2001

Exploring parentification of children in the context of Vietnamese families

AnhHuy The Truong
San Jose State University

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.efck-246s>

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**EXPLORING PARENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN
IN THE CONTEXT OF VIETNAMESE FAMILIES**

**A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Sociology
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts**

by

Anhhuy The Truong

August 2001

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chester Winton", written over a horizontal line.

Professor Chester Winton

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amy Best", written over a horizontal line.

Professor Amy Best

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kathy J. Kuipers", written over a horizontal line.

Professor Kathy Kuipers

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

A large, stylized handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joseph J. Roub", written over a horizontal line.

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING PARENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN IN THE CONTEXT OF VIETNAMESE FAMILIES

by Anhhuy The Truong

Drawing from data collected from a sample of Vietnamese adults who grew up in Vietnam, this qualitative study examines parental/parentified roles in terms of caring/caretaking functions in Vietnamese families. The findings from 108 survey respondents and interviews with 23 people from 21 families proposes the following hypotheses: parental/parentified roles as caring/caretaking roles in Vietnamese families are not pathogenic because 1) caring/caretaking functions are institutionalized as duties of children 2) caring/caretaking functions do not reverse the family hierarchy and 3) Vietnamese children interpret their contributions as constituting reciprocal acts toward their parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank the participants in this study. I thank those who had the time and willingness to share their experiences through the interviews. Without them this study would not have been possible.

I would like to thank Professor Chester Winton, Professor Amy Best, and Professor Kathy Kuipers, the three thesis committee members who have provided invaluable advice and guidance throughout my thesis project. Professor Winton made every office visit an intellectually stimulating discussion. I have gained a better understanding of how to approach social theory. Through Professor Best and Professor Kuipers, I have begun to learn how to conduct qualitative research. Their understanding and unending enthusiasm was important to me in completing this long project.

Professor David Asquith and Professor Chris Hebert have provided me with valuable advice for the quantitative aspects of the study. More generally, their classes on quantitative methods were important introductions which have encouraged me to explore this research tool further. I would also like to thank Professor Yoko Baba, my graduate advisor, for her guidance throughout the graduate program.

These teachers and mentors, among other faculty members, have been important influences not only on my intellectual development but also on my professional development. They are models whom I will turn to in the future to emulate.

I thank Viet Tran and Mr. Khanh Vu for their assistance with the translations.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for their unceasing support. Without them, my studies would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Parentification of children, in general, refers to the phenomenon in which children in their families assume caring/caretaking roles to a parent, other family members, or the family as a whole that are normatively performed by parents. The parental functions that these children perform are burdensome, developmentally inappropriate, and harmful to their health and interpersonal relationships.

The recent literature indicates that parentification of children is a robust concept, explaining a variety of dysfunctions in families. Parentification has been implicated in various family structures where children take on parental roles, including single-parent families (e.g., Dawson 1980; Minuchin et al. 1967), economically disadvantaged families (e.g., Srouf and Ward 1980), families with alcoholism (e.g., Goglia 1985; Goglia et al. 1992; Chase, Deming, and Wells 1998), schizophrenia (e.g., Bowen 1965; Walsh 1979), and spousal conflicts (e.g., Minuchin 1974). The long-term consequences of parentification include depression (e.g., Wolkin 1984), psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., Wallerstein et al. 1965; Jurkovic 1997), preference for caregiving professions such as nursing, social work, therapy, counseling (Lackie 1983; Sessions 1986; Jurkovic 1997), and a variety of interpersonal difficulties.

Using the CMD-II personality test together with the Sessions/Jurkovic (1986) scale, Jones and Wells (1996) discovered an association between a history of parentification and the development of masochistic and narcissistic personality characteristics.¹ At a more general level, one of the destructive effects of parentification

¹ Masochistic personality was found to be associated with caretaking behaviors, and narcissistic personality was found to be associated with unrealistic expectations by the parents, e.g., to fulfill a parent's unfulfilled dreams.

is the interference with individuation and autonomy (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Karpel 1976; Jurkovic 1997). The origin of parentification is often detectable across generations, and if the pattern is not altered, it is prone to be passed on to future generations (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Jurkovic 1997). Jurkovic (1997) inquires about the omission of parentification from the categories of child maltreatment. Clearly, the stakes are high, and the conceptualization of parentification has profound implications, not only for treatment, but also for law, family policy, and criminal justice.

It now appears, in light of the progress made in research, that parentification is a pervasive phenomenon, but not all forms lead to pathology. In fact, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) see parentification as a “ubiquitous and important aspect of most human relationships.” Therein lies the challenge, that of characterizing and delimiting the concept in a meaningful and useful manner. Research on parentification of children is making significant progress, and yet an elusive boundary between what constitutes parentification and what is considered normal behavior remains a challenge for researchers and clinicians.

Little, if any, research has located this phenomenon in a socio-cultural context. This exploratory study examines caring/caretaking roles in Vietnamese families. The study seeks to generate hypotheses from the data rather than empirically test already existing hypotheses. Importantly, this study accommodates the current models in the sense that it uses the parameters of the relevant literature that may or may not be useful in studying Vietnamese families.

This investigation developed from a graduate seminar titled “Modern Family”

which focused on parentification of children as one of its themes. This study was initially motivated by a certain curiosity about the idea that somehow one could be his/her parents' parent. Growing up in a Vietnamese family and widely associating with other Vietnamese families of differing circumstances, this researcher had difficulty imagining how such an arrangement was possible, even when the children were caring for other members, as they must always care about the family. This is because in Vietnamese families, members relate to one another in a hierarchical manner which indicates where they are located in the family hierarchy; this hierarchy places the father and mother in a high position and makes it difficult to reverse statuses. This contrast a further investigation of the the parentification of children.

First, the technical literature is reviewed; an analysis of the literature is presented from a sociological perspective. A brief introduction to some features of Vietnamese families is provided. The introduction is followed by an extended methods section.

The findings section first presents data on instrumental and expressive functions performed in a group of Vietnamese families and how roles toward siblings and parents are institutionalized. The next subsection discusses reciprocity, followed by a subsection on the family hierarchy. The last section is a presentation of two cases involving extensive caring/caretaking functions.

In the summary/discussion section, the proposed argument of the paper is summarized. Based upon the parameters of the current models of parentification in mainstream literature, some contrasting points on how Vietnamese families may be

different is presented. The conclusion highlights some limitations and proposes directions for future research.

SELECTED LITERATURE REVIEW

In analytical terms, the parentification of children involves two broad concepts of role reversal and reciprocity. Role reversal, in this context, refers to the assumption of parental roles by children. Reciprocity refers to the mutual exchanges among family members. The consequence is that the child who is parentified is denied the traditional role of child, and his/her childhood is a history of loss and sacrifice. Writing one of the recent reviews, Chase (1999) explains, "Despite numerous descriptions of theories, concepts, and definitions, it is generally believed that parentification in the family entails a functional and/or emotional role reversal in which the child sacrifices his or her own needs for attention, comfort, and guidance in order to accommodate and care for logistical or emotional needs of the parent" (p. 5). However, role reversal and reciprocity are general concepts that could have many meanings. Does regularly caring for one's youngest sibling constitute role reversal? Does providing only verbal reassurance to an anxious mother constitute role reversal? What if the child does so at seventeen years old? What follows is a closer review of these concepts.

One of the earliest references to parentification is Minuchin and colleagues' (1967) coining of the term *parental child*. His exploratory study, *Families of the Slums: An Exploration of Their Structure and Treatment*, is one of the earliest examinations into the child who functions in a parental capacity. Most of the twelve families studied were

single-parent families with children who had been identified as delinquent. Minuchin noted that in these disorganized families, children were elevated to the family's executive position due to the mother's absence of authority and the need for guidance and control of the other siblings. Taking on executive responsibilities to sustain the family, these parental children made family decisions and assume caretaking responsibilities without the guidance of the mother. In his work toward a systematic formulation of a general theoretical framework, Minuchin (1974) explains:

The allocation of parental power to a child is a natural arrangement in large families, in single parent families, or in families where both parents work. The system can function well. The younger children are cared for, and the parental child can develop responsibility, competence, and autonomy beyond his year. A family with a parental child may run into difficulty, however, if a delegation of authority is not explicit or if the parents abdicate, leaving the child to become the main source of guidance, control and decisions. In such a case, the demands on the parental child can clash with his own childhood and exceed his ability to cope with them. (Minuchin 1974:97-98)

Minuchin's general theoretical framework focuses on equilibrium and the orderly management of family behaviors. This state of homeostasis and healthy family functioning is achieved by the maintenance of clear boundaries within and between subsystems, which is the basis of individuation. In this context the *parental child* functions to maintain equilibrium by the exercise of authority and delegated parental power in carrying out caretaking responsibilities and family coordination; possessing such power, the parental child may be inclined to violate the parental subsystem boundaries by becoming enmeshed or by forming coalitions with a parent, which affects his/her individuation process. So, the *parental child* is "parental" in terms of parental power and authority, replacing or complementing the parent in his/her executive responsibilities.

The development of the conceptualization of parentification has been predominantly in psychology. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's (1973) work, *Invisible Loyalties-Reciprocity In Intergenerational Family Therapy*, was perhaps the foundational statement that guided the theoretical orientation of a large number of researchers, including Karpel (1976), Goglia (1982), Fullinwider-Bush and Jacobvitz (1993), Jones and Wells (1996), and Jurkovic (1997).

Focusing on a different theme, Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) coined the term *parentified child* which has become the main vocabulary in the description of parentification. Deriving from what they called the "dialectical relationships theory," their approach emphasizes the balance of loyalty, commitment, "bilateral ethical and existential indebtedness" (p. 34), and reciprocity of obligations and merits in relational systems. They noted from research and clinical observations that the parentified children whom they worked with exhibited an unethical imbalance of give-and-take, namely that the children were exploited, out of their loyalty, to give but not receive in return due rewards and recognition. Their language of "familial ledgers of obligation and merit," "accounting of justice," "balancing the ledger," "accounts due", and "repayment of obligations" speaks to the ethical and existential principle of justice and fairness, which is violated in the exploitative parentification of children.

The injustices surface when parentified children become adults and look to other family members, including their children, to "make up" for what they were denied in their childhood, for their unacknowledged sacrifices in their family of origin. These unreciprocated sacrifices are paid their dues by the process of parentification, or the "subjective distortion of a relationship as if one's partner or even one's children were his

parent” (p. 151),² and that “such distortion can be done in a wishful fantasy or, more dramatically, through dependent behavior” (p. 151). By means of a “subjective distortion of a relationship,” the adult may be able to reclaim what was deprived in childhood in a relationship with his/her parents or other family members. It is important to note that this distortion is subjective and highly fluid, ranging from pathogenicity to passing needs for emotional relief, in which case, “members of a family may be seen taking their turn at being parentified” (p. 160). So, what is apparently an overt role of caretaker, covert role of scapegoat, or instances of seeking psychological support by a family member in relation to an adult figure could equally, though not necessarily, constitute parentification.

This feature may not be restricted to goals of balancing the ledger of justice, but perhaps could be a pervasive phenomenon of relationships in many families. Schmideberg (1948) writes, “along with the adult side of the mind, an infantile level of development persists actively in all of us [adults], and both these aspects of the mind demand gratification of their needs” (p. 207). In many families these demands are directed toward one’s own children: “And just as they competed for their parents’ affection as children, so now each marital partner woos the child’s love, and even appeals to him, directly or indirectly, as an arbiter in parental quarrels” (p. 209).

In effect, the incompletely regressed need to be taken care of, to be told what to do, and other childhood needs is fulfilled in the adult often by adopting attitudes toward his/her children as if the children were the parent’s parents. These attitudes may be

² Karpel (1976) and Jurkovic (1997) reaffirms this “existential-ethical” dimension that is crucial for analyzing social relationships.

innocuous or captivating. This regression to infantile possessive needs for security is also discussed by Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973:152): "the fantasy of retrieving a parent revives old wishes for healing grief over the loss of one's infantile reliance on ever-giving, all-powerful parents" (p.152). This feature suggests that realigning oneself, directly or indirectly, with another person into a parent-child-like relational pattern provides a very effective way to obtain direct gratification, or "emotional gain" (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973:152). And for many individuals, it is the quick or even sole means of achieving fulfillment of certain psychological needs. In short, the parent-child relational pattern, according to Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973), is the medium for individuals to resolve their unmet needs, and the extent to which this pattern is made use of is the extent of parentification.

The aforementioned usage indicates the breadth of the construct. To reflect the attitudes of the members, caretaking behaviors and expressions of loyalty and affect are viewed in terms of a continuum of parent-child-like behavior, which becomes a yardstick for the assessment of parentification in various close relationships. A typical brother-sister relationship might be asked how much it is "like" a parent-child affective relationship if it were enacted, for example. The kind of caring by a parent, understood intuitively as "someone who cares for the children," has a property which may be seen in varying degrees of different affectual relationships. Thus, someone who cares for another could be interpreted as "like" a parent according to the degree of resemblance, and to that degree is parentified. This language is not just the analyst's constructs, but is reflected in the thinking of family members as well, as pointed out by Boszormenyi-Nagy and

Spark's (1973) quotation: " 'If I can be babied by you, I shall in turn be like your parent at other times'" (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973:154).³

The work of Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973), written from a psychological perspective, relates to social exchange theory in sociology(e.g, Blau 1964). This perspective focuses on human behavior arising from people seeking to maximize rewards and minimize costs in social interaction with others. Social exchange theorists see all social interaction as involving actors maintaining a ledger of costs and rewards that each actor incurs individually. Further, two actors maintain ledgers of rewards that are proportional to their investment in the relationship. If the ratio of rewards to investment is proportional for each member in an interaction, then the interaction is seen as having equity or fairness; the one who puts the most into a relationship should get the most out of the relationship. Further, relationships are viewed in relation to a perception of what other people have in their relationships; in other words, there is a comparison level where actors compare their relationship with the relationships of others, including relationships in one's past.

From a social exchange perspective, all relationships involve a social exchange of costs and rewards. What Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark highlight is that the balance of costs and rewards in relationships is not a one-generation phenomenon. Rather, the costs or rewards incurred in one's family of origin can affect the ratio of costs and rewards that exist between parents and children in the family of procreation. Their presentation is highly compatible with the ideas presented in social exchange theory in sociology.

Karpel's (1976) qualitative investigation, *Intrapsychic and Interpersonal*

³ It is possible that families have internalized normative role expectations defined by the analyst.

Processes in the Parentification of Children, was another major work in the literature. He identified “a constellation of conjunctive forces such as pity, tenderness, devotion, commitment, caring and self-sacrifice,” which he called “loyalty and concern” (p. 29) as the major forces at work. Karpel adopts Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark’s (1973) dialectical relational theory perspective that takes into account the existential-ethical dimension that emphasizes a balance of fairness and reciprocity in relationships. He hesitates from subsuming all acts of loyalty and concern under the rubric of “parentification.”⁴

Instead, he suggests that the term “parentified child” should be restricted to “object roles⁵ in which the child exercises overtly protective, care-taking and over-responsible duties” (p. 170), involving “a premature and excessive burden of responsibility for other family members placed on a child without balanced accountability⁶ in return” (Karpel 1976:3). In line with Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark’s (1973) thinking, the technical definition, for Karpel, represents an excessive degree of an otherwise normal aspect of close relationships. The non-destructive range of parentification includes “temporary or limited exploitation of the other,” which is an “inevitable aspect of partner’s complementary self-definition in close relationships” and is a way to “make reparation for past injuries” (p. 28).

⁴ Karpel (1976) avoids labeling “situations in which a child’s loyalty and devotion to the parent or family is expressed” (p. 165) as destructively parentifying. Elsewhere (p. 2, footnote 2), he remarks that the term “parentification” refers to a “pathogenic imbalance in the family.”

⁵ Karpel locates parentified children within a broader category he calls “loyal objects,” who may be loyal to their family but may not exhibit the functional overresponsible caretaking characteristic of parentified children. “Loyal object,” according to Karpel’s explanation, refers to the “non-reciprocal use of the individual as an object by the other(s) and the loyalty which binds him/her to the exploiter(s)” (p. 166).

⁶ Accountability is defined as “a willingness and ability to act responsibly toward the other and, in so doing, to merit responsible actions by the other in return” (Karpel 1976:29).

Karpel's perspective may be seen in terms of how he distinguishes the *parental child* from the *parentified child*. Karpel (1976) argues that there are three elements that the concept of parental child does not consider: 1) "the essential pathogenic features of parentification", 2) "the child's motivations," and 3) "the child's callings." These criteria distinguish what he called the "functional-transactional" approach explicated by Minuchin and colleagues (1967) from the "ethical-existential" approach to emphasize the aspect of "relational balance" that is disrupted in parentification. According to Karpel, Minuchin's (1974) "functional-transactional" approach emphasizes "power and the overall functioning of the family and its members,"⁷ while the "ethical-existential" approach emphasizes the "existential commitments and loyalties" and the "balance of justice and reciprocity between members" (p. 162).

Jurkovic's (1997) in-depth analysis, *Lost Childhoods: The Plight of the Parentified Child*, marks further progress in the characterization of parentification.⁸ He incorporates Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological perspective and Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's (1973) existential-ethical perspective into what he calls the "ecological-ethical perspective." This synthesis takes into account not only the ethical dimension of

⁷ Karpel's interpretation of Minuchin's model is primarily focused on "transactional structure, function, power and skills" (p.162). Karpel cited Minuchin:

"Family structure is the invisible set of functional demands that organizes the ways in which family members interact."

"Transactional patterns regulate family members' behavior. They are maintained by...universal rules governing family organization [such as]...a power hierarchy...[and] a complementarity of functions, [as well as] idiosyncratic...mutual expectations of particular family members."

"The family system differentiates and carries out its functions through subsystems.... Each individual belongs to different subsystems, in which he has different levels of power and where he learns differentiated skills."

⁸ Subsequent research related to parentification after Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's (1973) work were often done by his students. Jurkovic's (1997) model is a significant refinement of Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's model.

individual psychology and systemic and transactional characteristics, but also the multi-level systems of peers, social support networks, schools, communities, and national policies on families. The construct of parentification was built upon Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's basic model. However, Jurkovic argues that subsuming too broad a range of behaviors from infantization to rebel roles, for example, under the rubric of parentification according to Boszormenyi's model is "problematic" (p. 7). Therefore, he systematically identified nine parameters of parentification: type of role assignments,⁹ extent of responsibility, object of caretaking,¹⁰ age appropriateness, internalization,¹¹ family boundaries,¹² social legitimacy,¹³ and ethicality.¹⁴ These parameters generate a clear profile of *destructive parentification*: overt, long-term, age-inappropriate, expressive caretaking responsibility of a parent that is unilateral, unrecognized, and has become internalized as part of one's identity that is "enmeshed with undifferentiated parental figures" (p. 8). Another category in Jurkovic's classification is *Adaptive parentification* bears many features of destructive parentification but is often temporary and mediated by support of family members. *Healthy non-parentification* refers to a "moderate" level of instrumental and expressive tasks that are recognized and reciprocated such that their identity is not molded into a caretaking role. *Infantization*,

⁹ Role assignments can be classified as "concrete, functional tasks" or "socioemotional needs."

¹⁰ This refers to the person to whom the caretaking behavior is directed, e.g., parent, younger sibling, sick family member.

¹¹ This parameter measures whether the child's primary sense of identity and interpersonal style is derived from his/her caretaking role.

¹² This is understood in Bowen's (1978) concept of (un)differentiation and "emotional" cutoff, and Minuchin's (1974) concept of enmeshment/disengagement.

¹³ Social legitimacy refers to the normative expectations and recognition of the behavior within culture, but however, does not imply that they are fair and ethical.

¹⁴ Ethicality refers to "the balance of fairness between children and their caregivers over the generations." This is consistent with the thinking of Karpel (1976), Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973), and a number of other researchers who emphasize reciprocity in what is given and taken among family members.

the opposite extreme of destructive parentification, refers to a process in which the child is overly protected, “underfunctioning,” and insulated from caretaking responsibilities and, thus, may violate boundaries in their relationships with their children and other family members. Jurkovic reserved the term *parentified* for situations involving overt overresponsibility and caretaking (as opposed to indirect caretaking) for purposes of empirical investigation, evaluation and treatment.¹⁵

The operationalization of the nine parameters is a major improvement from Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark’s (1973) basic model in that it allows researchers to measure with higher reliability and assess individuals for potential parentification. The 42 true/false items questionnaire measuring caretaking responsibilities and reciprocity (Jurkovic 1997; Sessions and Jurkovic 1986) includes “In my family I often felt called upon to do more than my share,” “In my mind, the welfare of my family was my first priority,” “In my family I initiated most recreational activities,” and “Members of my family rarely needed me to take care of them.” Higher scores are indicative of parentification; extremely low scores indicates possible infantization; and scores in the middle range are healthiest for development. The scale provides a consistent empirical indicator for the categories of parentification, which could avoid variant subjective evaluations of the same individual on the part of the clinician or the researcher.

However, there are some limitations. It is important to note that the scale gives equal weight to instrumental and expressive parental functions. Similarly, it does not distinguish variations within each of the other parameters. In effect, the questionnaire

¹⁵ This usage would seem to exclude other indirect parentification roles such as Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark’s (1973) notions of the “scapegoat” and “well-sibling.”

does not differentiate different patterns of parentification having the same score. Second, the questionnaire contains items that measure the structural features of parentification as well as its consequences. Third, this is a self-report questionnaire that measures the subjective perceptions of only one member of the family. Other scales have been developed (see Burt 1992; Fullinder-bush and Jacobvitz 1993; Mika et al. 1987) but the Sessions/Jurkovic Scale appears to be used more often; recently, it was used to study adult children who grew up with alcoholic parents and intergenerational parentification (Goglia et al. 1992) and personality types (Jones and Wells 1996).

The refinement of the parentification concept has lead to the distinction between clinical forms of parentification- *exploitative parentification* (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973:83) *destructive parentification* (Jurkovic 1997), *pathogenic parentification* (Karpel 1976)- and less severe forms of parentification. Further, *adaptive parentification* as distinct from *destructive parentification* is an important conceptual distinction that represents a refinement from prior approaches that focused more often on pathogenic parentification, the reference from which other levels of parentification are contrasted.

The category *non-parentification* in Jurkovic's classification needs clarification. Its theoretical and empirical meaning is inseparable from its relation to the other categories, namely, a lower degree of parentification. Thus, a child who is temporarily parentified, moderately parentified, or relatively parentified and is acknowledged by family members could still be classified into the non-parentification category.

Jurkovic's classification tries to account for a large number of related constructs including "symbiotic therapist" (Searles 1971, 1975) "gifted child" (Miller 1981), "family healer," "well sibling," "child-as-parent/mate" (Walsh 1979), "spousification"

(Sroufe and Ward 1980), “scapegoat” (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973), “junior partner” (Weiss 1979), “family hero” (Wegscheider-Cruse 1985, 1990), and “hurried child.” Further, although not explicit in Jurkovic’s four-tier classification, the *parental child* is also included into this classification system.

Although conceptually different from *parentified child*, the parental child, as discussed by Minuchin and colleagues (1967), also contains instrumental as well as expressive elements of parentification that are specifiable in Jurkovic’s classification system using the nine parameters. In carrying out executive responsibilities and providing guidance for the siblings, the parental child has already provided emotional support not only to the sibling but the parent who may now look to the parental child as a source of security and relief.

In one of the families that Minuchin studied, Margaret, the parental child who was “‘torn apart’” and neurotic, not only cared for her mother, but tried to keep the family together. Minuchin describes her:

Overburdened to extremes, Margaret often supersedes her mother. She can become so ‘maternally worried’ that she escorts Daniel from the bus station despite a parental decision that he is old enough to try it alone. Margaret is understandably phobic about seeking life or relationships outside the home; she has trouble making friends and is obsessed about getting a job to ‘fix’ the family. (P. 228)

In many ways, the parental child is also the parentified child, according to Jurkovic’s classification. Interestingly, however, Winton’s (forthcoming) structural interpretation of *parental child* as a child who provides caretaking functions to a sibling and *parentified child* as a child who takes care of a parent allows for the possibility that a

child could be parental but not parentified, for example, in situations where an elder sibling has to care for younger siblings due to the absence of parental responsibility. This scheme also allows for the possibility that in families with only one child, the child is potentially parentified, but not parental, since the child has no sibling.

Parentification understood as the caretaking of a parent, other family members, or even the whole family is no longer viewed as pathological. Not only is it normal within limits, they are important opportunities to acquire skills necessary for a child's development; this is reflected by Jurkovic's inclusion of the infantization category at the opposite end of *destructive parentification*. The harm of *infantization* points to, in the terminology of Karpel (1976) and Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973), the importance of balance of give-and-take of obligations and merits, of reciprocity in human relationships.

At the analytical level, researchers and clinicians agree that some degree of parentification defined in terms of role reversal is normal. Minuchin (1974) states that in large families the distribution of parental power to children is normal and the family "can function well." Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) write, "...to some degree every child must be parentified by his parents at certain times. Without this, he would not learn to identify with responsible roles for his future life." Karpel (1976) views parentification as an "inevitable aspect of close relationships." Jurkovic (1997) emphasizes the importance of "occasional role reversal" for self development (p.xiii).¹⁶ Besides conceptual markers such as the object of caretaking and the type of role assignment mentioned by Jurkovic (1997), the difference between parentification of the *non-*

¹⁶ Goglia and colleagues (1992) reaffirm this point.

parentification type and parentification of the *destructive parentification* type is arguably a difference of degree.

It is clear that for many families, parentification outside the realm of destructiveness is an important and useful resource that has multiple functions such as “balancing justice,” obtaining emotional support, developing necessary skills, and forming a healthy, autonomous identity. This pervasive applicability indicates that parentification is 1) a mode of relating among family members that characterizes significant family dynamics and 2) a mechanism that structures the family relational system.

An overview of the literature indicates that it has several limitations. First, research has focused largely on pathological parentification resulting in the need for therapy. However, researchers point out that parentification is linked to the very ordinary behavior that all persons engage in whenever love, sympathy, concern, loyalty, and other emotions of a caring nature are expressed. Researchers generally agree that it is no longer accurate to say that our caring behaviors within intimate bonds, for example, are at-risk of developing into pathology. They are now giving greater attention to non-pathological forms of parentification. Second, there is a lack of qualitative studies to explore the broader context in which parentification is embedded. Chase (1999) pointed out that Karpel (1976) and Henry (1965) are the only two works that employed a qualitative method using naturalistic data. Third, parentification has been studied largely within the context of Euro-American, middle class families. This present qualitative study is a response to 1) the need for research on families without disorganized

structures¹⁷ (Chase 1999) 2) the lack of qualitative studies on parentification and 3) the need for research in families of other ethnicities (Jurkovic 1997).

Parentification outside the Context of Euro-American Families

The subjects in research studies of parentification have been generally Euro-American subjects and, so, does not expand on the sociocultural dimension that Jurkovic (1997) and other researchers have pointed out. There is no empirical study on other ethnic populations to examine this phenomenon (Chase 1999). In one study titled "An empirical study of parentification and personality" (Jones and Wells 1996) a significant number (11% of 360) of respondents to a parentification questionnaire were Asian-Americans students, but they were not explored in-depth. That is, racial difference was not explored.

Among few workers who directly address parentification in the sociocultural context, Anderson (1999) challenges the applicability of the parentification of children in the context of the African American family. He believes the parentification construct reflects an "epistemological bias grounded in culturally determined Western/American beliefs about child development, family relations, and social roles" (p. 165). He notes that Anglo-American values of "individualism, differentiation, autonomy, independence, mastery, and future" (p. 161) may be at odds with traditional, African-American-based values of "affiliation, collectivity, obedience to authority, belief in spirituality, acceptance of fate, and respect for the past as expressed in reverence for the elderly and ancestor

¹⁷ This generally refers to families brought in for or requiring clinical treatment.

worship” (p. 162). This difference, he argues, may lead to false interpretations of interdependence as enmeshment and flexible family roles as problematic boundary definitions. Anderson emphasizes the unique sociohistorical and sociocultural context of a group, and in doing so calls for a framework that is meaningful within that sociocultural system.

Brief Literature Review on Asian/Vietnamese Families

Very few research studies on Asian-American families are explanatory. Most empirical investigations on Asian-Americans have been descriptive, and they focused mainly on Chinese and Japanese Americans (Uba 1994; Pyke 2000). Another area of research focus on Asian families is mental health, but it has been pointed out (e.g., Harrison et al. 1990) that a large number of studies and reports on mental health issues did not take into account developmental dimensions. Most studies on Vietnamese/Asian families are descriptive and mainly revolve around aspects of immigration and adaption to American society.

In their analysis of the adaptation process of ethnic minority children, Harrison and colleagues (1990) mentioned “role flexibility” as a coping strategies “out of historical necessity” used among African-Americans, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian Pacific Americans, and Hispanics.¹⁸ Citing Allen (1978) and Allen and Sturkes (1982), they wrote of all ethnic minorities in general: “Familial social roles can be regarded as

¹⁸ The authors referenced Munoz and Endo (1982).

flexible in definition, responsibility, and performance. Parenting of younger siblings by older siblings, sharing of the breadwinner role among adults, and alternative family arrangements have been found to be more prevalent in ethnic minority communities than in majority communities” (p. 352). This encompassing construct clearly contains elements of parentification as defined in the literature. It would not be surprising that Jurkovic’s scheme would locate these children in the *adaptive parentification* category.

Research on ethnic minority families only mentioned the parentification of children or related concepts without exploring them in-depth. For example, researching a homeless Mexican-American single-parent family in psychotherapy, Karlsberg (1998) observed: “Parentification of the son increased as the mother’s weak bilingual abilities were challenged by her financial circumstances and the son was forced to become translator for his mother.” Studying adaption processes in immigrant families, Rakoff (1981) noted that the role reversal that young children experience as translators for their parents creates stress because the sense of power they have is at odds with their dependency on their parents. Rakoff (1981) wrote, “Frequently they adapt more completely than their parents and they may find themselves in the paradoxical position of being more accomplished in the new society: they may become parents of their parents” (p. 144).

On adaption processes of Vietnamese immigrants, Zhou and Bankston (1998) observed that children have to read documents, answer the phone, deal with outsiders, and shop for their parents. They wrote, “Many non-English-speaking parents have to rely on their children to guide them into American society, in effect becoming the children of

their children" (p. 170).¹⁹ The authors argue that although "parental dependency" does not constitute "extreme role reversals,"²⁰ it creates communication barriers that might affect parent-child relationships (p. 170). In general, these authors use parentification concepts in a general manner and only as they bear relevance to their immediate presentations. The constructs were accepted and taken for granted as knowledge and were not discussed thoroughly. That is, they relied on a structural feature of the parent-child relation without explaining the broader cultural context in which the ethnic children live and whether or not it is (potentially) pathogenic, for example. The authors adopted a simplistic definition of parentification whereby the children acting as guides and for their parents would be considered parentified by virtue of the helping roles that they perform for or toward their parents.

Like studies on other ethnic minorities, most studies on Vietnamese families or the Vietnamese population in general relate directly or indirectly to the context of immigration after the Vietnam War, resettlement, and adaptation/assimilation. Moreover, the early studies and reports heavily focused on mental health (e.g., Pham 1986; Williams and Westermeyer 1983). Two recent studies (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991; Zhou and Bankston 1998) have focused on the adaptation of children of Vietnamese immigrants and how they have succeeded, or failed, in school.

In an ethnographic study on twelve Vietnamese households, involving mainly

¹⁹ This statement is followed by "One young man expressed the alienation from his parents and family produced by this parental dependency: 'I don't see why I should listen to her (his mother). Like, she needs me a lot more than I need her. She can't even talk to anybody that calls on the phone. So I just do what I like. Who's gonna tell me I can't.'" This may be one of the "Americanized" Vietnamese that the authors mention.

²⁰ The authors probably mean this in a general sense, as they stated elsewhere: "Resettlement was often accompanied by role reversals between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between children and other adult family members." (P. 84)

adults aged 18-58 who were recent arrivals and were still adapting to life in the U.S., Kibria (1997) followed the migration-resettlement-adaption model examining such issues as mobilization of resources for survival, changes in power and gender relations, and the generational gap between the young and the old. Zhou and Bankston's (1998) study of children of Vietnamese immigrants also discussed issues of adolescents' experiences of bicultural conflicts and changes in gender relations.

In psychology, several studies on these children and their families have investigated the conflict and generation gap between children and their parents. Drawing for a sample of Vietnamese adolescents aged 12-16, De Ment (1998) found that first-generation adolescents had few interests with parents while second-generation adolescents felt not understood by their parents. Using a 28-item questionnaire measuring family values to compare Vietnamese and Caucasian adolescents aged 12-19 and some of their parents, Nguyen and Williams (1988) found that Vietnamese-American adolescents tended to reject traditional values and that the generation gap between parent and child was greater for girls than boys. Exploring the long-term effects of acculturation, Dinh and colleagues (1998) found that, among other findings, Vietnam-born Vietnamese-American college students had lower quality relationships with their parents than their U.S.-born counterparts. All of these studies were quantitative studies, done in English, and often involved the use of a questionnaire survey consisting of close-ended questions for numerical analysis. As descriptive studies, they do not explain. In other words, descriptive studies do not focus on the relations of factors and how they might influence a particular outcome.

Using data collected from in-depth interviews with 73 adult children of immigrants about their family and social experiences, Pyke (2000) recently presented some insights into the way children of Vietnamese- and Korean immigrants who have grown up in the U.S. appealed to the “normal American family” as a reference to evaluate their family relationships. Most informants gave negative descriptions of their relations with their parents with respect to discipline, emotional closeness, or communication. Interestingly, however, they were committed to filial obligations of caring for their parents in old age, which Pyke suggested that these children use to construct their ethnic identity.

There are no known studies on Vietnamese families that explores parentification of children in the Vietnamese cultural context. The meaning of family duties and caretaking functions have not been explored. Is it more stressful to perform more caretaking tasks? Do caretaking functions change the way family members relate to one another? These questions are not yet answered. This study explores some aspects of the Vietnamese family system as they relate to parentification.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Two of Parsons and Bales' (1955) five pattern variables, ascription/achievement and self/collectivity, are relevant to this thesis. Parsons and Bales originally used these variables to discuss differences in the value systems of societies that were agrarian versus societies that were industrialized. Preindustrialized societies would value status based on

ascription. Preindustrialized societies would also value collectivity (groups such as families) over self.

Vietnam in the latter part of the 20th Century was still basically an agrarian society that was trying to develop an industrial base. It was in transition from a preindustrial to an industrial society. As will be shown from the data, most Vietnamese respondents reflect the values of an agrarian Vietnam.

The longer the Vietnamese people live in the U.S., the more they are likely to take on the values of the post-industrial United States as a function of acculturation. Thus, the children of the respondents of this study are likely to reflect very different values than did these respondents who were, for the most part, recent immigrants.

The Role Perspective and Ascribed/Achieved Status sections to follow relate to Structural/Functional Theory, a sociological framework that dominated American sociology for many decades. This model analyzes the social structure of social systems, whether those systems be societies, corporations, or families.

The section on Reciprocity to follow relates to Social Exchange Theory. This sociological model views individuals as seeking to maximize rewards and minimize costs in social interaction. These theorists analyze social interaction as social exchange of rewards and costs. The perception of actors and how they perceive ratios of costs and rewards affects their interpretations of relationships as being fair and just, as having equity, or being unfair, unjust, or inequitable. From a social exchange perspective, the parentification of children lacks equity because the children are giving much more to their parents than they are getting from their parents.

*Role Perspective*²¹

Within the social institution of the family, each member occupying a specific status²² enacts a variety of roles toward all other family members. This array of roles constitutes one's role-set²³ within the family. The role-set for the status of the youngest member consists of the roles he/she performs in relation to his/her mother, father, each sibling, as well as other relatives with whom he/she interacts. The role-set of the female adult in the nuclear family consists of role of wife to husband, role of mother to children, role of child to her mother, role of cousin to cousins, role of aunt to siblings' children, and so on. The role-set for all other members can be identified in a like manner.²⁴

Family relationships are complex, however, and each member acts toward each of the other members, in not one, but multiple roles. According to Winton (1995), the father is not just breadwinner and disciplinarian to the children but also "medical father who gives medication when they are ill," "banker father who gives their children loans," "recreational father who may play games with the children," and "educational father who helps the children with their homework" (p. 51). He called this array of father roles the "father role sets."²⁵ Hence, the general role of father consists of yet another array of subsidiary roles for different domains of tasks.

²¹ Only the most relevant features of role theory will be used in this analysis.

²² "Status" here is understood as position within a social structure (Winton 1995).

²³ This is Merton's (1957) concept of the role-set: the array of roles that one enacts with all of the individuals in an institutional sphere forms a role-set.

²⁴ Minuchin (1974) sees this constellation of relationships in terms of identities: "But every individual's sense of identity is influenced by his sense of belonging to different groups. Part of Mark Wagner's identity is the fact that he is the father of Tom and the husband of Emily, as well as the child of his parents. The components of an individual's sense of identity change and remain constant" (p. 48).

²⁵ For Merton, the many roles that one enacts from a given status are directed at one person. While Merton would speak of the role of father, Winton speaks of the roles (plural) of father in relation to a child.

Family roles can generally be classified into two categories of expressive and instrumental roles.²⁶ Instrumental roles can be classified based on several major functional domains, such as economic functions, meal preparation, janitorial tasks, babysitting, and so on. Expressive functions include providing emotional support to a family member, caretaking of a sick person, caring for the family as a whole, coordinating family activities, resolving disputes, making important family decisions. The division of labor for these functions among family members can be classified by type, extent, duration, or any combination of these. Many instrumental functions can be viewed as expressive functions. For example, a child takes the role of food provider and the other members indirectly take the role of beneficiary of that behavior.

Whether a function is instrumental or expressive depends to a great extent on the interpretation of the family member him/herself who performs that function. For example, does the child understand her cooking meals on the grounds of family duty, helping mother, need to feel useful, or doing it to preserve the family? While expressive roles are often not clearly defined and thus can take many shapes and forms, instrumental functions are concrete and clear, which is why they play the important function of visibly organizing family behaviors and, thereby, providing some stability for locating one another within the family.

²⁶ This classification in the parentification literature (see Jurkovic, 1997) is based on Parson and Bales' (1955) construction of divisions of labor to fulfill the demands of the family systems. The differentiation of functions assigns the father instrumental functions to fulfill the physical needs such as providing food and shelter and a source of income, and assigns the mother expressive functions to fulfill the emotional needs of family members. It is important to note here that according to feminist theories, these simplistic classifications in structural-functional theories and the language of "the male role" and "the female role," for example, belie power conflicts and the subordination of women (Thorne, 1992). This classification is used in this discussion because parentification has been classified along these two broad categories of functions.

Expressive and instrumental functions of the family system provide important structural opportunities to functionally define self in relation to others and, thereby, differentiate self from others. The quality of this understanding depends significantly upon the degree of elaboration of one's roles and relations.

A functional definition of self is elaborated by one's ability to clearly locate and contrast oneself against others within the various behavioral domains. A father who understands his role in the family as solely that of breadwinner has a less elaborated father role-set than a father who understands his role as breadwinner, teacher, doctor, and so on. A more elaborated father role-set is most effectively obtained in the presence of clear rules and sanctions enforced by parents or other adult figures. A child who grows up providing emotional care for his/her mother without guidance, for example, will internalize that behavior as his/her own, and the behavioral patterns which he/she observes as associated with other members provide a significant basis for his/her conception of what an occupant of such a family position is and does.

Ascribed/Achieved Status

One of the five pattern variables which Parsons (1951) conceptualized in his analysis of social interactions across preindustrial and industrial societies is ascribed/achieved status.²⁷ This dimension measures the extent to which people evaluate

²⁷ The other four are diffuseness-specificity, collectivity-self, universalism-particularism, affectivity-affective neutrality.

and treat a person based upon whom that person is versus what that person does. Ascription is based on such factors as age, gender, or ethnicity, which are prescribed at birth. Status based on ascription might bestow low status to children if the family establishes a status hierarchy based on age where younger people are subordinate to older people. Status based on ascription might bestow low status to females if the family establishes a status hierarchy based on gender where males dominate females. Here gender affects status based on ascription. There is little a female can do by her actions to enhance her status when status is a function of “social facts” (Durkheim 1897) such as age or gender.

Status based on ascription is important in family functioning in the sense that behaviors that family members display toward one another are stable and would not easily change with achievements or other transient characteristics of a family member. For the family as a system to function effectively, the social structure of roles must be able to adapt rapid changes; yet, at the same time it needs to maintain some degree of stability to guide the behaviors of family members in the face of changes. One way in which this coordination is possible is application of the criterion of ascribed status of family members in interacting with them. When family members treat or interact with one another based upon ascribed status, e.g., statuses of parent, child, boy, their roles do not change with external contingencies such as personal accomplishments. Roles that are derived on that basis are stable roles and function to coordinate effectively the behaviors of family members.

Applying this framework to the family system, Winton (1995) observed that

“children today are rewriting that commandment²⁸ to read ‘Honor thy mother and thy father, if they deserve it.’” This means that the way children act toward their parents changes with their perceptions of their parents’ contributions. This contingency implies that their roles toward their parents are not pre-determined by any fixed external standards but are contingent upon their parents’ achievements. Therefore, their roles toward their parents can be unclear and unstable, and so family behaviors may become disorganized as circumstances change.

Self/Collectivity

Another one of Parsons and Bales’ five pattern variables that is important in this study is self/collectivity. This dimension asks whether interests of the group take precedence over self-interests. Acting for the sake of the group is essential to the survival of the group whose requisite functions may not coincide with personal interests.

In the family, members sometimes have to put the interests of the family above self in order to maintain the survival of the family. They may have to sacrifice individual needs to fulfill certain functions that benefit the collectivity (Winton 1995). Parents perform economic functions, for example, that benefit not just themselves but all family members. Children sometimes have to set aside other conflicting personal interests to perform chores or other family duties that contribute to the whole family.

Parents are in better positions than children to assume greater burden and make

²⁸ The Commandment “Honor thy mother and thy father” is one of the Ten Commandments in the Bible which represent the Judeo-Christian ethical code of conduct.

greater contributions to the family collectivity. Destructive parentification can result when children are forced to make disproportionate contributions that are inappropriate for their age and ability, be it the performance of instrumental functions or expressive caretaking roles. With an imbalance toward collective interests, parentified children are denied opportunities to pursue self-interests which in the long run can harm their development.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity has been recognized as an important feature that keeps social groups together (Gouldner 1960). Its basic structure is the implicit obligation to repay what was received. In other words, in providing a benefit, the giver implicitly obligates the receiver to reciprocate (Blau 1964). That obligation is dissolved upon a repayment perceived “proper”²⁹ by the actors. Continuation of the social relationship is dependent upon continuing exchanges by the actors. Gouldner’s (1960) analysis of the norm of reciprocity and stability of social systems provides some general parameters: 1) the obligation incurred in the offer is a *contingent* obligation,³⁰ so that the receiver of the item of exchange is not forced to repay; 2) the items given or received have a value; 3) in some situations, “*rough* equivalence” (versus “some” return) is sufficient to dissolve an obligation; 4) *homeomorphic* reciprocity refers to repayment of benefit that is the same or similar to what was received; *heteromorphic* reciprocity refers to repayment of a benefit

²⁹ This is understood in an extremely general sense, i.e., not taking into account issues of shared expectation, individual perceptions, relative needs, etc.

³⁰ *Contingent* obligation is different from *unconditional* obligation, which is not characteristic of the norm of reciprocity.

of equal value but not necessarily of the same type; and 5) perceived value versus objective value (e.g., as measured by economists); often, perceived value is more relevant in dissolving an obligation.

There are several features of reciprocal exchange particular to the family system. First, family social relations are compulsory. Children are forced to stay with the family until late adolescence, regardless of what injustices incurred upon them. Second, because they are forced to stay together, temporary inequalities that could otherwise sever the relation could be delayed and recompensed at a later time. Third, the exact value of a benefit arguably is not as important as its symbolic/existential meaning. Thus, reciprocity within the family can be highly *heteromorphic*. For example, temporarily caring for one's sick elder brother may count as a repayment for an expensive toy that one has gotten from him. Fourth, the definition of self could extend to encompass other members or the entire family; this would reduce the gap between the two parties involved in the exchange, which affects whether an obligation has been incurred or whether it is necessary to repay. Fifth, as Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) point out, besides the unquantifiable reward of social approval and satisfaction from what joy the children bring to the parents, what parents give to their children may never be paid back fully.

Parentified children make inordinate contributions to their parents or to the family as a whole. They contribute more than they receive from their families. Such exchanges are unreciprocal and unfair for them.

Beyond motivations of "mutual gratifications" (Parsons 1951), self-interest, and social expectations, reciprocity plays a unique function in the family. Reciprocity in the

family involves not only obligation to repay but also 1) the need to feel obligated to repay and 2) the actual discharge of those obligations. Viewed this way, reciprocity within the family is one of reciprocally providing opportunities for members to express gratitude, to attain a sense of responsibility and achievement. The *infantized child* who has always been in a receiving mode within the family could not discharge family obligations and repay gratitude to resolve that existential indebtedness (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark, 1973). He/she may later inappropriately cross boundaries and parentify his/her children or other family members to fulfill that need. The need to have obligations and the opportunity to repay them is essential to healthy development (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Jurkovic 1997).

Underlying optimal reciprocal exchanges in the family are clear roles and obligations. Children's responsibilities must be clear in terms of type and extent, beyond which is unnecessary, burdensome, or improper. Clear roles and responsibilities are necessary for dissolving obligations and meriting rewards.

ANALYSIS OF PARENTIFICATION

According to Chase (1999) parentification involves the general concepts of role reversal and sacrifice/burden; sacrifice/burden is related to reciprocity and justice which were key concepts of Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's (1973) discussion. These constructs are general, even ambiguous; they contain many assumptions, and they have not one but many meanings within a culture and across cultures. This discussion works at the level of generality as assumed in the parentification literature.

There are several factors that influence overall sacrifice/burden, which can be thought of as consisting of objective burden (burden intrinsic to the tasks themselves) and perceived burden substantially affect overall burden. Objective burden refers to how many and to what extent tasks are performed by the child, whether or not they are clear, and whether children have the experience/skills to do them. Subjective burden refers to the perceptions and subjective experience of the children who are performing parental roles. It is influenced by the degree of institutionalization of those roles, perceptions of fairness, what counts as fulfilment of an obligation, and so on. The values that are institutionalized in the family provide important resources for how children interpret their family experiences. Is family just a temporary stay? Is independence or interdependence valued in the family? What does family mean as part of self? Is performance of tasks interpreted as helping mother, caring for the family, or as a child's duty? Answers to these questions have implications for the burden perceived when children perform family duties or caretaking functions.

When parents fail to perform their duties, their children are often inducted into parental roles to sustain the family (Karpel 1976). Children in these situations often lack proper guidance. They may not know when their caretaking duties are finished, how to do them, and whether they are appropriate. Without limits or external sources of restraint to check their behaviors, these children lack a psychological niche, and the parental tasks that they perform are stressful. When a parent, or other family members, derives gratification from the child's functioning in a parental capacity, and parental role performance is interpreted as being loyal and responsible, equilibrium is maintained, but

only to the detriment of the child. In effect, they are functionally children to no one.

Because children do not begin life with intrinsic roles and abilities to perform them, they are reactions to their parents and, thus, are almost inevitably elevated to parental status when their parents depend on them for emotional support. When a father, for example, receives continual emotional support from a child as he would to a parent figure (Schmideberg 1948), he takes the stance of a child by virtue of his psychological dependence. This almost inevitably thrusts the child into the counter-role (Stryker 1980) of caretaker. The child performing the counter-role might not take initiative in performing the role that she finds herself in.³¹

The reconfiguration of the parent-child relation in which the child is elevated to parental status is likely to involve dissolution of ascribed roles associated with the former status of being a child. This cascade of changes often involves loss of parental authority and other parent status indicators for the parent. Without parental guidance and clear roles, these children may rely on their parents' needs to guide their behaviors. The parents' interactions with their children may be based upon the power and authority derived from the resources the children have achieved. Treatment based upon changing needs and earned authority are susceptible to change. These changes undermine the integrity of any former stable roles that is derived from their ascribed status as children in the family. Too much change in role definitions and boundaries will stress, if not paralyze, these children.

³¹ Minuchin talks of 'transactional pattern:' "Repeated transactions establish patterns of how, when and to whom to relate, and these patterns underpin the system. When a mother tells her child to drink his juice and he obeys, this interaction defines who she is in relation to him and who he is in relation to her, in that context and at that time. Repeated operations in these terms constitute a transactional pattern" (p. 51).

When the children begin to lose the understanding that their parental roles are what parents do, they are vulnerable to destructive parentification. In situations where parents have not articulated their parental roles, or articulated them but later relinquish them, especially when the children are still young, they have no more than a faint idea of what mother does and what a mother functionally is. Eva, a child in one of the families studied by Karpel (1976), remarked:

[Therapist 1 asks Eva what her place is in the family] I don't even know what an adult or a child is, so I can't very well know my place. I, in effect, also asked my father that, you know, what's an adult? What are you? And he couldn't answer. I don't know. (P. 63)

Without knowledge of what their parents do, the children will have no models for executing parental duties; this also means that they will not realize that the parental roles are not being executed by the mother. Therefore, the children reorganize the parental behaviors that they engage in as their own. When those parental roles have been internalized (Jurkovic 1997:10), it is difficult to be extricated from them.

On the other hand, in the situation where the children perform parental roles alongside their supportive parents, they can see at a distance, so to speak, their roles performed by persons other than themselves. This is substantively different from the former situation in which the children interpret their parental behaviors solely as their own. Seeing that one's behavior is parental makes for the possibility of role exit (Ebaugh 1988).³² Even though the children take on parental roles, they know that those are what parents do; observing their parents, they know when their parental role performance is

³² Only a general association is made here. Ebaugh's (1988) conception of role exit in her study on professions and identity contains many dimensions not relevant here.

completed or surpassed. They may understand that those burdensome duties are ways to help their parents, and they can seek compensations accordingly.

When children take on a caretaking role for other family members or the whole family for an extended period of their childhood, they may be deprived of the opportunity to explore and experience other roles (outside of the family life). In this state they may be trapped in whatever role, including parental roles, they engage in at the moment. Karpel (1976) argues that this has implications for identity formation:

Burdened with the 'commitment of the care-taker,' discouraged from autonomous activity and often restricted to the relational world of the family, the child may lose the flexibility to experiment with different roles and identifications, to feel free to 'try on' and discard different personalities in a gradual, if tentative, process of identity formation. Because the price of such vital experimentation is so high the child may be forced to settle for the identity s/he has evolved in the family. (P. 150)

He cites Erikson to support this observation: "...his sense of identity can remain prematurely fixed on being nothing but a good little worker or a good little helper, which may not be all he could be'" (Karpel 1976:150).

One factor of this trapped condition is not due to the intrinsic nature of the role that is presently occupied, but is due to the condition that there is no other, discernible role to step into and, therefore, out of the present caretaking role. Stepping out of a parental role requires clear delineations of not only what that role entails and when its performance is fulfilled, but also of what roles are not parental. Role entry and exit requires clear delineation and limits. This is why researchers and clinicians point out the importance of exploring other roles that were forsaken when the parentified child was

denied such opportunities. An attempt at reconstructing these roles in therapy is challenging because being told of what is involved in a parental role is different from direct experience and observation that have been foregone.

For children who have become adept at their caretaking roles, they will resist change, and so that role is not just a patterned behavior but also a way of seeing.³³ When caretaking behavior is perceived as one's sole means of competence and self-esteem, the performer will seek to reenact caretaking roles at available opportunities. This consequence has been documented in several studies that link one's history of parentification and career choice (Lackie 1983; Sessions 1986; Jurkovic 1997). As an emotional threshold is reached, these individuals, as parents, who are indifferent to proper role limits, will likely induct their children into arbitrary and unpredictable roles to fulfill their unmet needs. They parentify their children. So, the pattern is reproduced into the next generation (Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Jurkovic 1997)

Some strategies that therapists use include rechanneling or opening new channels of communication conducive to acknowledgement and acceptance of loss, "perspective taking," realignment of incongruous perceptions, reaffirmation of identity and what that identity involves, redrawing of boundaries, and understanding that emotional needs can be fulfilled by many means.

³³ This is a kind of role rigidity that is a common characteristic of the bureaucratic personality (Merton 1957). In his analysis of bureaucratic structure and personality, Merton draws upon Veblen's concept "trained incapacity", "Dewey's notion of "occupational psychosis", and Warnotte's view of "professional deformation" to analyze some dysfunctions of bureaucracy. Merton proposes, in a nutshell, that one is so well-trained in a skill that it can become an obstacle toward a more general objective; in other words, an act that is a manifestation of that skill is at the same time an act of incompetence. This occurs when new circumstances require a new skill (or the same skill modified), but in fact the same skill is rigidly applied, i.e. without qualifications. So, the workers' trainings become "inadequacies and blindspots." The result is a compromise in the overall achievement of the organization.

Clear roles and distributions of labor have implications for the balance of give-and-take that Jurkovic (1997) and other researchers emphasize. If task assignments are not clear, the children's contributions could go unacknowledged by other family members and, thus, are invalidated. The consequence is increased perceived burden. Second, the collapse of parental roles into the children's own behavior affects the ability to assess the value of their contributions. Unaware or unsure of what they do counts as a parental task means not being able to demand commensurate compensation. This uncertainty frustrates the calculus of obligations discharged and merits earned. The children in effect are taxed physically and psychologically. The result, using Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's language, is a ledger or history of uncertainties, of doubtful obligations or merits, of values with a large margin of error, so to speak.

GENERAL FEATURES OF VIETNAMESE FAMILIES

Philosophies/Religions

The Vietnamese people, among other Asian peoples, live in an agricultural civilization in East/Southeast Asia that dates back many millenia. What knowledge we have of the past, through archaeological findings and oral traditions, for example, indicates a way of life of harmony with nature and with one another. As neighboring cultures came into contact, cultural exchange was inevitable. Vietnamese civilization have influenced and were influenced by diverse cultural currents. Today, it is a mosaic of ancient culture and imported ideas that have been Vietnamized over time. In the

background of the indigenous culture, the harmonious trinity of Vietnamese Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, has been traditionally cited as unique philosophical/religious world views of Vietnamese society. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explicate their complex cultural distinctions and relations. So, only brief summaries of some major outlooks are here mentioned to locate the cultural context for the present study.

Ancestor worship (đạo ông bà) is an ancient cultural custom that is practiced by nearly all Vietnamese today. The basis for this institution is that after a person has died, the soul (hồn) continues on into another world and can influence family affairs (Tran 1995). The ancestors and those who have recently passed away protect family members, as well as punish those who commit violations or do injury to the family. In this sense the family does not consist of just living members, but those who have passed away. The motives for this practice is “respect and affection for the deceased forebears, religious fear for dwellers of the other world, desire for the welfare of the living” (Nguyen 1957:186). It is a culture whose function is “...to remind the living of the memories of the dead, to permit them to show respect, loyalty and gratitude for all the good deeds they have received” (Tran 1942:260).³⁴ Conspicuous manifestations of this practice include ceremonies and rituals during important occasions such as weddings, death anniversaries, funerals, and grave maintenance.

Arguably originated from the Lac Viet culture,³⁵ Daoist philosophy is a philosophy of relativity and balance. Its abstract philosophical thought is comprehended

³⁴ This quote is cited by Nguyen (1957:187).

³⁵ Vietnamese and international researchers are still debating about the origin of this philosophy/religion (Tran 1995).

by few people, which has lead to polytheism and other indigenous religious practices (Tran 1995). However, its practical expressions emphasize harmony with self, nature, and with people. Its philosophy of moderation teaches strength lies in flexibility, victory by non-confrontational means, excessive want of success and fame shackles oneself, and humility in relating to others (Ngu 1988). In the family system, harmony and stability is achieved when husband and wife complement each other in their roles (Tran 1995).

About 80% of Vietnamese are Buddhist (Engholm 1995). Originally a set of philosophical principles, Buddhism has transformed into a predominantly religious practice. The basic tenets of Buddhism include the Four Noble Truths: “1) one is born to suffer, and one suffers from one life to the next 2) craving is the cause of suffering: craving for pleasure, possessions, and cessation of pain 3) The cure for craving is nonattachment to all things including self 4) To achieve nonattachment one must take the eight-fold path of right conduct, right effort, right intentions, right livelihood, right meditations, right mindfulness, right speech, and right views.” (Vuong 1976:8). These eight practices can be understood as three broad teachings of 1) doing good and avoid doing bad 2) practice of cessation of excess desires 3) right meditation to the transient nature of all things (Tran 1995). According to the principle of *karma*, a person dies and reincarnates in a series of cycles of life and death until one’s positive karmic principle, which one works at, takes precedence over one’s negative karmic principles, whence that cycle ceases and one enters a state of bliss. This life is thought to be the positive or negative consequence of what one did in the past or the previous life. Some Buddhist orientations emphasize moderation, compassion for other beings, tranquility, and

acceptance of fate, which has enabled the Vietnamese people to overcome great hardship.

While Buddhism and Daoism explain metaphysical realities, Confucianism is more concerned with human conduct and social order. Confucius lived during a period of social chaos and sought to restore social order from the smallest social institution of the family to the universal order of society through virtuous conduct and social relations. Confucius laid out the statuses for all individuals along a hierarchy of rights, obligations, and conduct toward one another. The five social relations are 1) ruler and subject: "benevolence and moral behavior in the ruler and loyalty in subjects" 2) father and son: "kindness and sacrifice in the father and filial piety in the son" 3) husband and wife: "righteous and 'manly' behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife" 4) brother and brother: kindness and helpfulness in the older brother and respect in the younger 5) friend and friend: loyalty in friendship, and humane treatment in elders and deference in juniors."³⁶ The family plays important functions of socializing its members into their proper places.

Confucian ethics are often referred to by the five virtues of *Nhân, Nghĩa, Lễ, Trí, Tín* (humanity, righteousness, observance of etiquettes, knowledge, trustworthiness).

Beside the more recent introduction of Christianity, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism have been called the "Three Teachings" ("Tam Giáo") of Vietnam. They share in common a morality of moderation, compassion, and harmony in social settings and in nature.

³⁶ This is Tran's (1995) rendition from Voss' (1968:79) *In Search of Meaning: Living Religions of the World*.

The Family Unit

The Vietnamese family³⁷ (*nhà*), according to its narrow definition, commonly consists of husband and wife and their children, as well as sons- or daughters-in-law and sometimes servants (Nguyen 1957:176). The children move out as they get married, and the parents live with one of their children, often the eldest son. A number of families whose heads have the same last name (i.e., who descend from a common ancestor) form a *ho* ("clan"). Thus, the "extended" family could consist of complex kin relations. Commonly, however, it includes aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, and other close kin on the maternal and paternal side who often live within the same village or region. The strong consanguineal and affinal ties and high degree of interdependence among them gives fluid meanings to what "family" is composed of.³⁸ The common usage "người trong nhà" ("people in the family") can include, for example, descendants of great-grandparents and in-laws, who are implicitly bounded by perceived obligations toward one another.

The value of collectivity and interdependence make the family unit a very resilient system to mobilize resources to respond to emergencies or to achieve a goal. This character is clear even when Vietnamese families are relocated to the United States, where family members relocate again so that they can live within the same neighborhood

³⁷ Only general features of the Vietnamese family are presented here as they are related to the present study.

³⁸ The Vietnamese extended family structure can be viewed as similar to Foster's (1984) and Wilson's (1986) interpretation of the Black extended family as including consanguine, affinal, and fictive relationships.

or city to be close to one another (Tran 1995; Zhou and Bankston 1999).

Family Roles And Responsibilities

Located in a traditionally agrarian, less industrialized society, the Vietnamese family is still a multi-function unit. In *Getting to Know the Vietnamese*, Vuong (1976) wrote:

It is a mini-commune where its members live and share together... a religious place where the family altar is set up to revere ancestors or observe religious rituals..., a courtroom where conflicts or disputes between members are settled, a welfare center where assistance and social security services are rendered, a hospital where patients are treated, a nursing home where the elderly are taken good care of, an educational institution where family and formal education is provided..., and a place where all members share the joys, the sadness, the enjoyments, the suffering of life." (P. 21)

The family is the primary social institution that performs many essential functions. Many tasks are distributed among a large number of children according to their age and ability. There is sex differentiation in the performance of family tasks. However, in families that revolve around a home economy, duties may not be distinguished as much on the basis of home and work. The eldest children often have disproportionately greater responsibilities than the younger siblings. However, younger siblings are expected to help elder siblings with family duties.

In addition to other tasks, children are expected to care for their young siblings, especially in large families when the parents cannot take care of all the young children. Older children are given necessary authority to take care their younger siblings.

It is expected that parents are cared for by their children as they get older, as reflected in *ca dao/tuc ngu* proverbs, or "popular literature of the people:" *Trẻ cậy cha già*

con (“children leans on father when young, aging father leans on the children”). There is no point that determines when children should take care of their parents. It is a continuation of family responsibilities that begin in childhood.

As observed by researchers of Vietnamese/Asian families (e.g., Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1991; Harrison et al. 1990; Kibria 1993; Pyke 2000), Vietnamese socialization practices place emphasis on family roles more than autonomy. Family roles are well-defined and highly interdependent (Harrison et al. 1990). This is consistent with Cicirelli’s (1994) observation that whereas sibling relationships are discretionary in industrialized societies, they are obligatory in nonindustrialized societies. Their obligations include socialization and education functions that elder siblings perform toward the younger siblings. Because many family roles are institutionalized in the family and in society, their regulation creates greater stability in family relationships and facility acknowledgement of their contributions.

Reciprocity

In general, family members think more about the family than about self (Toan Anh 1969). This often means that the family takes precedence over individual interests (Hanh 1979). And when family needs and individual interests coincide, members are bonded together by a collective self. Vuong (1976) wrote of this attachment:

For the majority of Vietnamese, the family is the center of the individual’s life. Not only do the Vietnamese feel deeply attached to their families, but they are also extremely concerned with their family’s welfare, growth, harmony, pride, prestige, reputation, honor, filial piety... (P. 17)

Many *Ca dao/Tục Ngữ* sayings reinforce the family bond, for example, *Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã* (a drop of blood is worth more than a pond of water), or:

<i>Đắng cay cũng thế ruột rà, Ngọt ngào cho lắm cũng là người dưng</i>
(regardless how bitter, we are still of the same blood,) (regardless how sweet, strangers are still strangers)

Reciprocity is embedded in this context of family loyalty. The parents make sacrifices for the children, and in return the children fulfill their obligations toward them. Of the five prescribed relations in Confucian teachings, three are in the family. Perhaps, the strongest bond is the parent-child relation. For the children, *Hiếu* (“filial piety”) represents the institutionalization of the children’s obligations toward father and mother. Their role as children is to respect and love their father and mother, which implies listening to and obeying their father and mother, helping and supporting them, and taking care of them when they are old.

To prepare children to assume their roles, essential values are inculcated in them early. In elementary school, they learn to remember their parents’ love and sacrifices for them:

<i>Công cha như núi Thái Sơn, Nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra, Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha, Cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con.</i>
(Immense as Mt. Thai Son is father’s labour) (Like water flowing from its origin is mother’s love) (With devotion love and respect mother and father) (Living up to filial piety is the duty of the child.)

Lessons like this are to be remembered for the rest of one's life. Fulfilling their obligations often inevitably means putting family interests above oneself. Accordingly, their contributions are highly recognized and rewarded. Neglect of duties would be sanctioned. Children are reminded of their love for their parents who have made sacrifices for them by their aunts and uncles, elder adults, friends, music, literature, and so on. It is expressed in *ca dao/tuc ngu* proverbs, for example:

<i>Cha đắp gốc công cha non thái nằng</i> <i>Mẹ khơi nguồn nghĩa Mẹ biển Đông sâu.</i>
(Father's labor in building the foundation is vast like a mountain) (Mother gave life and love as deep as the Eastern Sea.)

The consciousness of “*công cha nghĩa mẹ*” (“father's labor, mother's love”) shapes many important decisions that children make. It is a common occurrence that children in Vietnam go to work thousands of miles away from their families to send home a small income to help support their families. To be *hiếu thảo* (“dutiful”) is an great honor, but to be *bất hiếu* (“undutiful”) would be a major disgrace. In sum, it is expected that Vietnamese children view their contributions, e.g., caretaking duties, as reciprocating great debts to their parents.

Family Hierarchy

Vietnamese society is a “status-minded” society, not in terms of rights and obligations,³⁹ but in terms of interpersonal behavior (Nguyen 1957:62). Each person

³⁹ Rights and obligations here refers to the Western bureaucratic sense of rights and obligations ((Nguyen 1957:62).

occupies a specific place, on the basis of which he/she relates to others. It is generally a hierarchy based on age and social status. The social relations between people are well-defined at home and in the public sphere. How to relate to one another (đạo xử thế) is summarized in the following *tục ngữ* proverb:

<p>Làm người phải biết cương thường Xem trong ngũ đẳng quân vương ở đầu Thờ cha kính mẹ trước sau Anh em hoà thuận mới hầu làm nên Vợ chồng đạo nghĩa cho bền Bạn bè cho thực dưới trên kính nhường.⁴⁰</p>
<p>(Being humans one knows the 3 relations and 5 virtues) (Of the 5 social relations, the ruler-subject foremost) (Respect and revere parents thoroughly) (Siblings in harmony will accomplish anygoal) (Husband and wife are faithful to each other) (Be true to friends; respect those above and defer to those below)</p>

The expressions “*Tôn ti trật tự*” (“order of elders and subordinates”) or “*người trên kẻ dưới*” (“people above those below”) epitomize the family hierarchy. Both above-ranking and below-ranking individuals are expected to conform to normative standards of conduct according to their respective place. The social hierarchy is apparent in speech, body language, authority structure, attitude, and other aspects of social interaction. It is important to note that occupying a lower status in this hierarchy does not mean being at a disadvantage, nor does it suggest an oppressive system of domination. Nguyen (1957)

⁴⁰ Phan Thiet (1995:302)

identified what he believed was the dominant motif of Vietnamese culture: “to take one’s proper position in the social scale.” In this scale, “the age and the learned are held in great respect. Wealth is not considered important in the status system” (p. 251).

The family hierarchy in terms of respect and authority is generally based on age. Children owe obedience to their parents and younger siblings are to respect and listen to their older siblings. At home in the presence of parents, siblings avoid conflict and this hierarchy is clear. Elders are not only allowed but can be even expected to censure or discipline subordinates.

Phép vua thua lệ làng (“the king’s orders are less binding than the customs of the village”), and the community does not control but defers to the family (Que 2000). At home, it is often the father who has final authority and makes major decisions in family matters. While patriarchy is the order,⁴¹ the father is not the only one having significant influence in family relations.

Lệnh ông không bằng công bà (the man’s commands are less authoritative than the lady’s [of the house] gong). Her title of “nội tướng” (“lady of the house”) is indicative of not only her authority in family routines but also her influence in important family decisions. Relative to the children, the Vietnamese mother’s authority is not suppressed by her spouse’s authority. That is, her authority over the children is not undermined by the fact that her husband makes final family decisions. She performs the important function of educating the children.

⁴¹ Vietnam’s matriarchal order was replaced by patriarchy from China around the 3rd Century B.C. Its influence is still noticeable today.

Comparing Asian and Euro-American culture at a general level Chung (1992) notes that Asians perceive a social structure as hierarchical in terms of leadership and responsibility, whereas Euro-Americans perceive an egalitarian structure in that individuals take more initiative.⁴² Some writers (e.g., Tran 1995) have used the terms “vertical/horizontal relating” or “social norm of verticality,” which not only often encompass power but also the totality of cognitive schemas and symbols involved in interaction. In acting toward an elder person, for example, one has to conform to proper language, tone, gesture, and other indications of one’s subordinate place. The significance of these behaviors is that most of them are ascribed and highly institutionalized such that they are not easily changed by other kinds of relations, e.g., caregiving/care-receiving relations. Therefore, it is expected that the family hierarchy is irreversible.

RESEARCH STATEMENTS/ HYPOTHESES

Methodology

There were no studies on Vietnamese or Asian families that focus on parentification in the technical literature. This exploratory study will use survey and interview data to examine caring/caretaking roles in Vietnamese families. As in any kind of exploratory research, it must have a direction (Ambert et al. 1995). That is any research must begin with some kind of concern specific enough for empirical investigation.

⁴² Some writers also characterizes American families as hierarchical. This contradiction may be defused if “hierarchy” is understood to have different dimensions. The power hierarchy is different from the respect hierarchy.

The direction of this study consists two general observations which may explain why caring/caretaking roles in Vietnamese families are not pathogenic. First, parent-child role reversal may be difficult in Vietnamese families. Karpel (1976) pointed to the failure of parenting as a pre-condition of parentification, which often is accompanied by the loss of parental authority and guidance. In contrast, the Vietnamese family hierarchy is a highly stable system. Parents have high status and elder siblings have authority over younger siblings. Second, sacrifice for one's family in Vietnamese culture may have different meanings from those in the context of Euro-American culture. Relatedly, there is a high degree of interdependence in Vietnamese families, and members are highly devoted to their families. These two dimensions involved in parentification guided this study.⁴³

In light of these early observations, a statement was proposed as a general problem statement to guide the data collection process: (H) *Children in Vietnamese families grow up according to a prescriptive model of development.* This guiding statement, and associated ideas, generated a wide range of items for the survey questionnaire, with foci of family duties, caring/caretaking functions, family hierarchy, and family loyalty. Because these areas are unexplored, other items that were potentially related to parentification were included (but proved irrelevant later).

The formulation of the first hypothesis took place in the middle of the process of trying to make sense of this complex sociopsychological phenomenon in the context of Vietnamese families. As the data collection process proceeded, notably during and after

⁴³ The institutionalization of family roles as the third dimension was conceptualized later.

the interviews, the original hypothesis was modified to 1) sharpen constructs into more workable form, 2) focus in on themes emerging from the data and 3) be answerable to the available dimensions for which data were collected. In this way, the process of continuous hypothesis revision makes this a hypothesis generation study.

Hypotheses- Sequence of Revisions

(H): *Children in Vietnamese families grow up according to a prescriptive model of development*

(H'): *Parent-child role reversal⁴⁴ is difficult in Vietnamese families.*

(H''): *For children in Vietnamese families, parental and parentified⁴⁵ roles are not pathogenic because*

(H''a): *they are prescribed⁴⁶ within the structure of the social system*

(H''b): *they do not constitute a hierarchy reversal⁴⁷*

(H''c): *reciprocity⁴⁸ is embedded within family loyalty⁴⁹*

The revisions and refinement of hypotheses follow the analytic induction model (Manning 1991). These revisions, as a result of emerging data, is a useful technique in

⁴⁴ This term is understood in a very general sense here. There is considerable disagreements among role theorists what a "role" is. Here, role reversal refers to the performance of parental roles by children that are normatively performed by parents.

⁴⁵ According to Winton's (forthcoming) interpretation, the parental child assumes caretaking roles vis-a-vis a sibling, and the parentified child assumes caretaking roles vis-a-vis a parent(s).

⁴⁶ In general, as interpreted here, prescribed roles are roles that are assigned to different family members based on the rank or status in the family. Further, they do not change with personal achievements or other contingent characteristics of family members.

⁴⁷ Hierarchy reversal refers to inversion of the general authority and respect that juniors are normally expected to express toward elders.

⁴⁸ Reciprocity is understood in a general sense here. It refers to a reciprocal or fair exchange between oneself and one's parents or the family.

⁴⁹ Loyalty is understood here as a general commitment to the family, which often means putting family interests above self interests.

qualitative research (Ambert 1995; Bogdan and Biklen 1992) rooted within a framework of grounded theory where analysis takes place even during the data collection process (Charmaz 1983; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Clearly, the modified hypotheses were neither intended to be confirmed nor disconfirmed by rigorous testing as in a deductive line of approach. Instead, they were modified to obtain a better fit with the data.

Preliminary Assessment

In the early stage of reviewing the literature, questions were asked about how parentification could be contextualized in Vietnamese families. Informal discussions were conducted with three Vietnamese-American mental health workers who often worked with Vietnamese clients- a psychiatrist, a university psychologist, and a social worker- to gain a preliminary understanding of their assessment of parentification. The talk with the psychiatrist indicated that parentification, as it was described to him, was an issue he did not normally face in his work with Vietnamese-American families. The other two mental health workers were unfamiliar with the concept. As interview was conducted with a local priest to gain a sense of what kind of problems Vietnamese family members reported and discussed; our talk did not involve issues related to parentification.

Later, interviews were conducted with a social worker and an elder attending an ESL (English as a Second Language) class at a community resource center to gain a sense of family relations and dynamics outside my personal experiences. Some of the themes that emerged were respect for elders by juniors, the age for maturity, filial piety, parents as role models, parental authority, and spousal relations.

These early discussions led to the formulations of two major ideas, namely the

family hierarchy and family loyalty, which were conceptualized more generally as dimensions of a “prescriptive model of development.”

Sources of Data

The principal data come from a questionnaire survey and 21 follow-up in-depth interviews. Vietnamese children’s school textbooks from the Second to the Sixth Grade provided a supplementary source of data; sections on the family were scanned for consistent themes. General Vietnamese books and documents were also consulted; they were often used as general context to locate the emerging argument.

The use of multiple sources of data (and multiple theoretical frameworks) in this study is an application of the triangulation of research techniques. The complementary use of quantitative and qualitative data provides additional insights behind the numbers; it compensates for the limitations of each method (Reichardt and Cook 1979), increases validity with multiple verifications, and offers a way of checking for discrepancies (Rank 1992). As Webb and colleagues (1966) state, “When a hypothesis can survive the confrontation of a series of complementary methods of testing, it contains a degree of validity unattainable by one tested within the more constricted framework of a single method” (p. 174).⁵⁰ Further, the quantitative data provide a check for comparison and generalizability of the interview subsample to the overall survey sample.

Survey Questionnaire Construction

The questionnaire survey was constructed by the researcher (See Appendix A). It

⁵⁰ I used Rank’s (1992) citation without consulting the original source.

was intended primarily to 1) capture the dimensions of the hierarchy, bonding, and reciprocity quantitatively, 2) gather information that would save time during the interview, such as demographic information, 3) provide potential interviewees a chance to familiarize with the topics that would be asked about during the interviews, and 4) serve as an interview schedule where the interviewee could be asked to explain further his/her particular responses.

Some questions were not used in the analysis because it was decided that they were not of primary relevance to the present investigation. Several ideas came from the review of the technical literature on parentification, and were used only for exploratory purposes (i.e., not as data for analysis).

The survey employed was in Vietnamese. The author wrote the original version, then a former journalist for a Vietnamese newspaper verified and helped revise some items on the questionnaire, as well as the interview schedule. A professional translator from a local high school district provided feedback for some items on the questionnaire. The English version attached was translated by the researcher and verified by a bilingual journalist only for this document.

Survey Sample

The sample for the survey questionnaire consists of two groups of people whom together produced a sample size of 108 respondents.⁵¹ The first group consists of 88 Vietnamese college students in three "Vietnamese-American Culture" classes at two

⁵¹ There were several items that were modified in the attitude/opinion section for the first class of about 20 respondents and, thus, were not included for analysis, but family duties and demographic background informations were used.

junior colleges in Northern California where 46% of the student population was “Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander” (SJECCD 2000). The course syllabi indicated that the classes explored Vietnamese culture and identity and the experiences of Vietnamese immigrants in American society. Most of the students in these classes were Vietnamese. Some interviewees indicated that they took the class for GE (General Education) credits. The second group consists of 20 Vietnamese adults from two parenting classes for Vietnamese parents at a community family service center.⁵² All of these sites were located in an area with one of the highest concentrations of Vietnamese in the U.S.

Half of all survey respondents were between 18-33 years old (Table 1, p. 56).⁵³ There was a slightly higher percentage of female respondents. Most respondents had grown up in Vietnam and had come to the U.S. as adults. The average length of residence in the U.S. is 7.3 years, which is below the ten to twenty years period that it takes to adapt to American society (Ong and Nakanishi 1996). That is, it takes on average one to two decades to become a functional member of American society. This sample might not be representative of the fully acculturated population of Vietnamese-Americans living in the U.S. Further, due to their exposure to American culture, they may not be representative of Vietnamese who live in Vietnam in all aspects.

Notably, the majority of respondents came from urban areas in Vietnam, which is not representative of the country’s geography where about 72% are still rural (Engholm 1995). The most common means of making a living was operating a family business.

⁵² This group was used to check for possible difference between persons attending college classes and persons who do not. The interview data indicated no noticeable difference.

⁵³ The 1990 median age for the general Vietnamese population was 25 (source: US Census of Population and Housing 1990).

TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND, 2000 (N = 108; N = 19)

VARIABLES	# cases	MEDIAN ⁵⁴	
Age ⁵⁵	99 ⁵⁶	33.3	
	19 ⁵⁷	40.0 ⁵⁸	
Years in U.S.	98	5.8	
	19	5.6	
Age left Vietnam	97	22.8	
	19	30.0	
Sex	102		56.9 % female
	19		57.9% female
Residence in Vietnam	99		67.7% city, 32.3% town/countryside
	18		55.6% city, 44.5% town/country
Family occupation in Vietnam	87		46.0% family business, 16.1% teaching, 11.5% housemaids, 10.3% farming
	18		33.3% family business, 27.8% teaching, 16.7% farming
Father's years of education	76	11.6	
	17	11.3	
Mother's years of education	78	10.0	
	17	10.0	
Adults with whom respondent grew up	98		87.8% father and mother
	19		78.9% father and mother
Sibling size ⁵⁹	92	4.1	
	19	4.6	

⁵⁴ Calculated as if they were grouped data.

⁵⁵ See text for clarification on the mean age.

⁵⁶ This is the number out of a total of 108 survey respondents who responded.

⁵⁷ This is the number of responses out of 19 survey respondents who were interviewed. The survey data for the 20th survey respondent who was interviewed were not recorded into the database for quantitative analysis.

⁵⁸ There was a wide age gap between the case aged 32 and two cases aged 39 and 40.

⁵⁹ This number may be lowered than what actually is the case. Some respondents who were interviewed had more than six or seven siblings but did not list them all because there were "too many" or because the respondents could not remember their ages.

The average level of education for the respondents' parents was some high school education, which is similar to numbers obtained by other studies.⁶⁰ Most respondents grew up with both parents, and came from large families. Percentages for sibling size and growing up with both parents were similar in Zhou and Bankston's (1998) study of a population in a different region of the U.S.⁶¹

There were several reasons for using students attending those college classes as participants. First, they were recruited because of their accessibility. Second, the classroom environment controls for important factors such as belief in legitimacy of the study, alertness, availability of someone to answer immediately any question or concern, and time allotment. Third, the classroom environment eliminates extraneous factors in the surroundings that could have affected the responses, e.g., availability of writing utensils, lighting, temperature, background conversations, and human interruptions.

Students were introduced to the general purpose of the study by the researcher, which was to try to better understand Vietnamese family relations from a range of perspectives. Any questions about the survey were answered. It took about 1/2 hour to complete the survey. Students were given adequate time to complete the survey.

Students of the first college class were given the survey at the end of an evening class. Students of the second college class were given the survey at the beginning of class. Students of the third class were given the survey immediately following the

⁶⁰ Zhou and Bankston's (1998:124) "Versailles Village Survey of 1994," which covered about three quarters of the Vietnamese population, reported 42.1% of fathers of 356 high school students had less than a high school education.

⁶¹ The "Versailles Village Survey of 1993" (N = 198) sampled students from a local high school where over half of the Vietnamese youth attended: the average number of children was 4.167; children living with both parents was 74.7% (Zhou and Bankston 1998:156).

semester final exam on a Saturday morning; one interviewee from this class said that people might have been too tired after the finals to complete the long survey. Some surveys were incomplete. However, most people agreed to respond to the survey. Students in the parenting classes were given the survey at the beginning of class on a regular class meeting.

Operationalization of Variables

(See Appendix B for a copy of the actual survey as well as exact wording and format of each item. The following sections follow the order in the survey: (A) duties by period, (B) distribution of tasks, (C) opinion on family experiences, (D) demographics)

Section A:

(Open-ended responses on family duties performed by the respondent during different periods)

Caretaking/caring functions by children were measured by two principal means. The first is a free response section, measuring these functions at different formative periods of the respondents. Respondents were asked the following question:

“What were the main duties you did in your family while growing up, for example, house chores, family business, care for siblings, etc.?”

Age 12-15 (6th-9th Grade):

Age 16-18 (10th-12th Grade):

Over 18 years old:

Most responses fell into four categories: sibling care, chores, family business, and work. The “sibling care” category included “picking up siblings,” “I stayed home and

took care of siblings.” The “chores” category included cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping. The “family business” category included responses like “watching over the store, bookkeeping,” “going to school at the same time as assisting the family.” The “work” category included situations where respondents went to work after finishing schooling or provided a complementary source of income for the family. Responses falling into the latter situation included “provide income for family,” “help father and mother to make money,” “go to school and selling around.” Extent of work is not considered here; therefore, the category includes full-time work as well as “sometimes working.”

It is important to note that responses may have been influenced by the prompt which provided some examples of family tasks at the end. Three of the four categories used for coding appeared in the prompt’s examples.

“Going to school” or preoccupation with school was a common response, but was not coded since it was not considered a family task. Erratic responses like “holding on tight to the family [economically]” were coded with missing values.

Section B

(Distribution of instrumental and expressive tasks according to pre-designated categories)

This section measured how pre-assigned categories of instrumental and expressive caring/caretaking functions were distributed across family members.

Respondents were asked the following question:

“The following questions refer to the time when you were growing up (middle to high school years). Who did each of the following task in your family?”

Some categories of instrumental and expressive functions were:

“Took care of younger siblings”

“Cooked, did grocery shopping”

“Disciplined members for wrong behaviors”

“Provided emotional support for sick family member”

For each task, respondents were asked to circle applicable responses under the column headings below:

father	mother	elder siblings	myself	younger siblings	aunts/uncles	grand- parents	other	not applicable
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Multiple circles on the same item indicated that that task was performed by more than one family member (or groups of persons).

The “other” category also prompts the respondent with “please specify” to indicate in the space provided the specific person in relation to the respondent.

The “not applicable” category allows respondents to respond to items asking, for example, who helped parents with their family business when the family never had a family business.

Section C

(Attitude/opinion section using the Likert scale to measure some aspects of the family hierarchy and loyalty/bonding)

A) The family hierarchy was measured by dimension of address titles, respect behaviors, and authority.

i) Address titles were measured by items 3 and 4 (other items related to address titles proved to be uncertain and were not used for analysis) (see Appendix for the wording).

ii) Respect behaviors were measured by items 16, 17, and 21.

iii) Authority was measured by items 16, 19, 20, 40, and 41

B) For family loyalty and reciprocity,

i) items 29-34 asked about attitudes of caring and concern toward one another;

ii) item 38 asked about family interest compared to personal interests;

iii) items 37 and 39 asked about family attachment;

iv) items 35 and 36, and 46 measure filial obligations.

C) Irreversibility of the family hierarchy was measured by two probes (in the interviews only): 1) personal achievements: whether or not personal achievements change the norm of vertical relating 2) family members as “friends:” whether being friends entails the dissolution of rules of vertical relating.

For each item in the Likert scale section, there were five response choices: “strongly agree,” “agree,” “not sure/don’t know,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” Each was coded from 1 to 5, which are merely labels for computations. A five-point scale has more discriminatory power than a three point scale, where respondents could more easily change their minds.

Responses of “strongly agree” and “agree” were collapsed into one category of “agree.” Likewise, “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were collapsed into “disagree.”

This recoding into “agree” and “disagree” categories suffices for the purpose of this study, and it makes it easier for analysis. Further, no easy interpretation can be made from subjective judgments between two very similar categories.

Seven items had two contradictory responses (indicating both agreement and disagreement) and were coded as missing cases for those particular items.

Section D

(Demographics)

Demographic backgrounds of respondents were collected for the following parameters: age, length of residence in the U.S., age at departure from Vietnam, sex, region of residence in Vietnam, family occupation in Vietnam, father’s level of education, mother’s level of education, people respondents grew up with, and sibling size. This information was used to check for any outstanding characteristics of this particular sample that could have implications for its generalizability.

For the free response to the item on family/parent’s occupation in Vietnam, four major categories explained about 85% of all free responses.

The dimension of people with whom respondents grew up was important because many of these families lived through the Vietnam War; as a result, their family size and structure could change due to death and/or migration.

Interview Pretest

Four informal interviews were performed to test and get feedback for questions to be asked in the official interviews, as well as streamlining the interview format with

Vietnamese interviewees. Three people were employees of public social services agencies. One was from an ESL (English as a Second Language) class at a local community center.

Interview Sample

Survey respondents were invited to participate in an interview on the same topics that appeared in the survey. About 50 survey respondents provided contact information for a follow-up interview. An attempt was made to interview as many willing participants as possible. The result was that 20 survey respondents participated. A general analysis of this subgroup indicated no major deviations from the response patterns of the larger survey sample (see the second row of each item in any table in the findings section). Because multiple views from different members of the same family provides a more accurate understanding of the family, these respondents were asked at the end of the interview if other family members might be interested in participating in such an interview. One interviewee was summoned in such manner. In addition, a sister of one survey respondent joined in with her sister at the beginning of the interview. For another survey respondent, her husband joined in and spoke for the second half of the interview when she went away to do house chores. Overall, there were 23 interviewees in 21 interviews representing 20 families for qualitative analysis.

These informants may not be representative of the overall sample in the sense that it is possible that only informants from “healthy” families, i.e., without conflict and so on, were willing to share opinions about their families. But it is also possible that those

informants living in families with problems may be inclined, for that reason, to express their concerns. The exact motive was not determined.

Several age groups were included in the interview sample. These informants provided different perspectives according to different life stages and different family statuses. These perspectives could be insightful as members exit and enter new social relations over time. This diversity of sample allows greater generalizability (Reichardt and Cook 1979).

Regarding the older age of the sample, the young adult informants were well into their twenties but still lived with their families. The middle-age informants indicated that they had left their families only after marriage, which is the norm in Vietnam. This means that although these informants were adults, they were still performing many family tasks which had begun when they were young. Further, many informants during the interviews indicated there was no change in their relations with all the family members.

All interviews were conducted within a six week period, starting approximately one week after the school semester had ended.

Most interviews took place at the respondents' homes, according to his/her choice. Other interviews took place at a school student center, a coffee shop, a work office, and a park. Beside some unanticipated arrangements, like those mentioned above, most interviews were one-on-one without the presence of others. During the interview with the two sisters, their parents came in and listened in the background. The father's ambiguous message caused nervousness in the interviewer, which, together with their

influence on the interviewees' responses, might have affected the reliability of the data. This was taken into account when excerpts from them were cited.

Structure of the Interview

The interviews were in Vietnamese. They lasted on average 1.5 to 3 hours. All interviews were taped and later transcribed by the researcher.

The interviewee's responses were reviewed before conducting the interview to familiarize myself with their backgrounds and family circumstances. Atypical responses were noted to be checked and clarified with the interviewees.

The focused interviews were semistructured. They allowed informants opportunity to reveal in detail their family experiences and outlook. Most interviews began with a discussion of the informant's daily routines of family tasks which opened more personal topics as the interviewees revealed additional information. This approach allowed the informants to discuss what was meaningful to them, not to the researcher. Following a set of pre-determined questions and topics, on the other hand, might impose onto the experiences of the informants incongruous models that could potentially distort the data. Relatedly, open-ended questions or formats were often used to allow the informants to use their own language and concepts to describe what was relevant to them (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). While guided by the interviewer, the interviewees were encouraged to talk freely on a topic introduced by the interviewer. This made possible emerging themes that might not have emerged were a structured interview protocol used. In fact, in response to the first three interviews, categories were

reorganized for feasibility, emerging themes, and specificity. In this regard a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 1983; Strauss and Corbin 1990) was applied.

Topics covered in the interviews were grouped into several broad areas (followed by sample questions):

A) Family duties, e.g., chores, caretaking/caring functions

- a) Dao is the oldest in the family; Can Dao describe the daily activities from morning to evening?
- b) Can elder sister tell who cooked and prepared meals, [when] most of the siblings went to school?

B) Siblings' relations to one another, e.g., authority, conflict resolution, bonding

- a) Duyen mentioned briefly about your siblings, can you share in general the relationships with your siblings?
- b) Has your [younger] brother ever talked back to (cãi lại) you?

C) Parent-child relation e.g., emotional distance, respect behaviors

- a) How is that love shown? That is, you know that your mother loves you, right?
- b) Is there a difference between 'ừ' and 'ạ'?⁶²

D) Relations with relatives, e.g., differences in intergenerational relating (cousins and aunts/uncles), obligations toward more distant kin.

- a) So, Thong can talk to them in a close manner like with your friends?

⁶² These are two forms of acknowledgement: one for elders, one for equals or subordinates.

- b) If these aunts and uncles are poor, Uncle would feel that Uncle have to help financially?

E) *Hiếu nghĩa* (“filial piety”) and family bonding

- a) ...item 36 [in the survey] [refers to the lesson] “Father’s labor is like Thai Son Mountain...” Elder sister still remember!
- b) Now living here, do elder sister [you] still support (‘lo’) your father and mother over there [in Vietnam]?

Spradley’s (1979) outline of *descriptive* questions, *structural* questions, and *contrast* questions was used. Often questions about a particular topic were first asked in a vague and general way to give respondents a choice to talk about what comes to their mind and what they felt comfortable talking about. Questions became more specific as informants disclosed new details.

Not all questions were asked of all interviewees. Several elder informants revealed a clear, even rigid, family hierarchy. For example, in some families where it was apparent that the parents were commanding in their authority, informants were not asked whether they listened and obeyed father and mother. They were not asked whether juniors respect elders, but instead were asked how family members exhibited that respect.

Responses to several topics might have been strongly influenced by social norms. For example, filial piety and respect toward elders are expected of everyone; so, informants might be inclined to provide more socially accepted responses. With some informants, the interviewer suggested one of those topics to the informant, thereby,

indicated its importance. For example, one of the questions the interviewer asked some informants was, “As you know, filial piety is important in Vietnamese culture. Can you tell me how you understand filial piety?” Excerpts were checked and contextualized if this arose.

Developing Rapport

This researcher’s Vietnamese ethnicity was an advantage in developing rapport with the informants, which first began when they had seen him in the classroom. In three out of a total of four classes, the instructor introduced this researcher as a graduate student from a nearby university and encouraged the students to participate and help him out. The purpose of my study and the survey instructions were explained to the students in English and Vietnamese, which could have produced a measure of trust in the informants. Additionally, this researcher’s semi-formal attire and friendliness was his attempt to present himself to them as a trustworthy person.

Because the informants were contacted by phone several weeks after the classes had ended, a significant number of people responded in the negative to a query for an interview. Some people had to be reminded of the purpose of the study again and reassured that the study was safe.

Several informants were concerned about tape-recording. They were told that the interview was for academic research only. They were informed all information would be kept confidential in an office and that any potential identifying information would be omitted in any published material.

This researcher put himself in the role of the novice by presenting himself as someone who had lived in the U.S. for a long time and did not have the kind of experience that they did in Vietnam. He expressed an observer's curiosity in their family experiences. In addition, he spoke with little information that would indicate to them he knows "too much" already. All informants were eager or motivated to share their experiences.

This researcher's status as an insider in several interviews was indicated by the fact that several informants used expressions like "in our Vietnam" "us Vietnamese." The common ethnicity of interviewer and interviewee allowed some interviewees to contrast (even criticize) Vietnamese families and what they perceived as American families or the different cultural context in general.

The Vietnamese social hierarchy makes a clear division between elders and subordinates, especially those of the younger generations. The age of this researcher at the time of the interview located him subordinate to six informants of the parental or grandparent generation, whose ages ranged from the mid-fifties to the sixties. He was junior to eight informants of his generation. He was an equal to nine informants whose age were similar to or below his. There were less restrictions on the types of questions asked with the informants who were of his generation. They could be asked personal questions that were not allowable with significantly elder informants. For example, questions like "Has your [younger] brother ever talked back/disregard (cãi lại) to you?" might not be asked of the more elder informants. In one of the interviews, this researcher tried to refer to one of the elders' actual family members, but with only limited success.

Thus, these informants were asked more often about rules and their general observations, which might or might not reflect their personal experiences. For example, they could be asked, "In elder uncle's opinion, elder uncle understand the word 'địa vị' in what way?" However, this researcher's high level of education compensated to some degree for the status disparity based on age and, therefore, opened up wider venues for communication with the elder informants. Elders can share much about their views and experiences, depending on such other factors as topics, degree of acquaintance, and tactful way of approaching the topic. Despite the issues discussed above, the conversations were relaxed and open for both the interviewer and the informant. These relations are preserved with similar titles in English in presenting the data so that the reader is informed of the media through which information was channeled.

Two middle-age adults possibly indicated that a certain question was too intrusive. The interviewer interpreted certain cues and immediately defused the perception of intrusion by a) explaining to the informant what the interviewer had "actually" meant or b) steered toward a different topic. Another informant, of the interviewer's parental generation, avoided answering directly relatively personal questions about relationships with his siblings. He only said something general about them.

Except for the first interview where the presence of the parents of two informants (who were sisters) might have strained the conversation, all were open to share their experiences. In one interview at a school bench, the informant was accompanied by an elder friend, physically challenged like her; however, the conversation did not appear

strained or restricted by her friend, who also contributed occasional comments, as evidenced by her disclosure of sibling conflicts at home as well as by her vivid descriptions of her thoughts.

Coding

Similar to the reasoning of Sandelowski and colleagues (1992), line-by-line coding was not performed. Line-by-line coding would not have been useful because “an initial line-by-line coding approach without an orienting gestalt for coding is empty coding, only producing more words that have to be worked through but that do not necessarily move the inquiry forward analytically” (p. 312). The primary reason was that the study did not require it. The open nature of the semi-structured interviews produced substantial non-relevant materials. Only dimensions of interest were coded.

Responses were coded first into fourteen categories: maturity, sibling respect, sibling care, sibling aid, filial piety, family tie, relations with aunts and uncles, relations with cousins, career achievements, manners, terms of address, respect for parents, general hierarchy, tasks sharing. Later, three new categories were employed to track emerging patterns: relation with mother, harmony, living at home. This organization represents the overall process of exploring general aspects of family relations and experiences, but was open to emerging themes. The eighteen categories are labels that provided a means of organizing the data; they were not rigid categories like those for making correlations in quantitative analysis. Several categories overlap one another, e.g., sibling respect,

respect for parents, general hierarchy. The choice of placement into a particular category often depends on what the focus of the message is. In short, these general domains were a first step to categorizing interview data.

The second stage of coding involved repeated scanning across cases in each category for patterns, or lack thereof, and counting them.

Countless rereading of the interview transcripts resulted in a strong familiarity with the interviewees and their families which allow the inclusion of passages in proper context when they were included in the final text.

Notes and memos were interspersed within the interviews during transcription of the taped interviews which provided insights and clarifications that would not have been possible at a later time. These notes often concerned translations, as well as cues to meaning, e.g., laughter, changing tone, comfort level.

The overall process was characterized by shifts between emerging themes, modification of theoretical frameworks, and creation of additional categories for coding. The revisions of hypotheses/problem statements went in tandem with this coding process.

All interviews were coded and analyzed in the original Vietnamese language. This is because the subtle meanings not communicable in English could affect the analysis process. Excerpts in Vietnamese were incorporated into English text. There was a noticeable difference in the textures of the passages and the nuances conveyed in the original language and their English translations. Passages have greater accuracy in the original language which the informants use to express their reality. Therefore, they were translated into English after the all analyses had been completed.

Representation

There will always be conflicts between trying to represent the informants' worlds as they are lived and conveying them to scholarly readers (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Informants' experiences and realities are filtered and, thus, imperfect when they are recorded and represented in text. This is especially the case when their stories are only presented in text as fragmented passages. Because of authorial privilege, the informants' experiences are presented through only one perspective, namely, this researcher's lens.

While informants can speak directly for themselves, they are treated as objects when their voices are broken into convenient packages to fit into pre-conceived models. It is also unfair to them. This researcher does not claim authority over the informants, and certainly not over their experiences. Therefore, assuming the role of presenter for their voices, he made sure that excerpts were not divorced from other contextual information that could affect its meaning.

To these ends, many extended excerpts were used. English grammar is minimally edited, giving priority to such elements as indications of emotion, stress, order of thoughts, passive versus active voice, literal translations of native terms, etc.

The excerpts were chosen based on such criteria as 1) representativeness 2) vividness in illustrating a point 3) clarity of expression, and 4) length.

Values and Assumptions

Social research is not conducted value-free. It is shaped by the researchers'

professional as well as personal values. Their values shape the theoretical orientations and methodology they use in research. Professional and personal values permeate the research process, such as methods used, data collection, and presentation of data.

The theoretical orientations chosen were the outcome of the omission of several other frameworks, eventually deemed irrelevant or unuseful. This elimination was principally influenced by 1) the nature of the problem and theories deemed applicable, 2) accommodation to the parameters prior researchers have considered relevant, and 3) this researcher's view of where the problems potentially lie, with implicit solutions to the problems perceived.

Biculturalism best describes the values that shape this researcher's work. As a member of both Vietnamese and American cultures, he could not be isolated from values and meanings in both cultures in which he is immersed. However, in the pursuit of knowledge,⁶³ scientific research requires a setting aside of any personal biases that could undermine scientific integrity. With this in mind, being able to traverse both worlds has helped him keep both views, if they are separable, in perspective. One advantage of this biculturalism is that standing at their intersection, he could bring the (American/mainstream) reader closer to the experiences of the members, which often means providing context and clarification to help the reader avoid misinterpretations.

It is important to note here that the danger of ethnic boosterism in doing cross-cultural research is considered here. Therefore, several factors are cited to prevent any potential misinterpretation of a favorable presentation of one ethnic/racial group over

⁶³ For qualitative researchers, knowledge is achieved partially at best, through the practice of researcher reflexivity.

another: 1) this investigation is concerned with exploring certain rules and norms at the gross level, which might not reflect the actual world in which people live. In fact, there was noticeable variations among several dimensions of family experiences among the informants; but they were not the focus of this study. 2) most informants were drawn from college classrooms 3) a cross-cultural study necessitates an introduction to their religions/philosophies and values, which are highly cherished among the members.

Limitations

All participants were 18 years old or older. Therefore, questions about previous childhood experiences were necessarily retrospective in nature. Memory is always partial; it is selectively exploited to achieve a particular objective, as well as being filtered by one's cognitive schemas. Collecting data at one time and asking for self-reports of one's past experiences may run the risks of false causal connections (Weis 1989) and difficulty recalling time, frequency, and reactions (Sudman and Bradburn 1982), especially for elder informants.

The advantage of studying adult informants, however, is that as adults they have had substantial experience or have completed their adolescent years. Stepping away from their past experiences could allow them to reflect with greater maturity and emotional neutrality.

Except for three families, knowledge about all other families were learned through only one family member. In studying the family as a system of interrelated parts, the view of one member might not completely or accurately portray how his/her family

actually functions. The meanings about family apply only to one person, whose views may be discrepant with the views of other family members. However, one of the concerns of this study is to capture the members' meanings, which requires exploring in-depth their particular interpretations of family experiences as they have lived them.

Studying families requires studying aspects of the whole system, if not the entire system. The numerous topics on the survey questionnaire reflect this. An attempt was made to cover as much as possible related topics, even if tangentially. However, it was understood that the task was impossible. The narrowing of interview topics was the result of these two considerations.

The data presented here do not try to make connections between variables across families. Information were only drawn from them as they are relevant for a particular presentation. Two cases are presented to provide greater context by presenting simultaneously several dimensions of family relations.

Lastly, most of the participants came from a "Vietnamese-American Culture" class which could have modified their views and thus, affected their responses. However, the interviews took place well after the semester had ended so that they were more removed from classroom knowledge. It is also possible that the class could have sensitized the informants to concepts and perspectives which enabled them to adopt and more accurately talk about their experiences.

RESULTS

A total of 108 survey questionnaire cases were used to present data on family duties and demographic backgrounds after 15 substantially incomplete surveys were

omitted from analysis.⁶⁴ Responses to the opinion/attitude section for the twenty cases from the first class were omitted from analysis due to difficulty of coding and adjustments, leaving 88 cases for that section. Also, note that the total responses are different for each item, as indicated on the second column of the tables. This difference does not affect analysis in this paper because its aim is not to correlate variables, but to obtain some general norms or trends.

Given this sampling size, it is expected that the maximum error is about $\pm 10\%$. Calculation of the margin of error was based upon unexpected responses from items that should have registered a uniform response. For example, 9.3% of respondents unexpectedly indicated agreement to the item “When addressing myself as “Child,” (con) I see my status as equal to the facing person.” Addressing self “child” prescribes self to a subordinate status to elders of the parental generation, which cannot be “ngang hàng” (equal) to elders. The Vietnamese word “ngang hàng” connotes an equality among equals generally of the same generations who can relate to one another without having to display respect behaviors and so on, and it is commonly used to fault juniors, especially those of a younger generation and below, who do not act according to his/her status. One interviewee noted, “self-addressing ‘con’ or ‘younger sibling’ already means [one is] subordinate, already.”⁶⁵ Other items that showed deviation from uniform response are “My obligations as a child to my parents were no longer important when I became an adult” (12.6% agreed), “Filial obligations are no longer important when one is already

⁶⁴ That is, most of these respondents did not respond to a large portion of the opinion section at the end. The other respondents thoroughly completed the survey, although a few items were left blank for some cases.

⁶⁵ “Xung con với xưng em là thấy thua rồi.”

TABLE 2. CHILDREN'S DUTIES BY DIFFERENT PERIODS, 2000 (N = 88; N = 19)

PERIOD	total responses	sibling care ⁶⁶ (%)	chores (%)	family business (%)	work (%)
Middle school	76 ⁶⁷	19.7 ⁶⁸	76.2	10.4	2.6
	15 ⁶⁹	20.0	73.4	13.4	-
High school	77	7.8	57.2	20.8	11.7
	14	14.2	57.0	28.5	-
Over 18	74	10.9	42.2	20.4	34.0
	14	14.2	42.7	35.6	14.2

⁶⁶ Many respondents indicated school alone, or school plus home responsibilities, as preoccupations. Responses about school were not coded.

⁶⁷ This is the number out of a total of 88 survey respondents who responded.

⁶⁸ This number is the percentage of all respondents who had cared for a sibling in middle school.

⁶⁹ This is the number of responses out of 19 survey respondents who were interviewed. The survey data for the 20th survey respondent who was interviewed were not recorded into the database for quantitative analysis.

TABLE 3. CHILDREN'S DUTIES IN DESIGNATED CATEGORIES, 2000 (N = 108; N = 19)

INSTRUMENTAL FUNCTIONS	total responses	children alone (%)	children alone + children&parent (%)
Care for young siblings	105	41.0 ⁷⁰	62.0 ⁷¹
	19	31.6	63.2
House chores, e.g., cleaning	105	46.7	69.5
	19	42.1	63.2
Cook, go grocery shopping	106	22.6	48.1
	19	15.8	47.4
Help with parents' business	100	69.0 ⁷²	76.0
	17	76.5	82.4
EXPRESSIVE FUNCTIONS			
Provide income for the family	106	4.7	24.5
	19	5.3	21.1
Manage the family budget	103	1.9	4.9
	19	0.0	0.0
Discipline siblings	105	8.6	21.1
	19	5.3	15.9
Make important family decisions	103	1.0	12.6
	19	0.0	10.6
Provide emotional support when someone is sick	104	5.8	31.9
	18	0.0	22.3
Take care of sibling issues	104	10.6	21.2
	19	15.8	21.1
Share thoughts with me	101	23.8 ⁷³	44.7
	19	21.1	47.5
Mobilize everyone when the family has a problem	103	8.7	33.0
	19	5.3	26.5
Care for father coming home from work	101	16.8	38.6
	19	5.3	36.9
Care for mother when she is ill	103	46.6	80.7
	19	47.4	84.3
Care for grandparents	101	9.9	44.6
	18	11.1	50.0

⁷⁰ This number is the percentage of all respondents who had cared for siblings alone (i.e., their parents did not perform this task).

⁷¹ This number indicates the cumulative percentages of cases that indicated the task had been done by children alone and cases that indicated the task had been done by children and parent(s).

⁷² This means if the family owned a business the children would assist, not 69% of 100 families actually had a business. Appendix A indicated that only 46.0% of respondents families had operated a family business.

⁷³ This means 23.8% of respondents share feelings with their siblings, not their children.

living in the U.S.” (2.3% agreed).

Items related to the social hierarchy and filial obligations were correlated to check for internal consistency. The results showed a high degree of internal reliability.

Survey Data- Family Duties

During the middle school period (between ages 12-15) the majority (76.2%) of respondents had performed house chores, which commonly included cleaning, washing dishes, and cooking (Table 2, p.77). Approximately 20% of respondents took care of their younger siblings. About 10% helped with the family’s business.

In high school, responsibilities for some people (12%) shifted from sibling care and chores to helping parents with their business or going to work. This trend continues beyond the age of 18, when about one-fifth of all respondents helped with the family’s business and one-third worked; during early adulthood a large number (42.2%) still performed family chores.

Responses to pre-arranged categories of family responsibilities indicated that the majority of respondents were involved in sibling caretaking (62%), cleaning (69.5%), preparing meal (48.1%) (Table 3, p. 79). Also noteworthy is that near one-half of all respondents cared for young siblings or performed cleaning duties alone (41.0% and 46.7%, respectively). More than one-fifth of all respondents prepared meals alone for the family.

A large number of respondents responded that as children they were involved in expressive functions toward siblings, parents, and grandparents. About one-third of

respondents indicated that they, alone or with parents, had provided emotional support when someone was ill, or cheered up the family when there was a problem. Disciplining younger siblings and taking care of sibling issues were performed by children in about one-fifth of respondents' families.

Thirty-nine percent⁷⁴ indicated that the children had cared for a father coming home from work (16.8% had done it alone). For the less common task of caring for the mother when she was sick, the majority (80.7%) indicated that they were involved in caring for her (46.6% cared for mother by themselves). Forty-five percent indicated that they were involved in caring for grandparents.⁷⁵ The performance of many of these functions both by children and parents indicates that children might perform these functions under parental guidance. Except for the category caring for mother when she was sick, few respondents indicated that they had performed these expressive tasks alone.

In summary, the data allows conclusion at the gross level that many respondents as children performed extensive instrumental functions early on and these continued into adulthood. Expressive functions were common among the respondents' families.

Interview Data

Twenty-one interviews were conducted. Quantitative data for 19 respondents⁷⁶ who were interviewed were computed and compared to the overall sample of all survey respondents. The subgroup did not deviate substantially from the larger sample in most

⁷⁴ Percentages written out are rounded to the nearest percent.

⁷⁵ This may also be interpreted as "would" care for grandparents.

⁷⁶ The survey data for the 20th interviewee were not recorded into the database for quantitative analysis.

major dimensions and variables in demographic backgrounds, caretaking functions, and opinions on family experience measured by the Likert Scale. Typical comparisons of all survey respondents to interviewed respondents include the following: 46.7%/42.1% indicated that the children had performed cleaning tasks alone in their families, 78.2%/93.8%⁷⁷ disagreed that filial duties were no longer important as adults (12.6%/6.3% agreed), 93.9%/100% indicated that they address elder siblings with “elder brother/elder sister.” Substantial disparities will be noted where appropriate. The small sample size only allows tentative generalizability to the larger sample, however.

In the following discussion, for approximately 20 informants, “some/several” means about 3-6 informants, “many” means about 7-12, “majority” means about 13-20 (or greater than 65%). These arbitrary assignments are the researcher’s own.

General Characteristics of Interviewee’s Families

From analysis of the major coded categories, no family exhibited indications of major conflict or dysfunctionality. In fact, some families exhibited a high degree of harmony and bondedness.⁷⁸ Except for one 27-year-old informant who had quarrels with two of her younger sisters, all young and middle age adult respondents indicated harmonious or close relationships with their siblings and parents, which is also the general opinion of the survey respondents. The majority (75.9%) disagreed that they were no longer attached (“gắn bó”) to his/her family (14.9% agreed) (Table 5, p. 103).

⁷⁷ The difference is magnified/exaggerated by the small size of the interview sample.

⁷⁸ See the sample subsection of the Methods section for a discussion on generalizability. It is important to note here that this is not an observational study; the data is based on what the informants reported, which may not be what actually had happened in their families.

Six of the eight young adult informants (age 19-31) were unmarried and still lived with their parents. Eight of nine middle age adults (age 32-53)⁷⁹ were married and no longer lived with their parents or siblings. Interdependence is a consistent theme among these families (Table 5, p. 103), as indicated by most informants, for example, that they regularly send gifts (money) back to relatives in Vietnam.

As reported by all of the informants, their parents clearly had authority with the children. The hierarchical nature of relating is a salient feature both between generations and among siblings themselves.

INSTITUTIONALIZED⁸⁰ INSTRUMENTAL ROLES

Consistent with the quantitative data, many interviewees indicated that they had performed extensive instrumental functions during their adolescent years. Often parents worked outside the house or could not perform all tasks simultaneously, children helped cook, wash dishes, clean the floor, wash clothes, wash and care for young siblings, and perform other chores. In many families that owned a business, there appeared to be no distinction made between house tasks and economic functions for the children. Phon,⁸¹ 27, the second of four children, described his chores when he was living in Vietnam:

Before father went to the re-education camps, I did not do that [selling footwear].
Before, I only had to help sell, bought merchandise for mother, and the house

⁷⁹ Young adults = 18-31; middle aged adults = 32-53; 54-72 elders. These are arbitrary assignments, although age 50 was cited by Detzner (1992) as the age people are considered elders in Southeast Asian cultures.

⁸⁰ "Institutionalization" is used in the general sense of social norms and expectations (Ebaugh 1988) and/or obligations.

⁸¹ These names are pseudonyms of informants, which are used to protect their privacy. For ease of sex identification, names that begin with a letter from A-L indicate female informants, while names that begin with letters from M-Z indicate male informants.

tasks- I took care of them, and care for the siblings. Later, we stayed home to run a small business so we got 'busy' [English]⁸²... Eldest sister also helped with the house tasks, but things like washing clothes, I did them occasionally- washed the dishes; don't know if I should mention them. Those were natural, just normal.

Elder sister Khue, 43, the fourth of seven siblings, described her routines when she was about 17:

Usually, after Liberation [of South Vietnam in 1975], the eldest sister continued to work for the government, and mother worked outside, so we distributed the errands. For example, those who had not gone to school, because at that time they were all grown up, shared the tasks in the family, like preparing meals, reorganizing, cleaning the floor, in place of my mother, and in the afternoon I'd return home and help mother with her business and other things.

Among siblings, duties were distributed according to age and capacity, volunteered, negotiated, assigned by parents, or alternated. In elder brother Tai's family, as in Phon's family, there was no such thing as "who does more or who does less." In Anh and Hoa's family, "we don't assign [house chores to specific persons]." In other words, family tasks were not subject to comparison or weighing of burden.

In many families, sex differentiation distributed family chores to girls. According to Duyen, "male members take care of affairs outside the house and the female members take care of house duties."⁸³ In Anh and Hoa's family, "the elder brothers- none touches the kitchen." Elder brother Mike said that those tasks were "ladies' duties." In four other families the male children either supported their sisters or took over the duties traditionally performed by female members, such as cooking or massaging for mother when she came home from work.

Most informants who discussed their responsibilities did not indicate that their

⁸² The original English words or phrases that informants used are placed in single quotation marks.

⁸³ "Phái nam thì lo những chuyện ở ngoài xã hội, còn nữ ấy thì làm việc nhà."

tasks were burdensome. The majority (85%) of survey respondents indicated that their family duties were fairly distributed according to age for each sex (6% disagreed).

For the informants, instrumental tasks might have served as important means to acquire skills expected of them, especially for girls. Socialization for girls conforms to the standards of *công dung ngôn hạnh* (manual skills, proper appearance, proper speech, proper conduct). Six informants mentioned that this standard was used seeking a wife. As elder sister Khue and great aunt Hoa cited a common saying, “*lấy vợ kén tông lấy chồng kén giống*” (“it’s important to look at a girl’s family order in seeking a wife; it’s important to look at a man’s stock in seeking a husband”). This commonly means that the future husband’s side would observe to see if his future wife has grown up in an orderly family. Lan recalled what she had told her brother in looking for a girlfriend to be his wife:

[The future wife should] know at least a little bit about ‘traditional’ [English] .. girls at least ‘should know how to cook, and do the housework, take care of her brother and sister, younger brother and sister’ [English], help father and mother, something like that.

Like what elder brother Tam expected of girls, Bao expected herself to be “*đảm đang*” (responsible and skillful at home). For Bao, house chores and taking care of younger siblings are ways for a girl to attain that quality:

Interviewer: Miss Bao did a lot of work in the house, was it burdensome ?

Bao: It was normal, not too burdensome, because chores like sweeping the floor or washing dishes were not very difficult. Besides, in Vietnam girls have to be dutiful in the home because it would make things easier for us in the future. People don’t like girls who are lazy.

Anh, 24, and her elder sister Hoa, 27, might have understood that social

expectation, and they appeared (and sounded) proud in their willingness to perform chores:

Anh: For example, sometimes [I] washed the floor, do the dishes, sweep the floor. Doing all the little things, like if somebody was cooking and [I] was standing nearby, then I would be called upon to help.

Hoa: There is no one to tell what to do, but if we see little things that needs to be done, then we'd do them!

These skills are institutionalized in family education, which continues well beyond adolescence, even into adulthood until marriage, when they would leave the family.⁸⁴ The significance of this institutionalized expectation is that the performance of instrumental tasks are not interpreted as taking care of family solely. That is, the child is motivated by other reasons in addition to that of taking care of/contributing to the family. First, failure to perform family duties results in negative evaluations. Second, fulfilling these duties is acting on her behalf; the fulfillment of this role becomes a resource as the children (often girls)⁸⁵ enters adulthood to form a family, especially for girls who are looking for a husband. It then mitigates any perceived burden as the result of thinking that one performs instrumental tasks alone. It is the justification and motivation for the performance of these tasks that are important in terms of burden perceived.

INSTITUTIONALIZED SIBLING CARETAKING

In a large family with many young children, parents are busy at work so that they could not care for the young children at the same time. That is when older siblings help with this task. Four young adult informants who lived in large families indicated that

⁸⁴ Most informants left his/her family at marriage and/or agreed that that was the case in Vietnam.

⁸⁵ For boys, helping the family would be considered "dutiful."

they had directly cared for young siblings.⁸⁶ Elder sister Chuong explained the norm:

The rule in Vietnam was that elder siblings care for the young siblings. I was a sibling in the middle so I didn't do anything; I was exempted from everything; the elder siblings did them already.

Survey respondents indicated that elder siblings' responsibility for younger siblings is derived from their rank in the family (Table 4).

TABLE 4. RESPONSIBILITY AS A FUNCTION OF FAMILY RANK, 2000 (N = 88; N=19)

CATEGORIES	Responses (# cases)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Having a higher <u>status</u> means I have to take more responsibilities and protect those younger than me in the family	68	76.5	10.3 ⁸⁷
	12	91.7	8.3
Having a higher <u>rank</u> means I have to take more responsibilities and protect those younger than me in the family	20 ⁸⁸	75.0	10.0
	2	-	-

To prepare children to help their parents with this role, they were taught early on. The following Second Grade lesson is typical of lessons that teach an elder brother to care for his young siblings (following page).

This role modeling continues well beyond the early years. Duyen, 26, explained her eldest brother's extensive role modeling for the younger siblings:

We siblings often look at elder brother to learn from him. Not really learning but meaning that the tasks at home, about how to deal with people, because we have to relate to grandfather and grandmother, uncle and elder uncle. The way Duyen's elder brother talk with them; then there's greetings, like, we still look at elder brother to learn from, and imitate.

⁸⁶ Middle aged and elderly informants were not asked this question.

⁸⁷ The percentages in the "agree" and "disagree" columns don't add up because the "don't know/not sure" responses were omitted here.

⁸⁸ This item was only used to check the variations in the understanding of the word "địa vị" ("status"). This word is less commonly used than "vai vế" (rank) in the family. It was administered only to the second group, which consisted of about 20 respondents.

A second grade lesson teaches an elder sibling how to care for his young siblings:

LÀM ANH ⁸⁹	(BEING ELDER BROTHER)
Làm anh khó đấy	(Being elder brother is difficult)
Phải đâu chuyện đùa	(It's not a minor task)
Với em gái bé	(With little sister)
Phải "người lớn" cơ.	(One has to be "adult", alright.)
Khi em bé khóc	(When little sibling cries)
Anh phải dỗ dành	(Elder brother has to console)
Nếu em bé ngã	(If younger sibling falls)
Anh nâng dịu dàng.	(Elder brother gently lifts up.)
Mẹ cho quà bánh	(Mother gave sweets and presents)
Chia em phần hơn	(Elder brother give younger sibling the bigger portion)
Có đồ chơi đẹp	(If there are nice toys)
Cũng nhường em luôn.	(Give them to younger sibling, too.)
Làm anh thật khó	(It's difficult being elder brother)
Nhưng mà thật vui	(But it is rewarding)
Ài yêu em bé	(Anyone who loves babies)
Thì làm được thôi.	(Certain can do the task.)
- Phan Thị Thanh Nhân	(-Phan Thi Thanh Nhân)

Trong, 19, likened his role as eldest brother to that of the head of a boat which would sink if the head sinks. Because he was presently in college, this role involved doing well in school. Great aunt Hanh expressed a similar view:

If there were many children and the oldest child succeeds, then all the younger children succeed, but if the oldest one is spoiled, girls who [run away to] follow guys, then the younger children will do the same.

Many informants revealed that the eldest sibling assumed a substantially greater share of family responsibilities, which often included caretaking of young siblings. Asked whether the other siblings helped her take care of the youngest sibling, Bao said (following page):

⁸⁹ (Trinh Dinh, and Do, 1998)

Usually, the eldest sister does everything, the younger siblings don't do them... Those siblings, they didn't worry ('lo') much about anything, only when I tell him to help me then they would do it. Otherwise, they don't think about it.

If the justification of caretaking/caring for younger siblings is based upon elder sibling status, then the younger siblings are taken care of by more than one elder sibling. Further, an elder sibling who is responsible for a younger sibling is looked over by yet older siblings. Thus, sibling caretaking is not definitional of any particular elder sibling. Caretaking of younger siblings can be entirely accounted for by the justification of elder status within the sibling subsystem, i.e., without reference to parental responsibilities.

Status-Derived Authority over Younger Siblings

With greater responsibilities, elder siblings were accordingly given the necessary authority over younger siblings to obtain their assistance, as well as to coordinate them in the absence of mother and father. Notwithstanding other indicators of authority, many informants indicated directly that younger siblings obeyed or listened to elder siblings. More than half (54.6%) of the survey respondents indicated that in their families, there was one sibling who had had more authority than the rest (19.3% disagreed).⁹⁰ As the eldest brother of two siblings, Trong, 19, explained:

For example, if what I say is right, if [they] see that it is right then they would do it right away, and if what I say is not right then "younger sibling [you] ask father and mother again to see if it is right."

The authority that elder siblings can exercise over their younger siblings is

⁹⁰ It is possible that some survey respondents might have interpreted the question to allude to the potential oppressiveness of such authority, which may explain the higher percentage indicating disagreement.

institutionalized in family education as well as in society at large. This authority is essential to take care of siblings in the absence of parents or other parental figures. It is necessary to attain cooperation from younger siblings to perform family duties. Thong's father would often tell him, "Child [you are] the oldest in the family, [you] must stay home and watch over the younger siblings." Many respondents cited the Confucian principle *quyền huynh thế phụ* ("Elder brother's authority substitutes for father's absence") to justify their authority over the younger siblings. Thong, 27, was the eldest child in the family. He explained:

...Thong's younger siblings go somewhere or return, each of them, surely, would tell me; ... sometimes, they don't greet [formally] like "Dear Eldest Brother, Younger Sibling just came home from school"; they don't tell the exact location; but all of them tell me. Sometimes father said, *quyền huynh thế phụ*. From a very young age, father and mother already gave us a mold; when father and mother are absent from home, all the authority is transferred to Thong. Even now when Thong lives in America, the next younger sibling sister in her letters would say, "Eldest brother, don't worry, anything comes up I will take care of it [for Eldest Brother]"... For example, recently, I read their emails; she [the next younger sibling sister] said, "in the house I represent the younger siblings to report to Eldest Brother this, report to Eldest Brother that....."; [she] represents the younger siblings; she takes care of the younger siblings; it's like a report, but it's not a report really but she just said, "in the house everyone is okay; father and mother in good health."

In elder sister Chuong's family, *quyền huynh thế phụ* took on wider scope beyond authority. Asked whether the *representative child* (con trưởng)⁹¹ role is relevant in her family, she responded:

...like, people say "*quyền huynh thế phụ*." That is why this elder brother carried a heavy load. When he had not yet formed a family, this elder brother carried a heavy load. He managed many family responsibilities like a 'leader' [English] in the family. He had to look over the youngest sibling, cooked, washed clothes [laughs]. He was a guy but he did all of them [gentle laughs]. Tôi nghiệp vậy

⁹¹ It is often the eldest son who assumes this role in family ceremonies and rituals and other occasions. "Representative" here means, in general, to stand out and represent a person or group.

dó... [expression of sympathy and affection toward her elder brother], when mother came home tired, he had to massage mother, too. Even the youngest son would do it, too. My family has a point of strength in that the children love father and mother very much. Father and mother would come home and at night the children alternate, but often the two sons took care of mother more, while the girls, mother made them study more.

Elder sister Chuong's elder brother had not only played the role of "leader" in the family but also performed expressive and instrumental functions in the family. However, his institutionalized role is recognized by all family members, and he would be recognized accordingly, as evidenced by elder sister Chuong's sympathy for him.

The data indicated that elder siblings, especially eldest siblings, generally had substantial authority over younger siblings. Although elder siblings might act as a kind of authority figure to the younger siblings,⁹² the rule that younger siblings have to listen to elder siblings is normative and could even be mechanical; so, their role as authority figure is might not be entirely expressive, depending on how they understood that role.

With regard to the burden/sacrifice dimension of parentification, it is relevant to note that the authority of elder siblings contributes to greater solidarity in nonindustrialized societies than in industrialized societies, where the quality of sibling relationships vary from extreme closeness to indifference (Cicirelli 1994).

Status-Derived Authority to Punish Younger Siblings

In several families the substantial authority allows elder siblings to discipline younger siblings. Some informants indicated that elder siblings (the eldest in two of the

⁹² This is especially the case when the parents hold the oldest sibling responsible for the younger siblings, as was the case for several female informants.

four families) physically punished younger siblings. The oldest age in which younger siblings could be punished were cited by some informants: 12, 15 , 18. Four informants reported that elder siblings had the younger siblings kneel on their knees. Six informants indicated that elder siblings only verbally censure ("la rầy"), and not hit, them. Dao, 27, explained how she had disciplined the younger siblings:

Dao: In Vietnam I was close to them, alright, but over here often they don't listen [to me]. In Vietnam I was elder sister so I can scold ('la'), I can hit them. They would lie face down so that I can hit, but over here that is not the case [Dao smile indicating lack of power over the younger siblings].

Interviewer: Hit by what means? That is, punish them.

Dao: Make them, like at that time I was very upset; in Vietnam we cook with dry woods, so I took the stick and said, "if you don't lie down, I'm, I'm, I'm going to throw it [at you]" [Dao and her elderly friend/classmate sitting next to her laugh].

Dao explained that she hit them only up to the age of 12, yelled at them ("la nố") up to 20, and beyond that she only talked to them.

In elder brother Mike's family the eldest sister took care of all family chores while the eldest brother assumed mainly the role of disciplinarian to the younger siblings because mother and father were preoccupied with their business. The younger siblings would "listen," "respect [English]," and were "afraid" of him. According to elder brother Mike, the elder brother and elder sister had "the right to punish,"⁹³ up to the age of 18. His *representative brother*⁹⁴ would punished the younger siblings for "fighting over food, "disturbing people... causing injuries." His mother and father loved the children

⁹³ "Anh chị có quyền đánh, có chứ không."

⁹⁴ This is an institutionalized role in Vietnamese families, which is often but not necessarily assumed by the eldest brother.

and would not punish them; so, they would tell the *representative brother* of the neighbors' complaints. He explained:

For the most part, that is simply a custom [English]. So, in Mike's family, ..often father and mother replace the eldest brother so that he would lead, he would 'train' [English], meaning that eldest brother has the right to 'eat you' [English], tell them to do it or 'eat you' [English], hit or yell at them to remember the rules. The younger brothers were not afraid of eldest sister; father and mother would only yell at them... Often the eldest brother would call them home, if they talk nonsense then he would hit them right away ... [he'd] often slap them... "Why are you so hard-headed that I repeat to you many times but you don't listen ?"⁹⁵

While usually the eldest sibling has a disproportionate share of authority, middle siblings do have authority over the younger siblings, depending on time, place, and context. If a middle sibling disciplines a younger sibling then the eldest sibling no longer has a reason to repeat the punishment. Therefore, authority to discipline sibling is not exclusively definitional of the the eldest brother role. In this way, the eldest sibling is not captive in the role of punisher. The rule that elder siblings have general authority over younger siblings means authority and power over the younger siblings are distributed throughout the sibling subsystem according to the status of each sibling in relation to one another. Elder brother Mike explained the degree of authority elder siblings have toward younger siblings as a function of their rank:

The elder brother has the authority to tell the younger brothers, the younger brothers below, below, below, below, below, the more below [the younger brother] the more the elder brother is able to tell him. "You are the youngest, you have to do it, you have to listen."

This disciplinarian role is only legitimate insofar as it is supported by social

⁹⁵ It should be noted that despite an appearance of an aggressive, violent family, the siblings love one another ("đứa nào cũng có tình cảm hết") and are still attached ("gắn bó; quỳnh [đánh] hết hồi cũng vậy hà, không sao").

norms, which made disciplinary actions more easily accepted by the younger siblings. This acceptance may explain why, according to elder brother Mike, all the siblings were and still are close to one another as evidenced by their regular contacts. He said, “in actuality, [we siblings] are still close (“tình cảm”), still siblings to one another, and not anything like enemies to one another.”

Another revealing aspect of this institutionalized sibling authority is the age at which elder siblings could still exercise authority over the younger siblings. Citing influences from Confucian education as one of its weaknesses, Great uncle Hoa illustrated the extent of the elder sibling’s authority over the younger siblings during his time:

During my time, the 70-year-old elder brother forced the younger brother down in the middle of the street and whipped him... I saw it with my own eyes. They were biological brothers. The younger brother made a mistake but [he] was forced down to receive the punishment... They had paternal and maternal grandchildren already. The younger sibling was already sixty something years old... [He] said, “I am adhering to *quyen huynh the phu*”... That is old.

Although elder siblings no longer punish their younger siblings to extremes, the rule of authority over younger siblings still remains. The institutionalization of *Quyền huynh thế phụ* legitimates authority of the elder sister or brother over the younger sibling.

It is crucial that the justification of the transfer of authority is based on the specific place of that person, namely one’s status as brother (*huynh*) taking the place of father (to help him). When this behavior is obligatory and normative, the authority justified on that basis is not parental because it is based on a rule which explicitly says that as brother one has to fulfill a publicly expected duty.

In pointing out that the egalitarian manner in which the American people relate to one another was the opposite of how members in her family relate to one another, Hieu, 32, the fourth of seven children, retold a recent incident in which she had verbally censured her 29-year-old brother:

I yelled at him ('la nó'), saying, "in this house I'm oldest; when father mother..... [are absent] [you] cannot go anywhere past 2 am before returning home"... He said, "Sorry, elder sister." It's not that he thinks that, well, just because father mother are not home that.....[I yell at him]..... Elder brother or sister on a par (ngang hàng) with younger sibling: no. Elder brother is at a higher rank than younger sibling (ở bậc cao hơn em).

Hieu was recently married but she visited father and mother's house on a regular basis. On a recent occasion, she stayed over to look over her parents' house while they were on vacation. Hieu's case illustrates that age, gender, and marital status did not affect her authority over the younger brother who was only three years her junior. Significantly, she justified her reprimand of the younger sibling in terms of *cấp bậc* (ranks), that is, on the basis of where she is located in the hierarchy. Therefore, she did not stand in a parental relation to her younger brother by virtue of assuming the punisher role, which is the fulfillment of an obligation prescribed to her elder sibling status. Further, by invoking this rule, she implicitly acknowledged the higher authority of three siblings her senior, which suggests that she did not have unrestrained authority to run the house:

Interviewer: On the contrary, for example, if this elder brother or this elder sister sees that these people under do something wrong...

Hieu: [They] would say it, of course! Because they have the authority! they are above! ("họ có cái quyền, họ lớn mà!") They are above, they have authority to say it, indeed.

In summary, that authority is clearly not exclusively confined to parental authority, but is distributed and highly regulated among elder siblings. In Vietnamese families, elder sibling authority is understood to be necessary and normal. While the authority elder siblings has over younger siblings is not uncommonly applied excessively, the “in principle” authority that they were given served as reference for siblings to resolve disputes. The authority of elder siblings over younger members in nonindustrialized societies has been identified as an important mechanism to prevent tensions and conflicts among siblings (Weisner, 1982). And in the long run, harmony (i.e., absence of conflicts) in the family could neutralize any felt injustices and maintain solidarity among siblings.

Interdependence

The value of helping and caring for one’s siblings is one of the main family themes children learn in the elementary school:

<p><i>anh em như thể tay chân</i> <i>rách lành dùm bọc khó khăn đỡ đần.</i>⁹⁶</p>
<p>(Siblings are like the arms and legs Cover for one another, who may not be perfect, help those in hardship.)</p>

Đùm bọc is a native term that members understand mutual aid toward one another. Elder Aunt Huyen remarked:

Siblings [have to] be attached to one another, love another, help one another. [That is a characteristic of] the Vietnamese family; regardless, siblings to one another [have to adhere to] *chị ngã em nâng* [if elder sister falls younger sibling lifts up], help one another with any difficulty and not abandon one another. ``

⁹⁶ (Luu, Nguyen, and Pham 1997:17; Trinh, Dinh, and Do 1998:3; Dao, Nguyen, Le 1998:82)

The *Tục ngữ* proverb “*chị ngã em nâng*”⁹⁷ (“if elder sister falls, younger sibling lifts [elder sister] up”) obligates the younger sibling’s to his/her elder siblings in difficult times as well as in normal circumstances. The expression *Em ngã chị nâng* (“if younger sister falls, elder sister lifts [you] up”) is not as commonly used as the other because it is understood. These expressions reflect an important feature in the cognitive system of organizing family experiences, namely, the justification of the helping behavior based upon the prescribed status of both the younger sibling as well as the older sibling. Given the prescription of mutual obligations between a younger and elder sibling, helping behaviors neither cast the younger sibling into a parental position to the elder sibling nor align the elder sibling to be parent to the younger sibling. This principle does not say that if one helps an elder sibling, for example, then one would have higher status to the other. On the contrary, it says as younger sibling, one is obligated to help. The “I as younger sibling” or the “I as elder sibling” organizes caretaking behaviors as its own, as what it is to be a younger sibling.

Trong’s mother’s repeated usage of “phải giúp đỡ lẫn nhau” (“have to help one another”) in the discussion on sibling mutual aid reflected the obligatory nature of sibling assistance:

In my opinion, even if elder brother has a social status higher [than younger sibling], or if I am are very educated, or being rich and luxurious, or what not, we still should not treat our younger sibling too...[unclear sound], meaning that [the elder brother should] help him, and not just because we have the authority as eldest brother in the family today we are rich and have a high social status so that we regard younger sibling like this or that. That is not acceptable. Have to help one another.

⁹⁷ (Luu, Nguyen, Pham 1997:17)

Most of the young adults and middle age adults are still close to their siblings, which is consistent with Cicirelli's (1994) observation that sibling relationships in nonindustrialized societies are normative and obligatory, and they continue into adulthood. Phon, 27, the second of four siblings, remarked, "whether elder sister is close to me, I don't know,...[but] I love elder sister, I love elder sister and the younger siblings; treat [elder sister and the younger siblings] the same."

If the obligatory mutual assistance encourages both elders and subordinates to help one another with caretaking functions since childhood, then the siblings have internalized them as what siblings do for one another.

Summary

In Vietnamese families, sibling caretaking functions already begin at an early age. The extensive roles involve a high degree of coordination between elder and younger siblings and the resolution of conflict and differences. Through frequent interactions, their behaviors are predictable and help establish strong sibling bonds. If these obligatory relationships are developed gradually, the children do not experience abrupt role changes, which are more burdensome if they lack skills and experience in performing them.

Further, the publicly recognized obligations of these roles that siblings perform toward one another provide a security that allows the child to perform his/her tasks without psychological uncertainty.

If responsibilities and authority toward siblings are justified on the basis of ranks which the family hierarchy structures relative to the parents, then caring/caretaking

functions are not exclusive of parents such that their performance constitutes parentification.

INSTITUTIONALIZED CARING FOR PARENTS

Most interviewees indicated that they did not directly care for their mother or father. However, in the discussion about *hiếu nghĩa* (“filial obligations”), and elsewhere, young and middle aged adults expressed a feeling as if they were looking forward to taking care of their parents in their old age. The expectation that the children will care for mother and father in their advanced years means that they have to worry about it now.

Lan said:

I think that father and mother won't live with us that long; because I live with father and mother only to a certain point where I have to form a family, I have a separate family to 'take care' [English] my children. I can 'take care' [English] of father and mother but it's not like when we were still unmarried. So, while I can still 'take care' [English] of father and mother, [I] can listen/obey, or 'do their best' [English] [sic] to [make them] 'happy' [English], to make father and mother happy. 'Just do it' [English]. [INTERVIEWER: making father and mother happy means what ?] because I think that I am grown up already I don't make father and mother unhappy with things that are not worth it.

Lan said that if there were no problem between her future husband and her parents then she would “bring father and mother home to care for them,” and her parents could then take care of her future children:

Otherwise, [I] really want to to live with father and mother, ... because my father and mother only have two children, so I don't want to be far away; I want it such that when I have formed a family, I can 'take care' [English] of [my] husband and children, as well as take care [English] of father and mother, too.

More than half of the young adult interviewees who were unmarried and still live with their families expressed a strong desire to be near their parents after they are

married.⁹⁸ Duyen, 26, the third of five siblings, was still living with her parents and three siblings. She said:

That word, “hiếu” (“filial piety”), to me it is not a responsibility but is just love for my father and mother. Our father and mother had to endure hardship all their lives for us, so when father and mother are old, if they are old they need the children’s love, so we have to love, to care for them. Old people get bored sitting at home alone, so we have to ‘spend time’ [English] with them, then take them out. Then if father and mother like this or that then I would get it for them. Also, one should not cause father and mother to be unhappy because we should not make old people unhappy. Plus, if my father and mother are ill then I would take care of father and mother. Whenever the illness is serious then I’d take them to the hospital, and never send them to a nursing home .

Anh and elder sister Hoa said they plan to marry a husband, provided that he is willing to live near mother and father. All informants who discussed this subject expressed, even in their adulthood, a desire to be close to their mother and father.

Caring for Family

Most of the young adults and some middle age adults expressed specifically a caring for the family (“*gia đình*”),⁹⁹ which generally refers to mother and father. About half (56.9%) of survey respondents placed more importance on the family’s interests compared to individual interests (Table 5, p.103). This caring reflected a strong bond to the family. Similar to Anh and Hoa’s eldest brother, Duyen told of her brother’s caring for family: “My younger sibling is a dutiful person- coming home from work [he] would care for the family.”¹⁰⁰ Thong spoke of “responsibility toward the family.” Phon’s

⁹⁸ This topic did not arise in the interview with Thong, whose family is in Vietnam; Dao, 27, said that “in actuality” she wanted to live separately.

⁹⁹ This does not mean that the other informants do not care about family, but that these informants specifically used this language which reveals their bondedness to the family as a collective whole.

¹⁰⁰ “Em Thảo là một người rất tốt- về nhà là lo cho gia đình.”

attachment to family was strengthened by the hardship his family had gone through:

At that time I saw that my family, father just came back from the re-education camp, [our family was] poor. In actuality, I saw a discrimination of social classes, so I felt more attached (“gắn bó”) to family.

Elder sister Chi saw her caring about her family of origin as one of two responsibilities that was still unchanged.

Many people indicated the obligatory nature of caring for one's family.¹⁰¹ The mandatory nature of this consciousness reverberated in elder sister Khue's critical remarks of her elder brother and his wife:

Once elder brother was well-off he was no longer concerned with the family. For example, during the death anniversaries, the ceremonies was about to begin but he had not come home,.. and, of course, his wife would not respect, too,... For example, during death anniversaries the other daughter-in-laws had to buy this or that a few days in advance to put on the family altar. His wife, on the other hand, would bring in the items when the ceremonies were over... So, things like that, the younger siblings don't respect as much as those who were more responsible.

Middle age adults who are married are also still attached to family. For those whose mother and father are not living in U.S., they contact them regularly and send home money to help care for their parents. Bao and Hieu, recently married, expressed a nostalgic longing to be with her family. Informants indicated that this caring was love and attachment (“gắn bó”) and/or responsibility to the family.

Survey data merged with interview data indicating that most respondents still had strong bonds to their families (Table 5, p. 103).

This generalized caring and concern for family members or the family as a whole is clear, perhaps because it is mandatory for all family members. This mandatory

¹⁰¹ That is, where respondents expressed it as a moral imperative or disapproval for an attitude of indifference towards the family.

characteristic may be best observed in the everyday behaviors where care and concern are expressed.

Filial Piety

Filial piety was the theme that best captured the informants' experiences of caring/caretaking functions toward their parents and general family responsibilities.

In a social context in which the sick and the elderly are cared for at home (Vuong 1976), being a *hiếu thảo* ("dutiful") child often means providing appropriate care for siblings, parents, and grandparents. Elder brother Tai, 53, lived with his wife and two young children. He explained the meaning of *hiếu*:

The word "hiếu thảo," its original meaning is the way the child treats father and mother... The word "hiếu thảo" means to help or to support father and mother, care for father and mother ... [it's] the concern, similar to [the English word] 'take care' [English].

Asked if the duty is economic, physical, or emotional caring, elder brother Tai, like Trong's mother, remarked, "this *hiếu thảo* is not financial [support], but emotional, the way one is treated; it is more emotional than financial." Elder uncle Hoa said: "not respecting father and mother causing father and mother to be unhappy is a disregard of *hiếu*."¹⁰²

When the children are young, they care for family members according to their limited ability. Elder brother Tai provided an example of emotional caring by a six-year-old child (following page):

¹⁰² "Không kính trọng cha mẹ làm cha mẹ buồn là bất hiếu."

Elder brother Tai: Mrs. A's family...gave a 6-year-old child an orange. Instead of eating the orange him/herself at home, he/she saves it until mother comes home, "Mother, Mrs. A's family gave me an orange, now I give mother half and save half for me to eat." Then his/her mother would say, "Good Heaven! Child, you is very hiếu thảo ("dutiful")." Child, you thought about mother, you knew that mother would come home tired and that mother would feel better eating an orange, so you cut it in half for me and save half for yourself."

Interviewer: so, this is a normal example, or is it ideal?

Elder brother Tai: This is normal, meaning that the child did think about mother, (s)he shared with mother, and (s)he loves mother, (s)he puts his/her love for mother more. This is hiếu thảo (being dutiful). It's normal.

TABLE 5. TRENDS OF FAMILY BONDING, 2000 (N = 88; N = 19)

CATEGORIES	Responses (# cases)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
My siblings cared about me	88	85.2	1.1
	15	93.3	6.7
My mother cared about me	88	94.3	1.1
	16	93.8	6.3
My father cared about me	87	87.4	3.4
	14	93.3	6.7
I cared about my siblings	87	95.4	2.3
	15	93.8	6.3
I cared about mother	87	97.7	1.1
	16	100.0	0.0
I cared about father	87	95.4	1.1
	16	100.0	0.0
My family was important but I had to take care of myself first	86	19.8	56.9
	12	25.0	75.0
Now I'm older, I no longer have a strong attachment to my family	87	14.9	75.9
	16	18.8	81.3

Vietnamese children are socialized early on into caretaking roles. In elementary school, they formally learn that their first duty in the family is đạo hiếu ("filial duty") (following page):

*Trong gia đình, con cái phải hiếu thảo đối với cha mẹ. Anh chị em ruột phải biết thương yêu nhau, đùm bọc nhau. Khi có người gặp khó khăn, mọi người cần hết lòng giúp đỡ.*¹⁰³

(In the family, children have to be hiếu thảo (“dutiful”) with father and mother. Siblings have to love one another, help one another. When someone is having difficulties, everyone need to wholeheartedly help.) (a Third Grade lesson)

This lesson teaches that a hiếu thảo (“dutiful”) child is a child who “knows how to love and respect and help father and mother, and knows how to take care of father and mother in old age.”¹⁰⁴ *Hiếu* means, according to one dictionary, “an attitude of attention toward/caring about father and mother.”¹⁰⁵ As is explicitly stated in the definition of “hiếu,” caretaking functions are prescribed into the role of being a child (to his/her parents).

A survey of textbooks from the Second to the Sixth Grade, revealed that “Taking Care Of Grandmother And Grandfather, And Mother And Father”¹⁰⁶ is a continuous, explicit theme in the family chapters. Although they are explicitly expected to care for mother and father in old age, caretaking does not necessarily have to be confined to that period when the children will have grown up. The understanding that children respect and care about their parents creates in them a willingness to care for mother or father should either fall ill (following page):

¹⁰³ (Dao, Nguyen, Le 1998)

¹⁰⁴ “Biết kính yêu giúp đỡ cha mẹ, và biết phụng dưỡng cha mẹ khi già yếu” (Dao, Nguyen, Le 1998).

¹⁰⁵ “Lòng ân cần đối với cha mẹ.” (Minh Tan, Thanh Nghi, Xuan Lam 1998); “Có lòng kính yêu đối với cha mẹ” (Dang et al. 1997:77).

¹⁰⁶ “Chăm Sóc Ông Bà, Cha Mẹ”

Mẹ ỐM	(MOTHER IS SICK)
Mọi hôm mẹ thích vui chơi,	(Other days mother liked to play)
Hôm nay mẹ chẳng nói cười được đâu.	(Today mother could not speak or smile)
Lá trầu khô giữa coi trầu,	(Dry araca leaves are on the tray)
Truyện Kiều gấp lại trên đầu bấy nay.	(<i>Kiều</i> epic poem lies closed above mother's head)
Cánh màn khép lại cả ngày,	(The curtain is closed all day)
Ruộng vườn vắng mẹ cuốc cày sớm trưa.	(Mother is not in the fields working)
Nắng mưa từ những ngày xưa,	(Shine or rain, mother still worked)
Lặn trong đời mẹ bấy giờ chưa tan.	(Those days were mother's life, not yet faded)
Khắp người đau buốt nóng ran,	(Mother's body is aching and hot throughout)
Mẹ ơi! cô bác xóm làng đến thăm.	(Mother! the neighbors are coming to visit)
Người cho trứng, người cho cam,	(Some give eggs, some give oranges)
Và anh y sĩ đã mang thuốc vào. ¹⁰⁷	(The doctor has brought in the medicine).

Most of the time children are not taking care of their parents. But when they do, their caretaking behaviors are specifically located in the obligations of a hiếu thảo (“dutiful”) child.

Clearly, caretaking roles are developed in children early on and continue into adulthood. This continuity develops in the children important skills as their caretaking responsibilities increase with age.

According to elder brother Tai these responsibilities begin “since when one is a small child to when the child has grown up, but if the child is still young then filial obligations are lighter, and for the grown-up child, filial piety is more obligatory.” And when the child has grown up “this *hiếu thảo* presses down on one's head, because why? because you are now mature, you have understood the burden and responsibility; so, you are more obligated (“ràng buộc hơn”); this little girl understands less, and this other side

¹⁰⁷ (Nguyen and Dang 1996:32)

[i. e., grown-up children] understands more.” Elder brother Tho said that his love (“tình cảm”) for mother and father is now more explicit (“rõ hơn”):

Whenever we return home [as from a trip] we’d buy father and mother something. Second, the time we used to entertain ourselves have to be shortened so that we can be closer to father and mother. In other words, we spend more of our time for father and mother, more than before. We know father and mother are now old and will not live much longer, this is when we need to spend more time with father and mother.

Within this context, we can understand variations in caretaking functions that children in different families perform throughout their early and later years. While in some families, children had performed extensive duties since their childhood, in other families, the children had done little because there were many siblings, or because there was a housemaid who took care of all the chores. For these children filial duties are expressed more clearly in their adulthood when their parents are becoming weak and often fall ill.

This motivation explains, for most informants, the language of “trách nhiệm” (responsibility) and “bổn phận” (duty) directly or indirectly associated with being a child to his/her parents. For example, speaking about her future plans of living near home after marriage, Anh did not simply say that it was the right thing to do, but it was “dutiful” of a child: “After marriage, the “duty” [English] of being a child doesn’t not end, but we often have to come back to this house.” According to Thong, to be *hiếu thảo* with mother and father meant “[one] has to have responsibility to father and mother and to our family.” He understood *hiếu* as having an “individual” meaning and a “general” meaning (following page):

Myself individually, the word ‘hiếu’ [means] I must take care of father and mother when father and mother are old. Or because I was cared for since the time I was little, so I do not want Thong’s father and mother to be unhappy... And speaking generally, filial piety is vast. For example, the responsibility of the child is to be hiếu thảo (“dutiful”) to father and mother.

For elder brother Mike, this expression of gratitude consists of emotional support by “mentioning [English],” being close (“gần gũi”) to mother and father, and providing financial support.

The obligatory nature and the public recognition as reward produce in the child a readiness and willingness to care for their parents. This interpretation may be incompatible with models in mainstream literature (e.g., Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Jurkovic 1997) which assume that the greater the caretaking, the greater the risk of harmful parentification. In Vietnamese/Asian families, the mandatory and institutionalized caretaking roles are legitimated and affirmed, and greater caretaking duties do not necessarily mean being more parentified.

In summary, prescribed into the status of the child is the obligation to care about/for their parents, and it begins at an early age. Caretaking functions later on are natural extensions of past responsibilities. This continuous reciprocity between parent and child is natural and assumed. Yet, parent is still parent and child is still child. That is, nowhere in the performance of caretaking duties is it presupposed that the child takes on a parental status. This is because the assignment of caring/caretaking functions presupposes that the child be a child.

FILIAL PIETY AND RECIPROCITY

As revealed in the foregoing passages, the informants were highly aware of filial obligations toward their parents. Underlying this motivation is the moral, reciprocal relation between parent and child. Of this relation, writer The Uyen (1998) observed that even the late exit from the family does not dissolve the parent-child bond, which is also institutionalized in Confucian teachings:

Once a child is born the reciprocal relation between the child and parent is established forever. There is no such thing as reaching eighteen one is considered grown-up so that one separates from father and mother as in North America. (P. 132)

This reciprocity is expressed in one of many lessons that children learn early on about the boundless labor and love their mother and father gave them:

Công cha như núi Thái Sơn	(Father's labor is like Mt. Thai Son)
Nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra	(Mother's love like water flows from a stream)
Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha	(Love and respect mother and father with utmost devotion)
Cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con. ¹⁰⁸	(Fulfilling filial duties is the duty of the child)

More than 95% of survey respondents indicated that they still remember this lesson which they had learned in elementary school. Elder brother Mike said that "this lesson, virtually everyone, 99% of the people, know it."¹⁰⁹ He explained the sacrifices of father and mother in the lesson:

This labor of father, we are talking about what father has taught us and the hardship of the father, how big it is. Mt. Thai Son is a famous mountain , it is very big...

¹⁰⁸ "Đạo con" suggests that *hiếu nghĩa* is the role identity of the child. That is, it is highly institutionalized in Vietnamese society.

¹⁰⁹ "Câu nói đó hình như hết 99% ai cũng biết hết ấy."

Elder sister Chuong explained the indebtedness contained in the meaning of the lesson:

It affects, it imprints in our soul, it wants to say that we have to remember father and mother's labor. It causes us to, to the end of life, always remember father and mother's labor, which is high like such a mountain, and there is no way to measure it. And water flowing from its source, as you know, a source ceaselessly flowing; it never stops. So, father and mother's love is so high that it could not be measured, and it continues to flow without ever ending. So, in whatever circumstances, father and mother will always be like that, and in return, we treat our children the same way, and our children have to understand that.

Great uncle Phi explained:

It means father's labor is very vast. Mother's love, mother has raised us, it is like water flowing from a stream's origin, it will never cease... even if the father did not have any significant contributions, his labor in nurturing, he loves us, that is why he nurtured us... So, all fathers have contributed, all mothers have contributed. Then, assuming the role of child, we, of course, have to treat father and mother at least with gratitude and love. The phrase "respect father and mother" means that. Tell you the truth, even the gangster, too, with father and mother, he still respects and defers to them.

The understanding of their parents' love and sacrifices as immense and unquantifiable profoundly changes the meaning of reciprocity. It means that one could never fully repay that "debt." As such, when children perform caretaking functions or other family duties, they are not motivated by the promise of an obligation dissolved. Significantly, the parents' vast contributions do not imply infinite burden such that it must be discharged. Instead, it represents an indissoluble bond between parent and child. This understanding, then, transforms the meaning of caretaking tasks: caring/caretaking tasks are important opportunities for children to express gratitude for their parents' love and sacrifices and to reaffirm that sense of indebtedness (trả hiếu). Therefore, caring/caretaking functions are interpreted as reciprocal acts toward their parents.

When elder sister Chuong was 14, her family was in economic hardship; so, she

asked for her mother's permission to go live at an aunt's house to sell jewelry to assist her father and mother ("tiếp cha mẹ"). The sense of indebtedness toward her parents might have affected the meaning of contributions for her:

Elder sister chuong: For example, I knew it was right to make money, I knew it was right to share, I know that I bring home an income for father and mother, and not just eat and consume all day. Yes, like that, then naturally I felt proud.

Interviewer: Did elder sister feel that 13, 14 years of age was too young, felt like the work was too burdensome?

Elder sister chuong: Tiresome, yes, but I thought that [in that way] father and mother endure less hardship, so I did not feel tire at all, I was very happy.

Lan, 24, decided to postpone business school and go to work to contribute to her family:

Yeah, one step at a time [English], because father and mother are not rich so could not support [me] to obtain an MBA degree, so when I've got the BA degree then I will have to decide to continue school or to go to work because I think that father and mother have raised me up. Until to now I have not been able to go to work to help the family and just kept on going to school. That is not right. So, I think I will stop at the BA degree and go to work.

The informants' language of "assisting mother" ("phụ mẹ") or acting "in place of mother" ("thay ba má") indicates that they do not solely interpret performing tasks as burdens to be justly distributed, but that they may interpret them as ways to help their parents. This help is located in the background of their feelings of indebtedness to their parents.

When the children provide an income, care for their sick parents, or do work more than required, they are said to be "có hiếu" ("dutiful"), "biết lo cho gia đình" ("cares about the family"). When they perform beyond their years, they are accordingly recognized, but on the basis of their being children, not solely on the basis of the amount or burden of work itself. So, Duyen's 25-year-old younger brother, who is "a very good

person- coming home, he'd care for the family,"¹¹⁰ would be considered a "*hiếu thảo*" ("dutiful") child. In the context where mother and father's "credit" cannot be equalled, caring/caretaking duties as reciprocal acts do not have the same meanings of "merits earned" and "obligations discharged" as they do in the context of the families that Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) discussed.

The reciprocity between parent and child continues on in their adulthood, as exemplified by the *tục ngữ* proverb "*trẻ cậy cha già cậy con*" ("when the child is young he/she relies on father, and when the father is old he relies on the child). As mentioned above, several informants indicated that the expression of *hiếu* ("filial piety") was "clearer" ("*rõ hơn*"), more "obligatory" ("*ràng buộc hơn*") in their adulthood. Elder uncle Hoa explained that in America he had "life insurance" and "social security" so that his children do not have to take care of him; but "in Vietnam father and mother live near the child everyday. The children care for aging father and mother everyday." In this way children are continuously reciprocating their parents' contributions by assuming responsibilities at home.

In light of the understanding that their parents' labor and sacrifices are vast, the children do not ask whether or not what their parents have done was enough, or that their parents had been fair to them. These children then do not think the same as many American children who think, "Honor thy mother and father, only if they deserve it" (Winton 1995). This thinking of "deserve" implies that those children set their own standards of their parents' contributions and what constitute the fulfillment of obligations.

¹¹⁰ "*là một người rất là tốt; đi làm về là lo cho gia đình...*"

Because it is a subjective judgment, it can be highly variable and changes with circumstances. This can create problems when their personal interpretations no longer have clear criteria of assessment, whereupon what counts as merit or obligation is no longer certain. This uncertainty may result in "invisible loyalties" to the family, which Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973) identified as the under-current at work in many problematic families. Treatment, then, often involves bringing up those feelings to realign merit and obligations for both the parents and the children.

In Vietnamese families, their indebtedness to their parents is highly public, as evidenced by the fact that Vietnamese parents and elders would often invoke the labor and sacrifices of the mother and father to persuade or talk to a child. As a public issue for discussion within and outside the family, it is more easily resolved than if it were hidden. In Vietnamese families, it can be said, the "ledger of justice" is highly visible, instead of invisible, and it enters directly into one's deliberation process, or the calculus of burden and merit.

Given that the social network of public recognition is more expansive than within the confines of a nuclear family unit, it is more likely that children will be acknowledged and recognized by others for their devotion and support of elders or other family members. If so, this broader social public recognition overcomes a criterion of destructive parentification as discussed by Jurkovic- that the efforts of children are largely unrecognized or unacknowledged by others.

In summary, feelings of indebtedness, love, and obligation, as communicated by the informants, together motivate the children to care for the family. While their

parent's contributions are vast, it is not necessary to repay all the "debt." And through their caring/caretaking functions, which they interpret as reciprocal acts, they are affirming their indebtedness to their parents' labor and sacrifices, which is reinforced by public expectations.

CARING BEHAVIORS AND THE FAMILY HIERARCHY

The respondents and interviewees indicated that they were involved in various duties and caring functions to varying degrees in their families. However, caretaker-care receiver relations were not isolated relations in their families; they were regulated within a hierarchical structure that is not altered by their caring/caretaking behaviors or personal achievements.

The family hierarchy conceptualized in terms of authority and respect provides the important function of coordinating the behaviors of family members in all circumstances. It achieves this purpose by prescribing the behaviors of each member toward other members according to their given ranks. Most social behaviors within the family are based on ascription which does not change with contingent attributes of family members.

Tôn Ti Trật Tự, or the Order of Elders and Subordinates

Several informants mentioned the expression *tôn ti trật tự*, which literally means order of "high and low, or big and small,"¹¹¹ to explain how family members relate to one another. Functionally, it is a hierarchy of differential authority and unilateral respect.

¹¹¹ (Le and Le 1970)

Great Uncle Phi's remark indicated the institutionalization of the order *tôn ti trật tự* in family education:

For siblings in this family, of course, there has to be *tôn ti trật tự*. Elder brother, younger sibling, their statuses [must be ranked above and below]... It is accepted is family education already. So, we, in relation to elder brother, have to respect the elder ranks... then this status [disparity] is necessary!

Elder brother Tam suggested the (morally) normative character of this order: "In principle, there must be *tôn ti trật tự*, in Vietnam people say *tôn ti trật tự*. Elder brother has to comport like an elder brother and younger sibling has to comport like a younger sibling."¹¹² According to elder brother Tho, "Even though the age differences are small, about the same, each person has a place."¹¹³ Elder brother Tho explained what this "place" consists of:

Generally speaking, with regard to our small [nuclear] family only, [we] still respect and listen, and it's not that if one person talk the other does not listen. We are still elder sibling, younger sibling. [We] understand that we have to yield to one another, listen to one another, and it's not the case that [we live] without a thinking of above and below. That is why whatever is right, then [one] has to listen.

The hierarchical nature of relating is highly institutionalized and reinforced between family and society. Anthropologist Jesse Nash (1992) and Zhou and Bankston (1998) observed that respect for authority characterized the social order of Vietnamese society.

Respect

All interviewees indicate that, in one form or another, they respect parents and elder siblings. The majority of survey respondents indicated that subordinates must

¹¹² "Đúng ra phải có tôn ti trật tự đó; ở Viet Nam nói tôn ti trật tự đó; anh ra anh em ra em hà."

¹¹³ "Mặc dù tuổi thì gần, xấp xỉ; nhưng mà mỗi người có một nơi,... [anh/chị -em]."

respect elders. Notably, 79.6% disagreed that adults no longer have to respect (kính trọng) elder siblings (10.2% agreed). Various ways of showing respect to elders reported by informants included listening to the elder person, asking permission, folding one's arms in front to greet elders, address elders with proper titles or ranks, speaking in a gentle tone, giving and taking something from elders with two hands, going away from adult conversations.¹¹⁴ Most respect behaviors are mandatory. Therefore, a lack of mandatory respect behaviors are often a kind of disrespect.

In talking about trying to adapt to American life, Great uncle Minh revealed how strict etiquette and rules of respect behaviors were during his generation:

For example, he [great uncle Minh's son] is sitting, talking with me, and putting his feet on the table [in the living room], I don't mind that. But in the old days, in Vietnam [my generation], doing something like that by me... for example, in the old days when I talked to my old man or my paternal grandfather, for example, then I'd have to be very formal, probably fold both arms with head down, and I remember each time when [I] was little that there was a death anniversary, or other ceremonies, then I had to dress according to customs back then, which was to wear the black *áo dài* long dress, then have to come there and fold arms, and have to be very formal {sounds passionate}. But now, I can let my children, I make it an exception so that my children don't have to do those things anymore.

The family hierarchy was evident in spatial positions of members in two of the informants' families, which they both described as relatively "phong kiến."¹¹⁵ Hieu described the arrangement in which paternal grandmother was "highest:"

...for example, cannot sit at the same level {"ngồi ngang hàng"} with paternal grandmother; for example, if paternal grandmother sits here [on sofa] but Hieu sit here {on the arm support that is higher than where grandmother sits}; then that's also not acceptable. Hieu have to sit far, a little far out, or below; if sit near then must be lower [than grandmother]; cannot sit higher.

¹¹⁴ Most of these behaviors take different forms among adults.

¹¹⁵ Literally meaning of or related to the feudal period. In the context above, it connotes formality and strict rules.

In general, there is a clear division of the behaviors that one conducts toward elders and juniors. Elder brother Mike explained the separation of elders from juniors:

Playing with him [a younger brother], if we violate or overdo something to him, then it's still okay, but with elder brothers and sisters who are older, then [we] cannot. That is called *vo phep* (disregard of respect etiquettes, disrespectful),... one does not play 'over' [English]. In other words, we are younger siblings, we have to assume a lower status.

Survey data on formality with elders are consistent with these informants' assertions (Table 6).

TABLE 6. FORMAL BEHAVIORS WITH DIFFERENT ELDER FAMILY MEMBERS, 2000 (N = 88; N = 19)

CATEGORIES	Responses (# cases)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
I have to formal with my elder siblings	85	84.7	3.5
	14	100.0	0.0
I have to be more formal with my parents than with my elder siblings	86	90.7	3.5
	15	100.0	0.0
I have to be more formal with my aunts/uncles than with elder cousins	80	87.6	5.1
	13	100.0	0.0

Phon's clarification of his younger brother's respect for him (by listening to what he taught him) reveals the kind of respect he had for the generations above (*kính trọng*):

[I said] respect (*kính trọng*), but in actuality, in general [he] knows how to listen to me. In contrast, saying respect (*kính trọng*) sounds too much, too strong.

As suggested by Phon, respect for elders (*kính trọng*) is a specific kind of respect. It is not expressed to equals or subordinates. That is, respect for elders (*kính trọng*) is unilateral, i.e., expected only of subordinates. Elders do not perform these behaviors.

Further, they do not have to be attentive to their own behaviors in front of the subordinates the way they'd have to in front of elders, including, as indicated by the informants, putting his/her feet on the table, using slangs or swearing words with equals, throwing objects that might hit elder sister. Elder brother Tai explained the difference:

Naturally, ...[parents] respect (i.e., being attentive to) his/her (i.e., the child's) opinions only, and not respect in the sense of deferring to him. The word "kính" in Vietnam speaks of the "kính trọng" (respect) between elders and subordinates only, and people above never "kính trọng" (respect) people below. "Father have to respect me," that is not okay... However, elders have to be considerate of the subordinates, too [i.e., not being abusive].

Elder brother Mike said that he did not "respect" his younger siblings (the way he was obligated toward his elder siblings):

...of course, our elder brother, we have to respect, we have to listen... 'respect' English] means we have to respect (tôn trọng), as for younger siblings we don't have to respect (tôn trọng).

Authority

Citing Nida (1945), Nguyen (1957) writes, "In Vietnamese, as in Aztec, 'it is impossible to say anything to anyone without indicating precisely the degree of respect to which the speaker and hearer are entitled in the community.'" In speech, one of the clearest indicators of the hierarchy is the ways members address one another. In light of the Confucian teaching *danh chính ngôn thuận* (proper speech requires correct appellation of names/titles), "applying the correct name in social intercourse is the concern of everyone" (Nguyen 1957). Elder brother Tam, like several other informants, suggested the mandatory character of this proper use of address terms: "[the children] have to properly self-address 'child.'"

In society, as in the home, one important function of proper address terms is that they locate members on the status hierarchy and, thereby, binds him/her to rules of behaviors respective of that status as well as legitimates the authority of elder with subordinates.

This social norm may explain why for great aunt Hanh, as for many other informants, simply calling an elder sister by proper title was not enough; the younger siblings had to address themselves with “em” (‘younger sibling’) and not “tôi.”¹¹⁶ That is, a slight deviation from the norm of addressing with “elder sister-younger siblings” was not acceptable:

[The younger sibling was] not bold enough to talk back. Whenever elder sister talk, younger sibling has to self-address “younger sibling.” [younger sibling] could never self-address ‘tôi.’ If the elder sister talks, the younger sibling listens. And if the younger sibling talks back then the elder sister won’t talk any more... Even if [young sibling is] upset or quarrel [with elder sister] still have to self-address “younger sibling,” and not say “may/tao.”¹¹⁷

By addressing self “em,” the younger sibling tacitly acknowledges subordinate status and agrees to listen to the elder sister. One reason why address terms that signify an elder status to self are not used indiscriminately is that it has consequences for one’s behavior.

More than 90% of survey respondents indicated that they used “elder brother/sister-younger siblings” in addressing one another (Table 7, p.119).

As indicated by the informants, the family hierarchy does not entail burden or oppression.¹¹⁸ It represents an order which makes possible the justification of one’s

¹¹⁶ This is an assertive way of addressing oneself in this context, indicating deference to no one.

¹¹⁷ These terms are forms of address that, in this context, indicate distance, rebellion, and/or coldness, as during an unpleasant argument.

¹¹⁸ This statement should be understood in light of the fact that in a small number of families elders do abuse their authority over subordinate members.

behaviors, the rectification of others' behaviors, and commendation of behaviors according to one's rightful place.

TABLE 7. SIBLING TERMS OF ADDRESS AS INDICATORS OF RANK, 2000 (N = 88; N = 19)

CATEGORIES	Responses (# cases)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
With siblings in the family, I address those older than me "elder brother/elder sister"	82	93.9	1.2
	16	100.0	0.0
With siblings in the family, I address myself "younger sibling" to those older than me	84	91.7	1.2
	16	93.8	6.3

The Family Order and Personal Achievements

For many informants who were asked about how their (potential) personal success could change their authority and respect behaviors, the hierarchy was clearly unchanged. Elder brother Tam provided a hypothetical example to illustrate the stability of this family order:

Out there in society [one could be] a general or something, but coming home [one's] authority and power is still less [than elders]. Even though out there one could be as accomplished as could be, but coming home one acts according to one's ranks... We'd say, "I am general director, I am a general out there in society, so coming home I have to have more authority than my elder brother." That doesn't exist. "[I have] more authority than my elder sister." That doesn't exist. "I have more authority than my father." That doesn't exist.

As reported by the informants, this hierarchical manner of relating is unaffected by career accomplishments or other kinds of achievement. The *tục ngữ* proverb "*con hơn cha là nhà có phúc*," ("If the child surpasses the father, then the family is happy"), which Elder Aunt Huyen and elder uncle Minh mentioned, encourages children to surpass their

parents outside in society. The children do not topple the hierarchy, but in bringing honor to the family, they elevate mother and father's status at home and in the community.

Elder sister Chuong worked at 14 and had given all her earnings to mother. However, as she explicitly stated, it did not elevate her to higher status. Instead, she justified her reward based on where she was located in the family hierarchy:

No, I was proud, that's all, I was proud when I brought home income for mother, I was proud because even though I was younger than the elder sisters but I realized the importance of making money to bring home to contribute to my father and mother. I was proud, that's all. It's not that through that contribution that I rise above permanently.

The satisfaction was interpreted as substantial because it was compared to the relative expectations for elder sisters. For elder sister Chuong, the family hierarchy also functions as a reference which allows her to make sense of the "amount" of her contributions. For Anh and Hoa, who were sisters, their sibling ranks allows them to make sense of family responsibilities relative to one another.

Even when an elder does not act according to his/her status, juniors cannot correct them directly. According to elder brother Mike, a child has to comport him/herself as child, and a nephew/niece has to comport him/herself as nephew/niece, who "has no right" to criticize an uncle regardless of what an uncle might have done or been:

We are nephew/niece so still cannot tell [the uncle]. If we tell him then that is *vô lễ* ("disrespectful," a strong form of reprimand). Even if he gambles, engages in unethical misconducts whatever. It doesn't matter. We have the duty of being child or niece [i.e., of generation below parental generation], so people who are 'higher' than him, let those people talk to him. As for us, we are minor so have no authority to talk of those concerns. 'doesn't matter' [English]... Even if he is crazy, we still have no authority to tell him.

For these informants, respect behaviors and authority toward elders is highly based on ascription. Their integrity is maintained when they remained stable across changing circumstances that could affect the way family members relate to one another.

Being “Friends” within a Hierarchical System

Forty-five percent of the survey respondents indicated disagreement to the statement : “I consider my aunts and uncles like friends and I could chat or play with them in a comfortable manner” (41% agreed; 14% were “not sure”). Many informants were asked if they considered whether various members were considered friends in a general sense. Follow-up questions probed into the informants’ specific understandings. Informants’ interpretations of family members as “friends” separated into two categories. Some people interpreted “friends” to mean egalitarian relating, while others interpreted “friends” as meaning ease of communication/sharing thoughts. Those that interpreted the former said that family members cannot be “friends,” especially toward elders. For example, Anh was close to elder sister Hoa, elder sister Ha, and particularly eldest brother who “from long before to now... did a lot for the family,”¹¹⁹ so she felt “closer to him.”¹²⁰ She clarified:

Interviewer: You are close to eldest brother. Close like a friend?

Hoa: No. No [English].

Anh: Eldest brother is eldest brother, and is not a friend [like a friend who is not related to the family].

¹¹⁹ “lo cho nhà nhiều ấy”

¹²⁰ “dễ chịu hơn”

The non-egalitarian nature of the family hierarchy often creates a vast distance between father and children in some families. Great Uncle Hoa said with a perplexed feeling that his children were “afraid” of him so that they could not be closer even though he said he had tried to convince them that he did not mean anything. He explained that the strict obedience that has created a great gap between him and his children was a weakness that was derived from strict Confucian teachings:

Tôn ti trật tự means, of course, grandfather comport like grandfather, father, father, mother mother, elder uncle, elder uncle, aunt, aunt in the family. There is *tôn ti trật tự* in the family. For example, children and nephews/nieces [i.e., those of the younger generation] have to obey. Obedience has its strength, but it has weakness, too... As for my children, my grandchildren, the first principle is that they have to respect (*kính trọng*) me. They have to be afraid of me. That is wrong, because if they cause me to be disappointed, then that is ‘impious’ (*bat hiếu*).

Elder Uncle Phi explained that the reason why his children communicated to him by talking to mother first is that he might have been too strict with them (‘‘*ng nghiêm khắc quá*’’). Asked how was respect could be expressed when elder sister Chi could comfortably (‘‘*thoải mái*’’) [laxness implied] communicate with her siblings, she said:

Thu: Comfortable but still respect (*kính trọng*) as usual. For example, that we don’t talk in a disrespectful manner (toward elders) is already a way of respecting (*kính trọng*) them.

Interviewer: You can give me examples of disrespect and not causing people to be unhappy.

Thu: For example, being close does not means [one] can talk...nonsense. For example, using bad words that cause others to be sad, even if [we] are close..., swearing or saying ‘‘you’re stupid!’’ or something like that,... If [one] respects (*kính trọng*) then [one] has to hold back those language. That is the strictness [of being respectful]. [One] has to be close, but has to ‘respect’ [English].

In some other families respondents said that their relations with their mothers were “more than friends.” Lan explained how mother was at the same time “friend, elder sister, and mother:”

Yeah. Mother, elder sister, like ‘I get her advise for something’ [English]. As for mother, ‘you know, because I’m old, but I’m not old like her, she’s got a lot of experience so I get some advise from her, from a mom, not from an` [English] elder sister because an elder sister sometimes is not much older than us, so [she] doesn’t know [much more than me],... As friends means that I can tell anything to father and mother. Sometimes, there are things that I tell mother as mother, but there are things that I talk like a friend.

In general, for those who said that elders could be friends in terms of ease of communication, the hierarchical order is still a salient feature of their interactions. Elder brother Tho said that mother and father could be friends to their children as an “art” (‘nghệ thuật’) in trying to facilitate communication with the adolescent child so that the child would share their thoughts and feelings with the parents. He said that communicating like friends does not mean they are on a par (“ngang hàng”): “No, no, no, that’s not correct, this is just for sharing thoughts and feelings only, and as for morality and family relations [father and mother are] still father and mother!” While there were variations in strictness in Vietnamese families, some form of hierarchy was a predictable structure.

Summary

The hierarchy of differential authority and unilateral respect requires that family members treat one another based upon their ascribed statuses, which remain unchanged in all conditions. If this hierarchy is irreversible, then caring/caretaking behaviors are

also regulated within this system of relating. Expressive functions of acting as authority figures to younger siblings, for instance, are prescribed into the family hierarchy where having elder status does not mean being elevated to parental status because that elder status is subordinate to other older siblings (or cousins in some cases). Elder brother Mike gave an example:

If we want to play, we have to report, saying, "I am doing that, I am doing that."
We cannot have the right to surpass. That belongs to elder brother's authority,
but we went 'over' [English], we surpass [elder brother].

So, any caretaking behaviors that informants had engaged in do not take place in isolation. Instead, they take place within a system of hierarchical relations which regulates the behaviors of caretaker as elder or subordinate. Therefore, caring/caretaking functions do not constitute a hierarchy reversal. If so, then the way family members treat one another may not change with shifts in caregiving/care-receiving relations. In fact, caregiving/care-receiving relations are not the primary relationships in Vietnamese families. Instead, they may function as opportunities where family hierarchical relations are expressed.

The stability in this order can act as a buffering system against continual changes and acts against potential reconfigurations of family relations. The family hierarchy does not easily lend itself to personal interpretations or changing states of mind. Therefore, it serves as a counter force, as it were, toward pathogenic caretaking, which has been associated with disorganized families where rules and boundaries have collapsed (Karpel 1976).

The Role Of Eldest Sister- Case #1: Bao

The eldest siblings usually assumes a disproportionate share of family responsibilities. Therefore, they could be considered more parentified than younger siblings. In Vietnamese families, however, the eldest sibling role is highly institutionalized and caring/caretaking functions may not have implications for parentification as they would in family systems in which these roles are less institutionalized or unclear.

Bao, 21, was the oldest of four children in the family. Her siblings were a 19-year-old brother, a 16-year-old sister, and a 13-year-old sister. She was recently married and moved with her husband's family from Vietnam to the U.S. a year ago. Back in Vietnam she had lived with her family in a suburban region in Saigon before marriage.

She explained her morning routines:

Usually, when [I'd] wake up, [I'd] make meals for father and mother to take to work. That was it. Then father and mother would wake up, eat, then get ready for work. After eating, I'd go to school, too.

Returning from school in the afternoon Bao would cook and eat with the younger siblings then take them to school. Her mother would cook during the weekend while during weekdays she had no time so Bao would cook simpler dishes and her mother would cook dishes that Bao did not know how to cook. Her other routines included sweeping the floor, washing dishes, feeding and washing the pigs, and washing the younger siblings. Bao recalled her sibling caretaking tasks when she was about eleven years old (following page):

[I] think at that time [the young sibling] was three or four years old. That little girl, she always sneaked away from home to go play, because [I] was busy cooking. Tell [you] the truth, I loved to play that sometimes I'd neglected the younger siblings. Sometimes, I'd go look all over the place looking for them, afraid that they might fall into the river or something. [INTERVIEWER: at home, who cares the most for the youngest sibling?]. When father and mother went to work. [I'd] wash her, take her to school, because the school was nearby.

Sometimes she would seek assistance from her younger brother, who was very "stubborn" ("lì"); but he would do anything if she talked sweetly with him. When she had finished the chores, she would either study or play with the younger siblings until her parents came home. Bao said, "Usually, the eldest sister does everything, the younger siblings don't do them."

That was the routine up to the ninth grade. Thereafter, Bao went to work in the city to help contribute an income to her family (as well as to get to know what city life was like). She said it was not really anything burdensome since they were just house chores that were not very difficult. Sometimes, she would cook and go out to play at the same time. She said, "In Vietnam, girls have to have responsibility ("đảm đang")... If girls are lazy, people don't like that." This social expectation means that Bao's motivation was not based solely on family obligations. Bao said that these tasks were passed on to Bao's then 15-year-old sister when she left for the United States.

Bao said that she and all the siblings were very close ("gần gũi") when they were young as well as now. She explained the interdependence: "Because the family was in difficult [economic] circumstances, so the siblings had to love and cover for one

another.”¹²¹ She had some authority over her siblings. Bao mentioned in particular that her authority over her 19-year-old brother, who was two years younger than she, was often interfered with by her mother that she did not have the necessary authority and could not verbally censure him (“la nó”). One time her brother did not do his chores as mother designated; Bao was angry at him but could not yell at him so she cried. This indicated that she expected to have authority over him.

Asked if she saw them as her friends, she said:

No. That is just the sibling bond (tình ch, em) and not friends,...I think its different from friends. [INTERVIEWER: different in what way?] Well, I love them more, I care about them more, I talk to them more about the family. As for friends, I think I never reveal anything about the family. With friends, [I] talk about school-related topics only...

In addition to her responsibilities with the younger siblings, Bao, assuming the role of eldest sister, cared for the entire family:

Bao: In our Vietnam, for the majority, it's the eldest sister who experiences the much more hardship (“cực”) than the other siblings. They are more carefree. It's comfortable for them, but for the eldest sister, she is always burdened (“khổ”);¹²² for example, caring for father and mother and the siblings, think about more things.

Interviewer: miss Bao feel you were one of those people?

Bao: Yes, very much like that. For example, sometimes, I felt the family's financial situation was in difficulty, so I'd go to work. Then I'd hear [of the news] that my younger brother also went to work, then I'd feel “deeply sympathetic” (“đau lòng”)¹²³ inside. I'd say, why not rather let just me endure the hardship; I'd would not have the heart to see my younger brother, the family [endure hardship]. It's my affection that I love him. I sympathize for him (“tội nghiệp nó”)...., my personality is that I often cry. Cry in a sympathetic way.

¹²¹ ~...tại vì hoàn cảnh đời đó khó khăn chị em phải thương yêu nhau đùm bọc...”

¹²² The Vietnamese word “khổ” in this context may not have all the connotations of the English word “burden.”

¹²³ This word means “to grieve, to be sore at heart” (Nguyen Anh Dung et al., 1998), connoting sympathy in this context.

Truc described this love/caring for family as “without bounds” (“vô bờ bến”) and continued to this day even though she is now married and living far away from her parents:

...Well, I like to care for father and mother. It really depends on each person's personality. As for me, even though I have a [separate] family already, I still miss father and mother very much, still caring for the family and siblings.

Significantly, Bao justified that burden on the basis of her being eldest sister, which she understood as a shared condition and accepted that role.

The preceding description indicates that Bao was highly concerned about her siblings and the welfare of her family. However, Bao's experiences were embedded within the family hierarchy which locates all family members according to ascribed statuses.

She and her younger siblings addressed one another with “elder sister” and “younger sibling” which identify where each person is in the family hierarchy and how to relate to one another. She said, “[The youngest sibling] addresses elder sister two, elder brother three,...[she] does not call [the next one] elder sister four, but elder sister Thi only.” Sometimes, she used “mày/tao” (assertive way of addressing oneself) with her siblings when she was angry at them. This suggests that the ranks of *chị/em* (“elder sister”/ “younger sibling”) have specific contents, including bonding between elder sister and younger sibling and the respect and authority prescribed to each status. Although Bao is the oldest in family, she is *em* (younger sibling) to an older cousin, whose relationship with her she described as, “Also good. [We] still address each other ‘elder

brother and 'younger sibling.'" She said she would help him if necessary. This address pattern was more formal when it was carried over into her husband family where she now lives.

The intergenerational boundaries in Bao's family were clear. Although Bao also loved her father, she was closer to her mother: "Mother punished a lot or a little, [I] don't care; I still love mother the most,... Mother and I are woman [i.e., as different from opposite sex]." Bao shared her thoughts and feelings with her mother "like a friend," and "[I] don't hide this or that," including the time when she first met her husband. Asked if she was equal ("bằng") to her mother, she replied:

Friends means that I could share thoughts, but that person is still my mother, I still respect ("kính trọng"). I still respect but I share thoughts and tell for mother to hear. Mother would give her opinions like whether I should ...{unclear sound} [associate with a friend (?)], how is that person... I see that she is mother and respect her and so on, and not thinking of her like friends and do whatever... With mother it's different because mother gave birth to us; with friends we are just like one another.

Being close to them does not mean that she is always casual to them:

For example, with maternal aunt, I still play and kid around, talk to her, but if there is something important then I'd talk [formally] and not fool around.

That she must exhibit proper formalities or respect behaviors to adults ("lễ phép")¹²⁴ is revealed in her comparison to elder siblings:

Generally speaking, it's not *lễ phép*, but we still have to address "elder brother/sister" and "younger sibling" properly, and not calling each other "may/tao" or this or that girl. That's all.

¹²⁴ This expression usually refers to respect behaviors juniors have to exhibit to elders [usually of the parental generation].

In summary, in Bao's family even though she was involved in many caring/caretaking functions, as revealed by her attitude toward family members and the family in general, she located those functions under the institutionalized role of eldest sister, which is recognized, regulated, and rewarded by social norms. By justifying her duties as elder sister, she implicitly located herself within the family hierarchy which obligates everyone to act according to ascribed statuses. The rules that family members invoked to justify their behaviors serve to delineate the roles derived from each status and prevents general role rigidity.

The Role Of Eldest Sister-Case #2: Elder Aunt Hanh¹²⁵

Elder Aunt Hanh, 58, was the oldest of ten children, each separated by approximately two years of age. She had performed extensive instrumental and expressive functions during her adolescent and early adult years. She could clearly be categorized in the *adaptive parentification* category on Jurkovic's parentification scale based upon the the degree and extent of caretaking responsibilities.

Elder Aunt Hanh studied in Saigon for several years until Tenth Grade when she had to quit school at 14 and return home (in the countryside) to help her mother take care of the young siblings (her father had to go into hiding for reasons related to his work). Her mother was about to give birth to a new child. Elder Aunt Hanh described her daily

¹²⁵ Elder Aunt Hanh was in her advanced age at the time of the interview; she was not yet grandmother. There are several reason for highlighting her case 1) she recalled in vivid details her experience during her maturing years 2) it suits the purpose of this paper which aims at exploring certain features of the culture, such as how members interpret their reality, and not as much on ability to remember past experiences.

routines:

[I'd] Wash the dishes, sweep the floor, cook, carry water home from morning all the way to the afternoon... After cooking the food, [I] took care of (nuôi) mother, because mother was in labor so she was always in the bedroom. After cooking, [I'd] call them [the younger siblings] home to distribute a bowl of rice to each of them... After they had eaten, the elder ones carried the younger ones on the back and go played while I clean up, wash the dishes, sweep the floor, prepare meals for mother. Despite those circumstances, I was still able to raise (“nuôi”) the younger siblings.¹²⁶

The situation was “lamentable” (“bi đát”). However, Elder Aunt Hanh justified her extensive responsibilities:

Interviewer: ...elder aunt think that was a sacrifice, or that was a responsibility, or a burden, what did elder aunt think about that?

Elder aunt hanh: I thought “*quyền huynh thế phụ*,”¹²⁷ I substituted my father to take care of the younger siblings!... [I thought] the responsibility of an eldest sister caring for the younger siblings.

This statement indicates that although Elder Aunt Hanh substituted her father (“thay ba”) to care for the family, she saw the tasks as part of her role of eldest sister. And being able to fulfill those obligations was a joy for her:

Interviewer: that responsibility, elder aunt see it as a joy or a burden, or how did elder aunt think about that?

Elder aunt Hanh: I thought I substituted for my father; so, of course, I was happy!

Elder Aunt Hanh returned to Saigon at 17 to learn a trade because she thought “*nhất nghệ tinh nhất thân vinh*” (“If one specializes in a trade and become good at it, then he/she will have a good life”). One year later she returned home and worked as a seamstress to care for the siblings and support their schooling. She became the main

¹²⁶ Rửa chén, quét nhà, nấu cơm, gánh nước từ sáng tới chiều luôn; ... nấu cơm xong rồi nuôi mẹ nữa tại mẹ bác sanh thì mẹ bác ở trong phòng sanh hà, nấu cơm xong rồi gọi nó về ăn cơm để phát mỗi đứa một chén cơm; ...ăn uống xong rồi ấy, thì đứa lớn cố gắng đưa nhỏ đi chơi thì bác lại dọn dẹp rửa chén quét nhà lo cơm cho mẹ bác ăn; bác vậy mà bác cũng vẫn nuôi được mấy đứa em; ...”

¹²⁷ “Elder brother takes father’s place in his absence.”

source of economic support while her mother cooked and provided basic needs. But her tasks were not less difficult than before. In accordance with her understanding about education, Elder Aunt Hanh (who considered her family ``phong kiến``¹²⁸) made sure that the male siblings finish (formal) education while girls who stayed home were trained in *công dung ngôn hạnh* (manual skills, proper appearance, proper language, proper manners). Again, she justified her responsibilities with *quyền huynh thế phụ*.

Then, educating them was most important... When they were young they did not need much [formal] education. When they were young, I only had to care about feeding them and putting them to bed and so on; forbidding them from climbing trees. When they were grown-up, then I was worked out by them (“mệt với chúng nó”). My father was already away from the family, so I “*quyền huynh thế phụ*” substituted father to educate them; that was tiresome... During the time she [one of the younger sisters] went to school, I encouraged her, then I acted in place of my father to talk sweetly to get her to go to school.

Elder Aunt Hanh spoke of feeling “*yên phận*” (feeling content having completed a duty) that she had married¹²⁹ three of her younger sisters to “educated” people. Only after her brother had graduated from college did she herself get married at the age of thirty-two. Reflecting on her accomplishments, she was thankful that she had completed her duties (“*đã hoàn tất công việc*”), which she understood as “*trả hiếu với cha mẹ*” (“to fulfil filial obligations”).

While she had performed extensive caretaking functions, duties not different from her parents, her understanding of family relations is not one of being “parent to” her siblings or her mother. For example, on the basis of being *chị* (elder sister), Elder Aunt

¹²⁸ This term means of or related to the feudal period. Elder Aunt Hanh meant to contrast the “traditional” view of education and today’s view.

¹²⁹ Her mother was probably the main person to do this, so this action indicates that Elder Aunt Hanh was actively involved in making decisions related to her sisters’ marriage.

Hanh could expect her sisters' male friends to pay her due respect:

[I] was just being normal [courteous] to see if people [coming to visit her family] greeted me, to see if people respect me as an elder sister or not. It is not acceptable that people would come, talk to my younger siblings and look down [or ignore] me.

The justification of her being elder sister meant that she was subordinate to her cousins, whom she also addressed as "elder brother/sister." The sibling authority structure was linearly vertical from the youngest to the oldest, which Elder Aunt Hanh described as "systematic." She explained:

"Younger sibling" and "elder sibling," entirely; [they] don't address one another by first names- "elder brother two," "elder brother five," "elder sister five," elder brother six," "elder sister seven," and so on... The system was like that... For example, the sixth sibling would listen/obey the fifth one. But my mother saw things this way, one who is born an hour ahead is still smarter. Mother said that.

Because experience is based on age, Elder aunt Hanh treated family members based on their ascribed statuses. This rule also applied to non-kin elders. She said:

...even people outside the family, too. Whoever is older than us, they are still smarter than us...experience or knowing life's ins and outs, and so on.

The intergenerational statuses are not alterable by other symbols of power or achievement:

'Status' ("địa vị") refers to knowledge. That is, when we self-address "child" ("con") with people, we think their knowledge is greater than us; so, we need to learn from them. That is how it is, and it's not having more money or social status.... I value their age. As for status associated with careers, it is not relevant.

Elder Aunt Hanh saw mother as much older than herself. Based upon age, her mother had a specific, irreconcilable status in the family hierarchy (following page):

Interviewer: hmm, so, equal, closer than friends...

Elder aunt hanh: her position of power is that of mother. She gave birth to us [since] several decades already, having more experience than us.

The exception to the rule of status based on age for some non-kin elders with respect to her mother indicated her mother's status:

For example, if that female guest were older than our mother; when we eat meals, we have to invite mother first, then invite that female guest, because my mother is the eldest in the family, the head of the household.

Importantly, her mother's status was not achieved in a system of ascribed statuses. Her status is part of the prescribed mother-child relation that structured their positions:

"When self-addressing 'child,' I see that my status is on a par with the facing person." {Elder Aunt Hanh read an item from the questionnaire} No! I am a child [in relation to the opposing person] so I am already below.

Therefore, in this respect she cannot be parent to her mother, even when she was caring for her during her pregnancies. For the same reason, she could not stand in a parent relation to her younger siblings by virtue of all the caretaking she had done for them.

The status hierarchy was also apparent in seating arrangement during family occasions:¹³⁰

I and my younger brother-in-law sat together on one table, and the other junior members sat together in another table, then the children of those children sat on the floor.

The status hierarchy also applied more generally to Elder Aunt Hanh's extended family. Elder Aunt Hanh recounted one time during a family get-together (following page):

¹³⁰ This should be seen in light of the fact that Elder Aunt Hanh described her family as somewhat "phong kiến" (literally, of or related to the feudal period), implying formality and strictness in her family.

{in soft voice} my younger brother-in-law was a professor. My son was sitting on a level below, and I was sitting with him and his wife. He brought over a glass of wine to toast to him but he immediately faulted him: "I only drink with your father, and I don't drink wine with you."

Vietnamese *ca dao/tục ngữ* proverbs also expresses this order of separation between the young and the old:

<i>Đòng đòng theo đạo đòng đòng, trẻ vui đạo trẻ già dong đạo già.</i>
(little đòng đòng fish follow the way of little đòng đòng fish) (youngsters have fun in their own way, the elders elders')

Of the place of each family member, Elder Aunt Hanh said, "Whoever is elder has to comport like an elder, and whoever is a junior has to comport like a junior."¹³¹

In summary, Elder Aunt Hanh justified the extensive caring/caretaking functions which she had performed during her adolescent years on the basis of eldest sister, and it is from her location in the family hierarchy that she made sense of her experiences and related to other members, including her mother who clearly occupied a higher status in the family hierarchy.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT / DISCUSSION

The above presentation makes several points. First, instrumental and expressive functions are highly institutionalized as duties of children and siblings in Vietnamese families. Caring/caretaking roles are institutionalized insofar as 1) they are prescribed

¹³¹ "Đứa nào lớn thì nó ra lớn, mà đứa nào nhỏ thì nó ra nhỏ chứ."

into the definition of a dutiful child, 2) they are obligatory, and 3) they are established early and develop gradually. These tasks are not merely obligations as shared burdens that have to be done. Instead, the performance of family duties constitutes fulfillment of expected roles and merit public acknowledgement as reward.

The children's motivation in caring for their family members is located within these institutionalized obligations. The psychological certainty derived from knowing that one is doing something acknowledged in society has an enormous effect on burden perceived and its effect on stress, one of the parameters of parentification in the literature. Further, one function of the institutionalized character of caring/caretaking roles is that they are less likely to be subject to personal interpretations of when they are counted as obligations and when not. Changeable interpretations would increase susceptibility to stress when one's caring/caretaking extends into uncertainty by the lack of recognition in the family and in the society at large.

Two other major features were identified as factors that could affect perceived burden in the performance of caring/caretaking duties. First, because Vietnamese children are taught of their parents' vast labor and sacrifices, their caring/caretaking functions are interpreted as reciprocal acts toward their parents, as reflected in the language of "trả hiếu" (to affirm indebtedness to one's parents). If so, then the same level or proportion of caring/caretaking tasks performed by children in Vietnamese families are not comparable to similar proportions performed by children in Western/American families; and therefore, it does not have consequences for parentification as it would for Western/American families.

Second, caring/caretaking functions do not reverse the family hierarchy; instead, they are organized along institutionalized statuses that constitute the family hierarchy. The stable family hierarchy also serves as a buffer against the influence of externalities such as personal resources gained and lost that could affect family relations. Not only does it function as a source of security in coordinating family behaviors, it also facilitates the evaluation of obligation and merit by providing a scale of relative responsibilities based on where each is located in the family order.

Chase (1999) interprets parentification as involving role reversal and sacrifice. First, the connection between parentification and role reversal appears to be located in a very specific context. Looking from a cross-cultural perspective, parentification, as Winton (informal discussion) suggested, could be an Indo-European concept in which caring/caretaking for family members is a "one-way," non-reciprocal relationship in which children do not, or are not expected to, care for their parents.¹³² If that is the case, it sheds light upon why caring/caretaking roles assumed by children are linked to parentification as children being parents to their parents. The link is that because caring/caretaking functions were primarily understood as responsibility or domains exclusive of parents, children who perform the same functions would be parentified by virtue of assuming the caring/caretaking roles.

Second, parentification involves role reversal that is coupled with burden and sacrifice. That is, the role reversal in children's assumptions of parental/parentified roles is burdensome, which may be due to a one-way, non-reciprocal parent-child relationship.

¹³² In light of the rapid social changes, this statement may refer to only the past century or so.

The burden is increased when children are not adequately prepared for caring/caretaking roles. In addition, that burden is greater when their contributions are not acknowledged by family members or the society at large.

For Vietnamese families, as for Asian families in general, caring/caretaking functions are prescribed and institutionalized into the status of children and siblings so that these relations are two-way relations which were established in childhood. In the Vietnamese family system, children are encouraged to care about and care for their families as much as possible, whereas in Western/Indo-European families reciprocal caring/caretaking relations are not as clearly institutionalized;¹³³ and it is caretaking without adult guidance or public recognition that puts the child in further stress.

If prescribed into the definition of "dutiful" child is the caring, helping, supporting of parents and other family members, then how can a child be parentified by that very process of role fulfillment which makes a child a dutiful child? In the context where caring/caretaking functions are prescribed into the duties of children early on, the concept of role reversal is only a description of a social configuration that may have no implications for pathology as they do in the context of Western/Indo-European family structures with one-way, non-reciprocal parent-child caring/caretaking relationships. In Vietnamese/Asian families, caring/caretaking roles do not contain the potential for pathogenicity, as is implied in the original formulation of the construct in mainstream literature. When caring/caretaking functions and authority are prescribed into the status of sibling or child, it is unnecessary to reclassify them into parental domains. Then,

¹³³ This is probably a class-specific model, i.e., it may not apply to all Western/Indo-European families.

whether we use the label "parental/parentified" or not becomes more an issue of semantics or theoretical orientation than an issue of what in actuality is the case.

It is conceivable to argue along the following line: role reversal/parentification goes on in Vietnamese/Asian families but that it is generally of a healthy kind, due to a high degree of acknowledgement and support by family members. Nevertheless, a contention is made here that in family structures with one-way parent-child caring/caretaking structure, role reversal takes on a specific meaning inextricable from its context, different from one in the context of family structures with two-way caring/caretaking relations. In mainstream literature, parentification has been conceptualized in the specific context of family structures with one-way caring/caretaking relations. Models that have been proposed to-date are based upon the interpretation that role reversal/parentification is necessary and healthy in moderate levels (e.g., Jurkovic 1997; Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark 1973; Karpel 1976), but that too much of it leads to destructive parentification. According to current models, contained within healthy forms of parentification is the potential for pathology; that is, its healthy forms are continuous with destructive forms of role reversal/parentification. Specifically, the difference between these two types appears to be a difference of degree.¹³⁴

That continuity, exemplified by Jurkovic's (1997) parentification continuum, does not thoroughly hold in family structures with reciprocal, two-way caring/caretaking relations, such as those found in Vietnamese/Asian families where children are actively encouraged to care for their families as much as possible.

¹³⁴ There are many permutations that can be derived from Jurkovic's nine parameters which would produce a wide array of small increments of parentification "units."

One implication is that classifying them as parental/parentified may subject them to treatments that are not appropriate for them. In treating families of different cultures, it is important to be attuned to the particular ways family members structure their experiences. For example, Anderson's (1999) observation that interdependence in African-American families could be misinterpreted as enmeshment (with connotation of pathology) may also apply to the context of Vietnamese/Asian families. As another example, because children in Vietnamese families are taught to be concerned for their families, their caring/caretaking concerns could be misinterpreted as an excessive caretaking or nonindividuation, two diagnoses that may subject the children to treatments that may not be congruent with the way they understand their family experiences.

Along with many rapid social changes in Western/American society, the family no longer has clear roles for children. In comparing adolescent tasks of other less industrialized societies, Minuchin (1974) observed, "Western society does not have clearly differentiated functions for adolescents. When the family releases its children, it releases them to inadequate supporting systems...adolescent crises of identity have resulted in a number of antinomian social phenomena" (p. 50). Therefore, for Euro-American children who assume too much or inappropriate responsibilities, they may need a different kind of support and guidance, one where parents, siblings, as well as other relatives need to provide continuing guidance and support as well as realigning proper limits and boundaries for all family members. For Vietnamese/Asian children, mutual obligations that reinforce the parent-child bond, or family bond in general, is the primary assumption in realigning family relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study accommodates to current paradigms of parentification in the sense that it employs variables in the relevant literature. The advantage of using similar dimensions is that we can better see how different family structures and systems directly compare to one another. However, these dimensions or parameters may or may not be relevant for analyzing Vietnamese/Asian families. The hypotheses generated by this exploratory investigation reflects some major differences between Vietnamese and Western/American family systems that can open new areas for future research. However, it is important to note here that although an indirect comparison is made between Vietnamese/Asian family structures and Western/American family structures, the sample from which data were drawn is different from families studied in the parentification literature which predominantly had a disorganized family structure.

Future research can compensate for the limitations of this study. First, this study only explored the views and experiences of one individual as a child or sibling (not parent) which may only be a partial account of his/her family. More in-depth studies of individuals as well as whole families as systems would contribute to a better understanding of Vietnamese families. Second, the family hierarchy and family loyalty were only explored as general features and, thus, were not explored in greater depth. Only general rules and norms were explored, which is different from what family members actually do. Third, variations, e.g., of the family hierarchy, were not explored; exceptions and disconfirming cases were not explored. Fourth, the findings on sibling relationships might apply only to large families.

The small interview sample for qualitative data could be enlarged to further confirm or qualify the findings in this study. It could be enlarged to cover other populations with different demographic backgrounds, including age, social class, and level of education. This investigation only studied more or less functional families. Future research can explore families with conflicts, long-term caretaking in Vietnamese families, single parent families or families without parents, families with drug addiction or other chemical dependencies, and families with economic hardship.

The final set of hypotheses, while representing the best statement of the data, remains hypotheses to be verified in future research in those different contexts so that we may obtain a better understanding of caring/caretaking functions in Vietnamese families and Western/American families and how they interrelate with each other.

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APPENDIX A

(Sample interview questions)

Topics covered in the interviews were grouped into several broad areas:

- A) Family duties, e.g., chores, caretaking/caring functions
 - c) Dao is the oldest in the family; Can Dao describe the daily activities from morning to evening?
 - d) Can elder sister tell who cooked and prepared meals, [when] most of the siblings went to school?

- B) Siblings' relations to one another, e.g., authority, conflict resolution, bonding
 - c) Duyen mentioned briefly about your siblings, can you share in general the relationships with your siblings?
 - d) Has your [younger] brother ever talked back to (cãi lại) you?

- C) Parent-child relation e.g., emotional distance, respect behaviors
 - c) How is that love shown? That is, you know that your mother loves you, right?
 - d) Is there a difference between 'ừ' and 'ạ'?¹³⁵

- D) Relations with relatives, e.g., differences in intergenerational relating (cousins and aunts/uncles), obligations toward more distant kin.
 - c) So, Thong can talk to them in a close manner like with your friends?
 - d) If these aunts and uncles are poor, Uncle would feel that Uncle have to help financially?

- E) *Hiếu nghĩa* ("filial piety") and family bonding
 - c) ...item 36 [in the survey] [refers to the lesson] "Father's labor is like Thai Son Mountain..." Elder sister still remember!
 - d) Now living here, do elder sister [you] still support ('lo') your father and mother over there [in Vietnam]?

¹³⁵ These are two forms of acknowledgement: one for elders, one for equals or subordinates.

APPENDIX B
(Sample Translations)

SAMPLE TRANSLATIONS

Sample #1

Phon: Hồi trước khi cha đi học tập cải tạo thì không có làm cái đó [buôn bán giày dép], hồi trước thì mình chỉ cần phụ buôn bán, đi mua đồ cho mẹ, rồi còn chuyện nhà thì mình lo, rồi chủ yếu là, với lại lo cho anh em; khi sau này thì mình ở nhà làm thêm một cái kinh doanh nhỏ nhỏ đó, thì nó cũng thêm busy [English] này nọ.... chị cũng có phụ chuyện nhà vậy nhưng mà mấy cái chuyện nhiều khi giặt quần áo, lâu lâu cũng có, rửa bát không biết có nên nói ra không, cái đó tự nhiên bình thường thôi. (p.2)

Phon: Before when father went to the re-education camps, I did not do that [selling footwear]. Before, I only had to help sell, buy merchandise for mother, and the house tasks I took care of them, and care for the siblings. Later, I stayed home to run a small business so I got busy [English]...eldest sister also helped with the house tasks, but things like washing clothes, I did them occasionally, washed the dishes, don't know if I should mention them. Those were natural, just normal. (p.2)

Sample #2

Tho: Nói chung ấy, gia đình nhỏ của mình thôi, thì cũng tôn trọng mà cũng nghe lời chứ không phải là người này nói người kia không nghe, cũng là anh em, cũng biết nhường nhịn nhau, cũng có vâng lời nhau, chứ hổng phải là sống mà không có tính cách trên dưới. Cho nên những cái gì phải là cũng là vâng lời thôi. (p.17)

Tho: Generally speaking, with regard to our small [nuclear] family only, [we] still respect and listen, and not that if one person talks the other does not listen; we are still elder sibling, younger sibling; [we] understand that we have to yield to one another, listen to one another, and it's not the case that [we live] without a thinking of people above and people below. That is why whatever is right, then [one] has to listen. (p.17)

Sample #3

Khue: ...nói chung là ở trên vẫn phải tôn trọng là xưng kêu là anh chị, nhưng mà những đứa dưới thì vẫn có thể đôi khi bực mình đó thì vẫn nói là mày tao {cười hơi},... (p.11)

Khue: generally speaking, [we] have to respect (ton trọng) by addressing [them] 'elder brother,' 'elder sister'' but to the younger siblings, [we] still can, sometimes when we are upset, call [them] 'may/tao'. {light laugh} (p.11)

APPENDIX C
(Questionnaire Survey (Vietnamese))

Thăm Dò Về Mối Quan Hệ và Vai Trò Trong Gia Đình Trẻ Em Việt Nam

Thân gửi các bạn học sinh,

Tôi tên là Trương Anh Huy, hiện đang theo học Cao Học tại trường đại học San Jose State University, chuyên ngành về Xã Hội học. Hiện nay tôi đang tiến hành một đề tài nghiên cứu xem xét việc trẻ em Việt Nam lớn lên như thế nào trong gia đình Việt Nam. Là một phần trong gia đình dù là gia đình có một cha mẹ, hay gia đình truyền thống, gia đình trung lưu, hay những gia đình kiểu khác nào thì cũng thể hiện các vai trò cùng trách nhiệm đa dạng mà ảnh hưởng các mối quan hệ của cá nhân đối với các thành viên khác trong gia đình. Thêm nữa, sự di trú đã tác động rõ ràng đến cơ cấu gia đình Việt Nam, chẳng hạn như ở các mối quan hệ giữa người con và cha mẹ và anh chị em. Đây là một chủ đề tôi quan tâm đến rất nhiều. Chia sẻ kiến thức và kinh nghiệm của các bạn trong vấn đề này chắc chắn cái thiện đáng kể sự hiểu biết của chúng ta về các gia đình Việt Nam.

Tôi sẽ phát bằng các câu hỏi thăm dò. Tôi hy vọng có được sự tham gia của các bạn. Tất cả các tài liệu liên quan trong cuộc nghiên cứu này đều được bảo vệ kín đáo như theo các điều lệ của nhà trường đưa ra (Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board). Tên bạn sẽ không hiện trên bằng thăm dò. Toàn bộ mọi thông tin thu được sẽ được cất giữ tại bàn làm việc của tôi. Sau khi hoàn tất việc nghiên cứu này, tôi sẽ hủy những tên và mọi dấu hiệu xác nhận hoặc chỉ đến bạn trong bằng các câu hỏi thăm dò. Tên bạn, tên những người bạn đề cập đến, và tên trường của bạn, sẽ được thay đổi trong các bài viết hay được xuất bản.

Cuộc thăm dò này là tự nguyện. Từ chối không tham gia sẽ hoàn toàn không ảnh hưởng đến địa vị trong lớp học hay hoàn cảnh xã hội của bạn. Bạn có thể ngừng tham gia vào bất kỳ lúc nào. Những rủi ro liên quan đến cuộc nghiên cứu này rất nhỏ, không đáng kể, nhưng những kinh nghiệm mà bạn chia sẻ sẽ đóng góp rất nhiều cho sự hiểu biết của chúng ta về các gia đình người Việt. Tôi xin chân thành cảm ơn trước sự giúp đỡ của các bạn.

Bạn có thể liên lạc với tôi qua số điện thoại 297-0715 hay qua e-mail: anhhuyl@yahoo.com. Nếu bạn muốn phản nản gì về bất kỳ khía cạnh nào của cuộc thăm dò này, bạn có thể liên lạc với Giáo Sư Cher Winton (924-5320). Về các câu hỏi về quyền của người tham gia trong cuộc nghiên cứu hay trong trường hợp bị tổn thương do cuộc nghiên cứu này gây ra, bạn nên liên lạc với Tiến Sĩ Nabil Abraham, Phó Chủ Tịch Cao Học và Nghiên Cứu (924-2480).

- Bằng cách điền vào bản thăm dò này, bạn đã chứng tỏ đồng ý rằng bạn đã được giải đáp tất cả các câu hỏi về cuộc nghiên cứu này, và bạn vui lòng tham gia.
- Chữ ký của người tiến hành cuộc nghiên cứu này trong đơn này đã chứng tỏ có sự đồng ý để bao gồm người tham gia trong cuộc nghiên cứu và chứng thực rằng người tham gia đã được thông báo đầy đủ về các quyền của mình.

Chữ ký của người nghiên cứu)

(Ngày tháng)

Trương Anh Huy
Tên của người nghiên cứu)

CÔNG VIỆC GIA ĐÌNH- BẢN THÂN

#

Trong lúc lớn lên bạn đã làm những công việc gì trong gia đình, chẳng hạn như quét dọn, giúp công việc làm ăn của cha mẹ, v.v.?

12-15 tuổi (lớp 6-9): _____

16-18 tuổi (lớp 10-12): _____

Trên 18 tuổi: _____

CÔNG VIỆC GIA ĐÌNH- MỌI NGƯỜI

Những câu sau đây nói về thời bạn đang lớn lên (thời trung học). Ai làm những công việc trong gia đình dưới đây?

(Xin đánh dấu "x" hoặc khoanh tròn vào các ô thích hợp chỉ đến những người làm công việc đó)

VIỆC LÀM

1. Trông nom các em
2. Giặt giũ, quét dọn, v.v.
3. Nấu ăn, chợ búa
4. Cung cấp lợi tức cho gia đình
5. Thủ ngân sách gia đình
6. Kỷ luật anh chị em
7. Quyết định những việc quan trọng ảnh hưởng đến gia đình
8. Ủng hộ tinh thần khi có người bệnh
9. Giải quyết vấn đề của anh chị em
10. Tâm sự với tôi
11. Động viên mọi người khi gia đình có một vấn đề gì
12. Chăm lo cho cha vừa đi làm về
13. Chăm sóc mẹ khi mẹ ốm đau
14. Chăm sóc ông bà
15. Giúp công việc làm ăn của cha mẹ
16. Việc khác- xin nêu rõ: _____
17. Việc khác- xin nêu rõ: _____

NGƯỜI LÀM

cha	mẹ	anh chị	tôi	em	đi, cậu, thím, bác, v.v	ông bà nội/ ngoại	người khác- xin nêu rõ:	Ngoài hoàn cảnh của tôi
(ch)	(m)	(ach)	(t)	(e)	(dc)	(ob)		(o)
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n
ch	m	ach	t	e	dc	ob		n

KINH NGHIỆM TRONG GIA ĐÌNH

Xin đánh dấu “x” hoặc khoanh tròn vào ô thích hợp phản ánh đúng mức độ đồng ý/không đồng ý của bạn về những điều dưới đây. Không có trả lời nào đúng hay sai. Ý kiến dựa trên kinh nghiệm của bạn mới có giá trị hơn. Những câu dưới đây nói về kinh nghiệm của bạn trong thời trưởng thành hoặc hiện nay.

	rất đồng ý	đồng ý	không biết/ không chắc	không đồng ý	hoàn toàn không đồng ý	Ngoài hoàn cảnh của tôi
	(rđ)	(đ)	(kb/kc)	(kd)	(hkđ)	(n)
1. Đối với các anh chị em cùng phái tính, công việc gia đình được phân chia công bằng theo tuổi tác	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
2. Nhiệm vụ của tôi ngày càng nhiều hơn	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
3. Trong các anh chị em ruột, tôi gọi những người lớn tuổi hơn tôi bằng “anh/chị”	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
4. Trong các anh chị em ruột, tôi xưng em đối với những người lớn tuổi hơn tôi	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
5. Tôi phải nghiêm chỉnh với các anh chị tôi	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
6. Tôi phải nghiêm chỉnh với cha mẹ hơn là với các anh chị tôi	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
7. Tôi phải nghiêm chỉnh với chú, dì, cậu, mợ, và những người lớn khác trong gia đình hơn là đối với các anh chị họ	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
8. Khi xưng con, tôi thấy địa vị của mình ngang hàng với người đối diện	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
9. Khi xưng em với anh, chị, tôi cảm thấy mình ở cấp bậc thấp hơn	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
10. Khi xưng cô/chú, tôi cảm thấy mình ở một cấp bậc cao, tương tự như một người lớn đối với một người trẻ	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
11. Bình thường, gọi một người khác em hoặc anh/chị tôi cảm thấy thân thuộc và gần gũi với người đó hơn	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
12. Khi một người nhỏ hơn gọi tôi bằng “anh/chị” và xưng em tôi thấy người em đó ở bậc dưới tôi	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
13. Khi gọi một người khác lớn hơn mình cô/chú, tôi cảm thấy mình ở một địa vị thấp hơn	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
14. Giữ vai trên nghĩa là tôi phải chịu trách nhiệm nhiều và bảo vệ những người dưới tôi trong gia đình	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
15. Giữ vai trên nghĩa là tôi phải nhường cho những người dưới tôi	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
16. Giữ vai dưới như một người em hoặc con nghĩa là phải biết lễ phép và kính trọng người lớn hơn mình	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n
17. Một đứa trẻ không lễ phép cũng không sao	rđ	đ	kb/kc	kd	hkđ	n

29. Tôi lo nghĩ đến các anh chị em của tôi
30. Tôi lo nghĩ đến mẹ tôi
31. Tôi lo nghĩ đến cha tôi
18. Tôi tỏ tình cảm đối với những người trong gia đình lớn hơn tôi một cách khác biệt so với những người ngang hàng hoặc nhỏ hơn tôi
19. Trong số các anh chị em ruột, có một người nắm uy quyền nhiều hơn hết
20. Thà nghe lời người trên mình còn hơn là tự mình làm mà có thể làm sai
21. Bây giờ các anh chị em ruột đã lớn rồi thì những người em không còn phải lễ phép với các anh chị nữa
22. Gia đình tôi như là một đội mà cha hoặc mẹ tôi là đội trưởng và mọi thành viên đều bình đẳng với nhau
23. Tôi xem các cô/chú/dì/cậu ruột như là bạn tôi và có thể trò chuyện hoặc chơi với họ một cách thoải mái
24. Nếu tôi không đồng ý với cha về việc gì, tôi sẽ nói với cha tại sao sai để cha có thể thay đổi
25. Nếu tôi không đồng ý với mẹ về việc gì, tôi sẽ nói với mẹ tại sao sai để mẹ có thể thay đổi
26. Các anh chị ruột cùng phái tính có nhiều tự do hơn tôi
42. Cha mẹ quyết định những việc quan trọng cho tôi trong lúc tôi đang trưởng thành
27. Càng lớn hơn thì tôi có thêm tự do để tự mình quyết định
44. Tôi muốn nghe ý kiến của một người khác để tôi có được một quyết định tốt hơn
32. Các anh chị em ruột lo nghĩ đến tôi
33. Mẹ lo nghĩ đến tôi
34. Cha lo nghĩ đến tôi
35. Trách nhiệm của người con đối với cha mẹ không còn quan trọng nữa khi tôi đã trở thành người lớn
36. Tôi có thể lặp lại bài học "Cổng cha như núi Thái Sơn..."

45. Tôi thường không thích tự quyết định về những vấn đề quan trọng vì mình có thể sẽ làm sai
37. Giờ đã lớn hơn trước, tôi không còn gắn bó với gia đình nữa
38. Gia đình quan trọng, nhưng tôi phải lo cho tôi trước đã
39. Giờ thì đã trên 18 tuổi rồi, tôi muốn ở xa gia đình để tôi có thể có một cuộc sống tự do và độc lập
40. Tôi tuân lời mẹ
41. Tôi tuân lời cha
47. Cố gắng để đạt được nhiều thành tích cho mình trong việc làm là quan trọng nhất cho dù thường khi trái ngược với đạo đức
43. Tôi là người tự lực
46. Chữ hiếu không còn quan trọng nữa khi đã sống ở Mỹ

rất đồng ý	đồng ý	không biết/ không chắc	không đồng ý	hoàn toàn không đồng ý	Ngoài hoàn cảnh của tôi
(rđ)	(đ)	(kb/kc)	(kđ)	(hkđ)	(n)
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n
rđ	đ	kb/kc	kđ	hkđ	n

SƠ LƯỢC CÁ NHÂN

Xin trả lời bằng cách điền vào khoảng trống hoặc đánh dấu "x" vào ô thích hợp.

1. Tuổi lúc tới rời Việt Nam: _____
2. Số năm sinh sống tại Mỹ: _____
3. Tuổi bây giờ: _____
4. Giới tính: ☐ nam ☐ nữ
5. Ngôn ngữ thường dùng trong nhà: ☐ tiếng Việt ☐ tiếng Anh ☐ ngôn ngữ khác
6. Trong thời lớn lên (trung học) tôi ở với (đánh dấu "x" vào các ô thích hợp):
☐ cha và mẹ
☐ cha thôi
☐ mẹ thôi
☐ người lớn khác- xin nêu rõ: _____
7. Xin cho biết tuổi và giới tính (nam/nữ) của anh chị em ruột:
 _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ)
 _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ) _____ (nam/nữ)
8. Khi còn ở Việt Nam gia đình tôi sống tại: ☐ thành phố ☐ thị trấn/xã ☐ thôn quê
9. Ở Việt Nam gia đình tôi sinh sống bằng:
 (thí dụ: chủ cơ sở làm ăn, quét dọn, giáo chức, nội trợ, v.v.) _____
10. Số năm học cha đã hoàn tất (thí dụ: hoàn tất cấp ba trung học = 12 năm): _____
11. Số năm học mẹ đã hoàn tất (thí dụ: hoàn tất cấp ba trung học = 12 năm): _____
12. Hiện nay, bạn đang ở với ai? (đánh dấu "x" vào các ô thích hợp):
 Cha ☐ có ☐ không; hiện cha đang sống tại:
 → ☐ Việt Nam ☐ Mỹ
 → Tôi gặp cha trung bình: ☐ mỗi ngày ☐ mỗi tuần ☐ mỗi tháng
 ☐ mỗi 6 tháng ☐ mỗi năm ☐ trên một năm
- Mẹ ☐ có ☐ không; hiện mẹ đang sống tại:
 → ☐ Việt Nam ☐ Mỹ
 → Tôi gặp mẹ trung bình: ☐ mỗi ngày ☐ mỗi tuần ☐ mỗi tháng
 ☐ mỗi 6 tháng ☐ mỗi năm ☐ trên một năm
- Ông bà nội/ngoại ☐ có ☐ không
- Anh chị em ruột ☐ có ☐ không
- Vợ/chồng ☐ có ☐ không
- Các con ☐ có ☐ không
 → số con đang cùng ở với bạn: _____
- Sống với những người khác- xin nêu rõ: _____

#

Nếu không là vấn đề, tôi xin có được một cuộc phỏng vấn với bạn để hiểu biết thêm về kinh nghiệm của bạn trong gia đình. Cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được thực hiện ở địa điểm và thời giờ thuận tiện cho bạn. Xin ghi lại tên và phương tiện liên lạc dưới đây. Cuộc phỏng vấn kéo dài khoảng một tiếng đồng hồ.

Tên: _____
Số điện thoại: _____
hoặc e-mail: _____

Cảm ơn sự tham gia của bạn

Xin dùng khoảng trống dưới đây để ghi xuống những ý kiến về các mối quan hệ và vai trò đối với cha mẹ và anh chị em trong gia đình.

APPENDIX D
Questionnaire Survey (English translation)

College of Social Sciences • Department of Sociology • One Washington Square • San José, California 95192-0122 • 408/924-5320

SURVEY OF VIETNAMESE CHILDREN'S FAMILY ROLES AND RELATIONS

Dear student,

My name is Anh Huy Truong. I am a graduate student at San Jose State University in sociology. I am working on a research project that examines how Vietnamese children grow up in Vietnamese families. Being a part of a single parent family, a traditional family, a middle class family, or other arrangements embodies varying roles and responsibilities, which affect one's relations with other family members. Further, migration has clearly affected the family unit, such as relations between children and parents and siblings. I am very interested in this topic which we know very little about. Sharing your knowledge and experiences will significantly improve understanding of Vietnamese families.

I will administer a survey questionnaire. Your participation would be very much appreciated. All records are held strictly confidential according to university regulations as specified by the Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board. Your name will not appear on the survey. All information gathered will be locked in my office desk. Upon completion of the study, I will destroy all personal identifiers related to the survey questionnaires. Your name, the names you mention, and the name of your school will be changed in any written or published material.

The survey is voluntary. Declining to participate will in no way affect your status in your classes or life situations. You may terminate participation at any time. The risk involved in the study is minimal, but your experiences will be an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Vietnamese families. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

I may be reached at 297-0715 or via email: anhhuyl@yahoo.com. Should you wish to complain about any aspect of the survey, please contact Professor Chet Winton (924-5320). For questions about research subjects' rights or in the event of any research-related injury, please contact Dr. Nabil Ibrahim, the Associate Vice President of Graduate Studies and Research (924-2480).

- By filling out this survey, you agreed that all your questions have been answered, and that you are a willing participant of this study.
- The signature of a researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the participant in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his or her rights.

(signature of researcher)

(date)

Anhhuy Truong
(name of researcher)

FAMILY DUTIES- SELF

1. What were the main duties you did in your family while growing up, for example, house chores, family business, take care of siblings, etc.?

Age 12-15 (6th-9th Grade):

Age 16-18 (10th-12th Grade):

Over 18 years old:

FAMILY DUTIES- EVERYONE

The following questions refer to the time when you were growing up (middle to high school years). Who did each of the following task in your family? (Please check or circle all appropriate boxes)

TASKS

1. Took care of younger siblings
2. Performed house chores: clean house, etc.
3. Cooked, went grocery shopping
4. Provided income for the family
5. Managed the family budget
6. Disciplined siblings
7. Made major family decisions
8. Provided emotional support when there was a sick family member
9. Resolved sibling conflicts/issues
10. Shared thoughts with me
11. Cheered up family members when there was a problem
12. Cared for father when he came home from work
13. Cared for mother when she was sick
14. Cared for grandparents
15. Helped with father and mother's business
16. Other- please specify: _____
17. Other- please specify: _____

father	Mother	Elder Siblings	Myself	Younger siblings	Aunts/uncles	Grand-parents	Other-please specify:	Not applicable
(f)	(m)	(es)	(m)	(ys)	(au)	(gp)		(n/a)
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a
f	m	es	m	ys	au	gp		n/a

FAMILY EXPERIENCES

Please circle or check to indicate the extent of your agreement/disagreement to the following statements. There are no right or wrong answers. It's your opinion that count. The following statements refer to your experiences while growing up or to the present.

1. For siblings of my sex, family duties were divided fairly by age
2. My duties increased as I got older
3. With siblings in the family, I address those older than me "elder brother/elder sister" ("anh/chị")
4. With siblings in the family, I address myself "younger sibling" ("em") to those older than me
5. I have to formal with my elder siblings
6. I have to be more formal with my parents than with my elder siblings
7. I have to be more formal with my aunts/uncles than with elder cousins
8. When addressing myself "child," (con) I see that my status as equal to the facing person
9. Addressing myself as "younger sibling" (em) to older siblings I feel like I have a lower rank
10. Addressing myself as "aunt/uncle" (cô/chú) I feel like I have a high rank, like an adult to a young person
11. Normally, addressing another person as "younger sibling" (em) or "elder sibling" (anh/chị) I feel closer with that person
12. When a youngster calls me "elder sibling" (anh/chị) and addresses him/herself "younger sibling," I see that that person has a lower rank than me
13. When calling someone older than me "cô/chú" I feel I have a lower status
14. Having a higher rank means I have to take more responsibilities and protect those younger than me in the family
15. Having a higher rank means I have to yield to the those younger than me
16. Having a lower rank, such as being younger sibling or child, means having to respect those older than me
17. It is okay that that a child does not show respect
29. I cared about my siblings
30. I cared about my mother
31. I cared about my father
18. I expressed love to my elder family members differently than to those younger than me

[illegible]

19. One of my older siblings had authority over other siblings
20. I'd rather listen and obey those above me than doing something by myself and risk making a mistake
21. Now that all siblings are adults, younger siblings don't have to show respect behaviors to older siblings anymore
22. My family was a team where my father or mother was the leader, and all members were equal
23. I considered my aunts or uncles as if they were my friends and I could talk and kidded around with them comfortably
24. If I disagreed with my father about something, I'd tell him why he was wrong so that he could change
25. If I disagreed with my mother about something, I'd tell her why she was wrong so that she could change
26. My elder siblings of my sex had more freedom than I
42. My parents made all important decisions for me when I was growing up
27. As I got older in the family, I had more freedom to make my own decisions
44. I prefer to hear another person's opinion so that I can make a better decision
32. My sibling(s) cared about me
33. My mother cared about me
34. My father cared about me
35. My obligations as a child to my parents were no longer important when I became an adult
36. I can recite completely the moral lesson "Father's labor is like Mt. Thai Son..."
45. I often don't like to decide something important myself because I might do it wrong
37. Now I'm older, I no longer have a strong attachment to my family
38. My family was important, but I had to take care of myself first
39. Now that I am over 18, I want to live away from family members so that I can live a free and independent life
40. I obeyed my mother
41. I obeyed my father
47. Trying to achieve in one's work is most important, even if they are often immoral
43. I'm a self-reliant person
46. Filial obligations are no longer important when one is already living in the U.S.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Please answer by writing in the blank space or select the choice that best describes your situation.

1. Age when I left Vietnam: _____
2. Number of years living in the U.S.: _____
3. Current age: _____
4. Sex: ☐ male ☐ female
5. Language spoken at home: ☐ Vietnamese ☐ English ☐ another language
6. While growing up(middle, high school) I lived with:
 - ☐ Father and mother
 - ☐ Father only
 - ☐ Mother only
 - ☐ Other people- please specify: _____
7. Please indicate the age and sex (M/F) of your siblings:
 - ____(M/F) ____ (M/F) ____ (M/F) ____ (M/F) ____ (M/F)
 - ____(M/F) ____ (M/F) ____ (M/F) ____ (M/F) ____ (M/F)
8. In Vietnam my family lived in: ☐ city/urban area ☐ small town ☐ countryside
9. In Vietnam my family made a living by: _____
(for example: business owner, cleaner, teacher, housewife, etc.)
10. Number of years of schooling father completed (e.g. finished high school = 12yrs): _____
- 10.5. Number of years of schooling mother completed (e.g. finished high school = 12yrs): _____
11. Currently, whom are you living with? (check all that apply):
 - Father ☐ yes ☐ no; currently father lives in:
 - ☐ Vietnam ☐ U.S.
 - ☐ I see my father on average :
 - ☐ everyday ☐ every week ☐ every month
 - ☐ every 6 mo. ☐ every year ☐ beyond 1 year
 - Mother ☐ yes ☐ no; currently mother lives in:
 - ☐ Vietnam ☐ U.S.
 - ☐ I see my mother on average:
 - ☐ everyday ☐ every week ☐ every month
 - ☐ every 6 mo. ☐ every year ☐ beyond 1 year
 - Grandparents ☐ yes ☐ no
 - Siblings ☐ yes ☐ no
 - Spouse ☐ yes ☐ no
 - Your children ☐ yes ☐ no
 - ☐ number of children living with you: _____

Currently, I'm living with other people; please specify: _____

#

If it is no trouble, I'd like to have an interview with to better understand your experiences in your family. The interview will be at a time and place convenient for you. Please leave your name and contact information. The interview lasts about one hour.

Name: _____
Phone: _____
or E-mail: _____

Thank you for your participation

Please make any comments you may have regarding Vietnamese children's roles and relations in the space below.