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Parents and Children Only? Acculturation and the Influence of Extended Family Members among Vietnamese Refugees

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Abstract

The nuclear family is often the point of departure in much of the existing acculturation research on refugee youth and children of refugees. The influence of other extended family members appears to receive less attention in understanding acculturation processes and intergenerational perspectives. This qualitative study explores the influence of extended family members upon a small sample of Vietnamese refugee parents and their adolescents while they undergo acculturation through their long-term resettlement process in Norway. With repeated interviews over a time span of 3 years, we identified situations and processes in family life in which extended kin become particularly activated and influential. Vietnamese refugee families in Norway keep close contact with extended kin even in the face of geographical distance to kin remaining in Vietnam, or globally dispersed. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are experienced as significant persons in the lives of many adolescents. Additionally, birth order of parents can often influence relationship dynamics among siblings and siblings children. Extended kin surfaced as especially important and influential at critical stages and crisis situations in family life. Extended family, and in particular, parental siblings play important roles in the acculturation experience and family functioning of Vietnamese refugee families in Norway. This has important implications for the study of Vietnamese and other refugee and immigrant families in acculturation research.

Keywords

Acculturation; Extended Family; Vietnamese; Refugees; Qualitative Methods; Mental Health

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1. INTRODUCTION

Families play a central role in the lives of many refugees by helping to organize, understand, and make sense of daily experience (Chun, 2006). Although researchers agree that acculturation takes place within the context of family, most attention has been devoted to the subsystem of parents and their offspring. The relationship between parents and adolescents in exile is seen as challenging as they engage a new culture and retain affiliation with their culture of origin often at different rates (Birman, 2006; Bornstein & Cote, 2006). As a result, "acculturation gaps" can be potentially problematic for parent-child relationships (Birman, 2006; Kwak, 2003; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Rosenthal, Ranieri &Klimidis, 1996), impacting the health and well being of family members (Sam, 2006).

The Vietnamese family is often presented as a strong extended kinship unit preoccupied with "collective family interests" (Beiser, 1999; Matsuoka, 1990; Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Nidorf, 1985; Rosenthal, Ranieri &Klimidis, 1996). Despite this, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the main research focus on how Vietnamese families acculturate in exile has been at the nuclear family level. Hence, the influence of the extended family has remained until now a relatively unexplored field and the role of extended kinship family members remains unclear in Vietnamese parent–adolescent acculturation experiences in exile.

Acculturation is the process of cultural and individual psychological change resulting from the meeting of two cultures, while adaptation is a consequence of acculturation determining subjective well-being and sociocultural competence, and acculturative stress is a stress response to life events rooted in the experience of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). Berry (2003; 2006; 2008) argues individuals and groups undergoing acculturation can use different acculturation strategies based in their orientation to two central attitudinal dimensions regarding cultural maintenance of their own group and desirability of inter-group contact. In this model, individuals choose one of four acculturation strategies: assimilation, integration, separation, or marginalization. The acculturation profile that an individual young person adopts reflect both these strategies, and the young person's orientation to intercultural issues such as: cultural identities, language use and proficiency, peer relations, and family relations values (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). These acculturation profiles extend beyond strategies to include acculturation attitudes, cultural identities, language use and knowledge, values, and attitudes regarding social relations.

Acculturation stress is the result of cultural differences found between the host culture and the person's culture of origin, which can impact the adaptation of individuals or groups undergoing acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010). The variation in and the intensity of this stress rests heavily on the similarities or dissimilarities between the host culture and that of the new entrants, including personal characteristics, amount of exposure, level of education and skills, sex, age, language, race, and psychological and spiritual strengths (Berry, 2006). In addition, immigrant youth frequently engage in the new culture and attain sociocultural competencies, particularly language facility, at different rates from their parents (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). For refugees, as an added burden, acculturative stress often co-occurs while simultaneously coping with the consequences of human rights violations, recovery from trauma, flight from the county of origin, and asylum seeking. These additional stressors further complicate the acculturation experience for refugee families (Allen, Vaage & Hauff, 2006)

In acculturation research, a number of studies have addressed the intergenerational relationship between immigrant parents and their adolescent children (c.f., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). As a point of departure, researchers often stress that adolescents

typically seek a new cultural identity. Young people are exposed to cultural values belonging to the country of resettlement by attending school. They also obtain fluency in a language new to them and socialize with young people from the country of resettlement. On the other hand, parents are mostly portrayed as lagging behind their children in strivings to obtain cultural competence, language proficiency, and access to the labor market. Parents are described as clinging to cultural values belonging to their country of origin and developing cross-cultural competencies at a slower pace than their adolescent children (Birman, 2006; Costigan & Dokis, 2006.)

A relatively large body of accounts describing family life and household structures in the Vietnamese refugee context has been published ranging from well grounded historical, anthropological, and sociological inquiries, to interviews by journalists in war-torn Vietnam, to studies of refugee behavior in transit camps (Woon, 1986). This existing literature includes several descriptions of the size and structure of Vietnamese families, and the roles and status of women in the domestic sphere.

As a result of occupations, war, and social disturbances, many Vietnamese families have been broken up and new structures of organizing family life have emerged. Several authors argue an understanding of the political history of Vietnam is necessary in order to gain insight into how these families organize themselves and how they have changed over time (Knudsen, 1988; McLeod & Nguyen, 2001; Woon, 1986). The French colonial administration (1862–1940), the upheaval of the Confucian traditional society, the Japanese occupation in the Second World War, French new-colonialism (1945–1963), the separation of Vietnam (North-South), and the civil war and intervention of the USA leading to the fall of Saigon in 1975, have all affected family structure. The need to organize the family in wartime necessitated new arrangements and inventive cooperation among and within families.

Statements and observations made about families in Vietnam display great variation. Some authors describe the Vietnamese family in their home country as a harmonious, extended unit where women occupy a subordinate position in the domestic sphere (Chan and Lam, 1983; Vuong, 1976). Others argue that Vietnamese families are predominantly nuclear in structure in their home country, with married siblings forming separate households upon marriage, and that women enjoy a high domestic status (Chi, 1980; Van Esterik, 1980). The Vietnamese family is often described as emphasizing filial piety and respect for the elderly (Nguyen & Williams, 1989; Pyke, 2000; Rosenthal, Ranieri &Klimidis, 1996; Zhou & Bankston, 1994) with family interests taking precedence over personal interests. Adolescents are expected to fulfill their responsibilities to the family and pay tribute to the family lineage (Kwak & Berry, 2001; Matsouka, 1990; Nidorf, 1985). Filial relationships with family members and family harmony are among the highest priorities within the Vietnamese culture.

In contrast, Vietnamese refugees have resettled into societies in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Northern Europe that possess cultural values aligned with individual uniqueness, autonomy, and the family formed through marriage (Morrow, 1989; Ying & Chao, 1996). These differences increase the risk of intergenerational difficulties among Vietnamese refugees (Ying & Han, 2007b). This risk is most prominent during adolescence, when separation and individuation from parents and the forgoing of an independent identity are normative developmental objectives in the Western world (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), whereas greater interdependence and the assumption of increasing adult responsibilities to the family are expected for Southeast Asian adolescents (Xiong, Eliason, Detzhner & Cleveland, 2005; Ying & Chao; 1996). These cultural differences that pose challenges for intergenerational relationships in contemporary Vietnamese refugee families

are related to the degree of autonomy that adolescents claim in relation to their parents, and how decisions are made or negotiated across the two generations.

Despite the intergenerational challenges, the Vietnamese refugee population in Norway reports to be content in many life aspects (Vaage et al., 2009). Most importantly, self-reported psychological distress has decreased significantly over the time of settlement in Norway. There remains, however, a substantially higher proportion of the refugee group reaching threshold scores on standard measures of psychological distress 23 years after resettlement, as compared to the Norwegian general population (Vaage et al., 2010). However, in contrast, self-reported mental health of second-generation Vietnamese adolescents was better than that of a Norwegian ethnic comparison group. This was a surprising result and needs to be interpreted with caution; these results might point towards positive benefits of bicultural competencies, or it might instead relate to biased reporting attributable to cultural factors such as cultural differences in reporting emotional and behavioral problems (Vaage et al., 2009).

In refugee acculturation research, it is frequently stressed that extensive negotiations occur among refugee parents and adolescents (Birman, 2006; Nguyen, Messè & Stollack, 1999; Ying & Han, 2007). Parents strive to transmit their ethnic culture to their offspring, while children attempt to balance the teachings of their ethnic culture with their experiences in the new culture (Kwak & Berry, 2001; Ho, 2010; Rosenthal, Ranieri & Klimidis, 1996; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). However, this research focus stressing “acculturation gaps” and acculturation dissonance ignores ways in which extended kinship networks affect parent-adolescent acculturation over time.

The impact of other family members appears to receive little attention in this literature. This near exclusive focus on the nuclear family contradicts research that emphasizes how the home culture of Vietnamese refugees emphasizes a collectivistic orientation (Knutsen, 1988; Longva, 1987; Nidorf, 1985; Woon, 1986). The current research focus seems to assume Vietnamese families move away from these collectivistic and extended family values when migrating to a culture described to hold individualistic values. In her model of family change, Kağitçibaşi (1996) questions this assumption by early modernization theories that claim the “the isolated nuclear family” or the “conjugal family” to be the most functional in societies at a certain level of industrialization (Goode 1963; Parsons, 1943) with their assumptions of inevitable changes in the constitution of the family and family relationships following migration (Kağitçibaşi, 1996). Recent critiques also call into question current conceptualizations of acculturation and its measurement (Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Chirkov, 2009; Rudmin, 2009; Ward & Kağitçibaşi, 2010). Accordingly, researchers have called for application of various epistemological and methodological inter- and multidisciplinary approaches, along with the use of narrative and other qualitative methods that might allow for greater focus on the complexities of acculturation process and change (Chirkov, 2009; Tardif-Williams & Fisher, 2009).

This paper explores the extended family relationships of Vietnamese refugee parents and their adolescent children living in Norway using a qualitative methodology. Our review could locate no studies investigating how extended kinship relations in refugee families of Vietnamese origin impact the acculturation experience for parents and their adolescent offspring in exile. The paper explores two research questions: (1) how do extended family members influence the acculturation process of adolescents and their parents, and (2) in what situations or stages in family life do extended kin become particularly influential during the acculturation process?

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Families were selected from a longitudinal prospective survey initiated by the last author with a cohort of 145 Vietnamese refugees on arrival to Norway in 1982 (T1) and followed up in 1985 (T2; Hauff, 1998). After 23 years of settlement in Norway, the cohort was recontacted in 2005/2006 (T3), and 80 of the original 145 refugees could be located and agreed to be re-interviewed. The participants at T3 also included 38 spouses along with 127 children born in Norway (ages 4–23). At T3, the data collection consisted of a semi-structured interview and a comprehensive questionnaire on health and adaptation (Vaage et al., 2009; Vaage et al., 2010)

From the T3 cohort, a purposive sample of eleven families was invited to participate in a qualitative study, of which nine accepted to be interviewed between February and June 2007 (T4). Inclusion criteria were families with adolescents ages 15–20 living at home. The sample included families representative of urban and rural societies in terms of both home Vietnamese background and current place of residence in Norway, and socio-economic backgrounds ranging from recipients of social benefit to high income earners, and from no formal education to university degrees. The sample also included families having different involvement in Norwegian society, from no or superficial contact to active participation in Norwegian organizations and leisure activities. These same families were re-interviewed in several follow-up interviews from September 2007 until January 2010 (T5).

2.2 Materials and Procedure

Prior to the first interview with families, an interview guide was developed using a Vietnamese reference group. The group consisted of Vietnamese men and women who had been living in Norway for many years. They were recruited through Vietnamese associations, representing both the interests of adolescent and adult Vietnamese social milieus in Norway. All reference group members were competent in both the Norwegian and the Vietnamese language and culture. As a result of this work, questions in the original interview guide were rephrased concerning family disagreement and family conflict in response to this reference group input. The reference group noted that Vietnamese families do not easily speak about disagreements within their families, and it might generate skepticism and hesitation to give such information in response to direct questions from a stranger.

The reference group recommended the interpreter used in the current study. Her role shifted between being an interpreter to research-collaborator and organizer of interviews. Her personality and knowledge of Vietnamese expectations when we entered a Vietnamese home came to ensure a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. She contributed also as a discussion partner and shared her reflections on the interviews afterwards. Her background as a boat refugee, having lived in Norway since early adolescence with her family, and her many years of experience interpreting was a great benefit to the study.

The interpreter who also arranged meeting details contacted the families participating in the study. All parental interviews took place in the homes of the families. The interview usually started in Norwegian and often shifted over to Vietnamese when the parents were explaining details or when more sensitive issues were brought up. Some parents had problems expressing themselves in Norwegian, displaying a preference to use Vietnamese. The parents themselves chose to be interviewed either together as a couple or separately. The interpreter participated in all the interviews with the parents while some of the interviews with the adolescent were carried out alone by the first author. During the first round of interviews (T4), four couples were interviewed separately and five couples were interviewed

together. Among the four couples interviewed separately, two couples had problems in their relationship and chose not to have the spouse present. Two other couples had different working hours and could not be interviewed together. Adolescents could also choose to be interviewed alone or with their siblings. For practical reasons, most of the adolescents found it more convenient to be interviewed alone, as it was difficult to gather the siblings at the same time.

Two pilot interviews were conducted with a tape recorder. This clearly created discomfort for the participants. In order to foster trust, it was decided instead to take careful notes during the interviews. The setting of the interviews became more relaxed and it improved the quality of the data. Each interview varied from 1 hour to 3.5 hours depending on the amount of information the participant wished to share. Immediately after the interviews, all notes were computerized by the first author to ensure that all details and content were recorded in the ways they had been presented and phrased by the participants. The interpreter also wrote a summary of the interviews and reflections were shared continuously between the interpreter and the first author. All direct quotations in the manuscript are translated from Vietnamese or Norwegian to English by the first author and the interpreter.

In the interviews conducted from September 2007 until January 2010 (T5), all parents were interviewed as single persons. These interviews were a direct follow-up on the issues covered in the first meeting, and proved an excellent opportunity to reflect with the families about the dynamics of family relations over time. Repeated interviews can capture whether or not the informants have changed opinions, how families have resolved issues since the first contact, and most importantly, if and how people have reflected over previous problems or concerns brought up in previous interviews (Hilden & Middelthon, 2002).

All adolescents also participated in follow-up interviews at T5. While some found it possible to meet in person two or three times, others preferred to communicate with the first author by telephone or e-mail. Over the years that the researcher had contact with the adolescents, many of them moved out from their parents' homes in order to study or travel. Communication by e-mail was both very efficient and successful in terms of continued contact, and ensured the continued participation of the adolescents.

2.3 Focus groups

After the last interviews were conducted at T5 and data analysis was carried out, two focus group sessions were arranged with the parents. The groups consisted of mothers and fathers, and had five and seven participants respectively. For the group sessions, the researcher had prepared a list of case examples illustrating various challenges of acculturation with the second author and members of the reference group. The cases were constructed based on key themes from the individual interviews and discussed. The intention behind developing these case examples was to make it easier for the participants to talk and express opinions in a group context. A similar focus group for adolescents was also arranged where four adolescents were gathered to discuss cases similar to those previously discussed by their parents. In this way, it was possible to collect opinions and arguments about the same cases for two generations. The last author (EH), who first interviewed the original respondents upon their arrival in 1982 and further in 1985, participated in all focus groups. This was seen as a great benefit, especially for the group of parents, because it encouraged them to reflect and discuss the developments in their lives since their arrival in 1982.

2.4 Analysis

Following the second round of interviews, the study material was analyzed by the first and second author and the interpreter. The material was read hermeneutically as a back-and-forth

process between the parts and the whole (Kvaale, 1996). Key themes were identified by studying the research notes and discussed by the team. Repeated interviews provided opportunities to deepen the themes with the participants and understand nuances of meanings expressed. Respondents' responses were analyzed for the ways they constructed aspects of their reality in collaboration with the interviewer (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Main themes were also shared with the research group and discussed among the participants at the focus group meetings. This provided member checking through elaboration on the themes and confirmation of their relevance (Seale, 2004).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Closeness and communication with extended family members

Our study indicates that families keep close contact with extended kin. Communication between parents and their siblings living in Norway, Vietnam, or elsewhere was sustained over the years in exile. Most of the parents in this study had one or several sisters or brothers in Norway. Some families were traveling to visit siblings (as well as other relatives) in Vietnam every year or every second year. Contact between siblings living in different European countries would often take place more regularly. A few families considered the security situation in Vietnam as a hindrance to visiting remaining relatives and chose instead to sustain contact by writing and telephone.

Adolescents described a close relationship to aunts, uncles, and cousins. While some adolescents generally felt the contact with aunts and uncles was warm and beneficial, others expressed a more stressful and frustrating relationship. However, adolescents experienced aunts and uncles as influential persons in their own lives and their parents.

Bao, 19 years old, articulated the closeness and familiarity he had with his aunts and uncles, saying that having them in the neighborhood made life a lot easier for him. In the second interview, he stated that the roles of aunts and uncles were to provide a "reserve home":

> I usually visit my uncles and aunts every weekend. Then we talk and eat together. If the fridge at home is empty during the weekdays, I just drop by my uncles or aunts places and I eat there… I open the fridge and pick what I like - I do not feel shy about it. Aunts and uncles are good to have when I need to ask about something that I would not have dared to speak to my parents about.

He explained further that his uncles and aunts also had the right to correct him if he went the wrong way or did anything he should not. Even though he felt relaxed and free to bring up issues, he valued the reactions from uncles and aunts with the same seriousness, if not more seriousness, than those of his parents. "Several of my uncles are smoking, but if I had started to smoke, I would have a really big problem with my parents, not to mention with my uncles and aunts."

For many adolescents, the communication and contact with uncles and aunts was expected and counted upon. Parents encouraged their children to travel and visit aunts and uncles. Adolescents explained that not only parents decide and negotiate with them, but that uncles and aunts also have "a right" to express opinion. Maria, 23 years old, expressed this the second time we me by saying:

> They [uncles and aunts] are in their right to express their point of view, and because you are younger, you are obliged to listen to them. If you do not listen, you are considered to be rude, and if you are rude, your aunts and uncles will most likely complain to your parents…. and then your parents again will get back to you.

In the first interview (T4) a mother also explained how extended family members were expected to be involved in raising children:

> In Vietnam, the nuclear family members usually live under the same roof, sometimes with extended family members too. All adult family members have a role child raising. The grandparents are often more kind and milder than the parents. But uncles and aunts… they are expected to be strict and shout just as parents can do.

Adolescents expressed that the close contact with extended family provided valuable relationships to cousins. If cousins lived near by, they were often considered almost as brothers and sisters. Contact between cousins, especially of the same sex, is encouraged by parents, and older cousins are often presented as role models for younger ones. Chuong, 18 years old, stated in the second time we met:

> Cousins are people you automatically can trust. My cousins and I have grown up like brothers, in each others' homes. Even though our parents at times have some bad disagreements with each other, we have been sent to each others' homes to play and stay together anyway. If I want to discuss something special, I can easily go to my cousins. My cousins are a few years older than me, and they have been through experiences and situations ahead of me, so I can lean on them when I reach the same stage.

Some of the adolescents described close relationships to aunts and uncles living abroad, noting their families visited each other at least once or twice a year. Parents argued that the need for contact with Vietnamese relatives living outside Norway was a main reason they were strict about making their children learn Vietnamese. A father explained in our first meeting:

> My wife and I have family [sisters and brothers] in Vietnam, Spain, Canada and the United States. Since our children were born, we have been very firm to make sure they can speak good Vietnamese so they can communicate well with the family.

3.2 Presence of uncles and aunts

Several of the adolescents discussed the presence of aunts and uncles in many different settings that took on different roles depending on the situation. Several of the adolescents described what they labeled as the "rumor/gossip club" in daily family life. Parents often presented their children with news from their aunts and uncles regarding their cousins, and emphasized in particular their positive achievements. Tom, 18 years old, explained in a follow-up interview at T5 how his parents pointed to an uncle and his children as a model for him:

> My father's brother also lives in Norway. My uncle is well educated, happily married and has three clever children. Two of them are medical doctors and the last one is about to finalize his Masters degree in finance. When my parents want to correct me or tell me what to do, they often refer to this family. Hearing about success stories of my cousins, make me sometimes feel guilty for not having been successful like them. Other times I get feelings of anger inside of me, why should this family be a model for how I should live my life?

Several of the families interviewed communicated regularly with relatives abroad using telephone, Skype, or by sharing news over Facebook, Twitter, or e-mail. Communication by telephone was seen as much cheaper now compared to only a few years back. The prices for mobile telephone calls between Norway and Vietnam cost the same as between mobile phones within Norway. Relatives are now more accessible and regular communication with extended kin now easily takes place. Lisa, 19 years old explained in the focus group:

> It has become very common that the adults make use of modern means of communicating. My mother for example is an eager user of Skype and e-mail, and she has a lot of contact with relatives in other parts of the world. It has also become more common to buy telephone cards. These are cheap even for long-distance calls. A typical scenario is that mothers discuss their worries, and good and bad news, and then they compare their life-situations and give each other advices.

Some of the adolescents recalled conflict with their parents that escalated to a situation of crisis. In these situations, several of the adolescents described how suddenly uncles and aunts became parts of the conflict too. Sometimes aunts or uncles tried to negotiate, at other times they supported either the parent or the adolescent. Such involvement and communication was experienced differently by parents and adolescents, as the parents to a larger degree expected involvement from their siblings, while for adolescents the involvement was often surprising. Involvement of the extended family played an important role in relationships between parents and children, and it colored the life-view for both.

In one family consisting of parents and two children, the communication between the father and the daughter worsened. The father expected the daughter to listen to him and respect the decisions he made for her. Instead, he said that his daughter started to argue with him "just as a Norwegian adolescent." The father followed his daughter everywhere and prevented her from participating in events where parents could not keep control. At the second interview, the daughter explained how surprised she was over the turn the situation took:

> Then… all of a sudden my uncles started to call me and supported me for not accepting the control my father wished to take over my life. These two uncles are living here in Norway and they are my mother's brothers and I must add they have never been very content with my father. My father's conservative ideas had also hit my mother very hard.

In later interviews, the daughter said that her father was very worried that her behavior could damage his good reputation within the Vietnamese community in his hometown, as well as that of his relatives, and especially his younger siblings.

In another family, Dinh, 23 years old, brought up how he felt his parents sometimes refrained from using common sense. Instead, Dinh claimed that his parents listened to superstitious beliefs, or ideas held by the "community," "the family" or "the kin." As an example, he spoke about the time he started to go to the gym. He was very eager to get results and started to use protein powder to maximize his efforts. His mother was horrified when she saw the big bucket of powder and thought it was steroids. She refused to listen to Dinh and his explanations. Instead, she took the opportunity to discuss the use of steroids with relatives at a large family dinner, inviting his uncles and aunts to express their thoughts on it. Dinh recalled in the third interview how there was no other way out of the situation other than to sit and listen:

> Around the table, one story after the other was told about how young people of today destroyed their bodies with steroids. Everybody present around the tables was convinced that I used steroids. My aunts and uncles finally confronted an older cousin who also was present at the dinner to have had a bad influence on me.

After a fight, Dinh got his mother to understand that the use of protein powder is not harmful to the body and it is widely used among athletes. Dinh explained:

> I was surprised that it should take such a turn to convince her… After all, she is an educated nurse! I sometimes feel that Vietnamese people have a tendency to listen to the opinions of others even though in contradicts common sense. You might say that "to loose face" is what you shall avoid, doesn't matter what.

This example shows how the extended kin might become involved in the upbringing of children. The opinions of aunts and uncles are seen as powerful and can supplement the parental authoritative role.

3.3 Birth order and power

In some of the families, parents were quite conscious about their role towards their own siblings. Birth order has implications for communication between siblings and determines how a sibling can be approached. Being the oldest in birth order implied serving as a model to younger sisters and brothers. Being a younger sibling implied being sensitive to the opinions of older siblings. This also has implications for the relationship between parents and their own children.

In her second interview, Yen, a 21 year old daughter of the family, talked about her mother's sisters and brothers with irritation in her voice. She explained how sick she was of the interference of her mother's siblings. Recently there had been a big conflict in the family concerning her older sister who was planning to get married. Her sister had met "the man of her dreams" and together they had announced their wedding ceremony to take place in the forest. As the sister did not have any close ties to the Catholic Church and the groom was Buddhist, the couple was happy with this decision to have the ceremony outdoors. However, Yen's mother was very disappointed with the daughter. All her aunts and uncles were also very unhappy with the wedding, expressing fear that this improper marriage could bring shame to the whole family. The mother's siblings started to put a lot of pressure on the bride's mother, threatening her "to be frozen out" from the family if she did not stop her daughter's wedding plans. The sister of the bride explained:

> My mother is very weak in the family. One thing is that she has got health problems, but another is that she is the second youngest of the siblings and then her opinion values the least among the six of them. The oldest in birth order has the most to say, and then, after having had their opinions, they descend to the others. The way my aunts and uncles interfere with the marriage makes my mother desperately trying to convince my sister to cancel her marriage plans. … I don't care about them [uncles and aunts] anymore, if they want to break with us, ok, it is fine for me, but for my mother I don't know.

The importance of the parental sibling role was not restricted to siblings living in Norway, but also extended to siblings who remained in Vietnam. Anne, 19 years old, was concerned for her father. She felt her father has a lot of guilt for escaping Vietnam *vis-á-vis* his relatives still in Vietnam. Anne explained that her father was the oldest of the siblings and the only one living in exile. She described her father as constantly preoccupied with his role of taking care of the younger siblings back in Vietnam, in addition to his own family life and work in Norway. Anne explained the third time we met that her father continued to do many things for his sisters and brothers in Vietnam:

> He has paid all my cousins marriages, he sends money to them frequently, and he stays in Vietnam for six weeks every summer and thereby uses all his free days from work in Norway on this annual vacation. Now I wonder when he has paid all the marriages if there is more for him to do.

The father of this family highly valued his responsibility to his siblings and did his best to set a standard that fulfilled his role as the oldest sibling. He explained that his remaining family in Vietnam was harassed a lot because of his escape. When being the oldest sibling, he explained it is important to demonstrate decency to younger siblings. In this situation, Anne felt her actions and behavior would reflect back on her father's reputation and that Vietnamese relatives would think he had failed to raise her properly. When Anne told her

father that she was going to rent a flat with her boyfriend, she felt like it was slapping her father in his face. After having come to terms with this decision and realizing he could not do anything to change it, the father expressed his ambivalence. The second time we met the father was equally worried about the cohabitation on the one hand and a potential divorce/separation on the other:

> She did not listen to me… (silence) Now they live together, but how long is it going to last? (silence) In my generation we love each other more and more the longer we live together. But young people today? In Norway? (silence) … and then what if… what if they [daughter and her boyfriend] split up… what then? (silence) It is it a scandal!

The father's concern was about how he could be seen as a respectable man in the eyes of his extended family members and Vietnamese friends, when his daughter behaved as she did. His role as a model for younger siblings was weakened if he was seen not to raise his children properly.

Parents who felt committed to setting examples for their siblings implied that their adolescents were more likely to experience expectations of behaving respectably according to Vietnamese norms in order not do to deter their parents' senior model role *vis-á-vis* younger siblings. Birth order among parents' siblings was seen as significant independent of where the siblings lived, and responsibility to these siblings also committed parents to helping younger sisters and brothers.

3.4 Life transitions and crisis

During life transitions, when adolescents are establishing love relationships and at the time of marriage and pregnancy, the extended kin are expected to express their sentiments, particularly as a new person is about to enter the family. In connection to life transitions, the concept of "shame" was frequently brought up in the interviews. The fear of "having shame brought into the family" would mobilize aunts and uncles if they felt their sibling's daughter or son was entering an improper marriage or a poor match in a relationship. If parents encountered difficulty in these situations, it was expected that other kin members would help out and get involved.

Maria, 23 years old, explained that extended kin are often called on in difficult life situations. As an example, she recalled how her parents recently had become involved in negotiating a difficult situation for a family to which they considered themselves related, despite not being blood siblings. The daughter of the family became pregnant after having had a short-term relationship with a Vietnamese man, and it was a very stressful situation for the family. At the third interview, Maria explained:

> It is the girl, and the family of the girl that are particularly important and vulnerable in such situations. My parents were asked to help because they are older than the parents of the pregnant girl, and because they are more confident with words and negotiating. All four of them finally went to the home of the boy to talk and resolve the situation with his parents."

This example shows how families lacking extended family in exile might choose to enter into "fictive" kinship relationships that take on the roles usually held by extended kin. As we have seen above, fictive kin might be called upon to enhance a family with a certain type of competence or qualifications that is needed in a particular situation. Most importantly, these relationships are considered an important resource to which one can turn when needing help.

4. DISCUSSION

Our study indicates the importance of broadening the scope of investigation to include extended family members in understanding acculturation processes and intergenerational relationships among Vietnamese refugee families, and more generally, among many refugee and immigrant families from other cultural groups. This approach can detect more of the family dynamics and functioning in daily life. In our study, extended kin members including aunts, uncles (parents' siblings) and cousins were experienced as close and significant family members.

The concept of "the family" needs to be expanded and qualified in acculturation research. The issues of what constitutes "a family," including who it includes, what are their roles, when are these roles initiated, where family members are located, and how these relationships are experienced by other family members all require future research attention. It seems implied that geographical closeness is a precondition for "extended family." In contrast, our study indicates that extended family members located in Norway, in the home country, and elsewhere were influential in acculturation processes, including responses to acculturation stress and acculturation attitudes and strategies. Kinship relationships can retain their social significance in the face of a break in face-to-face contact, whether as result of industrial bureaucratic pressures for geographical mobility (Litwak, 1960a; Litwak, 1960b) or as the result of refugee resettlement. Fifty years later, this seems even more relevant today within the context of globalization. Families in our study now enjoy continuous communication with extended family members residing abroad as opportunities to communicate with relatives living overseas has improved substantially in recent years. Modern means of communication have become cheaper and a larger section of the population in Vietnam now has access to internet calls (Skype), Facebook, Twitter, mobile telephone cards, and e-mail. This opportunity to communicate and share everyday news facilitates the possibility of continued extended kinship family identification within the context of an increasing globalization of these family structures,.

The theoretical framework for current understandings in the literature of how in particular non-Western refugees (and other non-Western immigrant groups) function or will function in a new society of settlement appear based in Modernization Theory. Sociologists Parsons and Goode were early representatives of this school of thought, proposing that the nuclear family structure of Western industrialized countries was the most functional (Goode, 1963; Parsons, 1943). Due to industrialization processes, Modernization Theory expected non-Western family relations would adapt to and soon resemble family structures in the Western world. In her model of family change, Kağitçibaşi challenges this theoretical framework. She argues that there is cultural continuity in the interdependence in families from collectivistic cultures after migration to more individualist cultures (Kağitçibaşi, 1996). The terms "individualistic" and "collectivistic" are used as higher-order concepts explaining cultural differences over many different situations that include the significance of family relationships (Hofstede, 2001). Generally, collectivists are seen as more inclined than individualists to have a stronger family orientation with expressed values of loyalty, connectedness, responsibility, and obligations among family members (Triandis, 1995). Our study has explored how extended family relationships are important to the Vietnamese refugees interviewed, indicating that emotional interdependence continues even while material affluence might provide family members with greater autonomy and independence related to their material wealth.

Social anthropological studies of Vietnamese refugees in exile have addressed the role of extended kin after migration. The existence of new arrangements in family life, such as the presence of more distant kin, in-laws, and "fictive kin" was seen as a coping strategy for

Vietnamese refugees in the United States (Kibria, 1993). Extended family and other non-nuclear family households were found important in facilitating immigrant adaptation (Benson, 1990). After settling in Canada, Vietnamese families were described to "show a high degree of cooperation among family members and close relatives, and lay heavy emphasis on lineal relationships" (Woon, 1986). These findings from the North American context cannot necessarily be transferred as valid for other countries. However, both the North American and Norwegian mainstream society emphasize individuality, egalitarian relationships, and self-assertion, which is likely to challenge traditional Vietnamese values. The extended family might additionally serve as a resource for adaptation in the face of this acculturative stress, providing practical, social, and emotional support both in the North American and the Norwegian contexts.

Our data converge with similar findings from the United States and Canada, showing that families from collectivistic cultures do not necessarily change toward the Western individualistic-separated pattern, but rather show continuity in family patterns or develop new, culturally distinct ones (Kibria, 1993; Benson, 1990). Similarly, after more than 25 years of settlement in Norway, the Vietnamese parents still considered themselves as committed towards relatives and extended family members, including those remaining in Vietnam, both in a material sense (sending money, paying education, health expenses, and marriages for relatives abroad) and through social responsibility (by continuing to fulfill a sense of duty to be respectable brothers/sisters to siblings). A recent survey from Vietnam (Hirschman & Loi, 1996) shows that Vietnamese contemporary households are modest in size, and nuclear family households are the most common form of living arrangements, especially in urban areas, however, there remains strong evidence of the importance of extended family ties as a source of social and emotional support.

An important implication of these continued extended family relationships in exile is how this influences acculturation processes at the nuclear family level. As described above, we have seen how parents' relationships to their siblings might influence and direct relationships between parents and adolescents. Every mother and father is also someone's younger or older sister or brother. For example, the marriage plans of a daughter are debated among the mother's siblings. Their opinions influence how the mother finally responds to her daughter about the arrangement. In another family, the father's position as the oldest sibling demands continuous investments in younger sisters and brothers. This takes his time and priority, and accordingly limits his capacity to focus on his own life and children in Norway. The person being a "significant other" (Erikson, 1968), for example, a sibling to Vietnamese refugee parents, might also give some indication as to what behavior a parent should expect from his or her children. For example, a parent striving to obtain respect from younger Vietnamese siblings might claim his or her children behave respectably according to Vietnamese norms. Disrespectful or improper behavior will reflect negatively back on the parent and can be understood as the parent's failure to correctly raise the children. In this way, the impact and influence of the extended family is present even though family members are located in a different continent. It illustrates how ways people adapt to acculturation, and the acculturation attitudes and strategies they adopt, is not only dependent on what is happening between parents and their children, but also on how extended family feed into this dynamic relationship. While the parents in our study had clear expectations for how and in which situations extended kin should get involved, adolescents often experienced this as surprising and strange. They were frequently surprised when uncles and aunts became activate as partners in discussions between themselves and their parents.

In our study, some adolescents described their relationships with aunts and uncles as more problematic, seeing them as interfering with their lives in a negative way. Parents often compared children with their cousins in order to make their own children strive harder and

achieve better in both personal and educational terms. This raises the question of the association between extended family influence and the mental health of adolescents. Relatively little is known about when, how and which kinship ties are more or less supportive to adolescent mental health, and how the benefits of these social ties and the receipt of their support shift with more time spent in exile. Future research is needed to address how parenting styles may shift over the years in exile and impact the mental health of Vietnamese refugees and their children.

Our study shows important ways in which extended family members influence acculturation processes occurring at the nuclear family level. In order to deepen our understanding of family dynamics, qualitative methods were used to account for the complexity and variation within group behavior. A more nuanced understanding of "extended family" better describes the process by which acculturation is negotiated dynamically among refugee Vietnamese family members, with important implications for other refugee groups. Family identification with extended kin endured despite geographical distance. In crisis situations, extended family members were activated and influential in parent-adolescent relationships. In the context and process of migration, patterns of interaction are changing in refugee families. Analytic tools and concepts suitable to detect and describe these new configurations are needed to adequately understand and respond to these changes.

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