Ebihara 1974). The participants who are the oldest child in the family were expected to take care of their younger siblings. There were mixed results regarding the literature on the role of siblings, since some participants who were the oldest child in their family fulfilled their responsibilities in that role while other participants' older siblings did not. To fulfill their familial duty as the oldest sibling in the family, he/she was expected to be a positive role model. George went to school and worked a part-time job to support his family, so he could

provide them with social capital. Several of the participants including Lee, Aurora, and Rith, did not receive homework help from their older siblings. Vincent, who is the oldest child in his family provided his younger siblings, nieces, and nephews with help in their school assignments.

Cambodian neighbors and friends were the main sources of social capital for the participants (Tang 2013:3). Some of the participants, such as Lee, Steve, and Vincent, walked home together to support and protect each other from racist hate crimes, gangs, and racial profiling from community members in their neighborhood. When Sara resettled in Chicago, Illinois her Cambodian neighbors was her main source of social capital. They invited her and her family to dinner, which made Sara feel accepted and comfortable because she could eat Cambodian food and talk in Khmer. The neighbors were also a form of social capital based on Bourdieu's definition since they provided her with the knowledge and resources on where to buy groceries and organizations that could help her find a job. Chicago was one of the demonstration cities for the Khmer Cluster Project. The findings confirm the literature on the Khmer Cluster Project as being unsuccessful in preventing secondary migration, since Sara ended up migrating to Maine, then to California (Chan 2004; Smith-Hefner 1990). Sara's sponsor was supposed to be her source of social capital, but her sponsor did not assist her with adjusting to life in America.

In contrast, Vincent's sponsor was a source of social capital. His sponsor introduced his family to their church community. The church was a social institution that created trust amongst Vincent and his neighbors who attended the same church. The church was also a place for Vincent to connect with others and develop relationships. Vincent's family attended the church to show appreciation towards the church that sponsored them (Chan 2004). Vincent gained Bourdieuan social capital when he attended Sunday school and learned verses from the bible.

Understanding the stories in the bible provided him with cultural capital since it allowed him to be aware of biblical references in the literature he read in school.

Almost all the participants' main sources of social capital were their family and friends, who valued education and provided them with motivational support to assist with their academic success. The findings confirm the literature (Tang 2013; Chhuon and Hudley 2010) on friends and peers being the main social capital to navigate the education system. High school teachers and counselors were another source of social capital that provided informational and emotional support. Grace's ESL teacher provided her with emotional support when she doubted her English language capabilities. Sam's physics teacher also provided emotional support since he understood Sam's background as a SEA refugee. Both of their teachers understood their historical background as refugees, which made them feel understood and cared for. The findings align with Wright et al.'s (2011) recommendation for teachers, counselors, and other educators to understand their SEA students' historical and cultural background. This would help students to become engaged in school, which can potentially lead them towards academic success.

Appadurai's 'Scapes: Cultural and Generational Differences

Ethnoscapes

According to Appadurai, ethnoscapes are:

the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. (Appadurai 1990:33)

In other words, it refers to the flow of people who constitute the world in which we live and occupy, such as immigrants, refugees, exiles, tourists, etcetera. Most of the participants are part

of the third wave of Cambodians in the United States, post-1980. According to Mortland (2010), the third wave of Cambodian refugees consists of Cambodians typically from rural areas, are uneducated, and unfamiliar with Western culture. Findings from the study do not confirm Mortland's characteristics of the third-wave of Cambodians in the United States. Mortland's participants came from a unique location of the northwest side of Cambodia, which consisted of rural farmers. Instead, the study revealed the participants are educated and even if they came from rural backgrounds, they were familiar with urban lifestyle since their parents sent them to attend school in the city.

Participants that resettled in small towns confirmed Smith-Hefner's findings that the small towns refugees' resettled in had a small Asian population in a primarily white community (1999). The displacement of refugees to different cities across the States reveals how refugees changed the landscape of small towns. Ethnoscapes also reveal that many of the participants' process of migration from their homeland, refugee camps, to multiple migrations after resettlement in the States to their current resettlement in a city with a large Cambodian American community. Since the participants are not tied to a single locale they can move to different locations for economic or political reasons. Thus, the location participants chose to resettle in is a place where they could feel connected to their home country.

Some of the participants have visited Cambodia a couple of times since resettlement. Sam's return to Cambodia was because he wanted to give his deceased father a memorial ceremony, which reveals how he is linked to his homeland. Even though he could have had a memorial service in America with his mother he thought it would be respectful to have it in Cambodia, since that is the country where his father was born and passed away in. Sam even met

the Cambodian expectation of the children providing their parents with a nice funeral (Ebihara 1974:327).

Technoscapes and Mediascapes

Technoscapes is the flow of technology moving across boundaries that allows us to be connected. It is often the result of complex relationships built on flows of money, politics, and labor. The internet is the most recent example of technoscapes that has rapidly advanced within the last two decades. The internet allows people to constantly be connected with others around the world. Participants' maintain their connection with family and friends in different places through the various forms of technology including social network websites, phone apps, video calls, and transportation. For instance, Rith and Grace used a car to attend the annual New Year celebration in Long Beach to celebrate the holiday with other Cambodians, even though they lived in a different city.

Mediascapes is the distribution, consumption, and exchange of information that provide images and narratives to the world of itself (Appadurai 1990:35). A social media website called Myspace was a platform Jason used to connect with other people in different countries who share similar music interest. The mediascape of the Myspace chatroom allowed Jason and his virtual friends to exchange and consume information on music and other topics with each other. Mediascape is an important platform that informs the participants on Cambodian history, whether it is through documentaries, novels, art, or music. The documentary, *The Killing Fields*, was Virak's first encounter learning about the history and experiences of the Khmer Rouge. Many of the younger participants' parents did not share their experience of the Khmer Rouge growing up, so media was the main source they used to expand their knowledge of Cambodian

history. Additionally, the participants informally enhanced their English skills through television shows and music. The media exposed them to colloquial English and American popular culture. Technology and media assisted the Cambodian Americans with their educational attainment by providing them with resources outside of the classroom to be globally competent students. Sam used these two ‘scapes to keep him informed on current news when he came home after school to watch the news. The news was a media outlet that provided Sam with the correct answers on current events in one of his high school history courses. Sam’s school curriculum was relevant to the time period of when he was in high school and provided him with knowledge as a globally competent citizen. Giri Raj Sharma states:

[Educational] policies and curriculum is formulated under the norms and values of the state which carries the ideology of the ruling class people. While devising policies and curriculum, state forgets to observe the global demand and the growing competency. (Sharma 2014:5).

This highlights how dominant ideologies are transmitted through technology and media. Having exposure to American ideologies provided Cambodian Americans with the knowledge of the norms of society. The State and those who own television programs have power over the media content. The knowledge from the media helped the participants to achieve educational attainment because they were aware of national interests.

Appadurai mentions the information viewers consumed is based on their choice of media (Appadurai 1990:35). Steve did not fully agree with a PBS documentary that depicted the struggles of Cambodians achieving academic success because it portrayed Cambodians as academic failures, which he said was common when they first resettled in America. He did not agree with the information the documentary presented because he knows a lot of Cambodians who graduated high school and attended college. He suggests the discourse on Cambodians in

the media needs to change from the negative stories on Cambodians to Cambodians having a rich culture with ancestral roots back to a once powerful empire. Grace's teacher played the songs "Anything You Can Do (I Can Do Better)" and "Imagine" to the class. In essence, she argues her teacher purposely played the songs to show his understanding of the students' struggle. The mediascape of songs allowed bonds between students and teacher to form.

Ideoscapes

Ideoscapes are closely related landscapes of images... which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation,* and the master term *democracy*. (Appadurai 1990:35)

Channeth's view of the current Cambodian government being corrupt is the opposite of democracy, which is an ideology Channeth values since his resettlement. His ideology of democracy was influenced by his experience of resettling in America after escaping the Khmer Rouge. All the participants who are genocide survivors mentioned enjoying Western ideologies such as equality and welfare.

Gender equality is a Western ideology that all female participants agreed was necessary towards their educational journey. However, they did not encounter gender equality growing up in America. Sophie and Sara encountered being stereotyped as Asian females who are hyper-sexualized. There were instances when Caucasian males chased Sophie and Sara while they were walking home from school. Sara mentioned how a Vietnam war veteran harassed her on the streets with calls regarding having sexual encounters. Grace mentioned "women can be anything we want to be and even in this country I think as a woman you still aren't getting valued or respected as we should be". Grace's expectation of equality in America for all genders does not correspond with the gender inequality in America.

The ideologies of Cambodian and American educational system differ in values and expectations. Cambodians expect teachers to teach their children how to behave morally. In contrast, in America teachers are expected to engage students in class discussions. Cambodians value education because they believe the outcome of learning is to have their child become moral individuals. The value of education in the American education system is to have students becoming critical thinkers (Smith-Hefner 1999). Channeth and Vincent's experience of being hit by their Cambodian teachers aligns with Smith Hefner's findings on Cambodian teachers hitting their students as a form of discipline (1999). Aurora's understanding of the ideology that teachers are expected to teach the curriculum and ensure the students understand what is being taught.

The participants also embraced the American value of individualism once they turned 18 years old. They participated in school activities, chose their own class schedule, worked a part-time job, and spent time meeting up with friends and family to socialize. However, they struggled to find a balance between their own aspirations and meeting the expectations of their family. Since Cambodian parents did not pressure their children to earn a degree in a specific field, the children had autonomy to choose their own career path. This finding is consistent with Ima and Rumbaut's (1989) argument that Cambodian parents do not pressure their children to achieve a certain level of success which reduces their child's level of stress. In addition to embracing individualism, all the participants embraced other middle-class values such as self-reliance and goal orientation. These values along with being family oriented assisted them with attaining academic achievements. The participants continue to strive for finding the Buddhist's concept of the middle path to navigate their continuous educational experiences. Findings confirm the literature on the contention between traditional Khmer parents and their children who are becoming more Americanized (Smith-Hefner 1999).

Exploring Identities through Hall's Concept of Cultural Identity

Hall's idea of cultural identity consists of two parts: one, is the collective experiences of shared history and ancestry and two, the process of becoming through differences and discontinuities which is influenced by politics, memory, and desire (Hall 2003). The participants' shared experiences help to answer the second sub-question for this study on how those experiences affected their educational experiences growing up. The second part of Hall's cultural identity, the process of becoming, answers the first sub-question of the research regarding negotiating ethnic identity in relation to academic success. The participants' collective experiences are constructively situated to understand that the lifelong process of becoming represents the active formation, renegotiation, and unfolding of their identity.

Collective Experiences

One shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside many others. (Hall 1990:225).

The collective narratives of the participants highlight what it means to be a member of the 1.5 generation Cambodian American group through shared norms, beliefs, values, symbols, and practices. Hall (1990) describes "British identity" as comprised of the symbolic British flag, memories of World War II, and collective rituals such as the opening of Parliament (Barker 2008:227). There were various symbolic references the participants mentioned. All the participants discussed Cambodian culture as a "rich culture with a rich history" but provided an open interpretation of what that means. According to Sochad, Angkor Wat¹ is the symbol of

¹ Angkor Wat is an ancient temple complex constructed during the 12th century. It is the world's largest religious monument.

Cambodian identity. Since Angkor Wat is on the Cambodian flag it aligns with the British flag reference, in that, the flag is a part of British cultural identity. They all share the experience of celebrating Cambodian New Years at El Dorado Park and going to the temples during *Pchum Ben*. Participants who identify their religion as Christianity, such as Grace, Sohad, and Sara, still celebrated *Pchum Ben*. At these events their family prepares certain Khmer dishes, but they are unsure whether they are preparing the right traditional dishes. They share experiences of having to make decisions based on their family, which is one of the main collective experiences of being a member of the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans. The other main collective experience is realizing their identity at heart is being Cambodian/ Khmer because they share the same ancestral blood. This highlights the “authentic” cultural identity based on shared history and ancestry (Hall 1990:223-225). These events and items are symbolic aspects of identity.

Channeth, Grace, and other participants who are genocide survivors mentioned descriptions of Cambodian history that align with the literature of the Pol Pot Era. Channeth and Sara discussed the United States Air Force bombing Cambodia because Americans were trying to destroy the Vietnamese supply line in the country (Smith-Hefner 1999:3). They both provided accurate dates of the Cambodian civil war that occurred from 1970-1975. Those participants mentioned memories of being separated from their family and “doing anything to survive”. Knowledge on Cambodian history and memories of the war are characteristics that are part of the participants’ shared experiences.

All the participants encountered similar barriers and opportunities when they were adjusting to their diasporic lives in America. Cohen defines diaspora as refugees who cannot return to their idealized home country (2004). The participants who are genocide survivors discussed diaspora on the collective and individual level prior to the Khmer Rouge and after the

Khmer Rouge. Sara suggests Cambodians cannot return to the time when rural Cambodians welcomed strangers in their homes since Cambodians today have become greedy. Channeth argues Cambodians today are selfish because they learn that trait from the corrupt Cambodian leaders of the current government. Sara and Channeth's examples suggest life prior to the Khmer Rouge consisted of a fair government and friendly citizens demonstrating an idealized imagined homeland. On the individual level, returning to Cambodia will never be the same experience the participants remembered from before the war. Sophie sees no value in returning to Cambodia since her parents and older siblings who passed away under the Khmer Rouge and will not be there. She would not have the same social status as before, and she will return to a country with more buildings than trees. The younger participants' narratives affirm the older participants view that Cambodia will never return to what it once was before the war disrupted the country and killed a quarter of the Cambodian population.

Growing up, the participants based their educational decisions on what they believe would contribute best to their family while meeting their familial obligations. The collective value of family orientation conflicted with other values they wanted to embrace, such as individualism. Participants share a collective experience of trying to find a balance between making decisions for themselves while meeting the demands of their family. This collective experience expands Ong's view of citizenship, the process of finding a balance between one's own aspirations to attain freedom and the demands of the government. That shared experience highlights family as an additional demand that immigrants try to balance in the process of obtaining Ong's concept of citizenship.

Part of being family oriented entails caring for all family members for family is supposed to be at the center of one's life. I expected the older participants to be more family oriented than

the younger participants because they have more knowledge of Cambodian culture. However, all participants prioritized their family needs through actions, even at times when they viewed their family as a barrier to their educational experiences. Their parents were dependent on them for assistance since their parents lacked English proficiency skills which consumed the participants' time to study, socialize, and become involved in the community. Being the translator for their parents increased family bonding time and provided the participants with an enriching emotional experience making them feel connected. Regardless of whether the participants enjoyed the responsibilities they took on for their parents, they realized their assistance allowed them to be a voice for their family.

They all shared having to meet traditional Khmer gender roles and sibling roles and values of seniority. All the female participants encountered times when they challenged the Khmer gender role that they learned as a child based on their encounters and experiences growing up in America. For instance, they participated in sports or activities away from home and worked part time jobs during college, which goes against being a good Khmer daughter, who remains close to home until marriage (Ebihara 1974). Gender expectations affected their educational experiences because they understood being passive and quiet in school and work would prevent them from achieving success. All the female participants agreed that speaking out and being active to seek resources were needed to survive and become successful in America. Both male and female participants were expected to marry a Cambodian partner and have an arranged marriage. This marriage expectation for females was highlighted in the *chbab srey*, which is the code of conduct for Cambodian women. However, none of the participants had an arranged marriage.

Role of Siblings Based on Age and Gender

The oldest child in the family is expected to be a role model for their younger siblings while the younger siblings are expected to respect their older siblings. All participants became role models for their siblings regardless of their age or intention. They wanted to make a life for themselves that was different from the Cambodians that were in gangs. Their parents emphasized they should choose their friends wisely and avoid being friends with gang members. The parents wanted their child to be surrounded with friends who will keep them out of trouble and will ensure their family maintains “face”. The participants also strived for success because they wanted to have a better life than their parents which is also what their parents wanted for them. To achieve the goal, they all went out of their way to receive resources and knowledge on college and starting a career. The participants share a collective experience of being self-motivated, as Lee mentions:

You have to work your way around just knowing the system and stuff. We didn't have the mentor or support you had to do it on your own.

The value of being active was imperative towards their learning experience growing up since their parents were unfamiliar with the American education system.

Cambodian Student Invisibility

The participants share a unique educational experience of having to make themselves visible, so they can obtain information and resources that are supposed to be readily available. Participants who were less active to reach out for help from their K-12 teachers and counselors felt invisible in school. They argued athletes, accelerated students, and Caucasian students received the most support from teachers and counselors, while Cambodians and other students of

color received little to no assistance and support. The findings confirmed Wallitt's (2008) discussion on Cambodian students invisibility. Wallitt argues Cambodian students feel alienated in school when teachers do not provide support, lack the knowledge of their cultural and historical background, and the lack of disaggregated data on Asian students assumes all Asian students do not need support. Participants who were active in seeking out resources and established positive relationships with their teachers and counselors in school felt acknowledged. To combat alienation, marginalization, and racial profiling in school and their community they learned how to utilize their social networks effectively.

Process of Becoming

Hall's second aspect of cultural identity emphasizes the similarities and differences of an imagined group which is useful to understand the imagined group of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans. The narratives the participants shared are not based on external factors but are a representation of themselves (Hall 2019:70). As the participants reflected on their lived educational experiences, they became conscious of how they once viewed their ethnicity in relation to their academic achievements. When I asked the question, how do you identify your culture and ethnic identity, it allowed the participants to reflect on how they are constantly pushing and pulling their various identities based on the history and politics of the time. The constant shifting between one or more cultures and choosing different aspects of each culture is what Hall defines as hybridity.

Many of the male participants encountered educators stereotyping them as underachievers and gangsters which contradicted how they viewed themselves. Those

participants shifted their identity away from the Cambodian student stereotype the teachers thought they were. They used “othering” to reveal the identity within themselves. Self-recognition emerges, historically, in countering the “other” (Hall 2019:75). Within themselves emerged their identity as academic achievers opposing the negative stereotype of Cambodian students. Steve argues some of his 1.5 generation friends that were once gang members are successful even though they did not complete their college degree. His friends may not be academically successful, but to their family and to themselves they are successful because they provide and give back to their family.

Sophie and Aurora are the only participants that paid less attention to the Cambodian stereotype. They focused their time on doing well in school and earning a college degree to meet their family expectations. Sophie and Aurora both attended schools in an inner-city neighborhood that had high crime rates, which make their experience overlooking the Cambodian stereotype unique. Aurora was in a magnet program during high school with majority Caucasian students that came from affluent families. She realized she was different from her peers when she attended a university in California that was located in an affluent neighborhood with predominantly Caucasian students from affluent backgrounds. This made her aware that she grew up in the hood and had minimal resources and opportunities to achieve academic success in comparison to the affluent students at the university she attended. The process of becoming for Aurora was when she became conscious of being an “other” in reference to her affluent peers.

The quality of education in schools varies depending on location. Schools located in inner-city neighborhoods are typically underfunded and have low teaching and learning quality, while schools in safe, middle-class neighborhoods have a better quality of education. Sohad,

Rith, and Sam had positive experiences in their high school that were located in a predominantly white neighborhood. They did not experience high level of discrimination like the participants that attended the inner-city schools in Long Beach. Attending schools where racism was the main issue decreased the amount of interactions with peers from different ethnic and racial groups. Lee, Vincent, George, Virak, and Jason encountered segregation at their high school and hanged out with other Cambodian students. However, Aurora, Grace, and Jason attended the same school as the former participants and made friends from different ethnic groups. The latter participants were more engaged in their high school which gave them the opportunity to meet and interact with peers outside of their ethnic group.

George, Rith, Grace, and Jason are the participants that mentioned their parents did not allow them to join after-school extra-curricular activities during high school. Rith captured the main reasons the participants felt their parents did not allow them to join after school activities:

We don't have the transportation, we don't have the means, I mean the means of transportation to take us and drop us off. And also, we don't want to fall behind of our academics. Because of language is a barrier.

The parents' concern for their safety to return home from high school during the evening and misunderstanding the benefits of extra-curricular activities confirms Chhuon et al.'s findings (2010). The participants' positioned their experience in the past to rediscover why their parents did not allow them to engage in extra-curricular activities. Lee and Survivor were members of their middle school and high school Khmer club. They both held cabinet positions in the club which was an opportunity for them to gain leadership skills. They joined the club because they identify with being Cambodian and wanted to connect with other Cambodian students. Having a connection with people of the same interests and background provided the participants with a sense of acceptance and belonging. Participants that joined the Khmer club whether it was during

K-12 and/or in college rediscovered their interest in Cambodian culture and are now proud to embrace their Cambodian identity. The Cambodian club was an outlet for the participants to form their hybrid identity and negotiate their cultural values and norms. The findings align with Hall's (2019) discussion on hybridity in diasporic communities that "in diasporic conditions people are often obliged to adopt shifting, multiple, or hyphenated positions of identification" (2019:134).

Lee, George, and Vincent participated in CCBP and were health advocates for Asian male youth in the community. During the 1990s there was a high rate of Cambodian teenager pregnancies, so CCBP addressed educating males on preventative pregnancy measures. This leadership opportunity provided the three participants to realize their interest in having a career that helps at risk youths in the community. Lee earned his Bachelor's degree in Sociology and applied what he learned in school to help the youths in the community. Sara's volunteer experience also allowed her to find her career interest that helps members in the community. These participants' identity unfolded through their community work as a process of their identity formation.

During the participants' K-12 school years, many of the participants had little to no opportunities to learn about their own heritage culture and history in school. The lack of culturally relevant curriculum caused a few of the younger participants to lose interest in school and even made them question the importance of their own culture. Participants such as Jason, Grace, Aurora, and Steve discussed having history lessons in middle school and high school on the Holocaust, but there was no reference to the Cambodian genocide. Jason gained a newfound interest in German culture during high school because "most people go to learn other cultures to learn about their own culture". Jason's remark emphasizes the concept of "othering" and

suggests how he studied German language to learn the language and history of the culture, so he can gain an understanding on the topic of genocide. Jason also listened to “emo” music that American youths listened to because it expressed emotions within him that he did not know how to communicate at the time. Star was disinterested in the “other” Cambodians, which he refers to as “them”, so he spent time playing video games like his American peers. Findings do not support Rumbaut and Ima’s (1988) argument that refugee youths focusing on assimilating to American youth culture will decrease their chance of academic success (1988). Jason and Star both obtained high levels of academic success but remarked they could have spent more time focusing on school during their K-12 school years.

The participants continue to negotiate their identities and use their hybrid identities based on time and place. Sometimes they will choose to embrace Cambodian values and traditions, while other times they embrace American values and traditions depending on context. Cassidy’s career as a regional manager for the California census requires her to be assertive and outspoken. She uses her voice to ensure the state provides resources for the community, even though the elders in the Cambodian community may view her behavior as an undesirable trait for a Cambodian female. Steve highlights the importance of using his ethnic identity when applying to scholarships. In his statement of purpose for college he positioned himself as a child of genocide survivors and a young boy who grew up in the “hood”. Typically, he would not share that information with others, but he understands the importance of revealing the identity hidden within him that has been silenced growing up. Steve uses his knowledge of hybridity to inform the Cambodian youths that using their Cambodian identity as a tool is something that they should be proud.

Now that most of the participants are adults and even have families of their own, they

understand the importance of giving their children, younger siblings, and youths in the community the resources, knowledge, and support they did not have growing up. Since identity is constituted within a person instead of external factors it allows the participants to view themselves beyond stereotypes and achieve what seemed unfeasible in the past. The on-going process of negotiating identity influences how the participants once viewed themselves, how they view themselves now, and who they want to be in the future, whether it is for themselves, their family, and/or their communities. Given the rapidness of globalization their future perception of themselves will also change. The participants will continue the process of negotiating, reidentifying, and reconstructing their identity as they interact with others, gain new information that may contradict what they once knew, and have new encounters and experiences throughout their lifetime.

Discussion on Agency

The four conceptual frameworks used in the study overlap with each other centering on the concept of agency. Scholars during the late 20th century focused on the challenges refugees faced during resettlement through a deficit view. Since refugees resettled with little to no cultural and social capital it made them vulnerable to having their environment control them. Their living conditions in rough neighborhoods with high rates of crimes and underfunded schools with limited access and opportunities for upward mobility (Xie and Goyette 2003). For those reasons, Rumbaut et al. argued incorrectly that Cambodians and their children would have unsuccessful lives and remain in the same conditions they grew up in. Scholars also argued parents lacked knowledge and resources to help their family navigate the American educational system.

Cambodian refugees arrived in the United States during a period of liberal welfare. They were faced with the demands of the government to quickly learn English, find a job, and become self-sufficient, so they would not become dependent on the state for welfare benefits.

The governmentality of Cambodian refugees' confinement to certain regions across the states, such as the Khmer Cluster Project, was unsuccessful. The governmentality of assimilation was also unsuccessful. For instance, Ong's usage of Foucault's governmentality in regard to citizenship does not apply to the participants in the study. Ong (2003) argues that refugees can achieve full citizenship in the United States if they become self-sufficient to meet the demands of the government. She also notes that refugees have a partial amount of autonomy in the choices they make because they are constantly negotiating their own aspirations with the government's pressure to ensure refugees do not rely on the state for assistance. Participants in this study made decisions centered around their family's expectations of them to succeed, in addition to their own aspirations for success. Their beliefs and behaviors were a combination between American and Cambodian culture. Participants used their hybridity to select certain aspects from both cultures that would be most advantageous for them depending on their given situation. Therefore, the subtle attempt of the government to control and regulate the beliefs and behaviors of Cambodians suggest refugees have little to no agency.

Similarly, to Ong's state-based analysis, Tang (2015) argues the government controls the movement of Cambodian refugees. According to Tang, Cambodians are a case of *refugee exceptionalism* where they are displaced to an inner-city to be "saved" by the government and will eventually move out of the harsh living conditions in the hyper-ghetto. Since Cambodians are being used as subjects to reinforce the idea that African Americans are reliant on the state which prevents them from achieving upward mobility Cambodians will also remain in the lowest

caste of society. Both Ong and Tang's works emphasizes the state having almost full control of the refugees' social conduct without considering the fact that refugees have the capacity and ability to make decisions for themselves. In addition, a limitation to both of their study is the small sample size which does not confirm their over-generalized argument of state control.

Moving away from the analytical approach of assimilation and a state-based lens, the participants' narratives highlight how they have agency and are not controlled by the state. The participants shared how they used their readily available resources in creative ways to gain the resources and knowledge that meet their needs.

The data collected on the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans provides information on the group of people scholars were examining roughly forty-years after their resettlement. Data analysis revealed the predictions of scholars were mostly inaccurate because they ignored the fact that refugees have agency. Bourdieu's view of cultural and social capital emphasizes the deficit lens previous scholars used since the capital white-middle-class individuals possessed were the norms of society. However, his traditional view on capital is applicable to the study because it contextualizes the pressure of assimilation participants felt obligated to meet growing up and how their Cambodian cultural capital was challenged in American society. Several of the participants discussed the demand to quickly learn English once they resettled in the United States, so they were placed in ESL courses. The older participants discussed the government demand for refugees to find a job quickly. Grace worked during the day and attended night school to learn English to meet those demands of the government. Bourdieu's idea on gaining cultural capital is seen in the participants' experience with formal education and socialization with peers.

The participants used their knowledge from their home and community as navigational tools. As Yosso (2005) argues, students of color can use their assets that were once viewed as deficits in creative ways to gain the resources they need for success. Some of the assets they used include being a refugee, having Cambodian friends, speaking Khmer, aligning with the ideology of collectivism, and being stereotyped as underachievers. Those assets were used as aspirational, familial, linguistic, cultural, social, resistance, and navigational capital. When the participants gained more knowledge of American culture their cultural and social capital increased.

Appadurai's 'scapes is a means of cultural transmission that provides people with cultural capital. Appadurai's concept of 'scapes was useful to understand the types of capital participants obtained, possessed, and utilized towards the educational choices they experienced. When they resettled in America, they came with Cambodian cultural knowledge and little to no American cultural capital. The government strategically displaced refugees in certain cities throughout the States to ensure assimilation. Ethnoscapes exists in the dispersion of Cambodians around the world since they are not confined to the boundaries of Cambodia. Ethnoscapes occurs through the multiple migrations that several participants went through after their initial place of resettlement. Most participants migrated to live in a predominantly Cambodian community, so they could connect and be surrounded with other Cambodians. Growing up in a Cambodian community provided the participants with a plethora of resources and opportunities. Cambodian neighbors and friends were used as social capital to navigate around gangs in their neighborhood. Several of the participants used aspirational and familial capital to overcome their self-doubt of learning English and graduating college.

Technoscapes and mediascapes also contributed to the process of gaining and possessing capital. Technoscapes refers to both mechanical and informational technologies that allows

people to interact with each other. Mechanical technoscapes exist in various forms, such as cars and gadgets. Owning a car is a form of cultural capital that helps to transport participants safely to school, work, and home. During the early 21st century informational technology was spreading across the globe. Participants grew up listening to music on boomboxes and watching the news, television shows, and Cambodian karaoke on the television in their living rooms. The main form of modern informational technology is the internet which gained popularity at the end of the 20th century. Many participants did not grow up with the internet until they attended college.

Mediascapes provide the viewer with vast amount of information, but it is up to the consumer to choose what type of information they want to learn. Participants have agency to choose the type of media source that will provide them with information that interests them and meets their needs. Mediascapes transmits ideologies through representation. Ideologies exist within people and are expressed through interacting with others, whether the interactions are in-person or virtually. Participants have encounters with peers, neighbors, and other individuals from different backgrounds exposed them to new ideas and knowledge. Their encounters and interactions with others increased their cultural and social capital.

The ‘scapes are “fluid, ever changing flows” which situate the participants’ narratives in socio-historical and cultural context. Depending on the time and place the participants used certain capital in unique ways to make educational choices. The reason behind their educational choices varies from person to person. Hall’s concept of cultural identity is useful to understand why participants made the educational choices they did and how those choices either hindered or benefited their later successes. The collective experience encountering hardships from the separation of family, feeling different from others, to lacking cultural knowledge made the resettlement process difficult. To overcome the hardships they used their family, friends,

teachers, community programs, and other individuals in their social network as a source of various forms of capital. Friends were typically their main source of social capital and family was the main source of aspirational, familial, and linguistic capital. Teachers and community programs were their main source of navigational capital since they provided participants with informational support.

The participants' educational experiences were centered around family. Their family expected them to do well in school, which influenced their educational choices. They became active in seeking resources to gain knowledge on how to apply to college, to fill out the financial aid forms, and how to navigate the career pathway. Their choice of friends was to an extent influenced by their parents who expected them to choose "good" friends. Their friends shared the same aspiration in education and being successful in life. Their friends, who share similar background as a SEA refugee, were a form of emotional support. They all shared times when their parents' expectations did not align with the choices that they believed would promote their academic success. Some participants wanted to join after-school programs but their parents did not understand the importance and value of after-school programs. All participants felt their parents over-protected them and insisted they come home after school, practice, or work. Growing up, their parents were concerned for their safety since America was a foreign country to them. The language barrier was a common experience that hindered academic success. Parents and children were unable to effectively communicate information with each other, even if the child could speak Khmer fluently. Their parents' unfamiliarity with the educational system in America was a barrier that all participants believed was a challenge to overcome. So, they often made decisions based on what they believed their parents will approve of with the assistance of the capital they possessed.

How the participants used their capital in certain situations varied based on how they self-identify culturally and ethnically. The older participants viewed themselves as Khmer American with more alignment towards the Khmer culture. Yet, they used values of American culture when it was most beneficial for them, such as speaking English outside of the house. Even though they knew their English skills were not proficient they wanted to speak English to feel accepted and part of their outside environment. The process of choosing to speak English over Khmer begins with understanding aspects of both cultures, situating which cultural aspects will be most beneficial in the situation, and executing their choice based on utilizing their hybrid identities. The younger participants grew up negotiating their Cambodian identity since Cambodians were negatively portrayed and/or they aligned with American values. The stereotypes of Cambodians as underachievers and gangsters were barriers to promote later success in adulthood. There were various approaches the participants took to combat the distorted view of Cambodians ranging from participating in class, asking for assistance and resources to being outspoken for their ethnic community.

As the participants became older, their educational journey continued just like the process of their identity formation and renegotiation. Identity is a never ending process where a person will never fully understand themselves since there are vast information and experiences that they have yet to encounter. They used the media to learn Cambodian history and culture. As Appadurai argues, the information consumed is based on what the viewers want to learn. Images needs interpretation to understand its meaning. Since interpretation is dependent on cultural and historical contexts, meaning changes over time. This allowed participants to position themselves and fine-tune events in the past to their present situation to understand their identity. The PBS documentary on the struggles of Cambodian Americans achieving academic success does not

highlight the academic achievements of the participants. Steve argues against the portrayal of Cambodians as poor, deficient, and unsuccessful, which is harmful for Cambodian identity because people around the world who have seen the documentary might believe the information in the documentary to be true. Steve's experience struggling to achieve educational success is another side of the story that is not represented in the documentary.

The media presents images that are not representative of different views and experiences, instead the media only reveal one side of the story. Participants can position themselves to either accept, negotiate, or reject the information being presented based on their lived experiences. Participants who watched documentaries on the Khmer Rouge have a better appreciation for their family and understand their parents' expectations for them to succeed in life. Some participants read books on the history of Cambodia and learned that their ancestors were once part of the Khmer Kingdom. Those participants embraced coming from a rich culture, despite not physically being there. The participants' hybrid identity influenced them to position themselves to use aspects from both cultures as forms of capital, so they could make educational choices that are advantageous to their given situation. Participants used their unique identity to position themselves as a mentor and a form of capital for their children and other Cambodians.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I explain the process of analysis between the participants' experiences, answer the research questions of this thesis, and place these findings in the context of the existing literature. Next, I discuss the contributions of my study of various fields of study. I provide recommendations for practice where family, schools, and communities can work together to optimize positive educational experiences. The chapter concludes with the limitations of the study and the implications of the study for future research.

Process of Analysis and Key Findings

My research topic on the educational experiences of 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans was developed over the course of two summers, 2016-2017, with the assistance of my undergraduate advisor Dr. Karen Quintiliani.¹ I expressed my interest to Dr. Quintiliani on how I would like to conduct research on Cambodians who resettled in the United States as teenagers and their experiences attaining success. I grew up questioning and believing many stereotypes on Cambodians who still remained in the Long Beach Cambodian Community from several of my family members and classmates. Some of the stereotypes I heard growing up included:

¹ Dr. Karen Quintiliani is the CSULB Department of Anthropology Chair and an Applied Anthropologist. One of her research foci is on the Long Beach Cambodian Community.

Cambodian children were disrespectful towards their parents because they did not understand Cambodian culture, the presence of a language barrier between parents and children explains why Cambodian children join gangs, and Cambodians disregard the value of education. This led me to inquire how these stereotypes affected Cambodians, such as my parents and family members, while they were growing up including affecting their trajectory to achieve success.

Prior to reviewing the literature on Cambodian refugees from the first, 1.5, and second-generations, I expected many of the younger participants to develop an interest in learning about Cambodian culture once they became older. I assumed that they would struggle to find a balance between the two cultures because they felt pressured to meet the demands of their family while wanting to fit in with their peers (Smith-Hefner 1993; Ong 2003). For instance, one of the demands the participants felt obligated to meet was keeping the Cambodian culture alive or their identity would be lost (as Cambodians noted by Smith-Hefner) (2003).

As a Cambodian American Anthropologist studying Cambodian Americans, Dr. Quintiliani discussed the importance of using reflexivity throughout the process of the research project. Reflexivity includes consciously being aware of my role as a researcher and being close to the topic of the study as a Cambodian American. Reflexivity was highly important during the analysis phase of the research because it influenced how I presented my findings. While coding the interviews, to a certain extent I put aside my expectations and personal interpretations of the data and was always mindful of presenting accurate data that represented the participants' narratives (Palaganas et al. 2017:431).

Dr. Quintiliani guided me to the literature on SEA refugees from over thirty-five years ago from scholars studying refugees coming in the United States during the 1980s.

She also connected me to leaders from various organizations in the Long Beach Cambodian Community. While I was becoming familiar with the literature and building rapport with members in the community, it was apparent that this research was more than just a contribution to the growing literature on Cambodian Americans, but the research was also a self-endeavor journey of negotiating my own identity. Being aware that the study was a part of my process of becoming made me more keenly aware of the need to set aside my own interpretations of the data and analyze the data in the context of the participants' narratives. Their narratives highlighted the variances between the participants' experiences in terms of support and belonging in the context of family, school and community, discrimination and racism, gender and relation of age in the family, language skills, and agency.

All the participants were agents in their own lives because they used their family, peers, educators, and community as assets to overcome barriers and gain opportunities (Yosso 2005). Most of the participants believed their family accepted them growing up because their family agreed with their ideas and values. Typically, their ideas and values were centered around the family and their values included doing well in school, earning a college degree, and becoming successful to provide for themselves and their family (Chan 2004). A few participants believed they did not belong in their family because they spent more time studying or exploring their interests instead of spending time with their family. In comparison to those participants, I felt included in my family even more when I spent my time studying. Similar to Star's experience, I felt distant from my parents when I explored my own interests as a teenager and wanted to spend more time with my friends than my family.

All the participants' parents provided them with support by giving them food and a place to live. When the participants mentioned that, I shared a similar experience of my parents

constantly reminding me and my brother to be thankful for “having food on the table and a roof over our head” growing up. It was during our teenage years when we realized that our parents’ experiences during the Khmer Rouge was why they told us to be grateful for the small things in life, such as having food to eat on a daily basis. Our parents’ experiences as genocide survivors was a familial and motivational capital that we used to achieve success (Chhuon and Hudley 2011, Tang et. al., 2013). Instead of viewing Cambodian parents who survived the genocide as having mental damage that can be passed on to their children, the participants used their parents’ experience of genocide as an asset.

In terms of school and community, several participants encountered discrimination and racism in school and their community for simply being Asian in the Long Beach Cambodian Community. When George and Vincent mentioned that their parents wanted them to attend a predominantly white-high school in the suburbs, I shared that was the reason why I attended a high school in the suburbs. The participants went into further details about the discrimination and racism they encountered in Long Beach growing up since they assumed that I was unfamiliar with the challenges growing up in Cambodian Town because I did not grow up there. However, my mother and her siblings grew up in Cambodia Town when they resettled in America. My mother and aunt would sometimes remind me, my brother, and my cousins how fortunate we are to grow up in a safe neighborhood because we did not have to face the challenges of gangs, crimes, and discrimination like they did when living in Cambodia Town.

Participants who believed they did not encounter discrimination and racism either kept themselves isolated, viewed themselves as smart, or lived in a non-Cambodian community. Star and Jason dissociated themselves from the Cambodian community because they wanted to have a separate identity from the Cambodians that were gangsters. My parents and several of my

extended family also became distant from the Cambodian community because they did not want to be viewed as unsuccessful Cambodians. They dissociated themselves with the community they were raised in since they made it out of Cambodia Town or low-income neighborhoods. However, they did shop at the Cambodian markets in Cambodia Town and participated in the annual New Year's celebration at El Dorado Park.

The variations across participants mentioned above can be explained by the participants' gender, relation of age in the family, language proficiency in Khmer and English, and self-motivation. Overall, the female participants had better academic success than the male participants. Many of the female participants were either the only child or one of the older siblings in their family. They were all proficient in speaking Khmer and were family oriented. Most of the female participants sought resources to help them achieve educational success. For example, my female cousin who is the oldest sibling in her family was expected to be a role model for her siblings. There were fewer female participants than male participants, which explains the discrepancies of variances between the male and female participants. The older male participants were also fluent in Khmer, family oriented, and self-motivators. Most of the younger male participants who are the oldest male child in their family felt responsible to be a role model for their younger siblings (Ebihara 1974). The narratives of the participants, who are the oldest child in their family made me aware that my brother faced the same expectations as those participants. Growing up, my parents always told me to excel in academia like my older brother and to look up to him on how to behave and act. As the youngest child in my family, I felt less pressured than my brother to meet my parents' expectations. The younger participants had limited Khmer language skills, but were proficient in English, so they helped their parents fill out paperwork and translated for them due to their parents' limited English skills. Like all the

participants, the younger male participants were self-motivators because they went out of their way to seek resources that would meet their needs to achieve educational success.

Findings for the first research question: *how are educational choices and experiences influenced by family, community and school*, revealed that based on the amount of support the participants received from their family, friends, teachers, counselors, and members in their community influenced their educational experiences and achievements. The more positive interactions the participants had with individuals in their support group, the greater amount of support they received led to an increase in educational aspirations. However, participants had to go out of their way to receive support for their educational aspirations. They used several types of capital as tools to receive appraisal, emotional, instrumental, and informational support. The common support participants received from family and friends were appraisal and instrumental support. Parents provided their children with encouragement to work hard and supplied basic necessities. Friends provided positive social interactions, companionship, and emotional support (Chhuon and Hudley 2011). The most common support K-12 teachers and counselors provided were emotional and appraisal support, while it was common for university professors and counselors to provide informational support. Members of the community from Cambodian services and to the church provided all forms of support. They provided emotional support, guidance and advice, access to resources, and opportunity to gain leadership skills. The participants' educational choices were dependent on the amount of support they received from their support group and how the participants used individuals from their support group as various forms of capital.

Findings for the second research question: *how does the process of ethnic identity negotiation and formulation within the United States system influence the educational choices*

and experiences of this group of Cambodian Americans, revealed that awareness of cultural and generational differences and participants' selection of certain aspects of Cambodian and American culture influenced their identity formation, which in turn affected their educational experiences based on their interactions with individuals in their environment. The participants' hybrid identities allowed them to position themselves as either Asian American, Cambodian American, Cambodian refugee, Khmer, multi-cultural, or Southeast Asian, depending on the situation. Hybrid identity is a tool the participants used to gain opportunities (York 2013).

Findings for the sub-question: *how does the refugee population negotiate their ethnic identity aspiration with academic success*, revealed that the participants positioned themselves as being separate from the negative stereotype of Cambodian students as academic failures. They viewed themselves as SEA when they were in an environment with other SEA students. At school, they viewed themselves as Asian American or Cambodian based on their interactions with their teachers. In their ethnic neighborhoods, they viewed themselves as Khmer. The second sub-question from the second question: *what are the shared experiences of this group of 1.5 generation of Cambodian Americans in relation to challenges and opportunities in the context of educational experiences that may or may not promote later success in adulthood?* The shared experiences of overcoming the challenge of their parents being unable to provide support navigating the American system led them to be active in seeking support towards their education attributed to their current success. Having the opportunity to access Cambodian community services was another attribution to their success. The other challenge they encountered was the assumption that all Cambodians are gang members and high school dropouts (Chhuon 2014). The main characteristic that defines membership to the group of 1.5 generation Cambodian American is active resiliency. As a second-generation Cambodian American, I did not encounter

the same challenges the participants faced, but this may not be the case for other second-generation Cambodian Americans. As an active member of the Cambodian community, I learned about the parallel challenges of the 1.5 generation Cambodians that second-generation Cambodian Americans faced. The distinction between the 1.5 and second-generation Cambodians confirms Tang's argument that the generational difference is due to contrasting sense of refugee time (Tang 2015). The 1.5 generation Cambodians are more aware of their family's history, view themselves as refugees even if they were born in Cambodia or Thailand, and were more family oriented than second-generation Cambodians. These characteristics continue to promote the success of Cambodians.

My Study in Relation to Existing Literature

When reexamining the literature on Cambodian refugees from over thirty-five years ago from scholars studying refugees coming in the United States during the 1980s, some scholars such as Rumbaut and Ima (1988) discussed how refugees will have unsuccessful lives because they resettled in America with little to no resources. They argued that once they are displaced in an inner-city neighborhood; they will remain there because the community lacks the opportunities and resources for success (Portes and Rumbaut 2006:29; 321).

Mortland, Ong, and Tang are scholars that do not apply the analytical approach of assimilation to study Cambodian refugees' process of resettlement in America. Mortland's (1993) study writes on Cambodian refugees in Tacoma, Washington, facing systematic injustice while trying to preserve their culture by building Buddhist temples and practicing Buddhist beliefs. The Cambodians received a lack of support from agencies and community members to develop culturally relevant programs and services. Ong (2003) borrows Foucault's concept of

governmentality to argue that the government determines the actions and behaviors of Cambodian refugees (2003). Therefore, Cambodians' life trajectory is predicted to revolve around the continuous challenge of finding a balance between their own aspirations to attain freedom while meeting the demands of the government. Similarly, Eric Tang (2015) borrows Ong's argument of governmentality in terms of the government controlling the movement of Cambodian refugees. He argues that Cambodian refugees arrived during an unstable, economic period of liberal warfare allowed the government to use them as a tool to argue the culture of African Americans is the reason for their lack of upward mobility and potentially Cambodian refugees will leave the hyperghetto. Yet, Cambodians were trapped in the hyperghetto because they are used to confine African Americans in the lowest caste of society (2015). Mortland, Ong, and Tang's texts critique the assimilation approach that Rumbaut, Ima, Zhou and previous scholars used. However, they still viewed Cambodians in a negative light. In their texts, Cambodians were presented as having little to no autonomy given state-based analysis where the government controlled their movement and opportunities to achieve success.

Analyzing the data in terms of the existing literature on the process of refugee resettlement and life trajectories of Cambodian Americans, my data moves away from those negative analyses of Cambodian American lives. My data presents a more positive approach to understanding the life trajectories of Cambodian Americans. The findings attempted to capture salient educational experiences of the eighteen 1.5 generation Cambodian American participants' trajectory of learning American and Cambodian values and traditions, soft skills and hard skills, and how they view themselves negotiating their identities throughout various spaces.

Findings from the study revealed that Cambodian refugees have agency in their movement and some have even left the inner-city neighborhoods where they were raised to better

and safer neighborhoods. Even though most of the participants grew up in inner-city neighborhoods and had limited resources for success, they all graduated from high school. Thus, the findings do not confirm Rumbaut's prediction that Cambodians would be high school dropouts and academic failures. Findings revealed the participants used what were once seen as deficits as tools for obtaining resources and support they needed for educational success (Yosso 2005). For instance, they used being refugees or having parents who are genocide survivors in their statement of purpose for their college application. They drew upon various capital to enhance their educational experiences and increase their chances of academic success.

The literature on the three waves of Cambodians in the United States suggests the participants were categorized into the second and third-waves. The findings confirm the existing literature on second-wave Cambodian refugees who did not experience the Khmer Rouge since they arrived in the United States between 1977-1979. Findings also confirmed that third-wave Cambodian refugees are genocide survivors that arrived post-1980. The data does not confirm the background characteristics of the second-wave and third-wave Cambodians presented in this study. According to Mortland (2010), second-wave and third-wave Cambodian refugees typically come from rural backgrounds, were uneducated, and unfamiliar with urban lifestyle (2010:79). In my study, there were several participants that came from affluent backgrounds, grew up in Phnom Penh, and were in the process of obtaining a formal education before the Khmer Rouge took over. The participants who grew up in the countryside province of Battambang were educated and attended primary school. The difference between Mortland and my findings was likely due to the location of our research and who we interviewed. Tacoma, where Mortland did most of her research, has a high population of former farmers from the northwest of Cambodia.

The analytical paradigm of segmented assimilation is applicable to the data for the study examines American and Cambodian cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values. As Bruce Trigger (2006) notes:

Paradigm influences the types of questions thought to be worth asking, the theories that are used to explain data, and the procedures that are employed to collect and analyze evidence (2006).

Therefore, I used segmented assimilation to explain the data on how the participants remained part of their own ethnic community while choosing to adopt certain aspects of American culture. When the participants' self-explored their Cambodian heritage, whether it was through talking with their parents or learning about it from the media, they began to align with their Cambodian culture and started to appreciate their culture and family more. This was a similar process of how I first learned about my Cambodian culture.

Participants had various interactions and relationships with individuals from different socioeconomic classes, cultures, and races from their encounters in their school, community, and family. The data confirms the acculturation paradigm that argues immigrants with low SES should stay connected with middle-class individuals from their same ethnic group for upward mobility (Waters et al. 2010). When Sam sought assistance from the middle-class Cambodians, they gave him advice to continue pursuing higher education. It was difficult for Cambodians living in the "hood" to have regular contacts with the middle-class Cambodians because they moved out of Cambodia Town to escape the increasing gang violence and crime rates.

Based on my personal experience, some of my family members chose secondary migration to California for better weather and to be closer to family (Mortland and Ledgerwood 1987). The participants migrated to multiple cities in the United States for other reasons

presented in the literature including: better job opportunities, medical services, social services, and to be with other Cambodians in the community (Mortland and Ledgerwood 1987; Phyle 2007). The data also confirms the participants' agency to move to new places that will meet their own needs instead of the government controlling their movements. My data questions the literature on the correlation between students attending inner-city K-12 schools and their future trajectory of having unsuccessful lives. Several of the participants attended inner-city schools that lacked appropriate school staff who should be empathetic and value education. The school also lacked resources on how to apply to college. The data revealed that inner-city schools lack certain resources and opportunities, but the participants were active in finding resources in creative ways so they could attain academic success. Overall, the findings highlight the various factors that shaped the participants' options for education as they strived to become economically and educationally successful, as well as becoming self-sufficient.

Contribution of Study

The study contributes to Asian American and Diaspora studies by enriching data on the struggles Cambodian American refugees faced growing up and how they overcame those struggles to find opportunities. The study highlights how Cambodian immigrants have agency in their educational attainment which contrasts with scholars such as Portes, Rumbaut, Zhou, Bankston, and Ima's literature in the late 1980s. Those scholars emphasized that a lack of American cultural and socioeconomic capital would prevent refugees from attaining upward mobility. The deficit perspective ignores the participants' agency to use their available resources in creative ways. It also contributes to the literature on ethnic and cultural identity formation within three main contexts of everyday life, which are family, community, and school. Focusing

on identity reveals the effects of generation, class, gender, and culture in the lifelong process of reconstructing and renegotiating identity. The participants' narratives of their lived experiences provide a valuable addition to the limited literature on the 1.5 generation Cambodian Americans' educational experiences. The growing body of literature on Cambodian American students mainly focuses on second-generation Cambodians. Therefore, the study provides a unique perspective on the 1.5 generation Cambodian students that are refugees or align with the refugee experiences of resettlement. It also expands current understanding of the various types of factors that induce negative academic outcomes of Cambodian Americans. The 1.5 generation Cambodian American participants emphasized the amount of cultural knowledge between American and Cambodian culture affected their educational experiences and educational choices. The research contributes to the literature on refugees and marginalized groups having agency in their lives.

In terms of education studies, the research contributes to understanding the diverse needs of Cambodian Americans who disprove the model minority myth. The study unmask the high levels of academic barriers and disparities in the educational experiences of Cambodian American students. The study also revealed how they struggled to overcome those barriers without sufficient support, so they had to become creative in finding the support they needed. The study brings attention to the need for disaggregated data on Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. Disaggregated data can be used to rethink how to serve different ethnic groups and how they can have a supportive network.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings revealed that participants received the most support from the community when their family and school lacked the knowledge and resources to help them attain educational success. The lack of resources Cambodian students received from school, the racism that occurred from their peers on campus, the lack of culturally-inclusive curriculum, and teachers and counselors that lack an understanding of their students' backgrounds were some of the barriers the participants encountered. Teachers should use inter-group dialogue in their classroom to encourage students to work together and discuss differences and similarities with each other, encourage students to critically reflect on their experiences, and encourage students to educate others about their home cultures to create an inclusive learning space. It is imperative for educators, community leaders, and scholars to listen and support their students, so they can address the students' challenges and needs to receive academic support, resources, and opportunities. In other words, students' voices can help to reform schools to create a safe and inclusive environment to better serve students and their families, which could ensure academic achievement and success to all students. Students should also learn both hard skills and soft skills, which would allow families and communities to become important outlets for providing those skills. Family, school, and communities should develop and maintain a collaborative relationship to discuss strategies and advocacy for supporting their students and children, so they can provide them with opportunities and resources for success.

Communities can develop after-school programs for Cambodian students, which can have staff members who speak both English and Khmer. The Cambodian Association of Illinois' Children and Youth program and the Khmer Parents Association after-school program can be used as models to create new after-school programs. These two programs aim to promote

academic success, social development, identity formation, and leadership opportunities for Cambodian youths. The program can be a safe-space for youths to receive support, assistance, and resources from peer mentors. They can gain the skills and knowledge to use in and out of academic settings, as well as learning about their Cambodian heritage. Since staff members speak both English and Khmer, parents can be more involved with their children's education and development. Having a space for Cambodians to come together on a regular basis can help establish trust amongst community members, as well as providing a sense of acceptance and support.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Given my limited time to conduct interviews during the winter holidays, I was unable to reach my goal of conducting twenty interviews. I conducted a total of eighteen in-person interviews and two over-the- phone interviews due to one month of collecting data. The sample size and specific geographical location were limiting factors of the study. I tried to find potential participants who grew up in Long Beach or moved to Long Beach so the data can represent the experiences and changes in a large ethnic community.

I used the snowball method to recruit participants and based on how the method works, participants' typically recommend potential participants similar to them in their network. Dr. Quintiliani introduced me to leaders and active members of the Long Beach Cambodian community who were the first few participants that I interviewed. A couple of participants thought out loud about potential participants that I could interview but did not recommend participants who did not graduate from college. Thus, I was recommended to other Cambodians who were viewed as successful in terms of achieving at least a college degree. Several of the

participants also thought it would be valuable to highlight the case of successful Cambodians since Cambodians are typically viewed as unsuccessful and underachievers. My undergraduate study focused on successful Cambodian Americans, which is another reason why there are many successful Cambodian Americans in the study. Therefore, the sample type of successful Cambodians was another limitation to the study.

Findings from the eighteen participants had unique narratives that differed from each other based on age groups, but they also shared similarities regardless of age group. Differences in their educational experiences were most prevalent between participants who came in the United States over the age of sixteen years old and participants that were born in America. The shared experiences of overcoming the lack of access while achieving success and meeting familial obligations with minimal support defines the group experiences of the 1.5 generation Cambodian American. The study included various factors participants used to form their hybrid identity which shaped their educational experiences. Despite the limitations, the findings provide insight for scholars and educators, focusing on the educational experiences of Cambodian American students to understand how culture, community, school, family, and identity are variables that impacts the students' level of academic achievements and success.

Future research can expand on other factors to present a more in-depth study. The concepts of power, race, and religion should be examined as variables for understanding identity. Doing a comparative study between the first-generation, 1.5, and second-generation Cambodian Americans can reveal the dispositions of each generation across various contexts, such as globalization and the use of technology. For instance, future research can expand on the case of successful Cambodian Americans overcoming barriers by examining online Cambodian association websites, groups, and discussion boards. These forms of technology can be a

platform to understand the information successful Cambodians share with each other and how it shapes their identity. A comparative approach will provide a clear picture of the process of cultural changes. Reexamining the communities and participants discussed in the literature can also provide a trajectory of cultural changes across generations. Future researchers who have the resources can return to the sites discussed in the literature, including Lowell, Oakland, Tacoma, and the Bronx. It would be interesting to see where Ra's children in Tang's book, or those like them who were displaced in inner-city schools, are in their lives now as adults and whether they achieved academic success.

Future researchers can examine more about the process of culture change and identity formation in relation to educational experiences. This can be helpful to mitigate disparities for AAPI families and show the diversity among different AAPI sub-groups. Understanding the educational experiences of AAPI students can also reduce barriers for AAPI students and families to access higher education.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

The purpose of the study seeks to understand the histories of Cambodian Americans who have primarily grown up in the United States and more specifically in California. Findings from the study will be able to describe how the experiences of school, family, and community shapes the identity of 1.5 generation Cambodian – Americans in terms of class, ethnicity, and gender.

Background Prompts

1. When and where were you born?
2. How many relatives did you have that were already living in the United States when you arrived? *
3. In what year did you arrive to live permanently in the United States? *
4. Can you tell me about where you grew up? What type of environment or location did you grown up?
5. How do you identify, this is what do you call yourself? (ethnically)*

Family Prompts

6. Can you tell me about your family?
 - a. Do you have any siblings? Are your parents together?
7. What were your parent's occupation?
 - a. What was their highest educational attainment?
8. Who lived in your household when you were growing up?
 - a. Did you have extended families living with you or around you?
9. What was your relationship like with members of your family such as your parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended relatives?
10. What was your role in the family?
11. What is the language spoken mostly in your household?
12. How did you spend time with your family when you were growing up?
 - a. Did you have dinner together? Did you visit any relatives?
 - b. How do you spend time with your family now?
13. What role did your family play in your education aspirations and attainment??
14. What topics did you discuss with your family? Did you talk about school, work, etc.?
15. Did you receive any help with your homework from any of your relatives?

School Prompts

16. Who would help you the most with your homework? *

17. In general, how was your experience in school?
18. What schools did you attend? Where were they located?
 - a. What classes did you take?
19. Can you tell me about your friends at school?
20. How was your experience with your teachers and classmates?
21. What barriers and opportunities did you face when you were attending school? (English as a second language)
22. Have you ever felt discriminated against? * If so, by whom?
23. Were you a part of any clubs, organizations, and or after school programs?
24. What was the highest education that you wanted to achieve?

Community Prompts

25. Did you grow up with other Cambodians around you?
26. Did you visit the temple or church when you were growing up?
27. Where did you celebrate Cambodian New Years?
28. Did you attend Cambodian weddings?
29. Did you participate in any community events? If so, who did you go with?

*Questions taken directly from Rumbaut and Portes' parental questionnaire and follow up questionnaire.

APPENDIX B
DATA COLLECTION MATERIAL

Questions 2, 3, 5, 16, and 22 was adapted to the interview guide and was taken from Rumbaut and Portes' Children of Immigrants longitudinal study follow – up questionnaire.

2. How many relatives did you have that were already living in the United States when you arrived?
3. In what year did you arrive to live permanently in the United States?
5. How do you identify, this is what do you call yourself? (ethnically)
16. Who would help you the most with your homework?
22. Have you ever felt discriminated against? If so, by whom?

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