

The Acculturation of Cambodian Families of Different Generations

By Saroeun Earm

Introduction

When I was in Cambodia for the first time, my mother twisted my ear after I came back from the woods that still had land mines that weren't yet clear. During the ride across the southern part of Cambodia, I finally realized how much I had stepped into my parent's history. I watched the farmers jump into their rice paddy, and replant their green stalks, evenly distributing them in the muddy waters. I realized that these labors had once enslaved people, held them in captivity, and tortured their human spirit during the three-year genocide. Among the survivors were my parents and all of the subjects that I interviewed in the Twin Cities area.

Many Cambodian refugees have a survival story and through these stories I discover a new set of survival stories they experience in the United States. The intent of this article is to present the history and perspective from Cambodian refugees and their children's generation in order for progressive and future dialogue. I wanted to discover and learn how Cambodian American families adapt, assimilate, or acculturate themselves into a different and unfamiliar culture and society. I use my personal resources, my ability to speak Khmer, my knowledge, and my sensitivity to both generations to find certain cultural values and traditions that are important and why they are important to Cambodian parents. I want to find a solution to close the gap that was created by cultural stigmas and language barriers that hampered the communication and understanding between the Cambodian parents and their children.

I discovered in my research three main challenges that Cambodian refugee/immigrant families encounter. They are moral values, gender, and language. These are the obstacles that parents want their children to sustain while adapting to American society. A cultural practice of moral values occurs when there is a Khmer community to inculcate them. Khmer girls and boys are socialized differently because of the cultural expectation. Bilingualism differs according to whose foreign-born parents choose to, or choose not to speak their native language. The success of immigrants depend 'on the density of ties among them'(Portes & Rumbaut 65) As in Cambodia, many Southeast Asian "immigrants of modest endowments can successfully overcome challenges to their children's mobility when they can count on strong families and communities supporting their efforts" (Portes & Rumbaut 69)

History:

After the Vietnam War in 1975, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge swiftly engulfed Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge started their guerilla group in the jungles of

Cambodia as the Vietnam War went on. They became a powerful group under the leadership of Pol Pot. He ruled Cambodia from 1976 to 1979 and killed over 1.7 million Cambodians, about a third of the country's population. Pol Pot's ideologies and reasoning behind his massive killings was based on Marxism and Maoism. Pol Pot wanted to build the nation into a Utopia. He felt that Cambodia was intoxicated and poisoned by outside influences like the West, Vietnam, different forms of religion, and other ethnic minorities that had settled in Cambodia. He went on a crusade of ethnic cleansing and massacred millions of people. His goal was to start over from the "year zero." Under him the government changed from a monarchy to totalitarian rule. He turned Cambodia backward into a solely agricultural country. The Khmer Rouge literally destroyed the structure of Cambodian society, politics, culture, and values. They implemented this by causing a massive resettlement of people from Phnom Penh and large cities to the rice fields and rural areas. Those who lived in rural areas lost all their land and worked in industrial and labor camps. The Vietnamese overran the Khmer Rouge in 1979 and hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees were forced to leave Cambodia for camps in Thailand or the Philippines. Many died on the way. Those who ultimately left the refugee camps are now living in the U.S., France, Australia, or Canada (Earm).

Methodology

I conducted my interviews with friends of my family. The Cambodian American married couples ranged from 28 to 70 years old and were interviewed at their homes. The subjects include 4 elders, 2 young couples, 1 interracial couple, and 4 middle age couples. I used a tape recorder for 6 interviews that were done in Khmer and then translated to English. The rest of the interviews were documented with hand notes.

I formed my questions in various ways in order to gather stories and personnel experiences. I wanted the people to tell me their stories. I asked about their life in Cambodia, their struggles and challenges as they immigrated to the U.S. The second part of the interview focused on the cultural values that they found to be important for their children to learn. Some of my questions may have channeled my subjects' answers in different directions from one another depending on the language I used.

Freedom

The book, *Contemporary Asian Americans* showed a graph reported that "the Cambodians suffered the greatest number of family losses and violent events," and the "demoralization rate was the highest for the Cambodians" (Zhou & Gatewood 195) compared with other Asian immigrants. When they arrived in the U.S. it was encumbering to learn and adapt to an unfamiliar

society and cope with their trauma. Some Cambodian refugees that I interviewed adapted more successfully than others but had to give up cultural values in order to do so.

America was a place for the Cambodian refugees to establish their hopes and dreams. There is a “distinction often made between refugees and other classes of immigrants.” They have “different motives for migration and traumatic nature of their flight experience. Refugees are said to be motivated to flee by fear of persecution (political motives), whereas immigrants are defined by their aspirations for better material opportunities and self-advancement” (Zhou & Gatewood 1993). Cambodians that came to the U.S. prior to 1970 had different motives than the Cambodians that I interviewed. The Cambodians I interviewed are refugees that fled from rural Cambodia and came to the U.S. through various sponsorships. They came to the U.S primarily to search for safety, but they also seek better lives and opportunities.

For most Cambodians, the U.S. is a symbol of freedom, and it is freedom that all of the older generation appreciate in this country. “They have justice. They have health care and education for my children. It’s safe here,” were some of their thoughts living in the U.S. So closely was freedom associated with in the new country, that whenever they spoke of it, they always used the English name of the country.

One would think that the most traumatic experiences would be the most difficult to talk about. I did not find it to be that way with my subjects. Oum Han told me that she and her husband walked from Kompong Chhnang, south central Cambodia, to the Thai border in 8 to 12 months. One family traveled in a truck for one month. My parents, Bong Samnang’s family, and Yai Rann’s family traveled on foot between 3 to 11 months through rivers, mountains, and jungles. They would travel by night and sleep by day. If they were traveling by foot, there was a chance that they could step on landmines or get killed by the jungle booby traps.

Many of the refugees were lucky if they found food. Bong Samnang’s family would go days without food, moving from one village to another. He and his family would not have survived if it weren’t for the generosity of the villagers who gave them one can of rice that they shared among eight or twelve family members. Yai Rann said that when she didn’t have any pots to cook her rice, she used a cylinder aluminum can. Oum Han said that she ate leaves and corn stalks when there was nothing else to eat. Bong Khorn’s parents died from eating unknown mushrooms.

Food wasn’t the only dilemma. When Oum Han was escaping, she gave birth in the jungle. There’s a traditional practice that after each labor, a woman has to be “steamed” to ensure that when she gets older she will have a healthy life. It eliminates blood clots and allows for the skin to be flawless and to

continue its firmness. It is performed when the mother either lies or sits on top of a straw bed with thick covers above her. Underneath the bed there are two or three pots of boiling water. As the steam rises she collects it with a blanket over her.

After the day Oum Han gave birth, she was lying in bed as her friends burned the wood underneath to heat up the pots. They did not know that there was ordnance buried in the ground. When the fire was made, it set off the buried ordnance, and it exploded. Everybody was outside, and she was left alone on the bed. She laid still and saw the sharp segments of the ordnance shoot out from the sides like fire crackers in all different directions except the top. Fortunately they didn't strike her.

The Khmer Rouge had set up agricultural labor camps that enslaved many people. Almost all of the Cambodian families I interviewed were rotated at least to 3 different labor camps. The Khmer Rouge soldiers would wake them up at three in the morning and would not let them sleep until at least midnight. Buu Somphoul was eight years old when he was separated from his mother to work at a labor camp watching cows and horses. His mother worked at a different camp. His father had committed suicide with his oldest brother because they knew that since they were former soldiers for the royal family, they would be killed. His mother later died because of her poor physical health. She was forced to go back to work the day after she delivered a baby.

Some families found it easy to cross the border into Thailand, and some didn't. Bong Samnang's family knew that they crossed into Thailand when they saw the Red Cross stations. They received medical attention and food. A week later UNICEF took them to a refugee camp called Sra Keo. When my parents came to the Thai border for the first time, the Thai soldiers wouldn't let the refugees enter. Then they allowed the Khmer Rouge to take the refugees back into Cambodian territory. The second time they attempted to cross the border, many of the Khmer Rouge fused in with the fleeing refugees to avoid the attacks from the Vietnamese soldiers. My parents were unable to cross because at the same time, the Thai soldiers were shooting their guns in the air to prevent the Cambodian refugees from entering their country while the Vietnamese soldiers mistakenly attacked them while targeting for Khmer Rouge soldiers.

Each family's history has its own traumatic and complex dynamics, and none was worse or better than the other. The comment that was common among all of the families about their stories was "It was so difficult, so difficult. No one suffered as much as we did" shows that each family occurrence of suffering is a similar event in a broader whole. It is also crucial to note that it is an individual's story that shapes who they are today. Yai Rann describes her hardships as "jchong slap, jchong rorh" because it was a chapter in her life

where she didn't know if she should live or die. The memories from these tragedies were painful for everyone to relive, but they were more than willing to share them with me.

United States

The assimilation process for each family was different when they arrived to the U.S., but they had two common struggles: reading, and speaking in English. Three families told me that they always would wait at the wrong bus stop for their children to be picked up for school because they could not read the street signs and did not know the right stop. Oum Han and her son waited three hours before a police car noticed them and finally dropped her son off at school. From that day on, the bus picked her son up and dropped him off in front of their home.

Discrimination against Asian Americans is very common in the U.S. After six years working at an insurance company, Thaly sued them for discriminating against her. She felt humiliated and that her dignity was stolen from her. Thaly came to the U.S. when she was twenty years old and only learned a little bit of English prior to her arrival. She had a positive attitude about her new life in a different country. She was happy to work hard and determined to achieve what was best for her and her family. The hardships in the U.S. could not be comparable to the hardships in Cambodia, she thought.

When Thaly was discriminated against at her work place, her attitude changed dramatically. She questioned the American value of "equal opportunity" and found it to be false and misleading. She had worked at the insurance company for six years and applied ten times for a higher position. She did not get the job and the people who were hired were less qualified than she, had less experience, but were Caucasian.

She filed a lawsuit, asking for an apology from the company. She did not want their money. She wanted them to recognize that they have done wrong, and to admit it. She became depressed when she quit the job, but she knew she had to do something to regain her dignity. She said that she sok chit cee dom mbal hy dom gcruy, mean oy gay meuh yeeih . She fought on and won her lawsuit, not only regaining confidence, but also becoming a voice for all Cambodian immigrants who face discrimination.

Freedom was good in many ways, but too much freedom made the Cambodians feel they were losing control over their own children. Four elders express that there was too much 'freedom' for girls. This will be elaborated and discussed later in the paper.

Moral Values

"Follow the Buddha's teachings. Know what is "bob" and what is "bunn." What is "goon" and what is "thoque."

Phoke mae day mean goon leugh goan."

Every one told me that one of the most important values in Khmer culture is to respect your elders. “To know what is sinful and meritorious. To know what are the good deeds and the bad deeds. Our parents have given us life and love and when a child grows up, he/she must reciprocate that care when their parents are older.” Many Khmer cultural values are adapted from Buddhist teachings. One of the greatest philosophies in Buddhism is for a child to repay his/her parent’s good deeds. This is a sign of respect, love, and duty.

There are certain cultural practices that one must perform to show respect.

Tha Som told me that he could tell which young Cambodians were respectful by their use of the traditional practice of greeting an older person. He/she will sompeah . The Cambodians who have lost their tradition would not know how to do that and would say “Hey! Hello Tha,” and wave. This practice is very important for people to know because it is a sign of respect.

Yai Ramm told me that when they arrived in the U.S. her son used to sompeah her before he left the house and would always tell her where he was going. When he returned home, he greeted her again with the sompeah. Gradually he discontinued the practice.

The respect for your family and your extended family creates a bond. “Family comes first,” Buu Somphaul emphasized. “It’s always been a Cambodian tradition.” Bong Thol told me, “Your parents are like your god. You respect them by taking care of them when they are older.” He did not like the fact that the U.S. have nursing homes to place your elders. Nursing homes took away the dignity of elders and treated adults as children. It is the duty of the children to take care of their parents, not someone else. Bong Rann, Bong Thol’s wife describes American people as Kbal na nah sawh nah nung which in this content describes one who is selfish and only thinks of themselves and doesn’t care for what needs to be done for their parents. They have no “filial responsibility.”

I interviewed two grandparents who lived by themselves and were retired. They stayed occupied by taking care of their grandchildren. One grandma was feeding her six-year old grandson with her own hands. One would assume that a six-year-old boy is old enough to feed himself, but by this interaction, she created a filial bond so that when he gets older and she needs his assistance, he can remember what his grandma did for him. He is responsible to fulfill his duty and care for her when she is old.

I found it really challenging to interview the older generation because I was always anxious. I grew up knowing that I had to give them the utmost respect because they were my elders. Now, if I wanted to challenge them with a certain idea, I had to be extremely careful with the Khmer words I decided to use. I asked Tha Tree and Yai Oun to explain their thoughts rather than to challenge them abruptly. With this in mind, I tried to question their ideas on the

inequality between Cambodian females and males.

Gender

“Phomma jarey”

Phomma jarey literal translation is taken from Pali meaning “body, creation judged, innocent, pure, conduct.” Tha Tree introduced me to this phrase. I asked him to explain the meaning of those words. He started off saying, “I will tell you what it means since a lot of your generation don’t know what it means.” Tha described phomma jarey as the women’s virginity.

“It is the most important aspect of a woman’s reputation. It is because of a woman’s phomma jarey, she is not allowed to go to parties and dances because there could be a chance that someone likes her, and take away her phomma jarey. When that is gone everything is gone.”

My understanding is that phomma jarey is a status symbol for a woman who is not married and has already reached puberty. It represents her physical body, her attitude, and conduct. However she presents herself in public is her phomma jarey. It is considered her reputation. This reputation is very hard to live up to in the United States. One of the ways she could lose that reputation is if someone, especially an elder, would see her with a man that is not a family member, would then assumed that that person is her boyfriend or has had an intimate relationship with. This lowers her reputation. It is everyone’s duty to protect a reputation. A man must avoid physical contact with women in public places. He has to refrain from physical affection until they are married in order for her phom be-ja ray to remain pure. If she is seen to have a culturally accepted and admirable reputation, the marriage is approved and worthy.

When I asked Tha if there is a concept of phomma jarey for men, he frankly answered, “No, there isn’t.” He said men are like jewels. “They can be dropped into the mud and dirt, but when they are picked up and washed, they look brand new and beautiful again.”

When the Khmer traditions confront the American value of independent women who relate to men on a daily basis, cultural conflicts are inevitable. Bong Khorn’s story is a stern case of social control over a female in the U.S. Bong Khorn’s parents died before they reached the Thai border. Her and her older brother was left for her aunt to take care of. When they came to the U.S., Bong Khorn’s aunt and her husband became their foster parents. She doesn’t know if her aunt’s strictness and control had to do more with the culture or the compensation they received from the government for taking care of them.

As a young Cambodian woman growing up with her foster aunt and uncle she found it hard to do anything. She wasn’t allowed to do any school activities and sports. Bong Khorn had wanted to join the volleyball team, but her aunt told her that girls don’t play sports, and it was a waste of time. She was to go

straight home after school. The only time she was able to play volleyball was through her church league. Their pastor asked her aunt and uncle for permission. Therefore she was able to play. She wasn't allowed to talk on the phone for if she did, her aunt assumed that she was seeing or dating someone. Bong Khorn is an attractive woman and during high school she had a lot of secret admirers. One of her secret admirers sent her a dozen roses. Her aunt scolded her and accused her of having a boyfriend. If this information was leaked into the Cambodian community, it will be seen as a disgrace upon her and the incompetence of her guardians.

The cultural control restricted Bong Sopheap from independence. She was not allowed to go to her high school lock-in. A lock in is an overnight celebration for graduating seniors where they are literally locked in the high school building with food and fun activities to do. Bong Khorn was frustrated and can't comprehend why she was not allowed to go. When she went to college she decided to live on campus. She felt that her aunt and uncle did not have an open mind or wanted to understand.

Her aunt and uncle felt that if they didn't control her, she would be influenced by society. If others see that her *phomma jarey* has been touched in any way, her reputation and her guardian would lose face. She thought that her treatment was unfair. She did not deserve to be imprisoned and have her independence taken away. She wanted to make her own choices. She rebelled by leaving her aunt and uncle's house and going to live on her own. Now her relationship with her aunt and uncle's family is much more amenable and reputable.

These issues became confrontational as the influence of modern feminism arises in the Cambodian culture. When Khmer women find themselves more independent, ambitious, and adamant in the wave of the 21st century feminism, they are challenging the stigmas put on them. There are many women who are choosing to live on their own and move away from their families. There are many women who are pursuing a higher degree in education. There are women who are making their own choices about when to marry and whom to marry. These women would less likely fit the ideal of *phomma jarey*..

It was interesting to talk about dating and relationships with the Cambodian parents. The older generations oppose dating because it ruins their daughter's reputation. The rest of the couples believe that it has become the choice of their children. They can't control them anymore because they have become American, and they feel that their children have crossed over to the other side. However one young couple that is soon to be parents made a comment that they approve the old ways because when they are parents they can explain what is good and what is bad.

When I asked Buu Somphaul and his wife what he thought of his children (ages 5 to 12 years old, the eldest is the daughter) dating interracially or dating in

general, they answered, “She can date.” They will allow her to choose who she wants to love and marry. As parents their role is to explain to her Khmer cultural expectations and values. It was interesting when they automatically thought the question was for their daughter when I used the word, “children.” It is interesting to see how dating and going out is more taboo for daughters than sons.

Most of the people I interviewed expressed that they want to have their children married according to the Khmer cultural customs. There was one Yai who opposed interracial marriages. She claimed that if she can’t communicate with her non-Cambodian in-laws, it would be hard to form relationships. All of the couples except for two had an arranged marriage. It was also interesting to find out that some parents who have lived almost half of their lives in the U.S still wanted their children, who were born and raised Cambodian-American, to have a traditional wedding regardless of who they married. One of the young couples opposed arranged marriages because they considered they to be forced love that would eventually end up in a divorce or domestic abuse.

Language

Language is thoughts and concepts put into spoken symbols. It is not only important how one speaks but also how the words of a language are used to empower an individual. Language is a powerful tool, and it enables us to exchange thoughts and ideas to resolve and create conflict. The Khmer language is held in the highest esteem and reverence by all the generations I interviewed. The younger couples with newborn babies wanted to personally teach their American born children and show them cultural traditions as they are growing up. One of the traditions is language. Bong Samnang and his wife said that they would find a way for their son to learn Khmer whether it was at the temple or in a class. The Khmer language is so important to them because it connects them to their cultural roots and heritage. It allows them to understand the history of Cambodians. Bong Samnang brought up a point that if one doesn’t know their history, they don’t know who they are.

According to some of the subjects, an identity of a Cambodian-American depends on their ability to speak Khmer. Bong Thol said that a Khmer person has to know how to speak Khmer. To him a Khmer person is one who is faithful to his/her cultural responsibilities. When the younger Cambodian generation becomes assimilated into American culture they might be ethnically Cambodian but their thoughts and actions are American. If they still have their Khmer cultural knowledge and sensitivity, then they would be considered to be bi-cultural.

He described how he could enforce the use of Khmer language with his children when they are at home. When they leave the house, they can speak English. “At home I want my children to speak Khmer and learn from my

mom, my wife and me.” As he was describing his plan to instill Khmer in his children, he also brought up the issue of Khmer pride. There are many young Cambodians who claim to have Khmer pride but can’t speak Khmer. Bong Thol said that the younger generation does not know what it really means to have Khmer Pride when they don’t attempt to speak the Khmer language. One of the hardest challenges for young generation Cambodians is to maintain their language. Parents are the most effective tools for their children to continue Khmer. Parents who live around a community of their own culture will most likely produce children who are bilingual. Parents who choose to live outside the community tend to have children who have assimilated into the mainstream. Studies show that children that grew up in a homogenous ethnic community would likely be bi-cultural and/or bilingual. “In the case of southeast Asian refugees, this result was readily attributable to the recent arrival of these groups and the children’s bond with parents, cemented by dramatic experiences of flight and resettlement” (Portes& Rumbaut 124).

Bong Thol stressed how speaking Khmer is distinctive and a part of the culture. He described how the house is like a square, and in that square one must only speak Khmer. Once one leaves the house, they can speak English. He knew this would be arduous to accomplish since he didn’t know how to enforce this in the future with his children. I see this as an obstacle for future Cambodian parents who want their children to speak their native language. Difficulties in communication cause miscommunication and misunderstanding. A great example occurred during one of my interviews. A mother misunderstood what dating meant. She thought that it was boys and girls hanging out with other friends, and so she said it was fine for her two high school daughters to “date.” Then her daughter had to tell her that dating was when “boys and girls go out together, all alone. Then they start making out and having sex. It’s what you see on T.V. mom. That’s dating.” The mother shrieked and said, “No! I don’t like dating. No dating.” These emphasizes how some parents speak English, but have limited understanding of the things their children say. When they reply to each other, the message is misunderstood. Some young people become frustrated and give up. The communication gap with their parents widens.

Buu Tha shared a story about a 6 year old girl who was bi-racial. She was half African-American and Cambodian. He assumed that the girl was African American. She was standing outside on the sidewalk and was feisty and rude at Buu Tha. Young people ought to respect their elders” Buu tha thought. He felt that the young girl disrespected him. Later Buu Tha realized that the little girl was the granddaughter of his Cambodian friend. His friend spoke to the girl in Khmer and she was able to understand him. He was dumbfounded that the little girl knew and understood Khmer. He realized that skin color was

inconsequential to her learning Khmer. Because she spent time with her grandparents, they had a cultural and linguistic effect on their grandchild. All the Tha and Yai believed that the third generation of Cambodians would lose their native language. They know that it's hard to maintain a foreign language when a more dominant language is spoken in the society. They said that once their grandchildren are born in the U.S., then they are American forever, even though they look Cambodian. "They will always be Khmer but they are American too." Tha Som believed that if he continued to speak Khmer and give his grandchildren videos or movies that are dubbed in Khmer, then he could help maintain a little bit of the language.

Analysis

"Joel stung tham pbort. Joel stroke tham pra-thet"

Buu Tha explained how he as one of the parents could not control and force his children to abide in the traditional Khmer gender values and culture. The significance of this phrase is that no matter where one is living, the culture and traditions that were once held in previous society will have to be altered because the forces and influences of the present society that one resides in are stronger.

Among the old and the young there is definitely a generational gap. It occurs in part because the "parents' conflicting demands to assimilate and yet to stay traditional" (Zia 212) creates pressure on the younger generation between the first Cambodian generations and their children born in the U.S. While parents might demand that their children marry a Cambodian through a traditional engagement, the children do not know how to refuse and most often will feel they have no other choice but to leave the family. It does not always happen this way, but unfortunately when parents are too demanding and controlling of their cultural traditions, it often occurs.

Culture is affected by "ethnic socialization that is practiced through the parents, extended families and the presence or absence of other members of the cultural group" (Lee 50). The community plays an important part in preserving culture. The social interaction in a community allows language to endure, cultural events to be celebrated, and for Khmer values to be perpetuated and practiced. It is evident how the family bonds and why connection is so important in Khmer culture. Through these bonds and interactions, cultural ties are established. "The use of an Asian language can affirm the interpersonal ties within the ethnic social network" (Lee 49). Language is spoken and practiced between cousins and siblings, aunts and nieces and nephews, and grandparents and grandchildren. Most of the Cambodian families I interviewed expressed how language was a powerful connection to their cultural roots and heritage. I discovered that traditional culture and family ties fall most heavily on the female members in the family. I have observed that three of the families had a

grandmother living with them. Parents depend on their daughters to take care of them when they are older. Women are obligated to marry a Cambodian man. Women are responsible to respectfully guard their phomma jarey. Independence and freedom is highly attractive to young Cambodians who feel they are suffocated in old Cambodian traditions carried on from their parents' country. Many young people learn to accept their lot and others rebel. Cambodian parents, who believe that control is really important, are able to keep their children socially constructed the way they desired. Yai Oun and Yai Ramm both raised their daughters to be "traditional". Their story was a success because their daughters were culturally constructed already from a different society, and when they came to the U.S. they were able to create a balanced relationship to both cultural entities.

One of the parents used an interesting strategy to raise their Cambodian children in the United States. He used the metaphor of tuning a violin. "If you tune it too tight it will snap apart. When it gets loose you tighten it up a little bit at a time. So you tune it to complement the sound of the orchestra." This proves that parents have moved away from extreme control to "tuning control." It's not too tight or too loose. In my observation it is a common method used by Cambodian parents in the United States.

I discovered that the parents found it easier to speak to me using Khmer proverbs to state their facts. It allowed them to make sense of their lives and make sense of the life that they are living now, coexisting with two cultures. They feel sometimes that they are not American. Many parents feel that being fully American means being born and raised in the U.S. The parents' experiences of exile from Cambodia and the acculturation into American culture as refugees and immigrants were also different. Therefore the social location of children and parents are different. This is where the miscommunication and misunderstanding takes up its roots.

Each family has assimilated differently. Some don't speak Khmer and others married interracially improve the effectiveness of socialization in American society. Cultural values change and alter. Attempts at maintaining Khmer culture in the U.S. are visible in the Cambodian community in Minnesota. The temple, the United Cambodian Association of Minnesota (UCAM), Khmer youth groups, and the Khmer Radio Station are evidence of a growing community.

Acculturation is a framework that is used to describe the level of adaptation of a certain generation according to their parent's "socioeconomic achievements, family compositions, and modes of incorporation" (Portes & Rumbaut 54). There are three types of acculturation. Dissonant acculturation is when children simultaneously learn the English language and lose their culture while their parents retain their native culture. Then the parent becomes dependent on

their children. Consonant acculturation is when the parent has enough resources for their children to maintain the culture but the children gradually adapt to the new culture and abandon their home language. The last type is selective acculturation that focuses on how culture and language is maintained by the children because of the “ethnic network” or the community influence that filters to the children. They are able to assimilate and adapt and be bicultural and bilingual. Most of the families I interviewed fit into the “selective acculturation” framework.

There is wisdom in each person I interviewed. They captured an immense historical power in their story. I believe that there needs to be a cultural relativity in values and understanding from different perspectives. I learned that the Khmer language brought me to a different level of analyzing and comprehending the Khmer culture. The use of language and how we understand one another bonds people together. I sensed a connection with each family that I talked about. It brought us together for that (? moment which should be everyday that they spent with their children and family). The battle of a young Cambodian American’s identity in the U.S. and the battle for the lost identity of their parents are equally difficult. This research allowed me to look at the problem from a different perspective. With good intentions and an open mind I learned the intricate dynamics of value, tradition, and cultural history of the Cambodian immigrants.

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Questions

1. What was your greatest challenge/fear raising your children in the American society when your cultural background is Cambodian?
2. What cultural values do you teach your children? Are the values Khmer or American? Why?
3. What do you think about American culture? Do you like it or hate it?
4. Do you think you and your children are less Khmer/American because of the values you taught them or how you raised them?
5. Are there any American cultural values and beliefs that you strongly disagree with or prefer over Khmer culture?
6. What do you think about interracial dating or marriage? What are your thoughts if one of your children decides to marry someone not Cambodian?
7. What do you think about the next generation after you, if they lose their Khmer culture?
8. What are some of your thoughts about the Khmer language, and whether or not it was spoken in the house?
9. Do you think that if people stop speaking Khmer, they would lose the culture also?
10. How do Cambodians identify themselves? American or Khmer?

11. What is the language spoken at home? What is the significant of speaking Khmer/English? What kind of effect does it have on maintaining the culture?

12. What do you think of the future of Khmer culture and language in the U.S.?