
Adolescent Boys
Exploring Diverse Cultures of Boyhood

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Hmong American Masculinities

Creating New Identities in the United States

Stacey J. Lee

Asian American men have recently been hailed as “turn of the century American heroes” by the popular press (Pan, 2000). Long stereotyped as passive, effeminate, asexual, and nerdy by the dominant culture, Asian American men are now being described by some journalists and academics as ideal romantic partners for women. According to a February 2000 article in *Newsweek*, hegemonic masculinity as represented by the white male is being challenged by Asian American men. Citing the crossover popularity of actors such as Chow Yun Fat and Jet Li and the growing number of Asian American men marrying outside their ethnic group, the article concluded that “Asian guys are on a roll” (Pan, 2000). The implicit assumption here is that marriage to white women represents an increase in social status for Asian American men. Despite the predictions in the *Newsweek* article, Asian American men as a group have not truly challenged dominant American ideas of masculinity. Although some U.S. communities may be embracing individual Asian American men as symbols of appealing and exotic masculinity, most communities have not embraced Asian American men as ideal symbols of masculinity or as American heroes. In fact, hegemonic masculinity as represented by the white, heterosexual, middle-class, independent, able bodied, Christian man thrives in many public high schools in the United States.

This chapter will examine the way Hmong American boys construct their masculinities at a public high school in Wisconsin. In particular, the

focus will be on the various expressions of masculinity that Hmong American boys create in response to messages from their ethnic community and the school community.

As Connell (1995) reminds us, masculinities are culturally constructed by people in everyday life and ideas regarding masculinity are culturally specific. Although there are a variety of masculinities within cultures, there is always a single hegemonic masculinity within a given culture or community. Kimmel (2000) describes the dominant or hegemonic masculinity as "a culturally preferred model against which we are expected to measure ourselves" (p. 4). Boys/men who do not express the behaviors and traits associated with hegemonic masculinity within a given community are identified as possessing deficient masculinities that are subordinate to the hegemonic masculinity. Because whiteness is central to the locally constructed hegemonic masculinity of the school, the Hmong American boys in my study are automatically marginalized because of their race. Most of the Hmong American boys also lack other qualities (e.g., middle-class status, assertive personalities, involvement in school, academic success, etc.) associated with the hegemonic masculinity in school.

The Hmong in the United States

The first Hmong arrived in the United States as refugees from Laos over twenty-five years ago. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the largest populations of Hmong Americans live in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Much of the scholarship on Hmong refugees has emphasized the differences between Hmong culture—described as preliterate, patriarchal, rural, and traditional—and mainstream American culture (e.g., Donnelly, 1994; Fass, 1991; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988; Sherman, 1988). In fact, cultural differences have been identified as the cause of many of the social and economic problems that Hmong Americans face. According to some researchers, Hmong definitions of success that focus on the family are often in conflict with mainstream American definitions of success which emphasize the individual (Lynch, 1999; Meyer et al., 1991; Trueba et al., 1990; Walker-Moffat, 1995). Several scholars have focused on the cultural differences surrounding gender between mainstream U.S. culture and Hmong culture (Donnelly, 1994; Goldstein, 1985; Scott, 1988; Walker-Moffat, 1995).

Early research on Hmong refugee students discovered that they experienced serious problems in school including high dropout rates from mid-

dle and high school (Cohn, 1986; Goldstein, 1985). Limited experiences with formal education, limited English language skills, and cultural differences were identified as the barriers to educational success. Shortly after their arrival in the United States the Hmong refugee community identified education as the key to social mobility in this country. Although the community quickly embraced education for boys and young men, they were more hesitant about the education of girls and women (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). The Hmong American community supported education for boys because sons were seen as being responsible for supporting their parents in their old age. Thus, the education of sons was seen as an investment for the family. In contrast to sons who remain responsible to their parents for life, daughters become members of their husband's family upon marriage. While education became a new way for Hmong boys and men to gain status in the United States, Hmong girls continued to gain status through early marriage and motherhood as they had in Laos (Donnelly, 1994; Goldstein, 1985). The emphasis on early marriage and motherhood led to high dropout rates among Hmong girls during the 1980s and early 1990s (Donnelly, 1994; Goldstein, 1985; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

Within the Hmong American community gender norms and roles have continued to evolve in the last decade. More recent research, for example, highlights the educational achievements of Hmong American girls and women and the changing roles of women in the Hmong American community (Lee, 1997; Ngo, 2000). While a great deal of research has focused on the experiences of Hmong American girls and women, relatively little research has highlighted the gendered experiences of Hmong American boys and men. Some research suggests that Hmong men in the United States are struggling with a loss of status within Hmong families, a result of changing gender roles for women (Donnelly, 1994). Within Hmong families in Laos, for example, male elders were viewed as the undisputed leaders and decision-makers, but in the United States women have gained independence (Donnelly, 1994). In her research on Hmong refugees in Seattle, Donnelly (1994) discovered that many Hmong men dreamed of returning to Laos, but Hmong women preferred life in the United States because they believed the United States offered greater gender equality for women.

Mainstream American ideas regarding masculinity that emphasize the individual have also been identified as a threat to Hmong notions of masculinity that emphasize the family. According to this perspective, the rise of juvenile delinquency among Hmong American young men is due to the

abandonment of the Hmong definitions of masculinity (Lynch, 1999; Walker-Moffat, 1995). Lynch explains, "One result of the eroding respect for traditional models of masculinity is that the Hmong American teenage males struggling to define cultural notions of male gender role most often use American models as points of departure. These models stress individualism and are in conflict with traditional Hmong ideals focusing on family-based loyalty and communal definitions of success" (p. 38). Thus, an emphasis on individualism is understood to lead young men away from the control of the family, thereby leaving them vulnerable to the negative influences of the American society. One problem with this argument is that it assumes that the problems within the Hmong American community are simply due to cultural conflict and cultural assimilation, thereby denying the fact that Hmong Americans face racial and class barriers in the United States. Furthermore, it assumes that the maintenance of traditional Hmong culture can protect Hmong American boys from racial and class inequality.

Background of the Study

Data for this chapter were collected as part of a one-and-a-half-year ethnographic study of Hmong American students at a public school I call University Heights High School (UHS) (Lee, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). Located in a mid-sized city in Wisconsin, UHS enjoys an excellent academic reputation in the city and throughout the state. UHS enrolled 2023 students during the 1999–2000 academic year with 29% of these students classified as students of color and 14% identified as receiving free or reduced lunch. According to estimates made by the various school staff, there were 54 Hmong students enrolled at UHS during the 1998–1999 school year and approximately 65 Hmong students enrolled during the 1999–2000 academic year. All of the Hmong American students at UHS are the children of immigrants/refugees. Some students arrived in the United States as young children and others were born in the United States. Although Hmong is the first language in the homes of all of the Hmong American students at UHS and most students' parents speak limited English, all the Hmong American students at the school speak English. Most of the Hmong American students are from low-income families and receive free or reduced lunch. Many live in low-income housing in the poorer sections of the city where lower income African American and Latino families also live.

The fieldwork for the study included participant observation of Hmong American students during lunch periods and study halls, interviews with Hmong American students and school staff, classroom observations, analysis of site documents, observations at school district meetings for Southeast Asian parents and observations of local Hmong community events. My identity, particularly assumptions about my identity, affected the way my informants responded to me. In my first encounters with Hmong American students, I was asked questions about my ethnicity, age, marital status, occupation, and place of birth. As a Chinese American woman, I share race and gender in common with the Hmong American girls, and I believe that this explains why I had an easier time making connections with the girls than the boys. Several girls, for example, asked me about gender roles for Chinese girls and women, specifically my family's ideas regarding gender roles. Significantly, the boys who were most comfortable with the dominant culture were also the ones most comfortable talking to me. By keeping students' secrets and remaining nonjudgmental, I was eventually able to gain the confidence of a range of Hmong American boys.

Hmong American Boys and/versus Hegemonic Masculinity at UHS

UHS prides itself on its racial, ethnic, and social class diversity. Despite the diversity of the student population, a culture of whiteness pervades the school (Lee, 2002). As in many other institutions where whiteness reigns, the culture of whiteness at UHS is shrouded by silence. This virtual invisibility served to normalize whiteness and thereby maintain its dominance (Dyer, 1993). High status extracurricular activities (e.g., music, theater, student government, yearbook staff, etc.) are dominated by white students. Photos of white students engaged in numerous school activities fill the pages of the school yearbook, confirming and reflecting the status of whites in the racial hierarchy of the school.

As in the larger society, whiteness is central to the hegemonic masculinity at UHS. In discussing the historical relationship between whiteness and masculinity, cultural anthropologist A. Ong writes, "white masculinity established qualities of manliness and civilization itself" (1999, p. 266). Similarly, Feagin (2000) argues that "white men have been the standard for male handsomeness, as well as masculinity and manly virtue" (p. 113).

Although whiteness is primary to dominant masculinity, not just any white male meets the standards set by hegemonic masculinity (Lei, 2001). As in the dominant society, boys at UHS gain status by being assertive and demonstrating individual achievement (Kimmel, 1994; Kumashiro, 1999). Although boys at UHS can gain status for athletic achievements, the most honored status at the school goes to white males who are academically successful (i.e., college bound) and involved in one or more high status extracurricular activities. Thus, the hegemonic male at UHS is white, plays on a varsity sports team, and does well in school. It is worth noting that education is central to UHS's definition of hegemonic masculinity because education is valued by the highly educated community in which UHS is located. Higher education is required for the kind of white-collar jobs that middle-class white parents expect their sons to have when they grow up.

Similar to hegemonic males at other schools, boys who embody hegemonic masculinity at UHS express their gendered power by taking up space, both literally and figuratively, in classrooms, corridors, and on playing fields (Orenstein, 1994; Thorne, 1994). These young men garner athletic awards, are elected to the prom court, and are chosen as graduation speakers. They enjoy friendly relationships with teachers and administrators, and are described as "all American boys." Not insignificantly, white males are the only ones honored with this title.

Hmong American boys and girls at UHS are marked as culturally different (i.e., foreign) because they deviate from the white norm (Lee, 2002). Conversations with UHS educators and non-Hmong students revealed that Hmong American boys are viewed as lacking hegemonic masculinity. Teachers remarked that Hmong boys were quieter in class than other boys and were not involved in school activities. Some teachers concluded that the boys were quiet because of language or other cultural issues. Because quietness is associated with femininity, Asian American men have often been constructed as effeminate and therefore not masculine. Cheung (1993) notes, "precisely because quietness is associated with the feminine, as is the 'East' in relation to the 'West' (in Orientalist discourse), Asian and Asian American men too have been 'feminized' in American popular culture" (p. 2). The characterization of Asian and Asian American men as feminine renders them harmless in the eyes of the dominant culture. Seen as too quiet, passive, nerdy, and small, Asian American men fail to exhibit the form of masculinity valued by the dominant American society (Kumashiro, 1999; Lee, 1999; Lei, 2001). Asian American men are thus easily dismissed as inconsequential. At UHS, teachers who assumed that Hmong

American boys are quiet because of language and other cultural differences simply ignored the boys. Although these teachers viewed Hmong American boys as being "different," they noted that they had never had any problems with them in class.

There are other moments, however, when the dominant group views the "quietness" of Asian American men as potentially dangerous and threatening. A few teachers, for example, expressed fears that some Hmong boys were hiding their gang involvement behind their quiet demeanor. One teacher asserted that gang involvement was prevalent among Hmong males.

I get the feeling that there are, that there are a lot of kids [Hmong boys and other boys of color] who are involved in gangs. And often, it will be, kids will be involved, and then it's just a part of life. You know, it's not even a question, of course you're involved in a gang for protection.

Although this teacher was convinced that many Hmong males were involved in gangs, the teacher admitted to not really knowing many Hmong males at the school. This teacher and others who feared that Hmong American boys were involved with gangs believed that school officials should keep a watch on the boys. Similarly, in her study of race relations at a multiracial high school, Lei (2001) found that the quietness of Southeast Asian American boys was perceived as both "understandable" because they were culturally different and "unsettling" because they might be gangs.

The stereotype of the mysterious Asian American gang member represents the dominant group's fears about Asian American masculinity. The Asian or Asian American gang member represents the alien threat living among "real" Americans (Lee, 1999). Asian American gang members and those assumed to belong to gangs are understood to be dangerous. They express a hyper-masculinity somewhat similar to the hypermasculinity associated with African American men (Kumashiro, 1999; Lei, 2001; Stevenson, this volume). While hypermasculinity is represented as dangerous, hegemonic masculinity is constructed as safe (i.e., man the protector). While men who express subordinated masculinities may have to rely on overt forms of aggression to maintain authority, men who possess hegemonic masculinities do not have to rely on physical power for their authority (Connell, 1995). The characterization of Hmong American boys at UHS as either quiet (i.e., harmless and feminine) or quiet (i.e., dangerous and hyper-masculine) mirrors stereotypes of Asian American men in gen-

eral. In either case, Hmong American boys are implicitly understood to lack hegemonic masculinity.

Significantly, Hmong American boys at UHS understand that the Hmong are constructed as culturally different and foreign by the dominant culture at UHS. They recognize that white boys/men hold the racialized and gendered power at the school and in the larger society. Furthermore, they realize that as Hmong American boys they lack hegemonic masculinity. Hmong American boys, for example, observed that "Hmong and other Asian guys are short." I heard Hmong American girls complain within earshot of their male peers that "Hmong guys are short." Hmong boys and girls understand that being short is seen as a feminine characteristic by the dominant American society.

The Hmong American boys at UHS express a variety of masculinities in response to the messages about masculinity they learn at school. In addition to negotiating the school's messages about masculinity, Hmong American boys must also negotiate the Hmong American community's messages about masculinity. Some boys attempt to construct a masculinity that reflects, combines, and re-interprets aspects of the hegemonic masculinity valued by the school with aspects of the masculinity valued by Hmong culture. Within the Hmong American community, the ideal man embraces education as a route to social mobility for his family. As noted earlier, this is gender specific because sons (not daughters) are expected to support their parents in old age. Significantly, the younger generation of Hmong American leaders embody this new ideal masculinity. These men serve as a bridge between mainstream American society and the Hmong American community. Although this new ideal Hmong American masculinity represents a cultural transformation, it should not be confused with the hegemonic masculinity of the school or of the larger society because it is also in conversation with the values and beliefs of the Hmong community. At the other end of the spectrum are the boys who express a counter-hegemonic masculinity that resists the hegemonic masculinity advanced by the dominant school culture and the new ideal masculinity of the Hmong American community. These boys reject the authority of the school, question the role of education in social mobility, and reject their responsibilities to their families.

In the next section of this chapter, I will examine examples of masculinity expressed by Hmong American boys at UHS. Although I will present individual portraits of three Hmong American boys, their respective expressions of masculinity should not be read simply as individual ac-

counts. While each boy is a unique individual with a specific history, my position is that each expression of masculinity represents a collective response to larger institutional and cultural forces (Connell, 1993).

Hmong American Expressions of Masculinity

Portrait #1—Cha:

An Expression of Hmong Masculinity from the Past

Sitting with three other Hmong students from the school's ESL (English as a Second Language program), Cha smiled and nodded politely at me when the bilingual resource specialist introduced us. Approximately 5'3" in height and slightly built, Cha is about average in size when compared to his Hmong peers, but is significantly smaller than the non-Hmong males at UHS. Because he fears that his heavily accented English is difficult for others to understand, Cha remains virtually silent in his classes. As a relative newcomer to the United States, Cha is still uncertain about some mainstream cultural practices and this keeps him from engaging in school activities. Unlike the majority of boys at the school, Cha and his friends wear relatively nondescript clothes that are chosen for practicality rather than fashion. In contrast to white boys at UHS who express hegemonic masculinity, Cha and his friends take up little actual or figurative space in the school. Cha occupies the sidelines in the cafeteria, the halls, and classrooms. In many respects, Cha is the quintessential example of the quiet (i.e., harmless) Hmong boys described by some teachers.

Cha has a small circle of Hmong friends that include his girlfriend and two other boys. Significantly, his friends are all relative newcomers to the United States and all are enrolled in the ESL program. Cha regularly eats lunch with this same group of friends and laughs and talks quietly in a combination of English and Hmong when he is with them. He and his friends maintain their distance from the U.S. born Hmong American students at UHS (Lee, 2001b). As immigrants, Cha and his friends are in the minority among the Hmong population at UHS that is dominated by U.S. born Hmong American students. When I asked Cha why he and his friends never associated with the other Hmong American students he explained that he and his friends are "more traditional" and that the U.S. born students are "more Americanized." For their part, the American born Hmong students criticized the newcomers for being "old fashioned."

U.S. born Hmong girls, in particular, mocked boys like Cha for being “nerds.”

As a self-described “traditional Hmong,” Cha believes that it is important to respect his elders and carry on other Hmong cultural practices. Cha explained that “traditional Hmong sons” grow up and care for their parents in their old age and he intends to live up to this responsibility. Because his father is still in Laos, Cha is already responsible for helping to support his mother. Cha works nearly forty hours a week at a grocery store after school and on weekends in order to help pay the family bills. Because of his work schedule Cha gets home late on most school nights and is often too tired to do his homework. Between a work schedule that prevents him from studying long hours and his difficulties with English, Cha struggles in a few of his classes. Despite his language difficulties, however, Cha receives at least passing grades because of his effort and attitude. Although he would like to pursue a two-year vocational education degree upon graduating from high school, he is afraid that his financial responsibilities for his mother will make it impossible for him to pay for school.

Sometime in the next few years Cha wants to marry a Hmong woman who shares his cultural values. Although he is interested in marrying his current girlfriend, he is not sure that she will want to marry him since she plans to go to college after she graduates from high school. In contrast to other self-described “traditional Hmong men” who do not want to marry educated women, Cha is supportive of his girlfriend’s interest in pursuing post-secondary education. Cha is also afraid that his girlfriend’s family does not like Cha because he is not from a well-respected and prominent family. Significantly, the fact that his father is still in Laos also leaves his family outside the circle of power in the Hmong American community.

Cha works hard and believes in the achievement ideology, but his limited English language skills will most likely limit his mainstream success. Although Cha has taken on the family responsibilities associated with being a “traditional Hmong son,” these very responsibilities interfere with his schoolwork. Since the Hmong American community looks toward the next generation of Hmong Americans to serve as cultural bridges between the Hmong American community and the larger American society, it is also unlikely that Cha will become a leader in the Hmong American community.

Portrait #2—Kao: A New Ideal Masculinity for the Hmong Americans

Dressed in polo shirts or rugby shirts, jeans, and sneakers, Kao’s clothing style sets him apart from most of the other Hmong American boys at UHS. While the majority of his Hmong American peers wear the baggy pants, over-sized t-shirts, and untied sneakers associated with urban youth, Kao’s clothes are more like those of the white, middle-class boys at the school. Aware that his clothes make a social statement, Kao shrugged his shoulders as he explained that his brother and many of the Hmong boys at school said that he dressed in a preppy style. Kao’s clothes, however, are not the only things that set him apart from most of the other Hmong youth at UHS. Muscular in build, Kao is closer to the physical standards implicit in hegemonic masculinity than any of his Hmong peers. Kao is one of a very small minority of Hmong American boys at the school to participate in mainstream extracurricular activities. In addition to participating in several activities, Kao maintains a “B” average in school. Not insignificantly, Kao is also one of a few Hmong boys who has established comfortable and friendly relationships with both male and female members of the UHS staff. He is even on a first-name basis with the school’s head principal. In short, Kao embodies many of the qualities associated with the hegemonic masculinity of the school. One member of the guidance office described Kao as a “good kid” and a “successful student.”

Perhaps most significantly, Kao’s decisions regarding how and with whom to spend his time set him apart from most of the Hmong American boys at the school. While most other Hmong boys only socialize with other Hmong or Southeast Asian youth, Kao rarely fraternizes with other Hmong boys at UHS. Instead, he associates primarily with white students he knows through participating in school-sponsored sports (e.g., track team) or other extracurricular activities. In addition to his white friends, Kao is friendly with a number of African American and Asian American (non-Hmong) students he knows through his work on multicultural events at the school. Kao explained that he made a conscious decision to separate himself from other Hmong American youth.

When I was younger, I used to hang out with a lot of Hmong people. And I didn’t get much done. I just usually do what they did and just played around a lot. And I guess, now, I just want to better myself, so I

try, try not to hang out with the Hmong people a lot. Just because, somehow, I see them as not trying hard enough, so I try not to hang out with them.

Thus, Kao's decision to distance himself from other Hmong youth was based on his desire to learn about the dominant American culture and to improve his future life chances. He views the adoption of certain aspects of white masculinity as being imperative for mainstream success. Kao asserted that his decision to socialize with white students has allowed him to learn about the larger society, but he also recognized that his choice was not without cost. As a Hmong American student in a largely white social clique, Kao said he is "more accepted than most Hmong people," but he also knows that his race and ethnicity mark him as being different from the rest of the group. There have been occasions, for example, when he has witnessed the way non-Asian students stereotyped Asian students. Although his friends try to reassure him by telling him that he is "different from most other Asian kids," this leaves Kao feeling "good and bad." He realizes that his acceptance by the dominant group is contingent upon his willingness to play by their rules, specifically the rules of white hegemonic masculinity. Significantly, because Kao is not white he can never actually achieve the hegemonic masculinity of the school.

Although Kao distances himself from most other Hmong boys at the school, he does not distance himself from Hmong adults or the Hmong culture. In fact, he maintains a strong Hmong identity. Kao criticizes the Hmong American boys at UHS for being "very nontraditional" in their attitudes toward the Hmong elders in the community. He argues that while most Hmong students isolate themselves socially, they also "try and draw away from Hmong culture." He suggested that most of his Hmong American peers had "Americanized in bad ways." Interestingly, Kao reported that his parents warned him to keep his distance from "Hmong kids who were Americanized in bad ways."

Kao asserted that he was proud to be Hmong and that he tried to make his parents proud by being a "good Hmong son." Kao explained that "good Hmong sons" dress conservatively and specifically not "like a gangster." He went on to explain that Hmong adults assumed that when Hmong kids wore baggy clothes it meant they were involved with gangs. Thus, Kao's relatively conservative clothing style reflects his desires to please his parents and to fit in with the dominant culture. He also explained that "good Hmong sons" are expected to "be respectful of others, elders, get a good

education, etc." Interestingly, "good sons" are those who reflect a combination of "traditional" characteristics (e.g., respectful of elders) with acculturated characteristics (e.g., formally educated). Regarding the importance of education for social mobility, Kao explained that his parents want their children "to be in a better position than they are now—financial wise." Kao noted that while his parents encouraged his sisters to do well in school, they have paid particular attention to his education and his brother's education because the sons are expected to remain close to the parents and help them in their old age. Thus, Kao's family, like other Hmong families, views the education of sons as an investment for the family.

Like his older brother, Kao plans to attend a two-year technical college and then transfer to a four-year university. Upon earning his four-year degree, Kao dreams of marrying a Hmong American woman, buying a house and starting a family. In short, Kao's plans bear a resemblance to the "American dream." He believes that associating with white Americans will help him gain access to information and resources necessary for economic and social advancement. Although he seeks individual achievement, he plans to use his achievements to help his parents. In other words, individual achievement in school is understood to be in the service of the extended family.

It is important to note that Kao expresses the type of masculinity expressed by the new generation of Hmong American leaders. Like many of the new generation of Hmong American leaders in communities throughout the United States, Kao views education as the route to social mobility. While this new generation of Hmong leaders has internalized the dominant achievement ideology, they are also committed to maintaining a distinct Hmong identity. In short, these men have adopted the strategy of accommodation without assimilation whereby they adopt aspects of the dominant culture without losing their ethnic identities and cultures. Many of the new Hmong American leaders use their educational backgrounds to work on behalf of Hmong American communities. Similarly, Kao is committed to using his individual success to help his parents. As a "good Hmong son" he believes that it is essential for him to support his parents in their old age. He dreams of raising his children who will be third generation Hmong Americans with a sense of their Hmong heritage and a connection to their paternal grandparents. In short, by being a "good son" Kao is achieving the new ideal masculinity of the Hmong American community.

Portrait #3—Houa: Counter-hegemonic Masculinity

Several UHS educators suggested that I speak to Houa in order to get the perspective of a young man who was disconnected from school. Houa expresses the type of masculinity that teachers associate with gang members. Identified by teachers and administrators as a chronic truant, Houa was difficult to track down. I eventually met him one afternoon when I was interviewing another Hmong American male during study hall. As we neared the end of the interview, Houa walked into the cafeteria with a swagger that exaggerated the masculine conventions of body carriage held by mainstream society. Dressed in baggy pants and over-sized shirt and coat, Houa's clothes are characterized by teachers and Hmong adults as "gang type clothes." When I asked my interviewee about his plans for the future, Houa chimed in with "I'm going to be really rich. I'm going to have my own island named after me." When I asked Houa how he planned to make his money he asserted "I'm going to own a big company, worldwide" and with that he walked away laughing.

After our initial meeting, I didn't see much of Houa again until the following year. I learned that Houa had failed to earn the requisite credits to be promoted and was being forced to repeat his ninth grade year. He spent mornings at the newly created "school within a school" for students who had been retained, and then came back to UHS in the afternoons for a couple of classes. During his afternoon classes, Houa often put his head down on the desk thereby raising the ire of his teachers. When I asked him about school, he simply stated that "school is boring." Like other chronic truants, Houa began skipping school because he was having problems keeping up with the work in his classes. Once he began skipping, his academic difficulties escalated.

One of Houa's teachers reported that although she had repeatedly encouraged Houa to come see her for extra help with his academic skills, he rarely did so. Houa's teacher suggested that Houa was simply "too proud" to seek out help publicly. In my observations, I found that most Hmong American boys rarely approached teachers or other UHS educators for academic assistance or personal support. Their reluctance to go to teachers for help may be related to ideas regarding gender. As mentioned earlier, within traditional Hmong culture men are seen as the ultimate authorities (Donnelly, 1994; Rumbaut & Ima, 1988). Thus, Houa and other Hmong American boys may avoid going to their female teachers for help because they do not recognize female authority. From this perspective,

going to female teachers may actually be a threat to their expression of masculinity. Although Houa may be acting out "traditional" ideas regarding gender, his unwillingness to accept the authority of female teachers put him at odds with the school culture. By contrast, young men like Kao have positive relationships with their male and female teachers. Kao's ability to maintain positive relationships with female teachers is an example of the accommodation without assimilation associated with the new ideal Hmong American masculinity.

Although Houa dreams of being wealthy, education does not figure into his plans to achieve mobility. In fact, he does not have any clear ideas about how he might achieve his economic dreams. Inasmuch as education has been embraced as central to the Hmong American community's definition of ideal masculinity, Houa's rejection of school represents a rejection of the new ideal Hmong American masculinity. Houa's problems in school have led to repeated conflict with his parents. He and his friends routinely fight with their parents over issues like school, respect for elders, and clothing styles. Unlike Kao, who hopes that his individual success will benefit his family, Houa dreams of individual success. Houa and his friends dream of being "really rich" so that they can own the consumer goods they covet. In particular, he dreams of having enough money to buy a nice/fast car.

Unlike Kao, who has been able to emulate aspects of the hegemonic masculinity of the school, Houa's academic difficulties prevent him from achieving a central quality associated with the school's hegemonic masculinity. In fact, Houa's academic difficulties and chronic truancy put him in direct opposition to the hegemonic masculinity of the school. Unable and unwilling to achieve masculinity through academic success, Houa has turned to other models of masculinity present at the school and in the popular culture. Specifically, Houa expresses a hypermasculinity, which is a style of masculinity that emphasizes toughness, consumerism, and resistance to authority (see Stevenson, this volume). Houa's choice of clothes and his swaggering walk are also evidence of his hypermasculinity.

School, however, does not view the hypermasculinity expressed by Houa as a legitimate expression of masculinity. Hypermasculinity, in fact, is seen as dangerous and problematic. Adults in the Hmong American community also hold negative opinions about boys who express this form of masculinity. Many Hmong American adults and UHS educators associate hypermasculinity with gang membership. In short, Houa's expression of masculinity is in opposition to both the hegemonic masculinity of the school and the new ideal masculinity of the Hmong American community

which requires a level of accommodation to dominant norms without total assimilation. Significantly, the expression of hypermasculinity embodied by Houa is growing at UHS and other U.S. high schools. At UHS, for example, the number of Hmong American boys who dress like Houa and express resistance to school outnumber the boys who exhibit the masculinities expressed by Kao or Cha. Many Hmong American leaders consider the growth of counter-hegemonic masculinity to be one of the biggest concerns within the Hmong American community (Lee, 2001b; Lynch, 1999).

Conclusion

In short, the Hmong American boys at UHS are negotiating new ways of expressing and performing their gendered identities. Viewed as dated and nerdy by the American-born Hmong youth, young men like Cha are increasingly isolated among the younger generation of Hmong Americans. Although he embraces education as the road to social mobility, his limited English language skills and his family obligations limit his educational success. Unable to bridge the gap between the Hmong American community and mainstream American society, young men like Cha are likely to be relegated to the periphery in the Hmong American elite. In short, the form of masculinity expressed by Cha may be dying out within the Hmong American community.

At the other end of the spectrum are young men like Houa who, by expressing a hyper-masculinity, reject both the hegemonic masculinity of the mainstream and the new ideal Hmong American masculinity. The fact that the expression of hypermasculinity appears to be growing more common within the Hmong American community suggests that many young Hmong American men feel trapped by both the larger society and the Hmong American community. A few young men like Kao are negotiating an expression of masculinity that bridges dominant norms and older Hmong norms. Yet these young men are not seen as possessing the qualities associated with the hegemonic masculinity of the school or larger society.

The Hmong American boys in my study are all struggling with how to be men in a larger society that tells them that they are not "real men" and not "real Americans." Their expressions of masculinity are responses to racialized and gendered inequalities at UHS and in the larger U.S. society.

Because whiteness is central to the hegemonic masculinity of the school and larger society, it is impossible for any Hmong American boy to achieve hegemonic masculinity. Thus, Hmong American expressions of masculinity do not challenge the legitimacy of the hegemonic masculinity of the school. In short, none of the Hmong American boys at UHS are seen by the school or by the larger society as "turn of the century American heroes."

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Frames of Self Capturing Working-Class British Boys' Identities through Photographs

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With the aim of capturing and portraying adolescents' experiences, researchers have achieved a remarkable degree of intimacy through “shadowing” the private lives of adolescents, or observing adolescents as they engage in their daily routines and interactions. However, such studies are nevertheless limited as they tend to “see” young people through the researcher's eyes and words. Similarly, when photographs are used, the camera is usually operated by the researcher who frames the shot by choosing what to focus on, what to leave out, and when to press the shutter. This chapter presents results from a study in which I privilege adolescent boys' perspectives by handing the camera, and hence more control for what is “seen,” over to the boys themselves. The purpose of this study was to understand how working-class adolescent boys see themselves in the world and how they interact with the wider society in which they live.

Challenging Stereotypes

The findings reported in this chapter are primarily based on one of two studies undertaken for the British Economic and Social Research Council between 1995 and 2001. These research projects were stimulated by growing mass media and policy perceptions in Britain that socially dysfunctional behavior by young men, as individuals and in groups, was increasing. Issues of concern included boys' reported under-achievement at