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### Silent Gratitude: Education among Second-Generation Vietnamese in Norway

Silje Fekjær<sup>a</sup>; Mariann Leirvik<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Research Department, Norwegian Police University College, <sup>b</sup> Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo,

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# Silent Gratitude: Education among Second-Generation Vietnamese in Norway

Silje Fekjær and Mariann Leirvik

*Some minority groups manage well in the Western education system; others do not. In this paper we investigate the role of parental education and family relations in explaining the relatively-high school performance among youth of Vietnamese origin in Norway. Differences in parental education and family relations can also help us to understand the internal differences in school performance of these young people. We use quantitative register data, qualitative data from in-depth interviews and survey data. Our results indicate that parental education does not explain their offspring's relatively high educational performance, nor does parental education per se seem to impact as much compared to pupils of majority background. The qualitative data suggest that family relations can provide a more promising approach to understanding these Vietnamese youths' educational success and differences. This is partly supported by the survey data, although the correlations are weaker than expected.*

*Keywords: Parental Education; School Performance; Family Relations; Second Generation; Vietnamese; Norway*

## Introduction

The educational performance and choices of second-generation youth from a minority background can be seen as indicators of their future integration and solidarity in Western societies (Heath and Brinbaum 2007). Hence, to achieve the socio-political goal of integration we need to understand why some 'model' minority groups seem to manage especially well in the educational system. Given the well-documented importance of social background in educational success (e.g. Breen and

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Silje Fekjær is Associate Professor in the Research Department, Norwegian Police University College. Dr S.B. Fekjær. E-mail: silfek@phs.no. Mariann Leirvik is Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology and Human Geography at the University of Oslo. Correspondence to: M.S. Leirvik, Dept of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Boks 1096 Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway. E-mail: m.s.leirvik@sosgeo.uio.no.

Goldthorpe 1997), it is interesting to understand why this may be less important among some youth with minority backgrounds. We also need to understand what causes differences in educational outcome *within* a specific group. More nuanced knowledge of minority groups is useful to help dispel stereotypes, where certain minority groups are presented as failures and others as successful, and to elaborate a school policy which is also aimed at pupils who do not cope well even though they belong to a group that is classified as a 'model minority'. Differences *within* a specific minority group have not so far been explored in detail (Conchas 2006).

Compared with most other minority groups, that of Vietnamese origin seems to do relatively well in the educational system in many Western countries (Bakken 2003; Kim 2002; Portes and MacLeod 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001: 249). We explore different explanations for this relative educational success. We ask the following question: To what extent can parental educational level and family relations explain school performance among second-generation Vietnamese youth?

### The Vietnamese Population in Norway

Following American military withdrawal from the conflict in Vietnam in 1975, and the incorporation of South into North Vietnam, a massive migration of Vietnamese refugees started. Most of those who first came to Norway were young, single men. Although from different social strata, most were employed as unskilled workers. The women, on the other hand, who had previously worked only in the household, ended up in similar occupational positions to the men (Brochmann 2003).

The relatively small and well-established Vietnamese community is the fifth largest minority group in Norway, but still numbers no more than 18,300 persons (Henriksen 2007). This may lead to particularly strong community ties. Approximately 6,100 of this community are considered as second generation.

Social background is one possible explanation for the relatively-high school performance among youth of Vietnamese origin, but previous studies have yielded conflicting results. We have studies which indicate that parental economic and cultural resources do not explain the relatively high performance of Vietnamese youth, either in Norway (Bakken 2003; Støren 2006) or in the United States (Portes and MacLeod 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). We note, however, that the Norwegian studies are limited by relatively small samples of second-generation Vietnamese, and do not specify the conditions which may explain their school performance. On the other hand, Kim (2002), studying Vietnamese and Cambodians in the US, found that structural factors such as parental social class are more important than cultural factors such as attitudes towards education and individual effort.

Social capital is a promising explanation for high performance among minority groups in Norway (Lauglo 2000), the UK (Modood 2004) and the US (Goyette and Conchas 2002; Zhou 2005). Social capital can be seen as different aspects of processes of social interaction, leading to both positive *and* negative consequences for the

individual (Portes 1998). However, none of these studies present social capital as an explanation for differences in performance within a specific minority group. This will be done in our study.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

### *The Importance of Parents' Education*

One possible reason why parents' education level influences children's educational choices is the rational action model, where educational choices are seen as individual decisions based on available resources and constraints. Children of highly educated parents will have lower costs, greater utility and a higher probability of succeeding if they continue in the education system (Breen and Goldthorpe 1997). Other explanations highlight that the school system treats people differently according to their family background (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Regardless of the explanation, there are strong reasons to expect a positive effect of parental education.

Whether parents' education is of similar importance among youth with a minority background is less obvious. Vietnamese parents whose children succeed in obtaining a high level of education despite the obstacles they face in a new country may have extra resources. If they are more strongly selected than other children whose parents have similar levels of education, we would expect a stronger effect of parental education. On the other hand, one might expect it to have less effect because minority parents with a high level of education from their home country lack country-specific cultural capital, e.g. familiarity with the cultural heritage of the host country (Krange and Bakken 1998). They may also have limited possibilities for supporting their children's schoolwork because of language problems and work obligations. In addition, a weaker effect of social background could result from the less-correct registration of parental education among minority parents, either because of incomplete registers or because foreign qualifications are not officially recognised. Finally, Vietnamese parents with low education may have other resources—for example, a strong drive towards obtaining a better life—and may not be as negatively selected as majority parents with low education. Altogether, there seem to be reasons to expect a weaker effect of parents' education level among the group of Vietnamese origin.

### *The Importance of Family Relations*

In this paper we have chosen to concentrate on the relationship between parents and child when looking at the importance of social relations. The analytic framework we present here is inspired by both McNeal's (1999) and Modood's (2004) notions and understandings of social capital.<sup>1</sup> In this context, we see social capital as three-dimensional: (a) the structural aspect and nature of social ties and relations, (b) the norms that exist in those relations, and (c) the enforcement of those norms. In our

study we will therefore firstly focus on the structure of the relationship between parents and child—how they organise the relationship—and its more substantial content (McNeal 1999). The second dimension includes the norms that are inherent in the relationship between parents and child, and we will mainly focus on the transmission of aspirations and attitudes towards education. Thirdly we take a closer look at the enforcement of norms, and how they are made effective (Modood 2004).

Looking at the two dimensions of support and control, Baumrind (1971) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) identify four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent and permissive. Other researchers have found that the authoritative parenting style is positively related to academic achievement and constructive school engagement (Lamborn *et al.* 1991), although their relevance to ethnic minority groups has not yet been confirmed (Chang and Le 2005).

## Data

For this study, we accessed different registers from Statistics Norway, survey data from Norwegian Social Research (NOVA) and some interview-based qualitative material that enables us to explore different explanations for educational outcomes. We discuss each of these data types below, in the order in which they will be deployed in the article.

### *Register Data*

The quantitative data are based on information from several registers in Statistics Norway. They cover all persons in Norway born between 1985 and 1989. We have selected all second-generation youth of Vietnamese origin who were either born in Norway of parents born in Vietnam or migrated before school age ( $N = 1,159$ ). We compare this group with the majority population of the same age ( $N = 261,518$ ), including around 7 per cent with one foreign-born parent or who were adopted.

The variable *school grades* is measured at age 16 when the pupils graduate from lower-secondary school. Our measure is an index which includes all grades that count when pupils apply for entry into upper-secondary school—a combination of grades based on national tests (exams) and teacher-assigned grades based on class work. The variable is standardised, with zero mean and a standard deviation of one.<sup>2</sup> *Parents' education* is that of the parent with the longest education or of the only parent present. It is divided into four levels: compulsory school or below, upper-secondary school, bachelor's and master's. Unknown parental education is included as a separate category. Information on education from Norway stems from official registers, while that on education acquired in other countries is either gathered through surveys or from registers. Education received abroad is included in the official registers if an application for official recognition of the degree has been made. This means that education from abroad will probably be slightly underestimated.

### Qualitative Data

The qualitative data come from 10 in-depth interviews with second-generation youths—four girls and six boys—of Vietnamese origin which took place in 2003. One interviewee came to Norway aged 16, took upper-secondary education and enrolled in higher education in Norway. The others were either born in Norway, or arrived around school age. Six were enrolled in upper-secondary school, and four had commenced higher education. Despite their educational variation, the parents were all working in ‘low-class’ physical jobs.

### Survey Data

We use quantitative data from the survey *Ung i Oslo 2006* (Youth in Oslo 2006), conducted by Norwegian Social Research (NOVA). The sample includes all pupils aged 14 to 16 in Oslo in 2006. The response rate was 93 per cent, N = 11,440 (Valset and Øia 2006).

### The Importance of Parental Education

Table 1 shows average grades—the standardised average in three subjects: Maths, English and Norwegian (mean = 0, SD = 1) and parental education—the sum of both parents’ education as reported by the pupils and scored 0 = compulsory school or below, 1 = upper-secondary, 2 = higher education—in the majority group and the group of Vietnamese origin.<sup>3</sup> The grade average of the group of Vietnamese origin is at the same level as that of the majority pupils. The standard deviation tells us that the dispersion is about the same in both groups. Vietnamese parents have a lower educational level—16 per cent have received only compulsory schooling compared with 3 per cent in the majority group.

The relationship between ethnic origin, achievement differences and parental education is further explored in Table 2. This table shows that, before we controlled for social background, the average school performance of the group of Vietnamese origin is similar to that of the majority (Model 1). After controlling for parental education, however, we see that Vietnamese youth clearly outperform the majority

**Table 1.** Grades (average) and parental education (percentage distribution) by origin

	Vietnam %	Majority %
Grades average	0.04 (s.d. 0.96)	0.01 (s.d. 0.99)
Parents compulsory school	16	3
Parents upper-secondary school	68	57
Parents bachelor’s degree	11	30
Parents master’s degree	2	11
Parents’ education unknown	3	0.03
N	1,159	261,518

**Table 2.** Grades by ethnic origin and parental education: linear regression

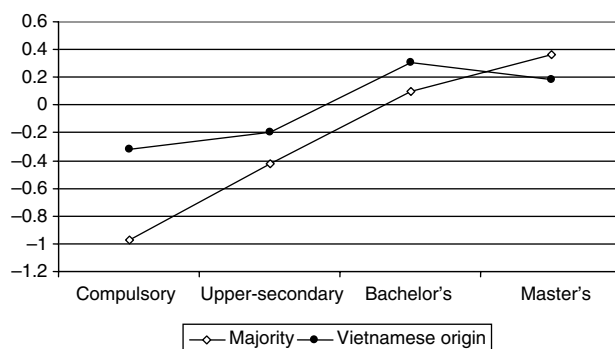
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Vietnamese origin (majority = 0)	0.03 (0.03)	<b>0.29</b> (0.03)	0.65 (0.07)
Gender (male = 0)	<b>0.43</b> (0.00)	<b>0.43</b> (0.00)	<b>0.55</b> (0.01)
Parents up.-sec. ed. (0 = comp. ed.)		<b>0.54</b> (0.01)	<b>0.55</b> (0.01)
Parents bachelor's degree		<b>1.06</b> (0.01)	<b>1.07</b> (0.01)
Parents master's degree		<b>1.32</b> (0.01)	<b>1.33</b> (0.01)
Parents education unknown		− <b>0.33</b> (0.09)	− <b>0.50</b> (0.10)
Vietnamese-origin parents up.-sec. ed.			− <b>0.43</b> (0.08)
Vietnamese-origin parents bachelor's			− <b>0.43</b> (0.10)
Vietnamese-origin parents master's			− <b>0.82</b> (0.20)
Vietnamese-origin parents edu. unknown			0.32 (0.21)
Intercept	− <b>0.20</b> (0.00)	− <b>0.96</b> (0.01)	− <b>0.97</b> (0.01)
N	262,677	262,677	262,677
Adjusted $r^2$	0.05	0.15	0.15

Note: **Bold** = significant at 0.05 per cent level. The standard errors are given in parentheses.

(Model 2), telling us that parental education does not explain the youngsters' relatively-high school performance. They seem to do well in spite of their social background, not because of it.<sup>4</sup> In Model 3, the interaction between ethnic origin and social background is tested. We show the results in Figure 1.

The results in Figure 1, however, are a little ambiguous. On the one hand, we note that pupils with highly educated parents receive significantly better grades in both groups.<sup>5</sup> The difference between the large groups with parents with upper-secondary and bachelor's education is the same among the group of Vietnamese origin and the majority. We also note that the group of Vietnamese origin whose parents are educated to master's level is quite small, so we should be careful when interpreting these results.

On the other hand, it is clear that, when we look at youth of Vietnamese origin, there is a remarkably small difference between those whose parents have compulsory

**Figure 1.** The effect of parental education dependent on origin

education and those whose parents have upper-secondary education. These groups constitute 84 per cent of the pupils of Vietnamese origin. The overall impression is that, although parents' education is important among both pupils of Vietnamese origin and those of a majority background, it seems to be somewhat less important for the educational outcomes of Vietnamese youth.

One possible explanation for a weaker effect of parental education is that the Vietnamese parents lack country-specific cultural capital and have limited possibilities for helping their children with homework, despite their high level of education. One could also argue that Vietnamese parents with a low educational level, who have managed to migrate in spite of limited economic resources, are a select group motivated to create a better life for their family. This results in a high level of scholarly achievement among their children, independent of their parents' relatively low educational level. A somewhat different version of this line of argument could be that, because education was less accessible in Vietnam, parents with only compulsory schooling are a less-negatively selected group than Norwegian parents with the same level of education. Hence, the differences between having highly or less-educated parents will be smaller.

A final potential explanation for the somewhat weaker effect of parental education is deficiencies in the registration of foreign qualifications in the Norwegian system, despite efforts made to update the registers (Dalheim 2001). Previous research, however, has shown a weaker effect not only of parental education, but also of parental income in groups with minority background (Fekjær 2007). Since there is little reason to expect sizeable gaps in the registration of parental income, a weaker effect of social background seems to be a feasible explanation.

### **The Importance of Family Relations: Qualitative Results**

In this section we explore the importance of family relations through our qualitative material, looking firstly at parents' attitudes towards their children's education.

#### *All the Parents Value Higher Education*

The parents first arrived in Norway hoping for a better life than that from which they had fled. Although they dreamed of obtaining a higher education, their first priority was taking financial care of the family, so they transferred their dreams to their children.

The parents value higher education in general and consider it to be their children's way out of a situation similar to their own. They want their children to have jobs that are less oriented towards physical work and more academic. Higher education, especially in the professions of medicine, pharmacy and dentistry, is highly valued:

My parents want me to have a profession when I finish school. They don't have anything against working-class jobs such as cleaning and stuff, but they want me to have an occupation that is respected in society.



Parents' ambitions for their children were clearly voiced—ensuring all the youths were aware of them—and expressed in their high expectations of their children's performance in school. It is not enough that the children do well; they want them to do very well or to be outstanding. Even though the parents are unfamiliar with the Norwegian educational system, they have an understanding of what grades to expect from the children. One interviewee expresses these high expectations:

If I got an A-minus and was really proud, they told me: 'Not so good. You'll have to do better next time'. If I got a straight A they told me to keep on getting straight As.

In his study of first- and second-generation minority youth, Lauglo (2000) highlights this characteristic as 'extra drive'. The extra drive causes the youth to overcome the obstacles associated with having a less-advantageous social background. This assumption is supported by the quantitative and qualitative analyses in this study.

### *A Debt of Gratitude*

If a person does well or is outstanding in school and continues in higher education, especially in the medical profession (or similar), the youth shows his or her parents a form of gratitude or appreciation.

When you're able to fulfil their wishes in a way they can be proud and happy, it's a way of paying back. To pay back like that is a way of showing love. We pay our parents back with silent gratitude and show them our devotion by taking higher education.

This importance of gratitude is supported by Zhou and Bankston (1994). This feature can also be present, however, among other minority groups (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

### *The Child's Manners as a Mirror of Success in Parenting*

Children's behaviour and academic achievements can be seen to mirror parental qualities, and the parents' reputation in the ethnic community is therefore dependent on them. Although the Vietnamese population in Norway is quite large compared to the other minority groups, several of the youths feel that they belong to a small group where everybody knows everyone else: 'We are a small group in Norway so everybody knows everything and they talk about it, so then it's probably more important what one does (educationally) and how one behaves'. This description also highlights another point. It seems that norm enforcement is made effective by the constant monitoring of the youth in the community. Although this finding only pertains to this study, other research comes to similar conclusions. Zhou and Bankston (1994: 831) describe this as a 'Vietnamese microscope', which may be a more common trait among the Vietnamese, although it may also be present in other minority groups.

### *Monitoring*

The parents have strong opinions and strict regulations regarding their children's leisure activities, friends and engagement in the youth culture. They do not appreciate unorganised activities like youth centres, and several of the youths were never allowed to participate. The youths describe their parents as stricter and more involved in their personal lives than Norwegian parents.

These findings are compatible with those of Lauglo (2000), who claims that the constructive engagement and parental supervision among specific minority groups explain why they do better than expected, given their socio-economic background. Lauglo therefore suggests that social capital trumps cultural capital in some minority groups. This is also supported by other studies (e.g. Caplan *et al.* 1991).

When we take a closer look at the youths' motivation for pursuing higher education, we find a feasible alternative explanation. They want to acquire a better position in the social hierarchy than their parents and do not want to work in the same physically exhausting jobs, telling us that—importantly—the parents' educational orientation is transmitted to the next generation (Modood 2004).

### *Parenting Practices: Similarities and Differences*

It is evident from our qualitative data that there are differences in the upbringing of children and in the parent–child relation, possibly explaining variations in school performance of Vietnamese children. Baumrind (1971) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) identified four parenting styles, described earlier. It was soon apparent that these styles were not a suitable frame for our data. The differences in parenting practices were too small to fit the general model.<sup>6</sup> If we used the 'traditional' parenting styles, all parents would fit the authoritarian model, and hence important differences would be concealed, which is why we needed to construct a more refined or contextual model.

In the light of shared qualities and differences in parenting we came up with two styles: the 'obedience and openness' type, into which five youths fitted, and the 'obedience and subordination' type (another five).<sup>7</sup> The youngsters all possess some shared qualities with their parents, involving obedience and hierarchy. Since affection is not something that is openly shown, the youths do not consider their parents as warm, but neither do they consider them as cold or rejecting. The qualities that set the two parenting styles apart are openness, understanding and subordination.

It soon became evident that the two groups also differed in their school adaptation. Children with parents who emphasise 'obedience and openness' have outstanding grades in both primary and secondary school, while those whose parents emphasise 'obedience and subordination' have more mediocre or below-average grades, or have faced longer periods of educational difficulty.<sup>8</sup> The two groups also differ when it comes to social background; the parents who highlighted obedience and

subordination in their parenting style are those who belonged to the lower socio-economic stratum in Vietnam.

It is important to mention that the patterns in the qualitative material, and therefore the two types of parenting, could be the result of chance, given the small sample size. The findings represent potential hypotheses or explanations that will be further investigated in the survey data, which are based on a larger sample.

### *Obedience and Openness versus Obedience and Subordination*

The relationship between parents and child in an 'openness and obedience' parenting style is quite open. The youth are allowed to discuss rules that are set by the parents, and this is not regarded as lack of respect or of obedience. Although the discussions do not necessarily cause major changes in the rules, the parents listen to their children's arguments, and show understanding. If the youngsters have a problem, they feel that their parents will understand.

The parents are able to understand that their child's experiences are quite different from their own childhood experiences in Vietnam. This understanding means a lot to their offspring, and makes it easier for them to accept the rules set by their parents. The children have the opportunity to influence important decisions and can speak freely about such choices as which upper-secondary school to attend or what kind of higher education they should aim for. The parents normally tell their children what is right or wrong to make them behave in accordance with their own wishes, and they use correction. They also make the children feel guilty if they do not approve of their behaviour. Nonetheless, we see this as a quite gentle way of guiding the children to achieve proper manners and behave in appropriate ways, compared with the methods used by the other parents.

In contrast, parents who practise the parental style we have called 'subordination and obedience' use harsher tools to make the children behave. Some kind of physical punishment is common in this type of parenting; not all use it, but they are still quite strict and use psychological threats such as 'You have to do as you're told as long as you live under my roof'. This type of parenting is less open and more hierarchic, with the youth in a clearly subordinate position. According to the youngsters, the parents who highlight subordination and obedience do not show much understanding of their children's lives and troubles.

One could assume that parents who have a more open relationship with their children do so because of their children's good manners and good performances in school. According to our data, this interpretation is not feasible. First, to have an open relationship does not equate with being less strict. Second, children who follow the rules set by their parents and who do well in school will not necessarily achieve a reduction in 'strictness', as the following extract illustrates:

I do follow the rules, but my sister doesn't. They cannot trust what she tells them. They can trust me.

*Has this positively affected the regulations for you?*

No. My father has sometimes wished to be less strict, but he has to be fair. He can't say yes to me and no to my sister.

### *What are the Consequences of Different Parenting Styles?*

According to our data, parents who emphasise 'obedience and openness' seem to have a positive influence on their children's school performance, a connection supported by Lamborn *et al.* (1991). We find several reasons for this. First, the combination of overly strict rules and a lack of openness might result in the parents actually losing control of and insight into their children's lives both at school and in their spare time. For example, one boy said his father prohibited his soccer practice and wanted him to spend his spare time on homework. Some of the children who regard their parents as too strict secretly disobey their parents.

When I was little I wanted to play soccer, but my father didn't allow it. He stressed the importance of school, so he forbade me to go to practice. I was able to sneak out to join practice. I was sneaking out for years, but one day he found out. When he found out he came to soccer practice and dragged me off the court, and dragged me back home.

Second, emotional relations between parents and child may be affected by parental styles. Youths who are not free to discuss the rules may perceive them as especially strict, resulting in a more complicated parent-child relationship. Potential conflicts may be more severe and go deeper, compared with a situation where the parents allow more openness. This can affect the child's ability to concentrate on school, both in class and in homework assignments. This is not a necessary consequence, but a possible outcome, and can be reduced or strengthened by other network resources.

A third reason for differences in performance owing to parental styles is 'discussion skills'. In the Norwegian school system, school grades are not only based on written assignments and tests, but also on the pupil's oral performance in class. This can be an advantage for youth with an open relationship with their parents, who are used to discussions where they must have convincing arguments to make their parents listen, and hopefully to make them change some of the rules, potentially resulting in skills that are beneficial at school (Bernstein 2002).

## **The Importance of Family Relations: Quantitative Results**

### *Complying with Parents and Parental Style*

In this section, we use our third data source, quantitative survey data, to see whether the findings from the qualitative material will be replicated in a representative sample. We compare second-generation youth of Vietnamese origin ( $N = 125$ ) with the majority population of the same age ( $N = 7,953$ ). In Table 3 we also include

**Table 3.** Importance of complying with parents on education/occupation by origin (%)

	Very important	Quite important	Not important
Majority (N = 7,652)	28	47	24
Vietnamese (N = 117)	55	32	14
Pakistani (N = 661)	58	28	14
Turkish (N = 149)	58	28	13
Sri Lankan (N = 120)	55	33	12
<b>Total N = 8,699</b>			

Note: Significant on a 0.1% level (Pearsons' chi-square = 364.0167, df = 8).

second-generation youth of Pakistani origin (N = 746), Turkish origin (N = 174) and Sri Lankan origin (N = 127) for comparison. *Comply with parents* is the youths' answers to the question, 'When it comes to choosing education and occupation, how important for you is it to comply with your parents' wishes?' (see results in Table 3).

As expected, we see that, compared to the 28 per cent of youth of majority origin, over half of Vietnamese youth consider it 'very' important to comply with parents' wishes when choosing education and occupation. We also note, however, that being eager to comply with parents on this matter is not unique to the youth of Vietnamese origin—over 85 per cent of minority youth from all four groups say that complying with parents' wishes is either 'very' or 'quite' important.

*Parental style* is an index ranging from zero to four representing the following four statements: 'I tell my parents about my problems', 'I try to keep most of my spare time hidden from my parents', 'When I tell my parents about something, I really feel that they care' and 'My parents notice when I am sad'. The five answer categories vary from 'completely right' to 'completely wrong'. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the scale amounts to 0.69. Our task here is to test whether the survey data will confirm the connection between parental style and school performance found in our qualitative data. We examined the correlation between parental style and school grades in the group of Vietnamese origin using Pearson's correlation. The results show a quite weak, but positive, correlation ( $r_{xy} = 0.15$ ). This means that youth who have a more open relationship with their parents tend to receive slightly better grades. This finding is in accordance with the qualitative results. Another interesting finding is that, compared with their peers, youth of Vietnamese origin report that their parents practise a less open and more subordinate parental style. Their average score on the index *parental style* is 2.2, compared with about 2.6 among the group with majority origin and the other minority-origin groups. However, judging from a regression analysis of differences in school performance controlling for parental style we see that differences in parental style do not explain the differences in school performance between the minority groups.

Finally, judging from the qualitative results, we would expect that parents with high education might practise a more open and less subordinate parental style. We have examined the correlation between parental education and parental style in the

group of Vietnamese origin using Pearson's correlation. Again, the results are in accordance with the qualitative material, but the correlation is quite weak ( $r_{xy} = 0.18$ ). This means that youth of Vietnamese origin with highly educated parents tend to report a slightly more open relationship with their parents.<sup>9</sup>

### *Different Appraisal of Education?*

Differences in parental style seem to be associated with the parents' social status in the home country. This connection was confirmed in the survey data and is in accordance with theories of socialisation that emphasise that different social strata raise their children differently (Bernstein 2002). It also implies that the original class structure in Vietnam is reproduced in Norway, mediated through differences in parenting styles.

Although we do find an association between parental education and parental style, it is important to bear in mind that the quantitative results show quite small differences in parental style between highly educated parents and parents with low education. One possible explanation of this is shortcomings in our quantitative measure of parental style. Another is the small sample size in the qualitative analysis—too small to capture a wider range of differences. The qualitative results imply that the differences between the two parenting styles are not clear-cut, as the two groups also have several traits in common. This means that it might be difficult to grasp the differences in a quantitative survey. It would be interesting to test other measures of the parental styles we described in the qualitative section, for example to include information on subordination in the relationship with parents (e.g. absence of discussions on rules and regulations and use of physical punishment and psychological threats).

Their orientation towards higher education, and appraisal of education *per se*, is more or less cohesive among all the parents in our qualitative material. Parents who had a high socio-economic position in Vietnam do not value education more than other parents. This is not in accordance with traditional educational theory, which often highlights how different classes vary in their appraisal of education. Such theories imply that a child will internalise values that are specific to the group while growing up (Hyman 1954). In our qualitative material, all the parents value higher education equally, and all prefer that their children choose an education oriented towards the professions of medicine, pharmacy or dentistry, suggesting that a theory which emphasises group-specific values as an explanation for educational differences among youth of Vietnamese origin does not provide a satisfactory theoretical explanation.

The qualitative finding of relatively small differences in the appraisal of education in the group of Vietnamese origin may explain why the quantitative register data show relatively small achievement differences between pupils with highly educated parents and those whose parents have less education. From what the young people have told us, it is evident that the parents, to some extent, *do* help their children with

their homework, especially at lower levels such as primary school. However, the differences between those with higher and those with lower levels of education are quite small due to language difficulties and because the parents work long hours and hence have little time for helping their children; this may in part explain the weaker impact of parental education.

The qualitative data indicated that different parenting styles might partly explain the different school performances of their offspring in the group of Vietnamese origin, an association partly confirmed by the survey data. Youth who report their relationship with their parents to be more open and less strict tend to perform slightly better in school. Again, it is important to keep in mind that the differences are not very large. As noted earlier, this may be because of shortcomings in our quantitative measurement of parental styles. Another possible explanation is that parental styles may be less important in minority-origin groups. Our results suggest that parental style also influences school performance among the minority groups but, judging from the survey data, it does not seem to be an important explanation of educational outcome.<sup>10</sup>

The appraisal of education may help to explain why youth of Vietnamese background outperform the majority when social background is controlled for, and why parental education seems to be somewhat less important. In our qualitative material, instrumental and cultural aspects that lead to an appraisal of education seemed to be important among our respondents. The parents tell their children to take advantage of the opportunities that exist, and the youths want to avoid ending up in the same social position as their parents. A 'debt of gratitude' and the fact that behaviour and performance in school are seen as mirrors of how well the parents raise their children are cultural elements that may lead to a higher appraisal of education, which again may explain why parental education matters less. The idea of a 'debt of gratitude' is indirectly supported by the survey data, which show that youth of Vietnamese origin are very eager to comply with their parents when making their decisions on education and future occupation. When the children try hard to fulfil their parents' expectations, the parents' attitude towards education becomes even more important. Theories that highlight the appraisal of education may contribute to an understanding of why some minority groups do better than expected compared with the majority.

However, the findings in the survey data also tell us that complying with parents on education is equally important in other minority groups. The culture of gratitude apparent in our quotes does not seem to be unique to the group of Vietnamese origin. Hence, although a culture of gratitude may be part of the explanation of why the youth of Vietnamese origin perform on a level with majority-origin youth, it does not provide an accurate explanation of the educational advantage of the group of Vietnamese origin compared to the other minority groups. One reason may be that, although the culture of gratitude also exists in other minority groups, other aspects like poor parental resources prevent the educational success of these groups. Further

research on specific minority groups is needed to understand their educational outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have used a mix of quantitative and qualitative data to closely examine one specific minority group that seems to do relatively well in the Norwegian education system. The objective was twofold: first to explore the role of parental education and family relations in explaining the relatively-high school performance among youth of Vietnamese origin, and second to examine differences in parental education and family relations that can help us understand the internal differences in school performance among the group of Vietnamese origin.

Judging from the quantitative register data, high parental education does not seem to explain the relatively-high educational performance among the group of Vietnamese origin. We also find that, compared with pupils of majority background, parents' education matters somewhat less for the educational performance of pupils of Vietnamese origin, although those with highly educated parents outperform their peers in both groups.

Family relations provide a promising approach for understanding educational success and differences among the group of Vietnamese origin. On the basis of the qualitative data we describe two different parental types. Parents who emphasise 'obedience and openness' and those who prefer 'obedience and subordination' possess different qualities which are equally important for their children's educational performance. The differences in organisation of the parent-child relation seem to be connected both to the differences in educational outcome and to the social positions the parents held in Vietnam. This is in accordance with theories of socialisation which emphasise that different social strata raise their children in different ways (Bernstein 2002). The link between family relations and social background provides an interesting approach for further research.

The qualitative data are, of course, only valid for the youths who participated in the study. Explanations found throughout our qualitative data, however, represent detailed and nuanced insights that can be further tested by quantitative data. We used data from the *Young in Oslo 2006* survey. These results provide partial support for our qualitative findings. In the group of Vietnamese origin, youths whose parents have high education report a more open and less subordinate parental style associated with high achievement in school. These findings are in accordance with the qualitative data, but the influences appear quite weak. We also find that, compared to youth with majority background, those of Vietnamese origin are more eager to comply with their parents' wishes when deciding on education and future occupation. This trait, however, is also common in the other minority-origin groups, of whom many have a relatively low level of school achievement.

Based on our qualitative material and survey data, we suggest that features such as 'the appraisal of education', 'the culture of gratitude', 'the children's behaviour as a



mirror of parental qualities', and 'parental monitoring' are all aspects that should be further explored in future research. Another fruitful issue to examine is why willingness to comply with parents' wishes does not seem to be transformed into educational success in other minority groups.

There are reasons to believe that the unbeneficial parent–child relationship that we found in some of the families of Vietnamese origin will change over time. Acculturation processes affect parents' child-rearing styles and parent–child relationships (Driscoll *et al.* 2008). It is also likely that this will change more drastically in the second-generation's child-rearing practices. One of the interviewees illustrates this when talking about how he will raise his children:

I would give them more freedom. I would try to create a relationship that would make the children come to me and talk about anything. Have a more open relation. I think it's easier to gain control in that way. Because you'll know what they're doing and thinking, since they'll tell you.

## Notes

- [1] Modood (2004) actually uses the term 'ethnic capital', but this is an extension or revision of social capital.
- [2] Teacher-assigned grades will be influenced by the teacher's perception of the student, and our measure of grades is mainly based on teacher-assigned grades. Hence, the teachers' possible positive perception of youth of Vietnamese origin as a 'model minority' might be part of the explanation for the relatively high achievement (Conchas 2006).
- [3] If the information on some of the questions which constitute the indexes *school grades* or *parental style* is missing we use the information from the remaining questions. As the proportion missing is generally quite small (< 4 per cent) this will have limited influence on the results. If we only have information on one parent's education we multiply his/her education by two.
- [4] We have also tested a model where control for parental income is added. This slightly increases the advantage of the group of Vietnamese origin, but neither parents' educational level nor parents' income seem to explain the educational advantage of the group of Vietnamese origin. An additional test of an interaction term with gender and origin is also insignificant, which means that the gender difference is quite similar in both groups.
- [5] In the group of Vietnamese origin, there are two exceptions: the difference between youth whose parents have only compulsory school and those who have parents with upper-secondary school is insignificant and youth whose parents have a master's degree receive slightly lower grades than those whose parents hold a bachelor's degree (insignificant difference).
- [6] We also need to acknowledge that the small scale of our sample prohibits any attempt to categorise into a fourfold model.
- [7] One of these five youths was more difficult to categorise, since his relationship with his parents seemed cold, but not as hierarchical as the others. He shared more qualities, however, with the group who emphasised 'obedience and subordination'.
- [8] There are some slight exceptions to the pattern in the material. For example, resources in the peer group may compensate for some of the disadvantages associated with a specific parenting style.

- [9] We have also tested analyses including several other minority groups and more advanced analysis (regression analysis controlling for age, gender, parental education and parental class). This yielded very similar results. The positive, but weak, correlations between parental style and school grades/parental education seem to be present also in the other minority groups.
- [10] We have also found, however, that the association between parental style and educational performance is equally weak in the group with majority background. This gives us reason to question the general importance of parental style and/or our quantitative measurement of parental styles.

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