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Karen Students' Social and Academic Experiences in Minnesota K-12 Schools

Margaret A. Crenshaw
Hamline University

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Karen Students' Social and Academic Experiences in Minnesota K-12 Schools

Margaret Crenshaw

An Honors Thesis
Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with honors in Education
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Introduction

Escaping from Burma's military dictatorship, today there are an estimated 6,500 Karen refugees in the Twin Cities metropolitan area (Edwards, 2012). Saint Paul is home to the largest and fastest growing Karen population in the U.S (Edwards, 2012). Little research has been conducted on the social and academic experiences of this new population in Minnesota schools. This honor's thesis is the result of two years of research studying the acculturation experiences of Karen refugees in K-12 schools. I focus mainly on a school district in a first ring suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota.

Many of the struggles that the Karen students shared with me mirror some of the other acculturation experiences of other South East Asian refugees, and yet there are some distinct differences. For example the role of Christianity in their resettlement and acculturation. The church provides access to social and cultural capital that other groups may not have had access to. With this research I hope to provide a glimpse into the unique schooling experiences of Minnesota's newest refugee student population, the Karen.

I became involved with the Karen community through my work as a fellow for the McVay Youth Partnership through the Wesley Center at Hamline University. I worked with middle and high school Karen youth in an after school program that I lead, along with two other fellows. As fellows, we plan daily activities, mentor and assist Karen youth with their homework, and guide other Hamline students who are interns. This work and the relationships I have built with these youth, have completely transformed my academic interests, as well as my perspective on social inequalities in society and in schools. The data in this study comes from

my own first hand experience working with Karen youth, as well as numerous interviews I conducted with youth and their teachers, mentors, and administrators.

History of Karen in Burma

The Karen people are Burma's largest ethnic minority. With a population estimated at 6-7 million, their presence is powerful (Delang, 2000). Before colonization by the British, there was no centralized government within Burma. Since the Karen were mainly located in the hills and lowlands of Burma, they were seemingly independent from the Burmese. When the British began conquering Burma in 1826 a strong connection with the Karen community was formed. The influence of the American Baptist missionaries, who also entered Burma during the time of colonization, affected the British's high level of trust for the Karen people. By 1886, when Burma became an official province of India, the British worked to support the interest of the Karen people. They designated Karen New Year as a national holiday and placed Karen in leadership positions in the government and military. For over a century the British rather than the Burmese ruled the Karen people.

The bond between the British and the Karen was tested during WW2 when the Karen people were responsible for many underground attacks against Japan. The Karen people's trusting and hardworking nature made them an important ally for the British. During WW2 Burma was occupied by the Japanese, and in 1948 Burma was granted its independence from the British. Since the country was no longer a colony, new groups rose to power, but the political environment was never stabilized. In 1962 the government was lead by a military dictator; by 1988 this leadership had transformed into a military junta. The new leadership resented the Karen for their close bond with the British colonizers, which was in turn reflected in their

governing of the Karen people. During these shifts of power the Karen sent representatives to Britain to fight for an independent Karen state, as they feared control by the Burmese. The British said they would not and could not fight for an independent Karen state. This left the Karen in a fight for their independence.

For many years the Karen maintained a stronghold in the lowlands of Burma, the most well known being Manerplaw. The government actively worked to eliminate these organized threats to power. One of the most effective policies enacted by the government was the Four Cuts policy enacted in the early 1970's. This initiative was "aimed at cutting off all supplies of food, funds, recruits and intelligence to opposition groups; in practice it meant undermining the opposition by systematically driving into destitution the civilian population supporting it" (Delang, 2000, p. 11). This included forced labor and relocation of villagers. Both the government and the rebellion groups demanded a lot from the villagers, including food, labor, and recruits.

Although the villagers were being systematically drained of resources and control what caused a major change in the security and safety of the Karen people was when the Buddhist Karen people became frustrated with the politics of the rebellion military. Within Burma there was a divide between being a Christian, British loyalist Karen and being a Buddhist anti-imperialist Burman (Harriden, 2002). Most of the leaders of the Karen military were Christian Karens. The Buddhist and Animist Karen people often were the soldiers on the ground. Their children were employed as child soldiers and they felt their voices were not being respected. As a result, in December 1994, a group of several hundred Buddhist Karen soldiers began working with the Burmese army in hopes for justice for themselves and their children (Harriden, 2002). With the insider knowledge from the Buddhist Karens and Thailand's economic alliance with the

Burmese government, the Burmese army was able to gain control of Karen National Liberation Army's stronghold in Manerplaw by early 1995. By March 1995 there were approximately 80,000 Karen refugees in Thailand, 8,000 of them who had arrived after the attack on Manerplaw (Harriden, 2002). After the take over of the Karen people's most important military stronghold the Karen fight for independence was left disorganized and disconnected. Since this point the Burmese military has invaded the Karen lowlands burning villages, killing civilians, and forcing the Karen people to leave their lands. For many years refugee camps have been set up on the Thai-Burma border. As the camps have become overcrowded and full, more and more Karen people are being relocated across the world. Since 2005, however, refugees have not been registered at these camps, and therefore are not eligible for resettlement (Oh, Rattanasamakkee, Sukhikhachornphrai, & Ochalumthan, 2010).

Karen in Minnesota

Nationally, nearly 8% of all foreign-born individuals in the United States are refugees (Davies, 2004). In Minnesota, this figure hovers around 25-50% in a given year (Davies, 2004). Refugees from Burma have been immigrating since before 1990, however it was not until 2006 that the numbers rose above 100 people admitted and resettled to Minnesota. To date there is not official count of how many Karen refugees are settled in Minnesota. This is mainly due to secondary migrations within the United States caused by pull factors including family, jobs, and social services. Estimates from community members of the total population in Minnesota range from 5,000- 8,500. A pastor at a church in Saint Paul that has served the Karen for over a decade recalls the first refugees that he encountered stating, "they were very educated folk with a lot of drive, very altruistic motives. Their community is very important to them." He explained that

this group recreated the social services networks, that had to develop in the camps, here in Minnesota. These social service networks attracted many refugees to Minnesota. The first formal social service group was the Karen Community of Minnesota (KCM), established in 2003 as volunteer organization dedicated to serving the community. From 2005-2008 shadowing under Vietnamese Social Services KCM members were trained and began to develop their own nonprofit 501 (c)(3) in order to provide additional support for refugees beyond the 3-month period provided by the government and resettlement agencies. The Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) was established in 2008 with a new name so that the KCM could continue as a separate volunteer organization. As of 2012, KOM has 18 paid staff members, over half of whom are Karen.

My exploration of Karen youth experience largely focuses on how students are acculturating in schools, and what factors have influenced their experiences here in the U.S. I will begin by defining four constructs central to the experiences of refugee youth: *assimilation*, *acculturation*, *social capital*, and *oppositional behavior*. I will then proceed to touch on the experiences of Asian American students in US schools explaining the model minority stereotype.

Assimilation and Acculturation

How immigrants integrate into their new country is greatly impacted by the context of the exit of their home country and the reception of their new country (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). When looking closely at the factors that influence the immigrant's success in the new country immigrants who exited their country with money, education, and trade skills fared better than their counterparts without any of these assets. Looking at how the immigrant is received by their new country, factors such as government policies, state of the economy, racial climate, and the

strength of ethnic communities greatly impact the new immigrants success. Portes and Rumbaut believed that these factors affected which path of assimilation the new immigrant took in their new country.

Experiences of immigrants in the second half of the 20th century to the present differ greatly. This can be attributed largely to the combination push and pull factors that affected their immigration. Whether there were push factors such as ethnic or religious persecution or pull factors such as a job or educational opportunity, these factors greatly affect immigrants' path of assimilation. Segmented assimilation theory explored by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (1993) rejects the idea of one linear path for immigrants to assimilate into the white middle class, and instead suggests that there are at least three different paths. The first involves disconnecting with ethnic roots and replacing them with values and culture from white middle class America. The second path involves intentional opposition to white middle class America in the formation of an oppositional culture. The third path involves preservation of ethnic culture and networks for economic and social advancement, known as selective acculturation. This path offers immigrants a balance between their cultural worlds, which promotes positive self image and success in adjustment to a new country.

Portes and Zhou (1993) examined challenges of assimilation and acculturation of recent immigrants, looking closely at the experiences of Mexican, Punjabi Sikhs, and Caribbean immigrant youth. Most obvious in their findings was evidence that for many of these youth shedding their cultural and ethnic roots was not the path towards success or acceptance. Portes and Zhou point out that the immigrant students who were successful in school and larger society were those who were rooted in their ethnic communities that thrived on the back of the social capital that was in their communities. In the theory of segmented assimilation, non-white

immigrants may never assimilate into white middle class culture like immigrants of the first half of the 20th century. While middle class white America might not open the door to these new immigrants, other co-ethnic communities impact the success of new immigrant youth. With pre-existing social services, small business, and additional support within the schools, co-ethnic partnerships between newly arrived immigrant and recent immigrant groups prove to be an opened door in a new country. However, Portes and Zhou state that, “the existence of a large but downtrodden co-ethnic community may be even less desirable than no community at all” (p. 87). New immigrant communities may fall into the same traps or experience xenophobia similar to recently arrived immigrant groups. Essentially Portes and Zhou find that integrating new and native cultures in an additive way provides the most success for today’s immigrants. As I look closely at the initial path of immigration for Karen refugees I will examine and compare this path to similar ethnic communities in Minnesota. By doing this I can gauge the reception of this new population to the larger society, as well as their partnership with other ethnic groups, specifically Hmong refugees.

Min Zhou and Yang Sao Xiong (2005) also explore theories of assimilation and acculturation of immigrants in the context of Asian American immigrants in the United States. Looking closely at the Chinese, Korean, Indian, and Filipino immigrants in the U.S. family’s typically high socioeconomic backgrounds greatly impacted both their reception in their new country, as well as how they adapted. Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian refugees’ low socioeconomic backgrounds formed a different initial path. Zhou and Xiong point out that while there are opportunities for students from each group to be successful or struggle, the initial path is greatly determined by the exit and reception factors outlined by Portes and Rumbaut (1996) for Asian Americans. Studying the acculturation of Hmong youth, Bao Lo (2009) points out that

while the theory of segmented assimilation allows for more than one path, it cannot fully account for the impact that race and class have on immigrants. While looking at the experiences of Karen refugee students my questions will surround largely around what assets the students have coming into the country that have placed them on a path to success. However, while looking at these assets for the Karen, it's critical to look at how Southeast Asians are affected by race and class in school and larger American society.

Gibson (1998) explains the role of schools in the process of acculturation by acknowledging that while there are many societal and cultural factors outside of school that affect assimilation, schools have a critical role in shaping the environment where students grow and acculturate. The students who are most impacted by a positive or negative school environment are students who may not find themselves within the main sphere of school because of language or cultural identities. They may find that school lacks equal opportunities and often distances these vulnerable students from relevant and challenging material. This is where schools play a critical role in creating a space that will provide a stable educational platform on which they can build a successful future. Without schools actively confronting these barriers, as Bao Lo (2009) pointed out, students will fall through the cracks because of race and class.

In my research I will explore how Karen 1.5¹ generation youth are acculturating to Minnesota. In using the term acculturation, instead of assimilation, I am referring to the balance between ones home-culture and the new culture(s) surrounding them. In the model of assimilation, new immigrants shed their ethnic identities and replace those unique identities with a mainstream identity. Acculturation, however, is an individualized balance between these two cultural realms in which the individual chooses which traits to keep and which traits to shed, in

¹ 1.5 generation refers to immigrants who spent some or most of their childhood in their native country prior to immigration.

order to become the most successful and happy in their new society. Although somewhat vague, these terms will be explored more completely later in this thesis with examples in the context of Karen refugee youth.

Hmong Acculturation

The Hmong share many similarities with the Karen. Both groups originate from Southeast Asia and came to the United States as refugees. Similar to the Hmong many Karen came to the United States with little language skills and many were farmers. While their cultures vary dramatically, their experiences of racialization and acculturation in the United States have many similarities largely because of the nature of their arrival to the United States.

Bao Lo (2009) seeks to understand the challenges Hmong youth face in acculturation at a school in Sacramento, California. Lo finds that many Hmong youth are struggling. For males, many feel unsafe at school and at home because of pressures from gangs. Many youth are harassed at school and alienated. For some youth gangs provide the sense of belonging and protection that they do not receive from the schools or their communities. Lo also notes that the struggles with poverty and race prove to be enormous barriers to integration into the middle class. The pressing economic needs of the youth and their families distract them from continuing to further their education and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Students who found success in the U.S. through support from their parents if they were not bound to strict parental expectations and from schools that worked with students to create their own identity. Lo found that many of the 1.5 and second generation Hmong youth were falling short of high expectations from parents and were left behind in schools.

Lo's (2009) finding surrounding the Hmong experience share many similarities in my findings on Karen youth. Many youth struggle with oppositional identities and safety in school. The similarities in push factors to a new country as well as racial and economic status contribute to the similarities between these two ethnic communities. More light will be shed on the similarities and differences between the experience of these two groups.

Social Capital

When using the term "social capital" in the context of refugee youth we are looking critically at the societal assets of the youth that are perceived positively by the larger society and contribute to the success of the youth. Karen students have both similar and different assets from other Southeast Asian refugee youth, which will be explored later.

Coleman (1988) defines three forms of social capital a) obligations and expectations, b) information channels, and c) social norms. It is through these processes that appropriate and acceptable behavior and attitudes are transmitted. Fernandez-Kelly (1995) explains that immigrant communities who adhere and adapt their social capital to their new environments accommodate the challenges and transitions new immigrants may face. Thus, it is a process by which parents help to teach their children.

In a case study of Vietnamese youth in East New Orleans, Zhou and Bankston III (1994) explore the impact of social capital in this ethnic enclave. Zhou and Bankston III found that youth who had become alienated from the adults in their community by their rapid assimilation to American culture were those who were most likely to be getting into legal trouble. While they may seem "Americanized" they did not reap any of the benefits of white Americans and were caught between two cultures, with out the social capital of either group. Essentially,

understanding and functioning within the norms of a sphere in society, in this case Vietnamese-Americans, was critical for the success of the youth. Those who were not taught those norms or rejected them were often left behind.

While social capital is critical to success of immigrants, we cannot only look at what they must learn and gain access to in their new country in order to be successful. González, Moll and Amanti (2005) explains that we must look beyond the view that immigrant's home culture is problematic and lacking. There are significant funds of knowledge that immigrant communities understand and navigate that are not recognized by the new country's dominant capital (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). While it is critical for success in the new country, social capital is not the sole means of successfully navigating a new country.

Oppositional Behavior

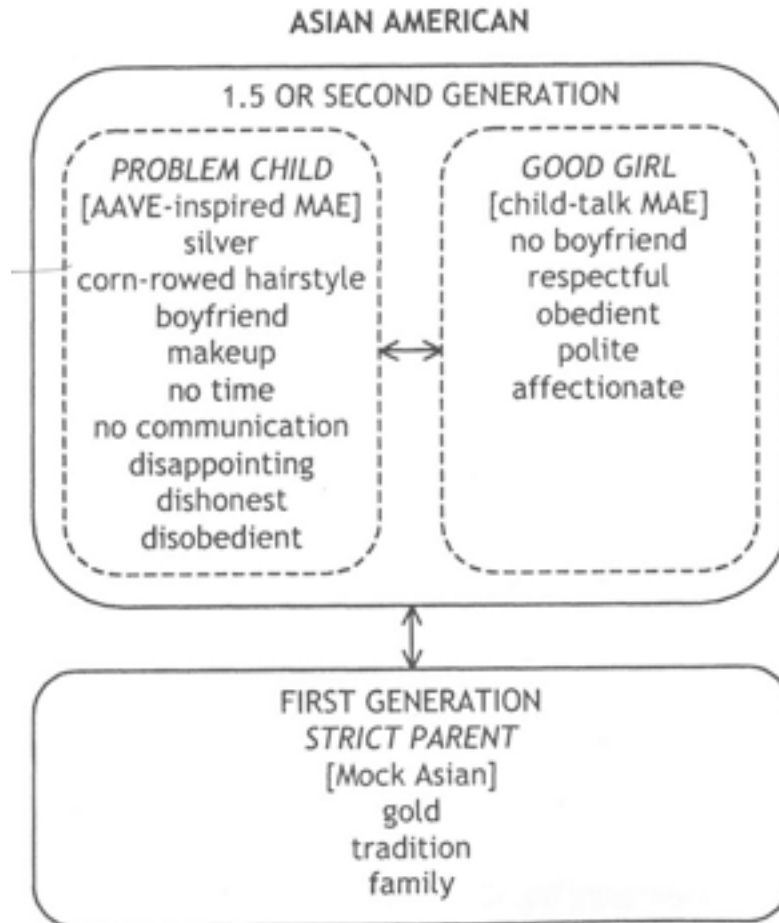
Immigrants come into direct or indirect confrontation with racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination daily at school and society at large. Many of these youth adapt particular behaviors as a response to daily discrimination. "Oppositional behavior" is a label that has been attributed to a group of these behaviors that has been observed often times, in schools and larger society. Karen youth, similar to many other immigrant youth, experience this discrimination, thus below I will explore the emergence and use of the term *oppositional behavior*.

Ogbu (1992) looked closely at minority students' experiences in school. He categorized them as either voluntary or involuntary immigrants. The term voluntary is used to define whether or not the "immigrant" chose to come to this country. Examples of involuntary immigrants in Ogbu's research are Native Americans, Black Americans, and some Chicanos. Refugees however were placed in their own middle category, semi-voluntary immigrants (Ogbu

& Simons, 1998). For voluntary immigrants learning the language and practices of the dominant culture are modes for success in their new country. For involuntary immigrants however, conforming means disconnecting from their own culture. Their culture is positioned as oppositional to the dominant culture, as it was formed in response to racism and discrimination. To give up this oppositional behavior may be seen as giving up their unique identity, only to be replaced by practices and values of mainstream White America.

For refugee students this oppositional behavior gets teased out a bit differently than for Ogbu and Simons's (1998) involuntary immigrant. Many immigrant youth try to adjust to the prejudice they experience from students and teachers--which causes them to either accept an oppositional identity to the culture of some of their classmates and/or shed obvious markers of ethnic identity (Ascher, 1985). This becomes troubling for not only educators, but also parents of the youth who may push them to stay connect to their ethnic roots. For youth who feel discriminated against in the classroom and do not have other outlets for support, oppositional behavior becomes a means of survival and acceptance.

When explored through the lens of Asian American immigrants Angela Reyes (2007) develops what this oppositional behavior may look like for 1.5-generation Asian American students. In the diagram the students are often categorized two ways as either the problem child or the good girl. This diagram (p. 58) below explains the particular experience of a Vietnamese-American female.



The false binary between problem child and good girl is also the false binary between old and new, ethnic identity and American identity. These binaries leave little middle grounds for youth. This binary labels youth a good or bad, and offers little space for the individual. Additionally, for many Asian American students the expectations of the parent play a strong role in the perception and expectation of these two types of children. Elimination of these binary helps us to create a more holistic idea of the acculturation of 1.5 generation youth.

Model Minority Stereotype

The model minority stereotype emerged in the 1960's as a categorization of the success of a minority population in the United States, Asian Americans, over other "unsuccessful" minority groups. This stereotype permeates the classroom and society at large. In the classroom Asian American students are known as the "wiz kids" who make their success through hard work and high marks in the classroom. This stereotype however is troubling for many, both high achieving and low achieving Asian American students as well as students from the "less-than-model minorities" such as Native American and Black students. For Asian American students, if they do not measure up to this standard they are often seen as delinquents, and for students within other minority groups the question is "why are you not achieving success like these Asian students?"

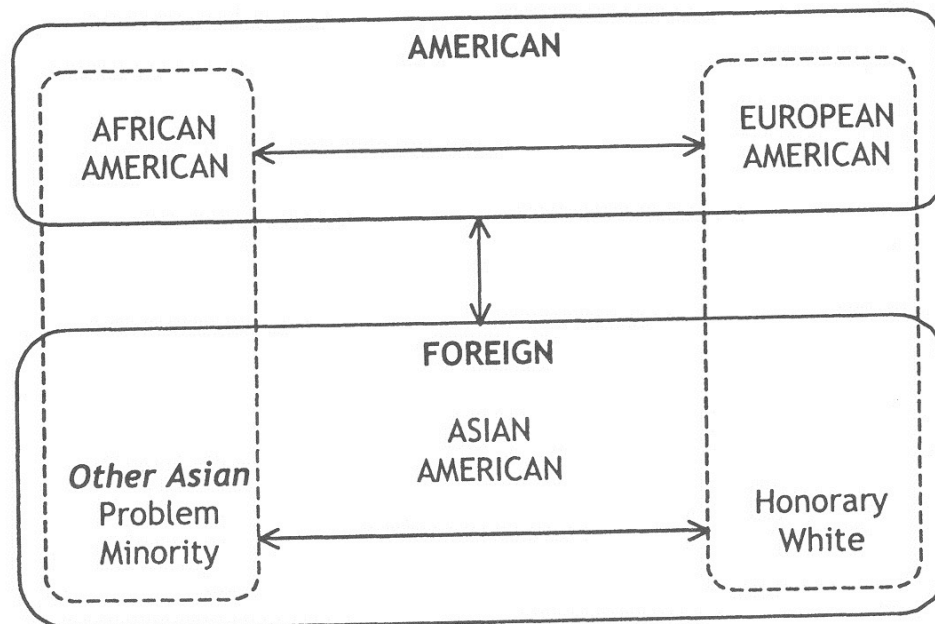
For many Southeast Asian refugees these binaries between being on the honor roll and being in a gang has presented itself as a serious threat to this population's success. For the delinquents a lot of blame is placed on becoming too Americanized, and for students who are successful, much of the success is attributed to the values within the student's home culture. In this type of scenario, students who are from the 1.5-generation are often seen as the honor roll students and second-generation students are the students lost in American culture (Rumbaut 1995). However these assumptions may also be reversed. Researchers like Sherman (1988) attributed the struggles of the Hmong 1.5 generation students to the clashes between Hmong and American culture. Again the perception of Hmong and American cultures as mutually exclusive and extremes of a binary, is simply not accurate for students who live in both worlds. Experiences in both cultures by 1.5 generation Hmong youth is silenced by this expectation of one culture or the other.

Lee (2001) hashes out the troubles of this stereotype in her research on Hmong American high school students. Lee broke down these binary stereotypes of recently arrived Hmong refugees and painted a more complete picture. In the Wisconsin high school the research evolved from, there was a divide between the “newcomers” and the “Americanized” students. Parents, teachers, and students based these categorizations of Hmong students on their birth place and fluency of languages, as well as clothes, and their attitudes towards school and adults. Lee emphasizes how dynamic Hmong culture is -- and must be so that this refugee population can be successful in the United States. For the newcomers, or 1.5 generation, Lee’s research suggested that they have obvious roots in Hmong culture, but are growing up in families that have made many adjustments to adapt American culture, such as valuing education for women and daughters. And many second-generation students continue to identify strongly as Hmong. Lee’s research challenged the false binary explaining that it is not the maintenance of culture that provides for success in both 1.5 and second-generation students, it is the careful and deliberate “accommodation and acculturation without assimilation” (p 525) of the student’s home culture with American culture. Lee also brought to light what she calls “structural” forces that affect students’ academic success; these included perceived economic opportunities, racism, and the culture of their school.

In Bic Ngo’s (2008) work, Ngo continues to uncover this middle ground of experience of Asian American students. She proposed three recommendations to examine this middle place. First, we need to address projections of the dominant culture onto this immigrant group, essentially stereotypes. Then, Ngo suggests that we uncover the roots and evolution for these stereotypes, specifically looking at their political implications. Finally, it is critical to take these stereotypes from the realm of theory and analyze how they affect the daily lives of students. Ngo

emphasizes the idea that culture is dynamic, and if we seek understanding of minority/immigrant/refugee group we must seek out the ever-changing dynamics between home-culture and American culture.

Reyes (2007) diagrams the spectrum and interplay of the model minority stereotype (p. 15):



Critical to this diagram is the dotted lines that Reyes explains is the range of experiences and attitudes falsely represented by finite labels. Just as Ngo has suggested there is a middle ground beyond the dotted lines of the binary experience of Asian American youth. The reality of the individual experience as well as the dynamics of culture account for this middle ground.

Exploring the well-documented perception of other Asian American students in US schools is critical to understanding the climate that Karen youth experience when entering US schools. The model minority stereotype exposes the similarities and the invisibility of unique experiences of Asian American youth.

Purpose of the Study

There has been almost no research published on the experiences of Karen youth in the United States. After a careful review of the literature the only published document I uncovered was a masters thesis published by Stacie Jai Fraire (2009). Her research looked closely at the acculturation of newly arrived Burmese immigrant students who had been in the country less than one year. All of the student participants attended a Newcomer Academy and were between 13-20 years old. The three main themes uncovered in her research were that the students struggled to communicate effectively in English, that they did not understand the U.S. education system's rules and protocols, and that they were struggling financially which affected their schooling. Overall, this research looked closely at the experiences of newcomers from Burma-- not specifically the Karen. This research begins to fill the gap in research on this newly arrived population. It offers insight into the daily schooling experiences of racialization. Additionally, I discuss the social and cultural capital provided by the churches. Finally, programs that currently serve the youth are examined for their success in promoting acculturation.

Methodology

Background to Research

My interest in this research began in the summer of 2010 when I visited a local church the Karen families attended. I had been hired to work with Karen youth in an after-school program and I knew little about the community, and this was my first step towards learning more. After attending a service, meeting the pastor and a few members of the community, my research had begun. In the fall of 2010 I began working with Karen youth at the after school program and realized I had a lot to learn about the community in Minnesota and their history in Burma. My education courses shaped my critical understanding of the experience of immigrant and students of color in schools. As my relationship with individuals in the program grew, I gained more insight into their experience in schools.

In the summer of 2011 I began a collaborative research project with Dr. Letitia Basford, seeking to explore Karen students' access to post-secondary education. I interviewed thirteen adults who were teachers, administrators, and mentors that worked with the Karen community. Through these interviews I gained perspective on the youth's experience in school, something I knew little about except from the stories the youth would tell me. I gained a valuable background for this research, but I found that I was not asking the right questions. I was a few steps ahead by asking about post-secondary access when there were some pressing challenges the youth faced in K-12 schools.

In the summer of 2012 I focused on learning specifically about Karen youth and their experience in U.S. schools. I had hundreds of anecdotal stories stored in my mind about their experiences, but I wanted to ask them in a one on one formal interview setting. Through these interviews I wanted to get their perspective, in their own words.

Research Theory and Design

The goal of my research was to capture the voices of the youth and gain their perspective on their schooling experiences in the US. While much of my findings in the interviews corroborated with literature surrounding the experiences of immigrant and Asian American youth, I completed the interviews before completion of the literature review. I wanted to make sure that my research was shaped around the youth's voices. Since I had a two-year relationship with most of the participants, I had an idea of what to ask based upon what the youth had already expressed to me informally.

The research conducted is qualitative. Much of this thesis is supported by the details revealed in interviews. My advisor, Dr. Letitia Basford's (2008) case study on Somali refugee youth shaped much of my design to my own research. In her research I appreciated the opportunity for individual stories and perspectives from the youth instead of generalized experiences. She helped me shape a case study that would share the story of their individual and unique experiences. I created questions that allow students to explain their story, not simply answer the questions I posed.

I conducted ten interviews with Karen students from the after school program. The interviews took place after summer programming that the youth interviewed participated in. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The interviews were voluntary, I asked each student if they were interested, and all of the students I approached expressed interest. Students were required to have a parental consent form signed that was translated into Karen². The students were interviewed individually. Each student was asked the same series of questions, but

² See Appendix A for Sgaw Karen parental consent form and Appendix B for English parental consent form.

follow up questions differed for each of the youth³ depending on what information was provided throughout the interview. I examined interview transcripts, looking for similar themes. From this emerged strong commonalities of experiences, as well unique experiences that offered a complex perspective.

The research conducted in 2011 was used in this project, but it was used only to support or contrast the youth's statements. The perspective of the administrators, teachers and community leaders helped to add an additional layer of information to what the students had shared, but the primary source of this paper was student interviews.

Participants

Selection of the participants was not random. I intentionally asked students that I had known for two years and that had been in the country at least three years to participate. The only exception to these factors was one 5th grader, Hser Baw. Hser Baw has an older brother who I had known for two years, but I wanted interview Hser Baw to seek the perspective of someone that was younger. I also tried to balance between males and females, and between grades, but I did not limit based on those factors. I had a goal of interviewing between 7-12 students, depending on gaps in information that the interviews revealed. These interviews lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour depending on how much the youth shared. Below is a table of each of the participants.

Primary Sources- Completed Summer 2012

Below is a table detailing the students who were interviewed. It is important to note that all of the names throughout this paper are pseudonyms. These students' interviews are the

³ See Appendix C for the Student Interview Protocol.

primary sources for the thesis. All of the Karen youth interviewed were receiving English Learner (EL) services, but each had strong English communicative skills so that I could conduct the interviews in English and did not need translation services.

Name	Grade	Gender	Arrival in Country
Eh Say	9th	M	2007
Hser Baw	5th	M	2007
Hser Ni	10th	F	2005
Rah Bay	10th	F	2005
Emily	7th	F	2007
Moo Say	7th	F	2007
Doh Pu	7th	M	2009
Naw Pid	7th	F	2009
Kyaw Doh	7th	M	2009
Htoo Saw	7th	M	2009

Secondary Sources- Completed Summer 2011

My secondary sources of information came from research completed in the summer of 2011. This research was largely focused on how students are integrating and their access to post-secondary education. I use this information as a secondary source because the goal of my paper was not to reflect observers' opinions about the community, but to focus on the students' perspective. The questions asked can be found at the end of this paper in Appendix D. In this paper, none of the secondary source participants are given a name, again to emphasize the focus on the students' voices. While not all of the participants below were referenced in the paper, their

perspective may have indirectly shaped my findings. These interviews typically lasted 45-75 minutes. Below is a chart of the participants interviewed:

Role	Additional Details	Referenced in Paper
Administrator of district discussed in paper	Organized summer school and additional out of school support resources.	Yes
EL Teacher	High School- Low Intermediate EL.	No
Sheltered Contented Teacher	Also attends local Baptist church that the youth attend.	No
Community Program Organizer	Organizes activities targeted towards post-secondary access for girls.	No
Church Pastor	American Pastor of Large Baptist church in the area, first line of contact for many families	Yes
Recent Graduate	Recent arrival that graduated from ethnically specific charter school.	No
Administrator of ethnically specific charter school	Not an administrator at the youth interviewee's school district.	No
Teacher of ethnically specific charter school	Not a teacher at the youth interviewee's school district.	No
Adult EL coordinator	In the students' district.	No
Mentor from McVay Youth Partnership	Worked with youth who were interviewed.	Yes

Role	Additional Details	Referenced in Paper
Director of McVay Youth Partnership		No
Academic support coordinator at Nonprofit		No
Past mentor, current summer school instructor	Worked for the McVay Youth Partnership	No

Role of the Researcher

I questioned my intention for writing this paper many times throughout the two years of research. As a young white American female who grew up in the suburbs, I had little experience in the challenges that these youth face, which posed the question: why am I so interested? My interest in this community started quickly after I learned I would be working with Karen youth. I wanted to learn as much as possible before walking into the experience. The little that I gathered was nothing compared to what I learned working with the youth. The closer I got with the students the more questions I had about their broader experience beyond the after school program.

While this curiosity sprouted from a natural place I asked myself, why do I feel like *I* should share this information? There was nothing extraordinarily unique about my experience with the youth that allowed me the rights to share their stories and experiences. I accepted that and promised to listen--not to tell or to assume, but to listen. I had a wealth of stories that were shared with me through my two years working with the youth, but I wanted to make sure I heard them correctly. The formal interviews allowed me to listen, record, reflect, and then extract.

It is impossible to deny that certain voices in our society carry more weight. Certain methods of presentation carry more value. This paper does not fill the space where their should be voices, but seeks to start and continue conversation about the needs of this new immigrant community.

Throughout my research, I have tried to be careful not to fall into the trap where educators only see the deficits. I listened closely to moments and places where the youth I interviewed felt proud and safe. I heard stories of teachers and mentors who went above and beyond, and made an impact on the youth. I saw the passion and commitment the youth had for their church. It is important to remember that just like every community there are strengths and challenges; additionally each individual has their own story.

As I finished writing the findings chapter of my research, an older female youth approached me at the after school program and vented about everything that was wrong with how Karen students were treated in school, in sports, and in the general community. She spoke for almost a half an hour and I did not say a word. I listened. Each of the issues she presented were a part of my paper. She did not know this. When you are reading this paper, listen. Read between the lines of the students' comments and reflect on the quotes. The voices of the students are present and asking for your attention.

Findings

Below are the three major themes that emerged from the interviews with the youth. The first theme, religion, details the role of the Christian church in the daily lives of Karen students. The second theme looks closely at the impact race has on student's experiences in schools and

the development of a racial identity in these youth. The final theme examines the impact of programs on students' acculturation, both positive and negative.

Theme 1: Religion

The Christian church plays a significant role in the positive acculturation of Karen refugees. In Minnesota, approximately 95% of the Karen are Christian. While the majority are Christian, there are also small numbers of Buddhist Karen (Alcorn, 2012). In the following section, I will talk about the role of the church in students' lives, including Buddhist students. Finally, I will talk about the social capital attending church develops in new Karen refugees.

Initial Resettlement

The most common ways refugees come to the US is to be sponsored by a church, non-profit organization, or family members. In the case of Karen refugees the churches have played an integral role in the initial resettlement of refugees through sponsorship, donations upon resettlement, and continued community support as they live in their new home. Many families upon arriving will hear from their neighbors about a local church and the families will go together. Families' first trips often result in receiving donations, donated by both Karen and US-born church members. A new family is welcomed within the first few weeks of arriving to the US by the churches.

Why do you go to church?

Of the ten youth I interviewed all reported initial assistance from churches, all reported that they currently attend church, and all reported that they enjoyed going to church. The

following findings come from the interviews with the youth, nine who identify as Christian and one who identifies as a Buddhist.

There are three main churches in the area that the students reported attending. For many, transportation to these locations is a reoccurring issue. Some families car-pool or use their family car. Some take advantage of the churches' fifteen passenger vans or small buses. These church vehicles visit the apartment complexes several times throughout the week. While transportation is an obstacle to attending church, all youth report attending regularly, even if they do not attend with their parents. Many youth reported going to church up to three times a week. I wanted to know why students consistently attended and enjoyed church.

Doh Pu, a seventh grade Male, put it very simply when asked what he liked about church, "I like listening to music, singing, and reading the bible. I like to listen to old man talk about the Bible." For Christian Karen families, their religion is something they take very seriously. The youth embrace church and their religious obligations, because of how central it is to their community. An example of this commitment is at Saturday singing practice where students may wait two hours at the beginning and end of practice to be transported because of all the interested youth and lack of transportation.

Churches offer talent shows, plays, and sports tournaments, in order to engage the youth. The churches also provide tutoring and meals for the youth. All of these offerings create a safe space for parents to send their youth. Unlike many other ethnic groups in Minnesota, many of the adult and youth sports tournaments are facilitated primarily by churches or the Karen Organization of Minnesota, rather than at large community members. The churches are central to activities and support for the Karen community.

This type of community centered around religion is not unique to Karen refugees. This broad community engagement in the churches can be compared to Catholic Vietnamese immigrants in East New Orleans. Zhou and Bankston (1994) report that Mary Queen of Vietnam Church, “has served not only as place of worship but also as the focal point of secular community activities.” Similar to the Baptist churches in the area in the case of the Karen, Mary Queen of Vietnam holds after school classes and has markets for the community every Saturday morning. While approximately eighty percent of the community is Catholic, the community as a whole broadly utilizes these services. Zhou and Bankston (1994) report that frequent involvement in this ethnic community by the youth supports strong communication skills in their native language and facilitates the formation of students’ ethnic identities. The case of Vietnamese immigrants in East New Orleans shows the capacity of a religious center to connect and engage an immigrant community, similar to the Karen experience in Minnesota.

The Buddhist Case

To illustrate the type of community the church provides for youth we must look at Buddhist Karen youth who attend church. Emily, a seventh grade female, told me her story of being a Buddhist Karen in Minnesota. When I asked her what religion she was, she responded with a bit of reluctance stating she was, “Buddhist, well my family is. I go to church.” Emily explained how Buddhist families in her community practiced religion. She shared that many Buddhist Karen in Minnesota practiced at home and made a few trips to a temple. When families did decide to go, the families from the same apartment complex would go together, since the temple is not close to their homes. The temple Emily reported attending offers tri-lingual services in English, Karen, and Thai. These additional language accommodations for the

new Karen arrivals show the intentional outreach by the temples. However, unlike the churches, the temples serve only a small portion of the community, and do not serve as a focal point for the Karen community as a whole, only the Buddhist Karen community.

Emily attended church with her friends rather than her family. In Emily's case, her family has only gone to church together once, when they first settled in Minnesota. Again, this shows that even for Buddhist Karen families, the churches are an initial point of contact while in the United States. The experiences of Emily demonstrate how the church is an initial and continual space for many, but not all, Karen to create and build community in Minnesota. While Emily regularly attended church she shared experiences when she did not feel included. She shared, "people used to make fun of my religion, I have to be quiet about it sometimes." These feelings of exclusion can be troubling for some students who find themselves isolated from a source of cultural and social capital. Her story shows only a glimpse of the Buddhist Karen experience in the Christian community.

Social Capital

Since many Karen refugees are Christians, some Americans view these immigrants differently. This is exemplified in an article titled "Karen are Deserving of American Welcome," published on March 2012 in the Austin Daily Herald. Within his article, Wallace Alcorn emphasizes the legal status of the immigrants and how his path crossed with this new immigrant group at his church. He appreciated their commitment to Christianity and presence in his church. The common connection for these immigrants and White Americans is church. This initial commonality provides for easier integration and acculturation in comparison to other immigrant groups. Sharing the same religion creates bridges between new immigrants and Christian

Americans, as there are common celebrations, customs, and music that are shared through this channel of communication.

The theory of segmented assimilation, multiple paths of acculturation, affirms the benefits of a centralized ethnic community. Zhou and Xiong (2005) explain that in the case of immigrants, like Hmong refugees who arrived with practically nothing, the absence of a centralized ethnic community that youth participate in would lead to exacerbated downward mobility. According to Zhou and Xiong, the presence of a strong ethnic community interrupts clear paths towards systematic poverty experienced by first generation refugees. For Karen youth the churches create a space for a centralized ethnic community that adjusts to the social, economic, and cultural needs of Karen refugees in the United States and provides them with social capital critical for success in the US.

Theme 2: Race

Racial Context

The Karen students interviewed in my research attend school in a first ring suburb of the Twin Cities in Minnesota. This school district, similar to others in the area, is experiencing increased enrollment of diverse youth. From 2006 to 2012 enrollment of students of color increased 44%, while enrollment of white students decreased 14%. In 2011 the racial breakdown of the district was as follows: 57% White, 19% Asian, 13% Black, 10% Hispanic, 1% American Indian. The explicit and implicit labels and stereotypes related to race are learned quickly by refugee youth in a new country.

The following theme explores Karen students' experience with race, including being racialized and the development of their understanding about other races. First I will capture the

way students perceive the racial groups in their school and Karen students' experiences with horizontal racism. Then, I will discuss the development of oppositional behavior in Karen male youth. I explore the experience of what it means to be Asian American, a student of color, an immigrant, and Karen in this suburban school.

Racial Mapping

“Racial mapping” is an activity portrayed in Olson’s (2008) ethnographical research of a California high school. She observes a teacher who asks immigrant youth to explain the racial grouping that happens within the school. Both the immigrants’ perspective and non-immigrants’ perspective is captured where the non-immigrants perceive the groupings of youth in racialized terms, and the immigrants perceive youth more by their ethnic identity. I found this research to reveal a lot about how immigrant students felt they were received by their schools, something I wanted to gather from the students in my study.

A question I asked all of the students I interviewed was, “What different groups of students are there at your school?” As with what Olson discovered, students who had been in the country three years or less were more likely to refer to groups of people by which language they speak or by the country they are from. For example white students were referred to as English people, Latino students as Mexico people, black/African American students as Africa people. This labeling was consistent among four students who had been in the country for just three years. Students who had been in the country more than three years, on the other hand, referred to white students as Americans, black/African American students as African American or Black, and other ethnicities by their specific titles e.g. Hmong, Somali, Mexican. All the students

referred to themselves as Karen students. The differences in use of labels show the students' perspective shift after being in the country for a few years.

This racial mapping described by the students reflects their understanding of racial groups in the United States. Within these descriptions are implied understandings of who is American and who is not. For example, white students were easily identified as English or American, while black students fall into other categories such as "Africa," "black," or "African American". This discrepancy in who is labeled American, and who is labeled differently is learned by Karen youth. It is reflective of who is truly American in their eyes, and who is not. Not once were white students identified as "white" or "Caucasian", instead they were labeled "American."

Not only is there specific language about defining racial groups that are relayed to the students, there are specific characteristics that can be relayed. Returning to the interview with Emily, seventh grade female, I asked, "If I were to go to your school, what different groups of students would I see?"

Emily: You would see people who are really naughty.

Me: Who are the naughty kids?

Emily: You know they are black and stuff. They got into a fight with Eh Doh.

Emily has been in the country for five years and answered the question very candidly. She comfortably labels black students as naughty, based on her experiences and interpretation of the racial context around her. Emily's perception of black youth is not uncommon. The Karen students learn quickly the hierarchy of racial groups in the United States. Their use of labels and definitions of groups most clearly exemplifies this understanding.

The N Word

To further illustrate this complicated mapping of race for Karen students is the use of the N-word by four students, males who have been in the country for around 3 years. The students were all sixth graders at the time. At the after school program where I work, we had issues with some of the Karen youth using the “N-word.” They had been using it either as an explicative or by repeating lyrics in a song. After a few weeks of staff telling the students to stop saying that word, explaining that it was never okay to use the term, four male youth approached me and asked what the “N-word” meant. Each of the youth was guilty of using the word at program, so I was initially surprised by their interest in the meaning. It was clear in the dialogue that proceeded that their understanding of the word was limited to using it as an explicative. The context and history behind the word was beyond their initial understanding.

Other than in song lyrics, these male students’ experiences with the N-word stem from personal experience. In the dialogue the youth responded saying that they were called the “N-word,” so it only seemed fair that they would be able to use the term. This experience was not uncommon for male youth. In an interview, Eh Say, an eighth grade male, told a story where he had been called the “N-word.” He had gotten into a verbal altercation with a black youth and as the dispute was ending the black youth said to Eh Say, “You Karen people, you’re the real niggers.” The complexities behind this statement reflect a larger, extremely complicated, racial context at these schools and the complicated racial context in the United States. As we can see by this experience where their black peers call Karen youth the “N-word,” there is a racial hierarchy in their schools, which is projected upon Karen newcomers. This is a clear example of racism experienced and internalized by black youth that is transformed into horizontal racism, which will be explained fully in the following section.

Racialization

Racialization is the processes of understanding racial context and the racial hierarchy in the United States. For US-born students this happens from the day they are born. For refugee students, this process starts again the day they step off the plane in the United States. While many refugees have experienced ethnic persecution, the re-racialization in the United States is an unavoidable process, particularly for students of color.

In the case of Karen students, similar to other students of color, grappling with racialization is a daily challenge. While I've already explained Karen students' internalized understandings of race within their schools, it is important to explore the horizontal racism Karen students experience from other racial groups. The term horizontal racism is when a member of a target group (in this case a racial minority) is believing, acting on, and/or enforcing the dominant system of oppression on a member of the same or a different target group (adapted from Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, 2009). The example of Eh Say's altercation from the previous section clearly illustrates horizontal racism; a black student (a target identity) believes, acts on, and enforces the use of the N-word on another targeted group, Eh Say, a Karen youth.

The experience of horizontal racism in this school district is not unique to Karen youth. In an interview an administrator in the school district openly shared their perspective on the issue of horizontal racism experienced by Karen students in their district:

The tension that we're starting to see, which is very, very common, is the tension between the Karen and the African Americans, and the Karen and the Latinos. A lot of times minority groups will, because they have no power, they can't fight the white system, so they fight each other. Some of it is the -- not a very good neighborhood. Lots of Latino and African American gangs in that neighborhood. They are so close, right on that corner. So what they do is, the black and the Latino gangs, they aren't going to pick a fight with the white kids, but they will pick a fight with the young Karen kids.

Every student I interviewed mentioned a personal altercation with either a black or Latino student. While I believe that the cause of these altercations is horizontal racism, it is critical to emphasize that these altercations are not the product of the “failures” of a particular racial group, in this case black or Latino students. Horizontal racism evolves from both institutional and personal racism that favors white people over people of color. Racism is internalized and projected uniquely by every person in the system, and horizontal racism is a product of this larger system of racism.

When I asked the youth what was the cause of these altercations, all responded that they did not know. A common scenario reported by male youth took place when entering or exiting the school restroom. For each male student interviewed the story sounded the same: The Karen boy or boys would enter the bathroom. A black student would raise their fist threateningly and/or state a negative slur to the Karen student(s). The Karen student/s would either leave or comment back exiting the bathroom quickly. In only a few cases did the student report the incident to a teacher. When it was reported, the problem stopped temporarily. The horizontal racism experienced by the youth is a product of the racial context and climate in the school. These conflicts often go unmitigated by the school, forcing students to adapt to these altercations without fully understanding the cause.

Oppositional Behavior

A product of racism experienced by these Karen youth, in particular the male youth, is what Ogbu (1992) defines as oppositional behavior. A majority of the male youth that I have worked with reported having been accused of being in a gang. Many youth, in an effort towards protecting themselves, have made groups and labels for themselves AKB- Asian Karen Boy or

KB- (= city name) Karen Brothers/Boys. The color of these groups is red, as many of the youth will explain, the “Bloods are red, we wear red.”

However, after sitting down and talking with the youth many times to talk about gangs, it is obvious they do not understand the scope of what it means to be in a gang. Minnesota statutes outline ten criteria of gang membership. The criteria according to the Metro Gang Task Force are as follows:

Admits gang membership or association; (2) Is observed to associate on a regular basis with known gang members; (3) Has tattoos indicating gang membership; (4) Wears symbols to identify with a specific gang; (5) Is in a photograph with known gang members or using gang-related hand signs; (6) Is named on a gang document, hit list, or in gang-related graffiti; (7) Is identified as a gang member by a reliable source; (8) Is arrested in the company of identified gang members or association; (9) Corresponds with known gang members or writes or receives correspondence about gang activities; and (10) Writes about gangs (graffiti) on walls, books, or paper. (Chin, 2009)

A combination of any three of these criteria is grounds for labeling someone as a gang member. Even with three met criteria, if the group/individual has not participated in criminal activity or they are under the age of 14, they are not considered to be in a gang by law (Chin, 2009). For the Karen youth, many male youth may meet at least 3 of the criteria, but some are not over 14 and most have not committed a crime.

An example of the display of these gangs or self-regulated grouping by youth is obvious in their unique hairstyles and colors, as well as drawings on their skin and notebooks. Below are four photographs exemplifying these characteristics that may be attributed to gang activity.



This youth had taken letters for a particular craft activity and displayed the initials AKB (Asian Karen Boy) on his shirt. Several other youth imitated this student, although there were no altercations that triggered this response. This display of association of the fifth and sixth grade male youth unified the group.



(See caption below the following photograph.)



The two photographs above are examples of how older middle and high school youth imitate gangs. It is important to note that while there are distinct hair styles, as well as bandanas, hats, and red clothes, that these students do not dress like this daily. Most days there are subtle reminders of this imitation, but nothing more than a red shirt or a scribble on an arm for most youth. These two photographs are extreme examples.



Students will frequently come in with marked up arms; some as simple as AKB and some as intricate as the drawing above.

I cannot speak to the gang status of the Karen youth as a whole, but the youth photographed and interviewed are missing the critical element of gang membership- criminal activity. There are many young male youth who are physically imitating gangs. We must ask why these youth are participating in this imitation? All of the interviewed youth reported altercations involving horizontal racism without intervention at school. Additionally these students are constantly learning to navigate a white middle class culture in the schools, something they may never fully understand or fit into.

Ogbu (1992) explains that oppositional behavior is an intentional decision to differentiate oneself from the majority group that does not value them. Students learn quickly that they are treated unfairly by the majority group. This gang imitation is oppositional behavior; it effectively differentiates the youth. It provides a sense of community and protection for the youth who are experiencing racism--horizontal and otherwise. It provides means of coping with being the newcomer in schools that have a narrow definition of what it means to fit in, to be "American." This narrow idea of "American," in this case specifically the white middle class, is something that Portes and Zhou (1993) argue may never be attainable for non-white immigrants, regardless of the degree of acculturation or assimilation.

Lee (2001) interviewed Hmong youth, looking closely at this perception of Hmong youth gang participation. She interviewed a female who admitted that she was frequently perceived to be in a gang, based on how she dressed. The female youth explained that elders and staff in school assumed that she was involved with a gang. Although she was not involved in a gang, Lee points out that criticism from adults causes students to retreat to their peers and avoid adults-- parents, teachers, etc. This same attitude and reaction was present in the interviews with the Karen youth, particularly the males. While many of them would firmly state they thought

gangs were stupid and they did not aspire to participate in one, they admitted that how they dressed was associated with gang activity. The middle school youth did not care about adults' perceptions, they persisted that they were not in a gang so it did not matter how they dressed.

Gangsters or Grappling with Identity?

A commonly reported cause of gang activity among immigrant youth is the phenomenon of "over-Americanization." Stacy Lee (2001) dispels this myth of over-Americanization in her study of Hmong youth in Wisconsin. She explains that implicit in the idea of over-Americanization is the belief that American culture is inherently dangerous, and that the student's ethnic culture will shield them from any danger. Hmong students are not in gangs because that's what it means to become American, but because of a lack of opportunity due to institutional discrimination. In fact, for second-generation students, Lee explained that it was poverty and racism that caused Hmong students to lose faith in the educational system. Lee's findings align with Ogbu's understandings of the who is and is not accepted in the majority group. Bao Lo (2009) corroborates Lee's findings in her research surrounding Hmong youth. Lo concluded that the way in which Hmong youth are discriminated against and have their identity policed leads to violence, crime, and downward assimilation. Again, we must think back to the question, why are youth physically imitating gangs? The experience of the Karen youth is, so far, not very different than what Lee (2001) and Lo (2009) find in Hmong youth. Karen youth are getting lost in the mix of racialization without clear support from teachers, adults, and the broader community.

In the 2003 report *A Dream Denied: Education Experiences of Southeast Asian American Youth*, Um explains that without intervention vulnerable students turn to peer association for

support and protection, sharing that “group membership becomes a viable substitute for the support and nurturing that school and families fail to provide” (p. 14). We see this in the Karen students as they label and group themselves for protection. Lo (2009) comes to a similar conclusion in her research surrounding Hmong youth. Lo interviewed a Hmong teacher in Sacramento. The educator shared that they believed there were different types of gangs. “When we think of gangs, we think they’re going to do something bad initially. I think the Hmong kids need a sense of belonging. They just need to feel that they are part of something.” The dire need for belonging and genuine integration is critical for the youth, especially the male youth. Lo explains that oppositional behavior is not a product of the culture or individual, but a call to have their voice heard by their community, at home and at school. The Karen students, when challenged daily by the racial climate of their schools, create groups amongst themselves for the purpose of having a community in the school where they are welcomed and safe.

The reality of the situation was phrased well in an interview I conducted in the summer of 2011 with Keng, a Hmong male mentor, who said, "It's their environment that they live in. From what they see there is a divide between them and the other students too. It's a lack of understanding on both ends. There is tension, but there is a lot of learning left to do. " Intentional bridges need to be built towards integration and positive acculturation, because without intentional and reflective action, these students will be left behind.

Role of the Teacher

Racial tensions and school violence are not unique to Karen students. This a well-documented problem that affects students from many different backgrounds. These challenges are reflections of larger societal issues involving racism, poverty, and images of power. There

are steps of action that can be taken to affect these challenges faced daily by Karen students. While I will offer these steps relating directly to the experience of the students interviewed, they can be applied more broadly to other groups of students experiencing school violence, harassment, and exclusion.

We must acknowledge and listen to these students' experiences. Students from many different backgrounds have many experiences with race and being racialized, but these experiences are often not acknowledged by teachers. Teachers must create safe spaces where students can have open dialogues about these kinds of experiences. Consider the experience where the Karen student was called the N-word by a black student. A passive response by a teacher to this situation would be to simply listen to the student. A more active response would be to talk about steps that student could take and/or to talk directly to the other student(s) involved. Maybe this dialogue would be only between the involved parties or more broadly involving an entire class. To put simply, these moments need to be acknowledged and discussed. This is not a moment to avoid, but a moment that is teachable.

Many teachers are not comfortable talking about issues involving race and prejudice and more comfortable with dismissing the problem. Race and racism is positioned as a phenomenon of the past, instead of a daily experience. Students need both the opportunity and the language to understand and describe their experiences. Ideally, schools should provide teachers with training in how to facilitate and guide these types of needed dialogues for how to identify and combat racism. In a time of test driven academics, this suggestion may seem unrealistic, but these issues are not going to dissolve without attention to them. An incident in the school or in a classroom is a great opportunity to break some big topics such as horizontal racism down.

These recommendations align well with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) offers 3 criteria to promote empowerment of all students. The first is that all students need to be successful in the classroom. Students need opportunities to showcase their new skills and understandings. The second is that students should continually develop their cultural competence skills. As I recommended, students need explicit instruction on what they see daily. Without explicit instruction much is left to isolated interpretation. Finally, Ladson-Billings (1995) recommends that students have a critical understanding of the “status quo.” Karen students interviewed expressed an initial understanding of this status quo, but the understandings were not explained or mediated. In order to ensure success and a fair education to each student, it’s critical to teach (inside and outside of the classroom) using culturally relevant pedagogy.

Theme 3: Initiatives Towards Acculturation

This theme covers the past and present after-school programs and initiatives that strive towards facilitating the positive acculturation of Karen youth by schools and community groups. Without opportunities for positive acculturation immigrant students can adapt to their new countries in a less positive and more static way. Students are at risk for assimilating, thereby losing ties with their ethnic culture, and/or taking on an oppositional identity that contrast the dominant culture.

There are several programs and opportunities created by the school district and the broader community that I believe facilitate positive acculturation experiences for Karen youth. In this section I will discuss positive acculturation opportunities for students in summer school and sports teams. I will also examine evidence of an experience of positive acculturation that

was facilitated by a teacher at the Karen New Year. Finally, I will talk about the facilitation of positive acculturation by the after school program where I work with many Karen youth, the McVay Youth Partnership.

KOM Grant

The Karen Organization of Minnesota (KOM) received a federal grant to build programs to help integrate Karen youth who have been in the country less than 3 years. Frequently KOM partnered with the local school districts to implement their programs. In the summer of 2011 nearly all of the Karen youth in the district participated in summer school. Much of summer school was academic, but there was significant time dedicated to building American cultural knowledge. An administrator in charge of organizing the summer program explained that it was their intention to build the background knowledge and language that would support success in school. They explained, “so much of our language and our experience is based on the assumption that you’ve sat around a campfire and had smores.” During summer school students attended a baseball game, rode a Zamboni, and roasted marshmallows. The youth learned how to play games that many American-born students learned growing up such as checkers and Uno. This implicit cultural knowledge appears in word problems for math, MCA tests, and the language of American-born teachers in the general classroom.

In the summer of 2012 youth who had been in the country less than three years were invited on a weeklong camping trip. This trip built the background knowledge and the sense of community among the youth. The explicit instruction and structured experiences to build cultural knowledge is critical for success, not only as a student, but also as a member of their new country. These cultural experiences help to promote positive acculturation in the youth through

increase knowledge about their new country. As they learn more about their new country in a structured environment, they begin to find a space where they fit. It also impacts students in the classroom because they build cultural knowledge necessary for success.

Show Choir Performance

During summer school in 2011 there was an opportunity for youth who had been in the country for more than three years to participate in a show choir performance sponsored by a federal grant and the school district. The performance built students' skills in song, dance, and stagecraft. The youth performed traditional American songs, popular songs on the radio, and traditional Karen songs. This performance included not only Karen youth, but also other students who were also attending summer school or the extended day programs. There was a combination of US-born and Karen staff who worked on teaching the songs, choreography, and building the set. Students who were not Karen were learning Karen songs and Karen dances from Karen teachers. This program exemplified integration with a purpose. The administrator I interviewed explained that during the first year of summer school with the Karen students, the district completely integrated the students throughout summer school. This means there were no separate programs for the EL and mainstream summer school students. They found that this type of integration was unsuccessful socially because there were "too many bridges to build." The administrator explained that they choose strategic points of social integration with a common goal that can facilitate this bridge building, such as the show choir performance where English language skills are not as essential.

Another reason this show choir performance was successful in terms of integration was because there were Karen adults in positions of leadership. Some of the Karen staff were adults, while others were recent graduates. It is important for Karen students to have role models and

teachers who they identify with. This makes a difference in the level of interest and success the students have in an activity. Additionally, it provided an opportunity for U.S.-born students to experience a culture they may not have known about prior to the performance. U.S.-born students left a zone of comfort in order to sing and dance in a language and culture other than their own. This type of dual integration creates an atmosphere where vulnerability and discomfort is a common theme among all students, not just immigrant youth. Dual integration also creates an environment that values the skills that all students bring to the table. This is a great example of constructive integration that promotes positive acculturation. Students saw their culture and language showcased along side their new culture, with students from the broader school community.



Photograph of the students and staff from the show choir performance.

Karen New Year

At the New Year youth and adults participate in traditional dances, songs, and sports. The event is normally sponsored by churches, KOM, local school districts, and local businesses. At the 2012 Karen New Year there was a great example of positive acculturation. The space for the New Year was filled with Karen families and some US-born people in the audience, often teachers or friends. Each year the audience is filled with a greater variety of people, Karen and members of the larger community. On the edges of the audience are booths about resources targeted towards Karen families.

However, it was at the 2012 New Year that something different happened. Typically during the speeches and dances in the New Year, there is a constant buzz of conversation from the audience. During one part of the program in 2012 the audience became silent as nine sixth grade youth entered the stage, with their music teacher from school and violins in hand.



Nine Karen youth performing at the 2012 Karen New Year Celebration

The students played a few songs and exited the stage with roaring applause. This is a perfect example of integration. While violins are not a part of Karen culture, the students were able to showcase their talents they developed in school to their community. A female student performer Naw Pid (seventh grade-- sixth grade in this photo) shared with me in an interview that she was very nervous to perform. She said that her legs were shaking, but when everything was done she felt very proud. This is positive acculturation; finding a balance of home and school, home country and new country in a way that promotes positive self esteem and acceptance.

McVay Youth Partnership

The McVay program offers after school services for youth three days a week for about two and a half hours after school. There are two McVay sites that serve predominately Karen youth. Programming occurs in a Methodist church space, however the programming itself is not religiously affiliated. The program is focused around mentoring youth. Many of the staff, all of whom are Hamline University students, come from diverse backgrounds. Many staff were born in different countries, speak languages other than English, and are first generation college students. Students entering fifth grade through twelfth grade are eligible to attend the program. Students are registered in the summer by staff and older students who communicate with parents in Sgaw Karen, Pwo Karen, or Burmese. There are no attendance requirements-- students attend McVay by choice. A fifteen passenger van picks up and drops off the youth at their apartments, and if their family transitions from the apartments to a house in the area they are also picked up by the van.

All the students I interviewed for this research are involved in McVay, some for only two years, some since its inception in their neighborhood five years ago. I asked why they attended McVay and students' responses ranged from "to get out of the apartments" to "homework help." Eight out of ten students cited their relationship the staff as a major reason they attend McVay. Students responded that they would definitely encourage any new students to come to McVay, one student explained, "I would make them go. There's a lot of people [at McVay] and you can meet new people, new friends, and teachers. And if you need help, you can ask them to help you." The students' willingness and excitement about recommending the program to new arrivals reflects the value they find in attending McVay.

There are a few key components that make the program effective toward integration of new refugee youth. The first is the student and staff relationship. Students are able to identify and relate to staff because of the staff's diverse backgrounds. They see staff who are like them, whether Karen, Asian American, immigrants, refugees, or multilingual. While not every staff falls into each of these labels, there is a greater diversity than they may find in their schools. This sends a strong message that there is a place and purpose for those whom they may identify with and relate to.

Another critical element to the program is that it creates a safe space for youth who may not feel safe at school or at home. Students can come to program after a rough day at school or an argument with their parents and blow off steam. Students do not have to worry about being teased or bullied because of their language or identity at McVay either, as almost all participants are Karen. While there are a few Nepali, Hmong, and Burmese students that attend the program staff works to create a safe space for students who are not in the majority at McVay. The consistent attendance of youth, both Karen and not, reflects the welcoming environment. Emily,

seventh grade female, concluded, “McVay is like my family, except we’re not actually related.”

This general environment of inclusion and acceptance promotes self-confidence and helps students find a balance in their life at home and school, which is in essence positive acculturation.

A final critical aspect to the program is how it increases access to post secondary education. Youth are brought to Hamline University’s campus two times a year. In addition to the physical access, they interact with staff that are all college students. They are able to answer and field questions about college, and what it takes to enter college. Hser Ni, tenth grade female explained, “You know when I was in the [refugee] camps I thought that I would just do exactly what my parents did, and I think some kids still think that when they come here. But there are so many opportunities, and McVay helps me and other students see that there are opportunities for us.” McVay offers an opportunity to bridge gaps students may have between their future goals and daily challenges, as well as build cultural knowledge necessary for success. The increased access to higher education for Karen youth promotes positive acculturation because it helps students see the opportunities for additional education and skilled jobs are available for them, that there is a place for them in their new country at schools and in future careers.

Sports

Karen students’ participation in athletic activities is another major point of positive integration. The school district’s support of the sports program and after-school bussing largely provides this opportunity. If students choose to participate in a sport or after school club, a bus is provided to take the students home. This support from the school district is critical in order to provide an opportunity for all youth to participate regardless of parent’s ability to arrange

transportation. However, while sports provide opportunities for integration and means of positive acculturation, without leaders who actively seek to create community on the teams, the same hostilities experienced in the classroom and greater community are reproduced on the field.

It is obvious the level of passion and commitment the youth have in playing sports.

During an interview with Keng, a Hmong male mentor, he explained,

"I think a lot of our students love sports. I know a lot of our girls have gotten involved with volleyball. A lot of the boys are involved with soccer. I know a few have gotten into boxing and wrestling. They are always excited to get involved with any kind of sport. We've actually lost a few students to sports activities, but I think it's a great team-building thing. It definitely helps them with their English too."

The potential benefits of schools sponsored athletic activities for immigrant youth are immense, as it creates a collaboration of language and culture towards a common goal, to beat the other team. An administrator of the district explained that the level of integration of Karen students in sports, so early after arrival, is unprecedented.

However, as the Karen students learn more English and become more stable in their new country's surroundings they become aware of their treatment by coaches and teammates relative to other participants. Kaw Paw, a ninth grade male, revealed that he almost quit his soccer team. He shared that his team did not get along and played terribly on the field. The US-born students on his team would make fun of the Karen students when they spoke Karen. He explained the groups within his team did not get along with each other. Kaw Paw told his parents that he wanted to quit, but they encouraged him to continue and finish the season. Kaw Paw stayed on the team for this reason, but said that he would not play again. This story is all too common for the youth, both male and female, when they participate in sports. The students who have been in the country longer were more likely to report feeling excluded and teased, many of who debated continuing to participate in the sport.

These feelings of exclusion and mistreatment extend beyond the court as well. Hser Ni, a tenth grade female, explained that when she went to the end of the season banquet for volleyball both Hser Ni and her other Karen teammate did not know how they were supposed to dress. “Everyone was dressed fancy, and you know me and Rah Bay were in normal clothes. We sat alone at our own table, because the other girls didn’t make room for us. It was so weird being there. I wanted to go home.” Male or female, volleyball or soccer, on the court and off students do not feel included. One of the U.S.-born Christian mentors who frequently drives the youth to Saturday games or practices, explained in a conversation that for students who play volleyball, soccer, or wrestling there is an obvious lack of cohesion on the teams. It affects the team’s success, as well as the Karen student’s satisfaction.

While some youth continue to play school sports, many youth find an outlet for their athletic passion in community sports tournaments. As briefly explained in the first theme, the churches and some community organizations organize Karen sports tournaments. Youth reported in the interviews that they enjoyed the tournaments organized by their community. At these tournaments you would find a parking lot full of cars and a pile of bikes. There are volleyball nets and soccer goals set up for both Karen youth and adults. Many times the youth teams are organized by apartment buildings, which means teams come from different school districts, incorporating the broader Karen community.



Youth in a community organized soccer tournament

Whats important to note is that these youth continue to play sports, both inside and outside of school, with the expectation that they will be welcomed. While youth have little complaints about the environment at the community tournaments, there are clear patterns of misunderstanding, discrimination, or exclusion that continue to arise when the students reflect on their experience in school sports. Without constant intervention and education from their coaches to integrate and create a welcoming space for these youth, students like Kaw Paw will withdraw themselves from these opportunities for integration. For these students it is not a matter of apathy, but a message that is sent to them constantly, “we don’t want you here.” And if this message is not interrupted the students will continue to internalize and act upon it, acculturating oppositionally. School sports have Karen students’ interest and offer an opportunity to promote positive acculturation, but not enough has been done to interrupt

students' negative experiences. The Karen community sports tournaments offer an opportunity for students to adjust to their new home constructively, however this alone is not enough to harbor positive acculturation of Karen students in the broader community.

Room for Improvement

Coaches, teachers, and mentors must strive to build stronger relationships between students. Again, I will highlight the show choir event to reveal how students were given the chance to share their culture and expertise with other students they may not have otherwise talked with in school. There are ways to build relationships both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, grouping students who do not usually work together can build a relationship if students are provided the support they need to be successful together. The key elements to positive partnering or group experiences is that each individual is working towards a common goal and provided support in the process. The show choir performance worked toward the goal of preparing for the performance. In the classroom this goal could be as simple as completing an assignment.

Simply working towards a common goal with passive facilitation will not guarantee the development of positive relationships. In fact it can do the opposite. If we look closely at the sports teams that the students participated in, many youth reported feeling excluded. The teams had a common goal, to win the game, but without specific efforts made toward building relationships students were at risk for feeling isolated. Active facilitation means creating partners and teams to work together, teaching students how to work together, and mediating any disagreements. This type of facilitation is essential to breaking down barriers and walls created around students.

Oppositional identities should not be seen as a poor choice by the student, but as a product of a negative environment where youth did not feel welcome or supported. Inclusive environments encourage positive acculturation in many more students than would passive observance of issues facing students. Teachers, coaches, and mentors all play a critical role in building relationships among students.

Conclusion

Student interviews revealed first hand stories about successes and challenges the students face daily. There is still much to learn about this new refugee community, but the students who shared their stories helped to open the door to the depth of stories surrounding this community. In closing, I will recap the three main themes, religion, race, and positive acculturation. Then I will close with some final thoughts on Karen students' overall experiences.

Church and Beyond

The Karen community in Minnesota have an impressive resource in the community churches that support them. Even with some Buddhist Karen, the church provides an important space that much of the community needs and utilizes. Through these churches, youth have an opportunity to showcase their talents and skills and adults have the opportunity to share their culture with others. Additionally, with the majority of the Karen being Christian, the church provides them social capital that benefits them in school and the broader society. These aspects of the church promote positive acculturation especially for youth. It is important to realize that there may be a population of Buddhist Karen who are isolated from the church and do not have access to these resources.

Karen Identity

Karen youth are grappling with a complicated racial hierarchy in the United States. While some feel comfortable and confident with their ethnic identity in their new country, others are still searching. Interviews revealed the complex and challenging pathways students used to navigate of the different groups of students in their school. Consistently youth reported that their needs for safety and inclusion were not adequately met in schools. While some students were challenged with fist and some with cruel words, each student adapted uniquely to their environment. Some youth, particularly the male youth, acted oppositionally, challenging their status and environment. Overall, there are many pieces of the puzzle of personal identity, cultural identity, and expectations from peers, teachers, and family.

Promoting Positive Acculturation

Many Karen youth are participating in programs outside the classroom, whether it be sports, a special summer school program, or an after school program. Karen students encourage newcomers to join these same programs that they participate in. These programs have high levels of participation, however some Karen students are experiencing levels of disengagement due to feelings of exclusion from coaches, teammates, or other staff. Programs that were largely filled with Karen students and/or Karen led maintained engagement. Those programs that were opportunities for integration with the broader school community had a wide range of both positive and negative experiences. Programs need to transform to better support these students needs. Transformation entails, adjusting to concerns from youth and working on dynamic improvement beyond and initial fix. Programs like the show choir performance, where students

were mentored and assisted in building bridges between cultures, produced the most successful results and promoted positive acculturation.

Final Thoughts

After listening to countless stories from youth, finally recording them felt like years in the making. I had outlined this paper in my mind unintentionally long before I sat down and put my hands to the keyboard. As a future teacher, I recognize the power of listening. The power of identifying student needs and making yourself available. Beyond that, this research pushed me to take listening one step farther, to start speaking. Using my voice to share, advocate, and teach is critical to the success of each student.

This research is all about stories and experiences. The stories of the students are similar to those of refugee and immigrant youth before them. While there are similarities, there are also opportunities for growth in these experiences towards positive acculturation. Each student deserves a space to learn and feel accepted; this research uncovers areas of success and areas that need improvement to promote this goal. We must listen, reflect, and act on these stories--stories of successes and challenges, hope and frustration, and most of all change.

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Appendix A: Sgaw Karen Parental Consent Form

ဟဲလိန်

ယမံဉ်မ့ၣ် Margaret Crenshaw န့ၣ်လီၤဒီးယမၤတၢ်မၤလၢမဲးဘုသးစၢ်တၢ်မၤသကိးတၢ်ရဲၣ်တၢ်ကျဲၤ န့ၣ်လီၤယမၤသကိးတၢ်ဒီး-----ခံန့ၣ်ယုၣ်ယုၣ်လၢတၢ်မၤစၢၤနဖိလၢလံာ်လဲၣ်လၢကဘၣ်မၤအိၤလၢဟံၣ်တဖၣ်ဒီးဂဲၤလိၣ်ကွဲၤစၢၤဖဲကွဲၤပျီၣ်ဝံၤအလီၢ်ခံန့ၣ်လီၤယမၤလိတၢ်ဖဲဟဲမဲလဲဖျါဖိမိၤလၢကကဲထီၣ်ကွဲၤရၣ်အဂီၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤယမၤလိန့ၣ်တၢ်တမံၤဖဲတၢ်ကိၢ်ခါအကတီၢ်အံၤပုၤကညီကွဲၤဖိတဖၣ်မၤတၢ်လၢကွဲၤဒ်လဲၣ်အဂ့ၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤယသးအိၣ်မၤစၢၤပုၤကညီကွဲၤဖိတဖၣ်ကအိၣ်ဒီးအတၢ်လဲၣ်ဖျါလၢအဂ့ၢ်ထီၣ်ဝဲခီဖျါလၢတၢ်ဒုးသ့ၣ်ညါကွဲၤရၣ်တဖၣ်လၢကဘၣ်မၤစၢၤကွဲၤဖိတဖၣ်ဒ်လၢအဂ့ၢ်ကတၢ်ဒ်လဲၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤယအဲၣ်ဒီးသံကွၢ်သံဒီးနဖိလၢယကမၤလိအါထီၣ်လၢအဝဲသ့ၣ်တဖၣ်အတၢ်ထံၣ်လၢတၢ်မၤလိမၤဒီးအဖိခိၣ်ဒ်လဲၣ်မ့ၣ်လီၤတၢ်ဖိထံသ့ၣ်ညါအံၤကကဲထီၣ်တၢ်မၤစၢၤလၢပုၤကညီကွဲၤဖိတဖၣ်လၢမဲၣ်န့ၣ်ဆိထံၣ်အပူၤခါဆူညါန့ၣ်လီၤ

နမ့ၢ်တူၢ်လိာ်,ယကသံကွၢ်သံဒီးနဖိတၢ်သံကွၢ်ယဲၣ်ဘီတုၤလၢနွံဘီန့ၣ်လီၤယကသံကွၢ်တၢ်သံကွၢ်လၢအတၢ်လဲၣ်ခီဖိလၢအဂ့ၢ်တဖၣ်ဒီးတၢ်ဘၣ်ကွၢ်ဆၢၣ်မဲၣ်လၢကီၢ်ဘၣ်အိၤတဖၣ်လၢကွဲၤန့ၣ်လီၤဒီးတၢ်လၢအဝဲတသးအိၣ်မၤဒီးသးအိၣ်မၤဝဲလၢကွဲၤတဖၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤတၢ်သံကွၢ်သံဒီးတဖၣ်အံၤယကဖိန့ၣ်လီၤလၢတၢ်ကလုၢ်ဒ်သိးယကသ့ၣ်နီၣ်ထီၣ်လီၤတၢ်လီၤဆဲးအဂီၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤတၢ်ဂ့ၢ်တၢ်ကျိၤလၢယမၤန့ၣ်လီၤလၢနဖိအအိၣ်အံၤယကကွဲးအိၤဒ်သိးတၢ်ဟံၣ်ဖျါလၢတပၣ်ယုၣ်ဒီးနဖိအမံၤအနီၢ်ကီၢ်ဘၣ်ဒီးတလီၣ်ဖျါထီၣ်နဖိအဂ့ၢ်အကျိၤအနီၢ်ကီၢ်ဘၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤနဖိမ့ၢ်စံးလၢယတသးအိၣ်စံးဆၢတၢ်သံကွၢ်အံၤဘၣ်ဒီးအဝဲသ့ၣ်မ့ၢ်အဲၣ်ဒီးမၤကတၢ်တၢ်သံကွၢ်အံၤဒီးပတုၢ်တၢ်သံကွၢ်တဘျီယီသ့ၣ်န့ၣ်လီၤ

နတၢ်သံကွၢ်သံဒီးမ့ၢ်အိၣ်ဝံသးစူၤဆဲးကျိးဘၣ်ယၤလၢ (၆၁၂)၃၉၆-၃၈၉၇ (မ့) Matt Olson လၢ Hamline University (၆၅၁)၅၂၃-၂၄၃၀

_____ ယဟ့ၣ် Margaret Crenshaw အခွဲးလၢကသံကွၢ်သံဒီးယဖိန့ၣ်လီၤ

_____ ယတအဲၣ်ဒီးလၢယဖိကဒီးသမံသမိးအသးဘၣ်

_____ မိၢ်ပၢ်ဆဲးလီၤမံၤ

တၢ်ဘျူးဒိၣ်မးလၢနတၢ်ဆၢကတီၢ်န့ၣ်လီၤ

သးခုလၢမၤသကိးဘၣ်တၢ်ဒီးနဖိအဖိန့ၣ်လီၤ

Appendix B: English Parental Consent Form

Hello,

My name is Margaret Crenshaw and I work for the McVay Youth Partnership. I have enjoyed working with _____ for about 2 years helping your child with homework and playing games after school. I go to school at Hamline University. I am studying to become a teacher. One thing I am studying this summer is how Karen students are doing in school. I want to help Karen students have a better experience in school by informing teachers on how to help them best. I would like to interview your child to learn more about their opinions about school. This research will greatly help future Karen students in the Minnesota.

If you agree, I will interview your child individually, asking 5-7 questions. I will ask about the positive experiences and challenges your child has had in school and what they like or dislike about school. The interviews will be recorded so that I can remember the details. Any information I gather from your student that I write about in a report will not include their real name nor will it have any details that will reveal that your child. Your child will be told that they do not have to answer a question that they do not want to and that they can end the interview at any time.

If you have any questions you may contact me at (612) 396-3897 or Matt Olson from Hamline University (651)523-2430.

___ I give Margaret Crenshaw permission to interview my child.

___ I do not want my child to be interviewed.

Parent Signature

Thank you for your time,
It has been a pleasure to work with your child.

Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

Introduction:

This interview is completely anonymous, your name will not be used. Is there a name you would like me to use if I write about something you said in my paper? This is being recorded but only I will hear the tapes, they are only to help me remember and make sure I write down your story correctly. If there are any questions I ask that you don't want to answer or don't know the answer to you can tell me at anytime. Do you have any questions?

1. What school do you currently attend? How many years have you been at this school? How has being in **** *schools* changed as you've grown up?
2. Tell me about the different groups of students at your school.
 - a. What do students who are not Karen think of you?
 - b. What do teachers think about Karen students?
2. Tell me about a really good day at school. Tell me about challenging day at school.
3. What religion are you? How does your religion affect your life here in Minnesota?
4. Do you participate in any activities outside of school? Tell me about how the activity has helped you in school or as a student who is new to country.
5. What do your parents think about **** *school*?
6. If you could change something about your school what would it be?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix D: Teacher, Mentor, Community Member Interview Protocol p. 1

- A. Please describe your job position. How many Karen families do you help?**
- B. Please tell us a bit about the Karen here in Minnesota.**
- a. Where do the Karen live? Why?
 - b. What schools are they going to?
 - c. What other communities are helping the Karen settle? (i.e., Hmong)
- C. How do you see Karen students doing here in **** schools?**
- a. Do Karen student have prior schooling from refugee camps to help them be successful in US schools?
 - b. Do teachers know about the Karen community?
 - c. How do you see the Karen parents' involvement in school? (At school, at home, communication with teachers)
 - d. How do you see Karen students' relationships with other students? (gangs, racial tension)
 - e. What kind of additional opportunities for additional learning are currently offered for Karen youth? (After school, summer)
 - f. Are you aware of Karen students getting involved with after school activities (athletic and non athletic)?
- D. How accessible is college to Karen students? What support is available for them toward the goal of college?**
- a. In your opinion, how important is college to the Karen community?
 - b. Are there specific programs available to Karen students?
 - c. What are teachers'/counselors' expectations for Karen students after graduation? What is happening in the classroom to get the students to college?
- E. Do you know of any Karen students who have attended college, either a 2 year or 4 year program? What specific resources helped the student to be admitted to the program? What challenges did they face in getting to college? How are they doing now in college?**

Appendix D (cont.): Parent, Teacher, Community Member Interview Protocol p. 2

- F. What does the graduation rate look like for Karen students? What are students who are not attending college doing after graduation?** I know a few students personally that have joined the military, is this common? How are students learning about opportunities within the military?
- G. Could you suggest other important people that I should interview?**