

Southeast Asians in Providence and Their Urban Environment:
Establishing Connections, Assessing Perceptions, Influencing Policy

by
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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Through several in-depth interviews with members of the Southeast Asian (SEA) community in Providence, this public perception study aims to assess this community's needs, desires, and use of their urban environment. The findings of this study will provide insights into the SEA community's perceptions of the urban environment - to ensure the inclusion of their needs in the development of indicators assessing the environmental health of Providence and future urban environmental policy. Since no previous studies have been conducted with the Providence SEA population on urban environmental issues, this study will also establish new connections as well as strengthen old contacts between the Southeast Asian community and environmental academia, organizations, and government agencies. The successful (and not so successful) methods of accessing and interviewing the target population can serve as methodology recommendations to future environmental research with the Providence SEA community.

KEY FINDINGS

- Roger Williams Park was an overwhelming favorite among respondents for family picnics, spending time with friends, playing sports, and fishing 'for fun.'
- No respondent reported eating fish caught from urban rivers.
- The water quality of local rivers and ponds in Roger Williams Park was criticized by the majority of residents for its cleanliness.
- Vacant Lots and garbage in the streets were the most frequently mentioned urban environmental concern by respondents without a direct question.
- Ten adult respondents spoke of the lack of resources available to the Southeast Asian community as a key factor in the lack of stewardship and activism within the community.
- Although respondents did not identify their concerns as 'environmental' issues, findings revealed that issues concerning rivers, vacant lots, parks, etc. were key concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Approach fish consumption studies with the SEA community with knowledge of differences in diets; types of fish consumed; lack of resources to information on 'safe fishing'; and awareness of the poor quality of urban waterways.
- Roger Williams Park's popularity among Southeast Asians in Providence should be used to recruit members of that community for clean-up efforts at the park. Future plans for urban parks should be modeled after the success of Roger Williams Park.
- Concentrate city clean-up efforts in residential areas to instill pride in the neighborhoods and the city.
- Discrepant perceptions of the 'urban environment' between academia, mainstream environmental organizations and members of the Southeast Asian community must be further explored and taken into account when developing policy and future research methodologies.
- Increased state funding to Providence Southeast Asian community organizations will enable community leaders to gain the resources they need to foster the present desire for activism and stewardship for their urban environment.

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PREFACE

The field of Environmental Studies demands the coordination and balance of ‘objective’ science and ‘subjective’ public perception in order to achieve political change in environmental policy initiatives. Public perception studies provide members of the public who normally have little or no access to the political sphere with an opportunity to voice their opinions on issues and ideas that may affect policy-making decisions. Thus, such studies play a direct role in the democratic process which aims to include the voices of the people that the policies will serve.

Unfortunately, public perception studies often fail to target minority populations because of barriers posed by language and cultural differences. This lack of inclusion by public perception studies reflects a larger trend by mainstream environmental organizations. The mainstream environmental movement has historically ignored the environmental hazards affecting people of color in poor urban and rural communities who suffer from a disproportionate distribution of environmental health hazards. Those who fight against these injustices are part of the growing environmental justice movement.

Environmental Justice entails equality not only in bearing the burden of the nation’s pollution problems, but also in demanding for equal access and opportunities for representation of communities of color in policy-making decisions. This environmental perceptions study with the Southeast Asian population in Providence aims to serve as the first step to meet that demand for equal representation in the decision-making processes that will affect the urban environment in Providence. Understanding perceptions of the Southeast Asian community aims to insure the inclusion of their needs and desires

regarding their urban environment and by doing so hopes to encourage future studies within this community and other Asian American communities which have been excluded from Environmental Justice organizing. Through the connections made and the processes practiced, the Southeast Asian community in Providence will have access to an increased number of resources to environmental academia and organizations so as to encourage activism and stewardship for their urban environment.

Through several in-depth interviews with members of the Southeast Asian community in Providence, this public perception study aims to assess this community's needs, desires, and use of their urban environment. En route to attaining this goal, the study hopes to fulfill three main objectives. First, the findings of this study will provide some insights into the Southeast Asian community's perceptions of the urban environment - filling the current void in academia and public policy research on this topic. This information can then be incorporated into the development of environmental health indicators for Providence and encourage future urban environmental policy to include the needs and perceptions of this and other minority populations. Second, since no previous studies have been conducted with the Providence Southeast Asian population on urban environmental issues, this study will also establish new connections as well as strengthen old contacts between the Southeast Asian community and environmental academia, organizations, and government agencies, and Third, the successful (and not so successful) methods of accessing and interviewing the target population can serve as "lessons learned" - providing methodology recommendations to assist future environmental research with the Providence Southeast Asian community.

Thus, this report will lay out the framework from which this perception study with the Providence Southeast Asian community was formed and then evaluate the findings of those interviews within that same framework to provide a clearer understanding of this cross-disciplinary study.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

As a public perception study focusing on a minority population, this project relied on a cross-disciplinary approach that drew from academic discourses of environmental justice, Asian American studies, and social research studies, as well as theories on community organizing, activism and local environmental projects. Relevant theories and studies have been taken from these disciplines and projects to provide a framework from which the study's objectives have been formed. The following chapters aim to serve as a map for this study's course and roots - providing background on where this study has come from, where it has gone, and where it recommends to go next. The relevant roles of public perception studies, representative public opinions, environmental justice, and equal participation in policy-making processes to the Providence Southeast Asian community and their urban environment will be further explored in the first three chapters. Chapters 4-8 will focus on the public perception study conducted with the Providence Southeast Asian community - exploring effective methodology, barriers to access, and findings. The final two chapters will apply literature research to the findings of this study to provide recommendations to policy makers on the urban environmental issues of greatest importance to the Providence Southeast Asian community and to future environmental studies researchers who wish to continue working with the Southeast Asian community in Providence.

**The Need For Public Perceptions Studies In Environmental Studies :
Applications To The Providence Urban Environmental Indicators Project**

As part of the movement to revitalize the city of Providence, the Brown University Center for Environmental Studies (CES) is currently undertaking a project to identify and develop environmental indicators to assess the health of the city's urban environment. With these indicators, environmental benchmarks will be established to serve as formal policy recommendations on urban environmental issues to the City of Providence.¹

A pertinent factor in developing environmental indicators and establishing relevant benchmarks relies on public perceptions of the environment. What urban environmental issues (i.e. lead poisoning, vacant lots, street trees) are most important to the residents of Providence? What types of natural spaces (i.e. open green parks, clean rivers) do Providence residents use most often? How can these urban environmental issues be addressed? How can these urban environmental spaces be improved? Policy recommendations that reflect the needs and desires of the public necessitates the inclusion of quantitative survey work as well as qualitative perception studies that determine which urban environmental issues are most important to Providence residents.

The roles of public opinion and scientific data rarely coincide and coordinate in academic disciplines, yet both methods play pivotal roles in developing policy through a participatory democratic process. Environmental studies remains one of the few academic disciplines that attempts to combine its studies of so-called 'hard' and 'soft'

sciences to policy recommendations. Scientific data attempt to represent the objective facts of a policy problem, while perceptual studies which rely on personal experience, opinion, and behavior are viewed as subjective and relative. Yet, in reality, neither method is so strictly confined to objectivity or subjectivity. Academics of social constructionism argue that scientific knowledge can never be wholly objective, for scientists inevitably bring to their work their own beliefs and values as well as the world view of the society in which they live.² Some believe that if lawmakers and bureaucrats were to adopt social constructionist theory, the policy-making process could be changed profoundly. Science would lose its mystique and expert objectivity and public participation in policy-making would be newly legitimized, revolutionizing environmental policies to be more protective of public health.³

On the other hand, recognizing the interrelationships of class, race, and hazardous waste site distribution is not difficult, and few would challenge its reality, yet the cause and effect relationship between those factors is difficult to prove. If almost everyone agrees that people of color are disproportionately poor, that a frequent characteristic of poor neighborhoods is their proximity to dirty industries, and that the protection of public health requires regulating the disposal of industrial waste,⁴ then why are scientific data necessary to promote policy changes? It almost seems unnecessary to use science to defend these environmental issues, yet social movement history teaches that appeals to

¹ Scott, Rowlett Neel, "Water Quality and Water Access Indicators and Benchmarks in Providence," http://www.hunger.brown.edu/Departments/Environmental_Studies/thesis/ugrad9697/rscott.html

² Tesh, Sylvia N. and Bruce A. Williams, "Identity Politics and Environmental Justice," *Polity*, v18n3, Spring, 1996, p.288.

³ *Ibid.*, p.288.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.291.

common sense alone can never achieve change in long-standing policies and institutions.⁵ Science provides the cause-and-effect argument that the environmental movement thrives on.⁶ Although, environmentalism originated from the moral claim that mistreating nature is as unethical as mistreating humans, this idea is still far too radical to support calls for social change on its own.⁷ Environmentalism cannot succeed unless it also uses causal reasoning.⁸ Environmentalists must show that the ill-conceived actions of humans will ultimately result in destruction of nature. Yet, many of these cause-and-effect cases have been difficult to prove - e.g. ozone depletion, global warming - devaluing science's ability to convince the public of the importance of environmental issues. Instead, environmentalists find themselves returning to the moral belief that stands behind their movement to inspire public advocates and maintain their belief and support.

Only studies of public perception can assess the level of interest and awareness in environmental issues and provide recommendations on where these issues need to be improved. The common sense which connects poor communities of color to hazardous waste sites still holds value in the public's eye and it is the voice of the public for which this study and all other perception studies show their concern. How can the necessity of public perception studies to environmental studies continued to be ignored?

Appealing to policy makers requires methods not so different from those used to appeal to the public. In fact, interviewing members of the public on environmental issues can achieve political goals through a direct democratic process. The success of policy initiatives often relies on local public support which is fortified by learning what the

⁵Tesh, p.291.

⁶ Ibid., p.291.

⁷ Ibid., p.291.

⁸ Tesh, p.291.

public's needs and desires are through public perception studies. If policy makers learn what the public wants or needs before proposing an initiative and addressing those concerns within the proposed policy, the initiative will more likely receive the public support it needs to be passed.

Acknowledging the equally important roles of experiential subjective knowledge of the lay person and the expert objective knowledge of scientists will allow the dialogue to reach beyond the realm of academia to the political and public arena where a participatory democratic process can ensue. Thus, as a study within the environmental studies discipline, the CES Indicators project is faced with the challenge of concentrating the efforts of two methodologies - scientific data and public perception studies - and presenting the findings from each method as equally valuable and useful in making recommendations to policy makers. By combining the findings from public perception studies with the scientific data on urban environmental issues, the CES Indicators project can establish environmental indicators that reflect both the perceptions of the public as well as scientific and political reality.

**Targeting Minority Communities in Public Perception Studies:
Why Inclusion of Minority Communities is an Environmental Justice Action**

A public perception study in Providence would fail to represent the views of Providence residents without the inclusion of minority communities in its target population. Public perception studies attempt to learn the opinions, ideas, thoughts, and observations of members of the general public - those who do not have the opportunity to participate directly in the political sphere, yet are greatly affected by public policy, consumer advertising, and product design. But who is this general public and are all the voices being heard?

Although perception studies aim to assess the perceptions of the public by interviewing or surveying a representative body of a population, some communities are often missed. The logistics of conducting a study that accommodates language and cultural differences often act as barriers to reaching minority communities. These barriers, though not impossible to overcome, often provide researchers with the justification for excluding minority communities from their study population. Yet, without the perceptions of minority groups within a population, how can a study claim to reflect the perceptions of a representative population?

These are questions that environmental justice activists find themselves asking mainstream environmental organizations and academia over and over again. Inclusion and Diversity are principles that guide and empower community activists in the Environmental Justice movement. The Environmental Justice movement which first emerged in the 1970s, was organized in reaction to the lack of attention granted to urban

and rural environmental issues affecting poor and working class people by environmental organizations, government agencies, and academia. The ‘first wave’ of the environmental movement began in the 1960s but concentrated its efforts on protecting our natural resources, mostly working through public interest groups.⁹ Environmental justice activists in the 1970s saw themselves not as ‘protectors of nature and defenders of wildlife’ like many mainstream environmentalists viewed themselves, but as ordinary people victimized by corporate industry’s hazardous waste sites that had invaded their neighborhoods and often tainted their healthy lives.¹⁰

In the 1980s, environmental justice activists criticized mainstream environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and government agencies for failing to address environmental issues that were affecting minority communities right in their own towns, cities, and states. The Sierra Club now acknowledges its shortcomings in failing to link social inequities to their ‘conservation cause.’ The Club explains their lapse in judgment to the discriminatory biases that were ‘the norm’ at the time of its organization, disabling them to reflect on how their social privileges allowed their stewardship of the wild places they loved.¹¹

Indeed, President Clinton signed an executive order in 1994 entitled, “Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations” that not only called for the identification and address of environmental

⁹ Tesh, p.286.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.286.

¹¹ Baxter, Tracy, “Environmental Justice For All,” Sierra

effects that disproportionately affected minority and low income communities, but also created an *Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice*.¹²

There has been significant progress made by other mainstream groups in addressing their own racial bias over the past years. Greenpeace and the Earth Island Institute have taken the lead among the “Big 20” environmental groups in rearranging their priorities to better reflect the diverse makeup of the society they aim to serve.¹³ Earth Island sponsored a precedent-setting Urban Habitat project and Greenpeace has aggressively tackled the issues of environmental racism, notably toxic industry’s preferential location in communities of color, as well as diversifying their staff in recent hiring.¹⁴

Still, many organizations fail to recognize issues of social injustice as environmental issues and those who have changed their attitude only did so after increased pressure by communities of color. People of color organized behind environmental justice realized that to guard the health of their communities, they needed to ‘shake up’ their absentee allies.¹⁵ Without the active support and campaigning of mainstream groups such as the Sierra Club, issues of environmental justice have difficulty reaching the public. Too often, the public perceives the environmental movement as the ‘first wave’ which concentrated on public interest groups and the protection of natural resources. The public may be unaware of the evolution of the

¹²Administration of William J. Clinton, “Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” Weekly Compilations of Presidential Documents, February 11, 1994.

¹³ Clarke, Chris, "Is the Green Movement Too White?" Terrain, Berkeley, California, Ecology Center of Berkeley, December 1993, gopher.igc.apc.org:70/0/environment/envjustice/resources/clarke1293.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁵ Baxter, p.101.

movement and the growing inclusivity of its agenda. Thus, for now, the environmental justice movement appears to run parallel to the mainstream movement, working behind the principle of sustainability but defining its focus and goals quite differently.

The discrepancy in agendas of the two movements creates another challenge for environmental justice activists to increase awareness and activism within communities of color. Associating the environmental justice movement with the mainstream movement can have a negative impact on recruiting communities of color to the movement.

Misperceptions of the environmental movement as strictly a 'white middle and upper class' movement marginalizes environmental justice activists and discourages participation from people of color who could be potential environmental justice activists. However, building coalitions with mainstream environmental groups still remains a goal for many environmental justice activists who recognize the public and political attention that these organizations demand. Environmental justice advocates at the University of Texas include "educating and empowering communities, community organizations, federal agencies, tribal, state, and local governments, academic institutions, businesses and industries and creating partnerships" as a critical aspect of the quest to achieve environmental justice.¹⁶ Their principle calls for the empowerment of communities as well as the education of academic institutions - appealing to the growth and change of both the environmental justice movement and mainstream environmental organizations. The objectives of this public perception study aim to achieve these goals by increasing awareness in the community and educating academic institutions and policy makers on the Providence Southeast Asian community's perception of the urban environment.

The Principles of Environmental Justice first drafted at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, includes seventeen principles that stressed the importance of equality in bearing the burden of environmental hazards, living in harmony with the earth, and providing opportunities for equal participation in the policy-making process. The seventh principle states:

“**Environmental Justice** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.”¹⁷

Thus, as part of the movement and struggle for equal protection under environmental laws, environmental justice stresses the important role of participation in decision-making processes in the struggle for social and environmental justice. A step in the direction to correct for these inequalities in representation of people of color in the decision-making processes is to include minority voices in public perception studies of their environment.

To counter potential disregard for minority communities in larger public perception studies, it becomes necessary to conduct studies that explicitly target a particular minority community to ensure the inclusion of their needs and desires in policy making decisions.

To ensure the Southeast Asian community in Providence, Rhode Island is offered an opportunity to voice some opinions on environmental issues affecting them in the city, I designed and conducted this study to target members of that community. I hope to learn

¹⁶Environmental Equity homepage, the University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/eneq>

¹⁷ Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, The Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice., http://www.envirolink.org/orgs/pen/crcql/ej_platform.html.

what urban environmental issues (i.e. vacant lots, fishable rivers, lead poisoning, clean parks, tree abundance) members of the Southeast Asian community are most aware of as well as which they show the most concern for in order to assess which issues hold the greatest import for the community. Such an assessment could provide policy makers with the information necessary to focus attention on urban environmental issues of most immediate concern to the Southeast Asian community. Therefore, the results of this study will contribute to the development of appropriate indicators that reflect the views of a representative population of Providence.

As a largely immigrant population with diverse personal experiences reflective of their political, economic and cultural identities, the Southeast Asian community may offer an alternative perspective of the Providence urban environment and its effect on their lives. Regardless of whether perceptions of environmental issues prove to be different in the Southeast Asian community from perceptions of other Providence ethnic and white communities, the provision of an opportunity to hear these perceptions in order to address the concerns of all residents of Providence in urban environmental policy necessitates the need for such studies. If the CES Indicators Project is attempting to learn the perceptions of the Providence community, perception questions need to be answered by people representative of the Providence population to provide a clear picture of the diverse perspectives on issues concerning their urban environment. It is necessary to begin to develop an understanding of the views of all spectrums of the population in order to develop environmental indicators and benchmarks reflecting all these views.

**Strengthened Connections and Coalitions Breed Stewardship And Activism:
How Reaching Out To The Providence Southeast Asian Community Can
Contribute to the Elimination of Environmental Racism**

UExclusionary Agendas of Mainstream Environmental Groups as a Barrier to Activism

Structural barriers and a lack of adequate resources such as connections to environmental academics institutions, organizations, and policy making processes pose critical challenges for communities of color in organizing against environmental injustices. The resources and services that academic institutions, mainstream environmental organizations, and government agencies claim to provide to the public are often systemically inaccessible to minority groups due to historic (and continuing) racial and class discrimination. Discriminatory barriers to the political sphere contributed to Reverend Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.'s alliteration of the term environmental racism. Chavis states environmental racism as “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, in the enforcement of regulations and laws, and in the history of excluding people of color from the mainstream environmental groups, decision-making boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies.”¹⁸

Exclusionary actions and agendas of mainstream environmental groups play a particularly relevant role as a barrier to organizing for communities of color because of their influential role in affecting political and public perceptions of environmental issues. Industry polluters, like much of the American public have mistaken *environmentalists* to include only those persons dedicated to the global issues that the first wave of environmentalism concentrated on - marginalizing and thus ignoring the interests of

minority communities fighting for environmental justice. Thus, polluters have long interpreted environmentalists' silence as a license to dump industrial wastes on marginalized communities.¹⁹ Perhaps the mistake has not been solely made by the polluter but also by environmentalists, since the polluter's perception of the environmental movement is simply a reflection of the actions (or shall I say lack of actions) taken on by mainstream environmentalists. Indeed, mainstream environmentalists have failed numerous times to speak out against the unequal burden of environmental hazards that communities of color bear. Their failure to protect the rights of minority communities alienates communities of color - placing pressure on these communities to organize for their own cause. In response to mainstream environmental organizations' failure to address environmental justice issues, communities of color have formed a network of environmental justice organizations. Although much political and public attention can be gained by joining the powerful mainstream groups, a convergence of the two movements would allow for the influential and historically 'white-focused' agendas of mainstream groups to overpower and dilute the environmental justice cause - necessitating the need for two separate movements .

Joining the mainstream environmental effort cannot effectively eliminate structural barriers to gaining resource access for communities of color. Instead, agendas and goals of mainstream environmental organizations need to incorporate the needs and desires of minority communities not just by including statistical evidence, but by actively seeking out the perceptions of members of these communities. By interviewing members of the Southeast Asian community in Providence, I will be able to offer recommendations

¹⁸ Delegates, p.3.

to environmental academics, organizations, and government agencies to incorporate this community's needs effectively into future public policy. Through the study process, connections between academic institutions and Southeast Asian community organizations will be made - establishing a point of access to resources and overcoming the first hurdle to sustaining local activism.

To substantiate urban environmental issues within the concerns of the Southeast Asian community in Providence and encourage stewardship and activism, access to information, resources, and services must be established. Thus, this study also aims to connect the community with environmental institutions (i.e. Brown's Center for Environmental Studies) and environmental organizations (i.e. Audubon Society, Clean Water Action) as well as community organizations working on urban environmental issues (D.A.R.E. - Direct Action for Rights and Equality²⁰). Increased understanding and appreciation of the environmental issues in conjunction with access to relevant resources could catalyze an environmental movement within the Southeast Asian community in Providence.

The Emergence of the Environmental Justice Movement

Environmental issues have traditionally been perceived as separate from human rights and social justice due to the limited agenda of mainstream environmental organizations. Environmental justice bridges the gap between the environmental movement and social justice movements. When human rights and ecology are given

¹⁹ Baxter, p.101.

equal weight in the environmental discourse, local people are not only more capable of participating in the development decisions that are going to affect them, but also end up acting as stewards of the local environment.²¹

Structural barriers to accessing resources as well as limited opportunities to participate in the policy-making process also act as an extra deterrent for communities of color to pursue environmental stewardship opportunities actively. Experts believe that these barriers and the lack of adequate resources account for the low level of activism by communities of color.²² That is not to say that many minority communities and environmental organizations have not overcome these barriers, but those who achieved success certainly did not do so without a struggle. When members of contaminated communities are adequately informed about hazards, their level of awareness and opposition to the environmental inequalities they suffer often result in active protest.²³

Increasing levels of awareness often calls for large-scale organizational efforts. The establishment of the Conference on Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards in January 1990 gave national visibility to the public debate on environmental racism and served as a catalyst for residents of polluted communities to organize.²⁴ The conference provided a forum for discussions on strategizing and organizing communities while building self-confidence and awareness of a common struggle among diverse

²⁰ Direct Action for Rights and Equality, a community organization in South Providence which shares its building space with the Hmong United Association. The organization uses direct action to counter environmental and other social injustices.

²¹ Sachs, Aaron, "Upholding Human Rights and Environmental Justice," *The Humanist*, March/April, 1996.

²² Weintraub, Irwin, "Fighting Environmental Racism: A Selected Annotated Bibliography," New Jersey, Rutgers University, [http://www.cruzio.com/\(meuser/ejigc.html](http://www.cruzio.com/(meuser/ejigc.html)

²³ *Ibid.*, p.4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

peoples. The following year, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit brought environmental justice activists, people of color in affected communities, and grassroots organizers together in Washington DC to network and give support to struggles against environmental racism across the country. The delegates to the summit, drafted and adopted the seventeen principles of Environmental Justice that continues to serve as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.²⁵ The energy gained and networks built from these conferences result in organized protest, legal actions, marches, civil disobedience, and other activities. Community newsletters, pamphlets, magazines, classes, lectures, and videocassettes have made it possible to recruit large numbers of people.²⁶

In addition, communities of color are using the power of the ballot and economic pressures to make their stands. Minority voter blocs are forming around the country to exercise clout in many areas where their opinions are not usually sought.²⁷ All these actions represent exceptional efforts by communities of color to fight environmental racism with limited resources and access to the political sphere working against them. Combining the efforts of environmental justice groups with public perception studies such as the one this report details, barriers to stewardship and activism for communities of color can be broken down and doors of opportunity for environmental academics and communities to work together can be opened.

²⁵United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, "Principles of Environmental Justice," Proceedings to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, Washington DC, 1991.

²⁶ Weintraub., p.4.

Environmental Justice Activism in Asian American Communities

Many of the works cited in this report focus on environmental injustices affecting African American, Latino, and Native American communities. The relative lack of literature on Asian American activism in the environmental justice movement reflects the lack of attention given to environmental injustices faced by Asian and Pacific Americans because they are little understood by environmental academics, environmental organizations, and even environmental justice activists. Considering the sudden growth of Asian and Pacific Americans (who include 26 nationalities including Chinese, Filipinos, Asian Indians, Hawaiians, Laotians, Hmong, Vietnamese, Cambodians, and others) in the U.S. population since the 1970s, the lack of information about the services targeting this rapidly growing group is a significant gap. The Southeast Asian community in Providence, like many Asian and Pacific American communities in the U.S. is poorly represented in the political system and leadership and policy-making roles in the environmental field.

Many Southeast Asian Americans, most of whom arrived in the U.S. as political refugees, offer a contrasting picture of Asian immigrant life in America to the stereotypical description of Asian Americans as the model minority. The model minority myth which finds its roots in the Cold War Era, stereotypes Asian Americans as educated, economically comfortable, compliant, silent, obedient citizens and most importantly, easily assimilated to American social life. The myth permits the formation of a pan-ethnic identity of Asian Americans that overlooks the socioeconomic and

²⁷ Ibid., p.4.

cultural differences within the population.²⁸ As a population whose median family income and unemployment rates fall well below the Asian American average, Southeast Asian Americans suffer from the idealized vision that the model minority myth paints of all Asian Americans. By accepting the myth of Asian Americans as a model minority, environmentalists fail to understand that the environmental threats that affect Asian American communities are not unlike threats to other communities of color.

Many of the environmental hazards affecting Asian Americans and especially Southeast Asian Americans in urban areas, are occupation-related. While many Chinese immigrants working in the garment industry in San Francisco Bay area suffer from the harsh working conditions and lack of environmental health standards in factories, Laotian families planting vegetable gardens for subsistence unknowingly risk their family's health because of the lead emitted from a neighboring factory that contaminates their soil.²⁹ Often lack of awareness is the only barrier to relieving Asian American families from environmental dangers. Increasing access to information on risks and dangers of subsistence fishing, farming, gardening, and occupational safety standards is often as simple as providing multilingual pamphlets in community centers, foreign language newspapers, and local postings. Providing these communities with access points to resources and including needs and desires of Asian American communities learned through perception studies in policy-making decisions must become routine actions for environmental academia, organizations, and government agencies if protection of all communities is to be achieved.

²⁸ Pang, Clara, "The Power of Diversity in Asian American Politics: An Analysis of the Relevant Role of Panethnicity in the Formation of a Cohesive Political Faction," final paper, American Civilization 161D: The Pacific Rim in American History, Professor Robert Lee, Brown University, 1996.

Asian American factory workers, migrant farm workers, subsistence fishers, urban dwellers, and other environmentally concerned activists have begun to organize for safer working conditions and cleaner neighborhoods. Leading the fight is the Asian Pacific Environmental Network, officially established in 1993, after several Asian American environmental activists met at the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991.³⁰ The group which is based in San Francisco serves the large Asian American population in its local vicinity as well as acts as a clearinghouse of information on environmental justice issues affecting Asian American communities across the country.³¹ Since its birth, several other environmental justice organizations have begun to concentrate efforts on issues facing Asian American communities.

The US Environmental Protection Agency national headquarters office in Washington DC has hired several specialists on Asian American environmental justice issues to work in their Offices of Environmental Justice and in the Office of the Administrator to ensure the agency addresses issues directly affecting Asian American communities.³² Numerous state environmental and health agencies are contributing to the cause by conducting studies on fish consumption - an emerging concern for subsistence Asian American fishers unaware of water and species contamination in rivers, bays, and lakes - in Southeast Asian communities in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Washington, and California. These studies along with studies of Asian Americans communities' needs and desire regarding their environments, not only achieve increased

²⁹ Shaffer, Gwen, "Asian Americans Organize for Justice," *Environmental Action*, winter 1994, p.31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

³¹ Asian Pacific American Directory, Asian Pacific Environmental Network description, [weblink]

³² US Environmental Protection Agency, "Environmental Justice Issues of Asian and Pacific Americans," a work in progress, draft copy, 1996.

awareness among environmental justice activists, academics, and mainstream environmental organizations, but also promote activism and stewardship within Asian American communities who now understand how they too have a stake in protecting the environment.

Background On Target Population

They take us and put us in boxes to live.
Each family lives in the same kind of box.
Everything is controlled.
There are no neighbors to visit like back home.
Because our boxes are not all in the same building;
I must walk a great distance to find people I know.
So we talk on the telephone and imagine
what this person does and
how he lives in his box
and I tell him about life in my box.

*Cambodian woman, Bronx, New York*³³

The Southeast Asian Population in Providence, Rhode Island.

Like many coastal cities in the United States, Providence, Rhode Island is home to a large immigrant population . According to 1990 census data, almost 10,000 of the 160,000 people living in Providence are of Asian or Pacific Island descent.³⁴ Of these 10,000, almost 6000 are either Cambodian, Hmong, or Laotian³⁵ representing a significant proportion of the city's residents - contributing to the economic and cultural growth of the city. Southeast Asians in Providence represent a diverse people themselves. They include preliterate tribesmen from the mountains as well as college-educated professionals from the cities, welfare families as well as wealthy businessmen, and super-achieving university students as well as members of youth gangs.³⁶ Despite the differences among themselves, Southeast Asians share something unique, a fundamentally different experience from other Asian groups. They did not come here

³³ Tenhula, John, *Voices from Southeast Asia: The Refugee Experience in the United States*, New York, NY, Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1991, p.141.

³⁴U.S. Population and Housing Census Bureau, 1990.

³⁵ Ibid.

voluntarily, seeking *Gam Saan* or fortunes in America.³⁷ Southeast Asians come to Rhode Island as refugees, in an attempt to escape the communist regimes creating political turmoil in their native lands. Many lived off of the vegetables and herbs they gardened and sold and the fish they caught in remote areas of Laos and Cambodia. Once in the urban U.S., they are faced with new challenges including the demand for new trade skills and limited access to clean waters for fishing or nontoxic soil for gardening. Many Southeast Asians find themselves working in low-skill, low-paying, dead-end industrial jobs - unable to use the skills they learned as fishers and farmers in their distant homes. Where can they fish or farm in South Providence or Providence's West End?³⁸ Among people like to grow their own favorite vegetables and medicinal herbs and whenever a swatch of land is made available to them at such places as Roger Williams Park, they plant a garden.³⁹

Adjustments to the cityscape suggest a perception of the urban environment unique to their experiences as displaced farmers and fishers, refugees and immigrants, ethnic minorities and economically active Americans. Farming land and fishable waters of their homes taken from them, many Southeast Asians now find themselves in unfamiliar urban settings in the United States. With little choice in their immigration to the U.S., the majority of Southeast Asians in Providence live in heavily populated areas of the city, ethnically diverse and rampant with poverty.

³⁶ Takaki, Ronald, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, New York, NY, Penguin Books, 1989, p.47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.47.

³⁸ Lind, Louise, *The Southeast Asians in Rhode Island: The New Americans*, Rhode Island Ethnic Heritage Pamphlet Series, Providence, RI, The RI Heritage Commission and the RI Publications Society, 1989, p.13.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.27.

Almost half of the Southeast Asian population in Providence lives in communities that have been identified by the Enterprise community organization as “suffering from pervasive poverty, unemployment and general distress.”⁴⁰ These communities which include areas of Upper and Lower South Providence, Elmwood, West End, Olneyville, Smith Hill, and portions of Federal Hill, have a poverty rate of at least 25% in at least 90% of the census tracts in those areas.⁴¹ Upper South Providence, Olneyville, Washington Park, the West End, and Elmwood all have a higher percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander residents than the citywide average of 6.0%.⁴² In addition, the most active and most widely used Southeast Asian community organizations (the United Hmong Association of Rhode Island, Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians, Cambodian Society, Genesis Center) are located in these neighborhoods - attracting more recent immigrants to the established ethnic enclaves.

As a largely immigrant population, the Southeast Asian community may offer an alternative perspective of the Providence urban environment and its effect on their lives based on past experiences in their Southeast Asian homelands. Areas of residency in Cambodia and Laos where the majority of the Hmong, Cambodian, and Laos communities in Providence come from is quite different from the urban environment that these people now call home in Rhode Island. The change in environment may influence their perception of nature, especially within the urban environment. In addition to a change in natural environment, changes in occupation, dominant culture, and political

⁴⁰ Enterprise Community Demographics, proposal for revitalization project.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The Providence Plan, Providence Neighborhood Fact Book, March, 1994.

structures upon arrival in the U.S. may contribute to the construction of a perception of nature that reflects these transitions.

Past Studies of Environmental Issues and the Providence Southeast Asian community.

As noted above, no perception studies have been previously conducted with the Providence Southeast Asian community regarding urban environmental issues. As some findings will show, community leaders in the Southeast Asian community recognized a lack of attention given to environmental concerns in their community in addition to a lack of outreach by environmental academics, organizations, and activists to Southeast Asians in Providence. The lack of previous studies underlines the need for communication between environmental organizations and institutions in order to encourage activism among Southeast Asians and stewardship of their Providence urban environment.

Although a scarcity of perception studies with the Providence Southeast Asian community exists, risk assessments of Southeast Asians consuming fish from polluted waters in East Providence have increased awareness of possible environmental hazards affecting the local Southeast Asian population. Immigrating from remote rural regions of Southeast Asia, many Southeast Asians practiced subsistence fishing and farming before arriving in Providence. Some Southeast Asian fishers still exist in Rhode Island although sport fishing seems to outnumber subsistence fishing. Southeast Asian fishers have been identified in fishing areas such as the Robert E. Turner Reservoir in East Providence.⁴³

Lee's 1995 study of Southeast Asian fishers in East Providence, identified members of

⁴³ Lee, Siemay, "Are Turner Reservoir Fish Safe to Eat? A Risk Assessment of Rhode Island Southeast Asian American Fishers," Providence, Brown University, in completion of the Undergraduate Degree in Environmental Science, 1995.

that community as a potentially affected population by the contaminated rivers of Providence. The study included interviews of 20 Southeast Asian fishers at the reservoir who reported consuming fish at rates ranging from 10 -340g/day for Cambodian fishers, 59-114 g/day for Hmong fishers, and 16-24 g/day for Laotian fishers. These consumption rates support the higher-than-average rates of Southeast Asian fishers estimated in studies conducted in Minnesota and Wisconsin where large populations of Southeast Asians reside. In addition to high consumption rates, Lee found that Southeast Asian fishers and their families prepare, cook, and consume parts and species of fish which are known to accumulate larger amounts of toxicants than the species and methods of preparation used by the average American. The discrepancy in fish consumption patterns may increase the susceptibility of Southeast Asians and other Asian American communities to toxic contamination. The results of these studies contribute to the identification of fish consumption as a primary environmental health concern for the Southeast Asian American community.

The environmental concern of fish consumption for Southeast Asians now extends to Providence, Rhode Island. In addition to the growing number of Southeast Asians immigrating to the area and Lee's study which identified members of that community as local fishers, recent reports from EPA on the level of contaminants found in the city's local rivers have caused the issue to resurface. Fishing in Providence rivers has become a recent concern to environmental health experts who have received reports from EPA on the level of contaminants in the city's Woonasquatucket River that will limit the amount of fish that is safe to eat from the river. A risk screen conducted by US EPA Region 1 on the Woonasquatucket, found that the subsistence ingestion of sunfish

or species similar to sunfish would result in an excess cancer risk of 2.6×10^{-2} while a fisher who ingested eel as a sole source of fish could suffer an excess cancer risk of 9×10^{-3} .⁴⁴ For both species, 96% of this risk was found to be due to dioxins in fish tissue and 5% to PCBs in fish tissue.⁴⁵ Although experts believe the likelihood of fishers deriving fish from the Woonasquatucket to be quite low,⁴⁶ reports by members of the Woonasquatucket Greenway project, the Rhode Island Audubon Society, the Rhode Island Department of Health, and the Hartford Park Housing Project claim fishing by ‘ethnic group’ namely Asian Americans and Latinos occurs on the Woonasquatucket.⁴⁷ Concern from local environmentalists for local fishers’ health prompted studies in the environmental academia on perceptions of the local waterways for the development of environmental health indicators.

Lee’s study revealed a clear awareness of the contamination of the Turner Reservoir among Southeast Asian fishers through their reported abandonment of the reservoir. Her respondents’ reportedly stopped fishing at that site due to a health advisory warning fishers of the presence of contaminants in the water, making fish unsafe to eat.⁴⁸ Although the fishers interviewed were not directly questioned on their perspectives of the importance of the water quality of the Turner Reservoir, one can assume that as fishers, water quality is a priority. Although health risk estimates of eating fish from the Turner Reservoir were quite low, the Southeast Asian American fishers interviewed regarded the advisory as due warning to stop fishing there. The possibility

⁴⁴US Environmental Protection Agency Region 1, “Human Health Risk Screening Analysis for a Subsistence Fisherman in the Woonasquatucket River, Providence, RI,” DRAFT, 1996, p.3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.3.

that Southeast Asians' awareness levels regarding the poor quality of water in Providence rivers is the reason for their refusal to fish in local rivers can only be effectively assessed through a perception study with that population. Through my data collection and analysis I will further explore why Southeast Asians are not fishing in Providence and why a general misperception to the contrary exists.

Lee's discussion of the reactions of fishers to the health warning was her report's only attempt to address perceptions of water quality and its importance to the fishers. Her focus also limited the study to a particular location which created a challenge in tackling issues of access to clean rivers or other uses of the river for members of that population. Fish consumption remains to be the highlighted concern for local environmentalists involving the Southeast Asian population and thus their only point of connection between environmental academia and the community. With no prior studies on other recorded uses of local waterways by members of the Southeast Asian community, it is difficult to predict responses by other members of the Southeast Asian population on the importance of water quality in their local rivers. What about those who simply wish to walk along the river and hope that it does not emit an offensive odor? Should these people still be concerned about the chemical content of the water? As the following section will reveal, questions regarding fish consumption in addition to a number of other possible concerns about urban rivers have been identified by pilot interviews as issues of concern in the Providence Southeast Asian community.

Methodology

My findings relied solely on the subjective remarks, comments, and opinions of members of the target population: Southeast Asians in Providence. As a qualitative social research study looking for detailed responses, I opted for in-depth in-person interviews, as the preferred method of data collection. Since the target population represented close to 6000 people, gathering responses from every Southeast Asian Providence resident was not a realistic goal in the time allowed. Therefore, I preferred extensive responses gathered from in-depth interviews (sacrificing quantity of respondents) over brief surveys with a larger respondent pool. I do not claim that my findings represent the entire Southeast Asian community.

Unfortunately, accessing the target population posed several challenges to using this methodology effectively. The language barrier prevented me from conducting in-person interviews. The language difference not only stood as a barrier to communicating during the interview, but limited my ability to contact members of the community to participate in the study. In order to overcome the language barrier, I used students as translators to interview their parents/guardians. After interviewing the students, I sent them home with a copy of the same protocol to interview an adult in their household. The data collected from these interviews failed to reach the level of depth and clarity that the other interviews which I conducted were able to gather. In addition, no observational notes on respondents' expressions, attitudes, and tone were taken and no probing questions were applied, unlike the interviews I conducted. Consequently, this method of

data collection was abandoned and I used an interpreter to translate in subsequent interviews.

From that point on in the data collection, respondents who felt more comfortable participating in the interview in their native Asian language, were interviewed with an interpreter who translated questions and answers between the respondent and me. With the exception of the five interviews mentioned above, I conducted all other interviews and took written notes and taped the conversation when convenient. The majority of the interviews took place in person - either at the respondent's place of work or home. The remainder of the interviews were conducted over the phone (in English) due to convenience factors for the respondent.

Interview protocols guided each interview, but I took liberties to rearrange the order of questions and simplify wordings during interviews to accommodate unexpected situations of misunderstandings. The inconsistent manner in which protocols were used in addition to the evolution of the protocol (further illustrated below) was not meant to disregard the value of a controlled protocol. These methods were taken in order to access the most in-depth responses possible within the limitations caused by barriers to gaining access in the target population.

Protocol Development

Since my data were obtained primarily through in-depth interviews, protocol development was pivotal. In addition, I hope to provide methodology recommendations to environmental academia conducting future studies with the Southeast Asian community through my experiences - necessitating the need for emphasis on protocol

development. An analysis of successful protocols and their development will reveal my assessment of the most productive method of obtaining useful data as well as engaging elusive respondents. Throughout the study, the interview protocol evolved through four main drafts and numerous revisions. Thus, it is important to note that the findings presented in this study are not based on identical protocols. It is also important to note that 6 of my 28 respondents were not interviewed in English - contributing to the need for protocol revisions.

Four main revisions were made on the interview protocol. The first protocol attempted to cover a variety of possible urban environmental issues of concern to the target population, but focused largely on waterways (perceptions, use, water quality). The protocol's focus on waterways tended to overemphasize the saliency of waterways to respondents and thus overshadowed other environmental issues mentioned in the interviews. The protocol did not provide respondents with an opportunity to comment on issues that were not directly asked about in the protocol. Thus, questions that aimed to assess saliency of urban environmental issues was ineffective since the topics were pre-chosen.

Using the second draft, I began the interview with an open ended question asking what the 'urban environment' meant to the respondent. This question was followed by, "How important do you think it is to have natural spaces such as parks, rivers, and green spaces for community gardens in the city?" The remainder of the questions asked more specifically how gardens, rivers, and parks were used (if they were used at all) and then I requested suggestions for improvement in these locations. The protocol ended with questions regarding stewardship, placing responsibility for city improvements, and

change in perceptions since immigration to the U.S. I used this protocol to conduct 17 interviews. Although this protocol was used with the largest number of respondents, it failed to bring in the most informative and in-depth responses. The second draft attempted to cover too many topics without probing deeply enough to gather the most useful and insightful data. The interviews conducted with this protocol also used the least effective method of accessing and interviewing respondents. All the interviews conducted with the second draft were with middle school students or their parents (interviews conducted by students, not myself - refer to Methodology). The ineffective methodology and protocol of these interviews left me with two options: redraft the protocol to focus on only one urban environmental issue and concentrate on that issue throughout the study or redraft the protocol to address all issues of concern within a usable format more effectively. The third draft of the protocol takes the first option and the fourth protocol takes the second.

From past studies at the CES and because of increasing interest from the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, fish consumption was identified as a relevant urban environmental issue to the Southeast Asian community. Using the recent report from the EPA on the high contaminant levels in the Woonasquatucket River and protocols used for fish consumption studies in Southeast Asian communities in Sheboygan Wisconsin, I drafted a third protocol that focused solely on fishing in Providence rivers, consumption of fish species, and methods of cooking and preparing those fish. After conducting five interviews with members of the Southeast Asian community and speaking to other contacts in the community, I was unable to identify even one person (Southeast Asian or other ethnicity) who fished on the Woonasquatucket or other rivers in the city for

subsistence. Thus, I abandoned the single-issue protocol and turned to my second option - redrafting a protocol covering a number of urban environmental issues within an effective and informative format.

Throughout the development of the protocol, I attempted to assess the saliency of urban environmental issues to members of the Southeast Asian community, but repeatedly failed to communicate clearly 'what an urban environment is'. After realizing that the term, 'environment' itself was possibly the problem, I deleted the term 'environment' in the final draft of the protocol. I simply asked what the respondents would suggest for improvements in the city. Depending on the responses given, I proceeded with questions concerning issues I identified as urban environmental issues with possible relevance to the Southeast Asian community. The remainder of this chapter explores the questions of terminology and issue identification by explaining how urban environmental issues were identified for the final protocol and why the term, 'environment' was eliminated.

Terminology: What does the term 'environment' imply?

The term 'environment' has come to represent a number of different concepts, social movements, biological systems, and physical surroundings. Environmental justice activists like Robert Bullard believe the environmental crisis cannot be solved effectively without redefining environmentalism to include social justice.⁴⁹ Pressure from Bullard and other grassroots activists challenged mainstream groups to enhance their agendas to include and pursue actively issues of social justice affecting environmental efforts. Many

of these groups have begun to understand and even embrace the cause of social justice activists mobilizing to protect their neighborhoods from toxic waste sites and lead smelters.⁵⁰ But the revolution within the mainstream environmental movement has yet to reach all organizations, many of whom continue to view environmental and social justice issues separately. The narrowness of the mainstream movement makes people of color believe that their concerns are not ‘environmental’⁵¹ Without prior exposure to efforts made by the environmental justice movement, people of color, like the majority of public perceptions, may shy away from environmental issues believing that they represent irrelevant abstract concepts inapplicable to their daily struggles in the inner-city.⁵²

Use of the term, ‘environment’ in interviews with respondents of the Southeast Asian community revealed similar reactions to those described above. Results from interviews showed a variety of responses and understandings of what the ‘environment’ and in particular the ‘urban environment’ meant to respondents. Because academics, social researchers, and government agencies working in the environmental field have failed to reach the Southeast Asian community in Providence, Rhode Island, this population has been criticized for its lack of interest and action on environmental issues. Interview results questioned the validity of this claim with the wide variety of responses to what the ‘urban environment’ meant to respondents. Perhaps the Southeast Asian community failed to show interest in environmental issues because they did not associate their daily struggles with absentee landlords and vacant lots with the environmental cause.

⁴⁹ Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voice from the Grassroots*, Boston, MA, South End Press, 1993.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

My first attempts at contacting respondents for interviews revealed a recurring difficulty in sustaining interest from community members and obtaining referrals from those who did talk to me. I found myself repeatedly insisting that I did not need to speak to an ‘expert’ in environmental issues, but was looking for perceptions from anyone in the community. I was constantly met with sentiments such as “We [Southeast Asians] are new here and have to worry about food on the table and roofs over our heads...we have to get jobs. We don’t really have time to worry about environmental issues.” Frustrated and discouraged by the number of respondents who assured me that members of the Southeast Asian community were not concerned about environmental issues, I was suddenly intrigued by the comments made by these same respondents about how concerned they were about the cleanliness of the water in local rivers and the empty trash-filled lots in their neighborhoods. The same people who told me they were planning to take their middle school students to the neighboring river to clean it up and hoped to see more trees planted in their neighborhoods also told me they did not see themselves as environmentalists. Why is the term ‘environmentalist’ so limiting?

My findings lead me to believe that members of the Southeast Asian community in Providence are indeed concerned about their environment, but because of the limiting connotation of ‘environmentalism,’ never associated their concerns with the environmental movement. Thus, upon asking respondents about the urban environment I was often met with looks of confusion. In order to avoid further confusion I chose to focus my protocol questions on the city. Thus instead of beginning with a question such as “What does the urban environment mean to you?” I began with the question, “How

⁵²Austin, Regina, “Black, Brown, Red, and Poisoned,” *The Humanist*, July/August, 1994.

would you like to see your city improved?” hoping to sustain interest from respondents on the topic yet still explore issues regarding the urban environment.

Issues of interest: What is an urban environmental issue?

As a student of environmental issues, I find myself quite comfortable in discussions on urban environmental issues and what they entail. Upon taking on the task of developing my protocol, I realized, that those issues that academics have regarded as urban environmental issues may not be on par with those issues of most importance to members of the Southeast Asian community. To incorporate the perceptions of the respondents effectively and assess the degree of import those issues represented to them as urban environmental issues, I opened the conversation with an open-ended question asking what they would like to see improved in the city. After several probing questions to ensure the respondent did not have any other suggestions or issues to mention of their own, I continued the conversation by asking questions that specifically addressed: rivers, fishing, parks, vacant lots, lead poisoning, and trees. The first four were identified as issues of concern from previous interviews in which these issues were mentioned by respondents independent of my questioning.

This protocol also included questions regarding street trees and lead poisoning because of the breadth of studies completed on these issues by CES. Although these issues have been studied quite in-depth with members of the Providence population, the Southeast Asian community has not been targeted in any of these studies. Thus, to complete the work already in progress on these issues, I chose to include lead poisoning and street trees in the final version of the protocol.

Data Management

Written notes were taken during all interviews and a number of interviews were also recorded by audio cassette for additional reference. Recordings allowed a second transcription of interviews to complete any missing data in the original transcription. Responses were then retyped for clarity and ease of management. Data collected from each interview were then filed chronologically. Data went through three stages of coding. Data were first color-coded according to general issue categories such as residency, Roger Williams Park, water quality, access to parks and rivers, fishing, personal responsibility, lead poisoning, vacant lots, and trees. The coded data were then reanalyzed for repeated concepts, ideas, and perceptions within each category - coding patterns with one-word labels. Patterns across categories and respondents were then identified and labeled accordingly. Next, all topics, themes, and patterns were listed and data were analyzed for frequency across respondents, taking note of which respondent gave each response and whether the responses were answers to direct questions on that topic, probing questions, or whether the issue was mentioned by the respondent with no probing at all. The protocol version used to gather each response was also duly noted.

Findings were analyzed in three alternate respects to interpret which urban environmental issues held the most import in the Southeast Asian community in Providence. First, issues that were mentioned by the respondents without probing or initial direct questions by the interviewer were interpreted as important issues. Second, issues that were mentioned various times within the span of one interview, whether they were brought up initially by the respondent or the interviewer, were also considered

important issues. Last, issues that were mentioned across interviews, that is, issues that were mentioned by more than one respondent were also considered to be pertinent issues. Because of the small number of respondents, this study does not claim to represent the thoughts and perceptions of all members of the target community. That is why, although some issues were only mentioned by one respondent, these issues were still considered important because of the passion and interest that that one respondent showed toward that issue.

Barriers to Access

Access to the Southeast Asian population in Providence continued to challenge the success of this study and by doing so played a pivotal role in the development of an effective methodology. Barriers that continued to hinder data collection shaped the target population, interview protocol, and no doubt contributed to the survival of this study. Perhaps the difficulties faced in accessing respondents from the Southeast Asian community in Providence can be interpreted as a failure in past communications with the community by the University or even the misperception of the goals of environmental studies. In either case, the lessons learned in successful and less successful methods of accessing the target population can serve as recommendations to future social researchers so as to avoid ‘reinventing the wheel.’

Unaware of the difficulties I was to encounter, the study began with a target population limited to adults of Southeast Asian ancestry living in Providence - since I believed that perceptions, opinions, and needs of the adults of the community would safely represent the needs of the community as a whole and that reliability would be stronger with adults. Furthermore, I thought that adults in the community were more likely to be immigrants than youth, providing possibilities for interesting comparisons between environments in Southeast Asia and the urban environment of Providence reflected in their perceptions of ‘environmentalism’ as a general concept. I hypothesized that experiences as immigrants who formerly lived in less urban areas would provide contrasting opinions on the Providence urban environment when compared to the opinions of other residents of the city. This hypothesis will be further explored in the

analysis of findings. Unfortunately, the connections available through the University and the CES were mainly with local youth, making the establishment of contacts with the adult Southeast Asian community a formidable task. The community organizations serving the Southeast Asian population in Providence provided the most optimistic hopes for obtaining willing respondents for the study.

Three main community organizations serve the Providence Southeast Asian community: The Socio-Economic Development Center for Southeast Asians (SEDC), the Hmong United Association of Rhode Island, and the Cambodian Society. SEDC provides resources in the form of translators, mentor programs for youth, and English as a Second Language classes, job counseling, and other social services to members of the Southeast Asian community in Providence and neighboring areas of Rhode Island. After state funding to the single-ethnic organizations was cut, community leaders from the Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese communities merged their organizations in to a single entity - SEDC. SEDC appears to remain the stronghold in the community for social services, but the single-ethnic organizations have kept their names and continue to serve their community surviving on donations from individuals and run by volunteer staff.⁵³

The Hmong United Association of Rhode Island, located in South Providence serves a state-wide Hmong community through social services similar to SEDC and in addition providing citizenship classes for immigrant residents. The classes are led by bilingual instructors and focus on terms and phrases included in the 'tests' for citizenship to the U.S. The Cambodian Society also conducts citizenship classes for members of its

⁵³Sam, Sokvaam, personal communication, 11/6/96.

immigrant community at the local Buddhist Temple on Hanover Street in Providence. The Temple serves Buddhists across the state and is a central location for many Cambodian celebrations. The depth and breadth of activities and services provided by these community organizations demands constant contact with members of the Southeast Asian community. Therefore, I decided that staff people from these organizations would be the logical first step to reaching other members of the community and extending my respondent list.

After a couple of interviews with staff people at the Hmong United Association and SEDC, I realized that my respondents were not very willing to refer me to other members of the community - citing busy and demanding schedules as reasons for disinterest in my study . All these community organizations face the demanding task of serving a growing and diverse community of Southeast Asians under the limitations of small budgets and small staffs. Even with the passion and commitment of the community members who staff these organizations their ability to provide adequate resources to everyone is limited. Thus, they may be reluctant to take time out of their overfilled schedules to participate in a study of perceptions of the urban environment that seems unimportant and irrelevant to their lives.

Furthermore, my inability to speak a Southeast Asian language presented additional problems in interviewing members of the community. Knowing, that a large portion of the community did not feel comfortable with their English capabilities and that the language barrier justified many past studies to exclude the Southeast Asian community in their target population, I found this hurdle especially daunting and

pertinent. The interviews with staff people at the community organizations were all conducted in English, but they warned me that few members of the community would feel as comfortable as they did with someone who did not speak their language.

To counter the language difference I tried using the CES' contacts with Providence public schools to reach Southeast Asian middle and high school students so they could serve as translators for myself and their parents. Unfortunately, very few teachers were willing to accommodate me and the responses I received from the students' interviews with their parents tended to be brief and less informative than the data I collected from the in-person interviews.

Finally, after a staff person suggested I attend a citizenship class and interview some of the students before or after the class, I returned to the community organizations for assistance. This strategy worked very well at a citizenship class at the Buddhist Temple. The instructor assisted me in acting as an interpreter and the people were very willing to answer my questions. Unfortunately, the following week, when I hoped to return to the class, the local Buddhist community was faced with a more immediate dilemma of their own. An accidental fire destroyed the dormitory portion of their Temple, leaving many monks and nuns homeless and the community faced with the task of either rebuilding or relocating. The community members, consumed by the problem at hand, could no longer provide me with any assistance. Thus, interviews and data collection with the Cambodian community was cut short due to this tragedy. Fortunately, I was able to attend another citizenship class at the Hmong United Association where I recruited a few final volunteers to participate in my study. For these interviews I used a translator to contact, arrange, and translate the interviews.

In retrospect, the barriers I faced in gaining access to the Southeast Asian community would have been difficult to avoid. As in any study, obtaining a certain level of trust without any previous exposure to that community can impede access and maintenance of that access throughout the study. The language barrier certainly stood as the largest impediment to gaining that level of trust. Although I believe that the troubles I faced in gaining access to my target population was necessary, I also believe that this study could have benefited from an earlier use of translators. I had originally hoped that I would be able to gain the trust of community members with or without a translator at my side. Unfortunately, I realized that language in itself is such a critical form of communication, that without an understanding of any Southeast Asian language I was unable to ensure my respondents' complete understanding of my study purpose. Without this understanding it became nearly impossible for me to gain the community's trust. Near the end of my study, when I finally opted for the assistance of a translator, I finally felt comfortable with my interviews - whether this was due to the translator's presence or to some gain of trust, I do not know. Either way, I now can appreciate the difficulties that arise in gaining access to a target population, but realize that these difficulties can be overcome with patience and determination.

Profile of Respondents

Twenty eight members of the Providence Southeast Asian community were interviewed for this study. Of these 28, ten respondents were middle school students and eighteen respondents were adults. Of the 10 middle school students, nine were female and one was male. Six of the adults interviewed were women, six were men, and the remaining five adult respondents were parents interviewed by students following a protocol that did not include a question regarding gender of respondent.

The first five respondents were identified as community leaders - teachers, presidents of community organizations, and active members of the community. Nine of the ten middle school students were interviewed in groups of two or three. Appendix B shows which students were interviewed in a group. Some findings in the text and in Appendix C will be quoted as a response of more than one respondent. These responses were stated by the students interviewed in groups. While not all three of the respondents stated the findings, if they are listed as having stated that finding it is because they showed agreement to that statement.

The respondents will be identified by numbers (corresponding to the order in which they participated in the study) when reporting their responses in the FINDINGS section. Appendix B identifies the respondents by these numbers along with their gender, where the interview was conducted, who conducted the interview, which protocol was used, when the interview was conducted, what language the interview was conducted in, whether or not it was tape recorded, in person or over the phone, individually or in a

group. All of the respondents participated in the study voluntarily and without confidentiality.

Findings

Findings have been divided into three sections: 1) Issues, 2) Personal Responsibility, Stewardship and Activism, and 3) Saliency of Environmental Issues. Issues includes responses given by respondents concerning the issues identified as ‘urban environmental issues’ by this study (access and use of parks/rivers, water quality, fishing, lead poisoning, vacant lots, and trees). Stewardship and Activism focuses on responses to questions regarding personal responsibility to cleaning and maintaining their urban environment as well as responses commenting on the availability of resources for stewardship, activism, community organizing, and safe fish consumption. Finally, data revealing the saliency of urban environmental issues relative to other urban issues as well as which environmental issues are of most concern are included in the Saliency section.

The key findings are listed below followed by a brief description of each and selected corresponding data. The remaining data can be found in Appendix C. Although division of data into categories and sections necessitates some interpretation, this section aims to report the data as unbiased findings - directly reporting the responses recorded from interviews. These findings will be analyzed and interpreted to develop recommendations for policy makers and future researchers regarding Southeast Asians perceptions of the Providence urban environment in Chapter 9.

Most of the findings presented will not make a special note of which protocol version was used to elicit the responses, but it is important to keep in mind the four different protocol drafts when analyzing the data and how the different focuses in each protocol produced different responses. My questions (noted by CP in interviews I

conducted and Q in interviews conducted by the students) are included for only those quotes which may need some contextual clarification. Respondents are identified by numbers corresponding to the numbers assigned to them in the respondent profiles (refer to Appendix B).

Issues:

- A. Roger Williams Park was an overwhelming favorite among respondents for family picnics, spending time with friends, playing sports, and fishing ‘for fun’
- B. No respondent reported eating fish caught from urban rivers.
- C. The water quality of local rivers and ponds in Roger Williams Park was criticized by the majority of residents for its cleanliness.
- D. Vacant Lots and garbage in the streets were the most frequently mentioned unprompted urban environmental concern.
- E. Respondents who spoke about lead poisoning during their interviews revealed a diverse array of perceptions on the issues.
- F. Trees in the city also received mix reviews from respondents.

Personal Responsibility, Stewardship, and Activism:

- G. A discrepancy between generations was found in willingness to take responsibility for maintenance of the urban environment’s health.
- H. Willingness to act as personal stewards to their urban environment was found in both adult and student respondents.
- I. Ten adult respondents also spoke of the lack of resources available to the Southeast Asian community as a key factor in the lack of stewardship and activism within the community.

Saliency of Environmental Issues relative to other urban concerns.

- J. Although respondents revealed that the issues that we discussed as environmental issues were not necessarily their most important concern, environmental issues still held a certain amount of import.

A. Roger Williams Park was an overwhelming favorite among respondents for family picnics, spending time with friends, playing sports, and fishing ‘for fun.’ Twenty-two of the twenty-eight respondents reported visiting Roger Williams Park ‘regularly’ or ‘often.’ Roger Williams Park was mentioned in responses to a variety of questions from, “Do you like to spend time outdoors?” to “Where do you fish in the city?” Comments on the park were heard in the form of compliments, criticism, and appreciation.

CP: Do you visit parks or spend time outdoors here in the city?

#2: *“Yes. I try to do that quite normally...usually go to Roger Williams Park to play ball there.”*

#4: *“I go to Roger Williams Park where they have lots of open space.”*

All ten of the students interviewed named Roger Williams Park when asked, “Do you visit any natural spaces (parks, rivers, open green spaces)?” Students reported a variety of activities that they enjoyed participating in at the park including picnics, sports, games, feeding ducks, fishing, and spending time with family and friends. When asked what improvements they would like to see at the park, students’ responses tended to deal with material additions to the park.

#8: *There’s only a couple of picnic tables. I’d like to see more places for food.*

#11: *I wish we could swim there. They need changing rooms so we can swim. You can’t swim now because it’s too deep.*

#15: *They could have playgrounds there for kids to play on.*

#16: *I wish they had free rides.*

#17: *The lemonade is too expensive there.*

These responses do not intend to give the impression that the students were only concerned about the built portions of the park. In fact, all ten students mentioned the quality of the water in the park’s ponds in response to questions regarding fishing, swimming, descriptions of, or improvements of the park

#8: *I like Roger Williams Park better than Water Place Park because it's bigger, but the water at Water Place Park seems cleaner.*

CP: Is there anything you would like to see improved at the park?

#14: *Just the water.*

CP: Are you able to do all the activities that you like to do at [Roger Williams Park]?

16,17: *You can't swim there. You wouldn't want to swim because the water is dirty and nasty.*

Although both the adults and students interviewed complained about the poor quality of water in the ponds at Roger Williams Park, respondents had many positive remarks to make about the Park.

#1: *"It's a very pleasant place. It's very clean. They keep it pretty clean. I guess they have to. It's one of the beautiful places in Providence. They say there are only five of these kinds of parks left in the U.S...like colonial parks, not these contemporary parks they have everywhere now. Roger Williams is one of them."*

CP: Why do you like to go to the park then? What do you do there?

#26: *It's a public park. I like to go jogging there, have family picnics, the kids can play volleyball, and we can just spend time with the kids.*

In addition to the overwhelming popularity of Roger Williams Park in the target population shown by the number of respondents who reported visiting the park, a few respondents also remarked on the wide-use of Roger Williams Park specifically within the Southeast Asian community, commenting on citings or cultural activities that occurred in the park.

#1: *"The Hmong, there's lots of Hmong in Washington Park [neighborhood where Roger Williams Park is located]. They throw waterlily seeds into the water for ducks to eat."*

#2: *"I see a lot of Hmong kids who like to play soccer there."*

#5: *"Roger Williams Park is used a lot by Southeast Asians and Cambodians."*

Although almost all of the respondents mentioned some aspect of the park (water quality, garbage, safety) that could be improved, none of these reasons deterred them from returning to the park regularly.

B. Not one respondent reported eating fish caught from urban rivers. Contrary to the popular belief that Southeast Asians in Providence are subsistence fishing along urban rivers, data revealed a majority of respondents who reported never fishing from the local rivers because of pollution and contamination. Twenty -four of the twenty-eight respondents answered “no” when asked whether or not they have ever fished from any of the rivers in the city. 22 of these respondents said they had never seen anyone else fishing from the rivers in the city, but the other 2 respondents said they had seen others fishing from the river, but noted that the fishers were merely ‘fishing for fun’ and did not intend to consume the fish they caught.

CP: So why aren't you fishing anymore?

#2: *“One of the reason I don't visit the rivers in Providence is I know that environmentally it's not safe. There's too much pollution in rivers. Also you can see the physical pollution and damage that's been done to the river. People that are not accustomed to...uh...Rhode Island....I mean Providence rivers they would go fish there, but if you've been here for a while you know there's been tires thrown into the river. It's not safe to catch any fish there”*

#4: *No one fishes on the rivers in the city. We prefer salt water fishing.*

CP: Have you ever seen anyone fishing from the rivers in the city?

#21: *I've never seen anyone fishing. Just kids playing but they weren't Asian.*

CP: Was this along the Woonasquatucket River?

#21: *I don't know where that river is. I meant the Providence river on the other side of town near the port. There's garbage and tires in the river. The waters not clean - people wouldn't fish there.*

Of the remaining respondents, two said they sometimes fished on urban rivers ‘for fun’ but did not consume the fish they caught while the other two respondents reported fishing on rivers, but were unclear to whether these rivers were in the city or not.

#3: “Yeah we fish around. Sometimes we try to teach kids how to fish, but we just go near by here. But if we want to fish for food or something we have to go far away where there’s ...you can catch fish”

One respondent was surprised that someone would even suggest that fishing was occurring on the urban rivers.

CP: So you’ve never seen anyone fishing from the rivers in the city?

#21: No. I’ve never seen anyone fishing. This is the first time anyone has even asked me that.

As some of the above quotes mentioned, many respondents reported of fishing from bodies of water other than the rivers in the city. Respondents listed other fishing areas such as Roger Williams Park, Fox Point Park, Naragansett, Jameston, Exeter, Smithfield, Westerly, Charlestown, Newport, and Bristol. Some respondents were willing to drive out of the state to find safer waters to fish from (Appendix C).

Fish was indeed a significant part of many respondents’ diets, but respondents noted that this was only true for Cambodians especially among the older generation because of the lifestyles they led in their home country. On the other hand, one Hmong resident noted that fish was “not a main food product” for the Hmong people perhaps reflecting their farming lifestyles in Southeast Asia where most Hmong resided in mountainous regions of Laos.⁵⁴ Most fish consumed by members of the Southeast Asian

⁵⁴ Lind, p.23.

community were purchased from local Asian grocery stores and not self-caught. Fish and other food products commonly found in these Asian grocery stores were often imported from overseas - so fish was bought frozen or salted, not fresh.

#21: Fish are a bigger part of the diet for the older generations because of the home country life where they depended on fish. The younger generation eats less fish because they have adapted to American diet.

Most people get their fish from Asian grocery stores. The fish is imported from Thailand. It's imported frozen. Can't get fresh fish. The stores also import vegetables, clams. The type of fish we like, you can't catch here in the rivers.

C. The water quality of local rivers and ponds in Roger Williams Park was criticized by the majority of residents for its cleanliness. As some of the above quotes regarding fishing in urban rivers suggested, respondents found the quality of water in urban rivers to be less than satisfactory. Seventeen respondents described the rivers of Providence as “dirty,” “filthy,” “polluted,” “contaminated,” or commented on the amounts of garbage seen in and around the waterways. Another four respondents did not comment directly on the quality of water with any of the above descriptions but instead stated that they would never fish in the rivers, suggesting that they perceived the water to be less than safe. Most comments on water quality of rivers were given in response to questions regarding fishing in the rivers, thus, many of these responses have already been listed above. Respondents also commented on water quality in response to questions concerning why they no longer visited rivers in the city or what they would like to see improved at the river sites or simply questions asking to describe the rivers in the city.

#3: Over here, every time I go there I tell my kids, don't touch the water. It will stain your hands and then when you go home you have to clean your hand before you eat something. Very smelly and dirty.

CP: Is there anything about the rivers that you would like to see changed?
#28: *They need to clean it more. People dump garbage in it. It's filthy.*

Four respondents were asked direct questions regarding Water Place Park and their perceptions of that river site. Two other respondents referred to Water Place Park as an example of the city's attempt to revitalize the downtown area. Through these comments one can find some interesting perspectives on how well the new development is able to overcome the negative perceptions of the city's rivers.

#2: *"But the Providence waterways...they're doing a wonderful job in terms of cleaning the portion of the river in the downtown settings. I believe there are a lot of corporations involved particularly Citizens Bank. Other than that...as you go beyond that....as you go beyond the down town setting....it's still the same river but there's quite a difference in appearance."*

Twelve respondents also criticized the ponds in Roger Williams Park for their poor water quality. Seven respondents showed their concern for the quality of the pond water in response to questions asking to describe the park or whether they visited the park at all. The other five respondents pointed to the quality of water in the ponds as an aspect of the park they would like to see improved.

One respondent was asked how she would define 'clean water.' Her response suggests a strict order on water quality standards from the often extreme media stories of the effects of contaminated water on human health.

#1: *"Water you can swim in, water you can even drink If it goes into your mouth it doesn't make you have an extra head or something. Where you can wash your hands like in other streams."*

D. Vacant Lots and garbage in the streets were the most frequently mentioned urban environmental concern by respondents without a direct question. Even though only the final protocol which was used to interview three respondents included a direct set of questions focusing on empty lots in residential neighborhoods, concern for vacant lots still arose in several other conversations. The fact that four respondents who were not directly asked about vacant lots mentioned them on their own, reveals the saliency of that issue for those respondents. Vacant lots and garbage in residential areas came up in conversations with a total of nine respondents who mentioned the issue in a variety of contexts. Four respondents (two of which were not asked a direct question regarding vacant lots) spoke of vacant lots as a problem in their community because of the trash accumulating and the rats they attracted.

#3: A lot of people are concerned about vacant lots - a lot of garbage and rats.

#4: Since coming to the U.S., cities are not a good place to live because they're crowded, have problems, pollution, crime, vacant lots, not clean.

#26, #27: There's an empty lot right behind our garage. It looks like a dump. There's an owner, but they don't seem to care.

Another respondent mentioned vacant lots when speaking of his participation in the development of community gardens with the South Side Community Land Trust in South Providence.

#5: I'm involved in the South Side Community Land Trust. We sponsor garden projects with them for the Cambodian community. We're turning vacant lots into gardens where Southeast Asians live.

The other two respondents mentioned vacant lots as a former problem in the community or a problem that has yet to reach the Southeast Asian community.

#28: I haven't been around the neighborhood much, but there used to be an empty lot with a lot of garbage near Roger Williams Middle School, but it seems to be gone now. They built some community center for kids there.

#2: [D.A.R.E.] deals with the environmental issues of vacant lots - people bringing garbage from outside of the city and dumping it in the South side. It affects everybody but in particular it doesn't affect the Southeast Asian community because we haven't addressed the issue yet.

E. Respondents who spoke about lead poisoning during their interviews

revealed a diverse array of perceptions on the issues. The variety of responses appeared to depend on the respondent's experiences with the issue. While one respondent was cited for lead in their home, another spoke of a neighbor who was forced to move away after their child was found to have high lead blood levels. These two respondents were both asked direct questions regarding their knowledge of lead poisoning. Another respondent spoke of lead in gardens when referring to the inappropriateness of 'farming in the city.'

#3: I know there might be lead in the soil when I see people farming [in the city]. I don't think it's good farming. It's not a good place.

CP: Have you heard anything about lead poisoning?

#26: There was a problem in our house, but it was corrected. Now we are supposed to do the outside of our house.

CP: Where did you hear about the lead?

#26: We have tenants upstairs who take their children to the doctor regularly to get their blood checked. They had lead so we corrected the problem.

CP: Have you ever heard anything about lead poisoning?

#28: Our neighbor's landlord painted the house and did something wrong so the kids had high lead levels and the family had to move somewhere else.

F. Trees in the city also received mix reviews from respondents. Like lead

poisoning, questions regarding trees were only included in the final protocol, so only two

respondents gave responses to direct questions on that subject. One other respondent spoke of trees when describing his work on urban environmental issues in Providence.

#26: It's important to have trees especially in the warm weather for shade, but they should plant smaller trees in the city because the big trees have big roots that get stuck in water pipes, and then you have that problem to correct.

#28: I like trees because they provide shade and fresh air, but the city should check when they are getting dry or the branches are dried so they can cut them and no one will get hurt if they fall.

CP: Would you want more trees on your street?

#28: Yes, where neighborhoods have no trees. It makes streets look better and gives people fresh air.

#5: I'm a co-programmer of a project called Design Main Street, sponsored by the city to renovate Broad Street in South Providence. As part of the program I want to plant as many trees as possible along Broad Street.

Personal Responsibility, Stewardship, and Activism

G. Personal responsibility for the maintenance of public areas in cities as well as neighborhoods with private property often reveal a respondent's willingness to act as a steward to the urban environment. Three of the four protocol drafts included questions concerning the respondent's opinion of where the responsibility for maintaining the city (parks, rivers, and residential areas) lay and what role, if any, they would be willing to take in helping to clean the city's parks, streets, and rivers. The most evident finding within the issue of personal responsibility across respondents revealed a discrepancy in taking responsibility for the urban environment's health between generations. A majority of the middle school students interviewed believed it was "everyone's" responsibility to clean and keep the city clean, while more adults looked toward city government and property owners to clean the city. 7 of the 10 students (#8 - #17) interviewed said they thought it was "everyone's" responsibility to maintain the city's parks, rivers, and streets. On the other hand, only 2 of the 18 adults respondents (#1- #6, #18 - #28) said they thought it was "everyone's" responsibility to keep the city clean and six adult respondents pointed directly at the government as the one responsible for the city's maintenance (APPENDIX C).

H. Although more students believed it was "everyone's" responsibility to maintain their urban environment than adults, **willingness to act as stewards to their urban environment was found in both adult and student respondents.** A second question attempted to examine what role, if any, respondents would be willing to take in helping

clean the city's parks, streets, and rivers. Nine students and eight adults reported a willingness to participate in a neighborhood clean-up.

CP: If the city were to organize a neighborhood clean-up would you be willing to participate?

#1: *Yes, our school is doing a project with Brown [University] to clean up the river in Merino Park behind the projects.But I would do it even without the kids.*

#5: *People would participate if they know it's their need...but we need community organizing. We have problems with organizing. There are other organizations in the city to help other people, but not enough for us.*

#19: *No because I am raising four children also I am working full-time. Therefore I don't have the time to help. I could only clean around the house.*

Both student and adult respondents reported previous acts of stewardship for their neighborhoods and parks suggesting a willingness to continue their actions as stewards to their urban environment and into the future. Their stewardship and activism for urban environmental issues took a variety of forms including education, community organizing, planting trees, cleaning neighborhoods, and organizing community gardens (APPENDIX C).

I. Ten adult respondents also spoke of the lack of resources available to the Southeast Asian community as a key factor in the lack of stewardship and activism within the community.

#5: *These areas are often neglected by politicians...they don't have the same concepts or ideas as the people living there. We need to figure out how to find an agency to support them.*

#2: *"I know the west coast has a lot of strong Asian activists on environmental issues. The East coast I don't know any group that's in existence. So there's a difference in the progression of the awareness of the issue of environmental issues in particularly dealing with fisheries and the oceans. The east coast... there isn't*

a lot of environmental issues interest in the Asian community at all . I don't know whether they've done it in Boston. But particularly in Rhode Island the majority of the Asian population are new immigrants. They're not accustomed to how things work in America so it's more like a don't ask don't tell you don't know so what kind of situation."

Saliency of Environmental Issues Relative To Other Urban Concerns.

Measuring the saliency of urban environmental issues to respondents in relation to other urban concerns requires an analysis of all findings across respondents. Findings were analyzed in four respects to interpret which urban environmental issues held the most salience in the Southeast Asian community in Providence. First, three of the four protocol versions included at least one question focusing on saliency of environmental issues in relation to other urban concerns. The first draft asked, “Would you say that environmental issues are important compared to other community needs?” The second draft asked two questions, first, “How important do you think it is to have natural spaces such as parks, rivers, and green spaces for community gardens in the city?” and then closed the interview with, “Compared to other needs and concerns in your community, how important is it to have these natural spaces and keep them safe and clean?” The second question attempted to serve as a check for the response given for the first question. The third draft did not include any question on saliency of environmental issues. The final protocol, focused less on ‘natural spaces’ and asked the respondents to rank the issues mentioned during the interview according to importance to them. Thus, responses to this direct question represented one measure of saliency of environmental issues for respondents and their communities. Although most respondents only claimed to represent their own views, others spoke on behalf of the Hmong, Cambodian, Southeast Asian or residential community. Questions focusing on stewardship which normally followed the ‘saliency’ question also revealed the level of import environmental issues held for respondents.

Issues mentioned by the respondents without probing or initial direct questions by the interviewer served as the second measure of saliency of environmental issues. Vacant lots and garbage in residential streets were two of those issues that repeatedly appeared in responses without direct questioning by the interviewer. Issues were interpreted as 'important' when respondents mentioned or commented on them various times within the span of one interview. Whether they were issues brought up initially by the respondent or the interviewer, an issue that came up in conversation more than once was also considered an important issue. Finally, issues that were mentioned across interviews, that is, issues that were mentioned by more than one respondent were also considered to be pertinent issues. Because of the small number of respondents, this study does not claim to represent the thoughts and perceptions of all members of the target community. That is why, although some issues were only mentioned by one respondent, these issues were still considered important because of the passion and interest that that one respondent showed toward that issue.

As the section entitled "Terminology: What does the term, 'environment' mean?", in Chapter 5 explained, the use of the term, 'environment' caused confusion in various interviews. Thus, assessing the importance of environmental issues required taking into account the discrepancy in perceptions of what environmental issues represented to respondents. As previously stated in this report, my findings led me to believe that members of the Southeast Asian community in Providence were indeed concerned about their environment, but because of the limiting connotation of 'environmentalism,' never associated their concerns with the environmental movement. In order to eliminate some of the confusion brought on by the term, 'environment,' I often took the liberty of listing

the issues discussed in the interview (i.e. water quality, parks, fishing, etc.) as a way of defining ‘environmental issues.’ It is important to note that the majority of the interviews did not mention the word environment, and thus tried to delve deeper into the issues of most concern among the respondents regardless of how they identified or categorized them.

I have already presented evidence that revealed concern for vacant lots, unkept streets, garbage in parks and rivers, water quality of urban rivers and park waterways, across respondents and in-depth for a number of respondents. Here I present some of the responses to questions that attempted to assess the value respondent’s placed on environmental issues affecting them. The remainder of the responses can be found in APPENDIX C.

CP: Would you say that environmental issues like rivers are important compared to other community needs?

#2: *“Actually if you were to rank them or prioritize them environmental issues are not a big issue in the Hmong community because of the hierarchies of these... Hmong today are more concerned with economic.....food on the table shelter over their head and the basic ministries of life. When you worry about those basic needs you don’t have time to worry about environmental issues.”*

#1: *“Well, yes. Things like cleaning the river. I think keeping the air clean is important, too. Like the trees. Planting trees. ... But because we live in the city I think it’s important to have trees. I’m more concerned about having trees because this is the city. If I was in the country I wouldn’t care as much. Like the river. If I lived in the country, I wouldn’t worry about it being clean because it’s natural there. There’s no pollution unless some company decides to dump some chemical waste in it. I think that’s important. People who couldn’t go to oceans, the river is close by. It’s the closest thing for them.”*

Q: Compared to other needs and concerns in your community, how important is it to have these natural spaces and keep them safe and clean?

#4: *Other needs are more important but natural spaces are one part of it. We have to bring them all together. Everything together is important because it’s where we live.*

#5: *Absolutely essential to community. We should clean up the rivers in Providence. Water Place Park gives a good look to the city. Roger Williams Park is used a lot by Southeast Asians and Cambodians. We definitely could have more [places] like this. More trees.*

CP: Out of all the issues that we talked about today...[list issues]... which three would you say are the most important to you?

#26, #27: *First, getting the [gangs] off the streets. Second, the empty lots with all the garbage. Third, keeping the streets clean. They should do this at least once a week. And also, the big rats that we find digging in the garbage. They're always near the vacant houses. If no one is living in those houses and they are just attracting rats and garbage they should clean those up or get rid of them.*

#28: *First the teenagers. We need to keep them in school and make sure they stay away from drugs and alcohol. Second, rivers and streets. We need to keep them clean not just because it looks bad when they're dirty, but also because when they're dirty they pollute the air.*

Combining the findings previously presented and the findings presented here, I argue that urban environmental issues are indeed a concern of members of the Southeast Asian community in Providence. Although respondents revealed that the issues that we discussed as environmental issues were not necessarily the most important concern of theirs, environmental issues still held a certain amount of import.

Data Analysis and Recommendations

Fish Consumption Studies and Health Advisories

According to the findings in this study, very little fishing along urban rivers - including the Woonasquatucket River - occurs among members of the Southeast Asian community. Those who did report fishing on the rivers noted that they fished along the rivers simply 'for fun' and did not consume the fish they caught. Still, I do not suggest that all efforts to conduct fish consumption studies with the Southeast Asian community in Providence should be abandoned, but that perhaps they should take a different approach. Although this study interviewed only 28 members of the Providence Southeast Asian community and does not claim to represent the views of the entire population, findings reveal some important details regarding perceptions of fishing, Providence rivers, and fish consumption in the Southeast Asian community.

First, it is important to note that Cambodians appeared to be more concerned about fish and fishing because fish remains a larger part of their diet compared to the Hmong people who have little interest in fishing at all. Thus, if any efforts are going to be concentrated on Southeast Asians and fishing it should focus on the Cambodian community and avoid lumping all Southeast Asians together.

Second, I found that the species of fish that were tested for contaminants in the Woonasquatucket River by the EPA were not eaten by members of the Southeast Asian community. Those respondents who did report eating fish on a regular basis did not report eating eel and American sunfish - the two species tested in the EPA risk

assessment. Some types of fish that Cambodian respondents reported as commonly eaten include: scup, striped bass, blue and black fish, and flounder.

One respondent who reported fishing regularly in Westerly, Charlestown, and Newport showed a remarkable sense of responsibility for 'safe fishing' by calling the Department of Environmental Management before fishing to find out which species were safe to catch and in what amount. He did admit that his actions were unusually cautious and that he did not expect that many other fishers would follow suit. In addition, he stated that although he rarely depended on posted signs as notifications of an unsafe waterway, these signs were only in English, excluding Southeast Asian and Latino fishers from safety advisories. His statement suggests two key factors in future fish consumption studies and fish health advisories. First, although all of my respondents were aware of the poor water quality of rivers in the city, not all respondents felt confident that other members of the community were equally aware. Thus it is still important to measure the level of awareness among Southeast Asian fishers and the general population of that community. Second, health advisories and information regarding their suggestions of how much fish and which species are safe to consume must be distributed to all populations in their native language. Access to information on safe fishing is still necessary even though Southeast Asians in Providence may not prove to be fishing in urban rivers more than other populations.

Finally, researchers and policy makers must not assume that Southeast Asians fish on urban rivers anymore than other members of the Providence population. Although language can serve as a barrier to accessing appropriate information for safe fishing, one must not assume that members of the Southeast Asian community are not capable of

assessing the quality of water in urban rivers. As my findings revealed, respondents showed a high awareness of the poor quality of water in urban rivers. In fact some respondents were surprised that I would even suggest that people would fish along the rivers in the city. Thus, it is important to approach future fish consumption studies and policy making affecting fishing in Providence with an awareness and sensitivity of the Southeast Asian perceptions presented here.

Roger Williams Park As A Model For Success

Roger Williams Park proved to be a popular site for recreation, exercise, and time spent with family and friends among respondents. Respondents also reported seeing other Southeast Asians at the Park and perceived the park as a common gathering place for members of that community. Historical literature supported these findings by describing Roger Williams Park as a common site for cultural activities including cultural dances as part of the New Year (Pema Lao) Celebration.⁵⁵ With the recorded frequency of use by my respondents I would recommend that future urban parks be modeled after the success of Roger Williams Park.

Respondents complained about water quality and litter in the park yet none of these aspects seemed to deter visitations to the park. Still, the success and popularity of Roger Williams Park may decrease if the water quality declines or amounts of litter increase. My findings also revealed a potential for stewardship among respondents for their urban parks, rivers, and streets. Since members of the Southeast Asian community use Roger Williams Park so regularly, recruiting members of the community to

⁵⁵ Lind, p.31-32.

participate in a clean-up day may foster a greater sense of stewardship that can extend to the entire city. Thus, I would recommend that increased efforts to maintain the park should include the participation of members of the Southeast Asian community to instill a sense of ownership, pride, and stewardship.

Finally, I would recommend continued studies on Southeast Asian use of Roger Williams Park. The findings of this study simply revealed the popularity of the park among members of the Southeast Asian community. Future studies could concentrate on suggestions of improvement of the park among community members and furthermore why the park seems so popular among this particular ethnic group.

Cleaning Up Vacant Lots and Residential Streets Can Instill Pride In The City

The wide concern for the trash accumulated on city streets and vacant lots especially in residential areas leads me to believe that the physical health of their neighborhoods are of extreme importance to members of the Southeast Asian community. Vacant lots and garbage in the streets were urban environmental concerns most frequently mentioned spontaneously by respondents. Respondents who were asked to rank the issues mentioned in the interview according to importance showed vacant lots and littered streets as second only to respondents' concern for the safety of their youth - protecting them from gangs, drugs, and alcohol.

Concern for the upkeep of their neighborhoods most likely stems from a feeling of ownership and pride of property. Much like Roger Williams Park, respondents have a sense of ownership of residential areas with which they come into contact with regularly. Thus, concentrating city clean-up efforts in residential areas can foster pride in

neighborhoods that can extend to other city areas. Similar to Roger Williams Park, recruiting residents of the neighborhood to participate and even lead clean-up efforts will cultivate stewardship for the urban environment.

As residents of neighborhoods that are often neglected by politicians and policy makers, members of the Southeast Asian community would appreciate efforts from the city to help clean-up their neighborhoods. The extensive revitalization efforts of the mayor's council on the downtown efforts must extend to areas that residents of Providence call home. Clean-up efforts should include revitalization of vacant lots and creation of more open spaces for inner-city neighborhoods. One respondent stated, "To my knowledge there is not a lot of open spaces particularly in the inner city. In the outskirts of the city I see a lot of open space and a lot of attention is put to that area in terms of keeping it nice and clean...but in the inner city I haven't seen a lot of efforts in terms of facilities. That's what I would like to see...in terms of improving the visibility and the beauty of parks."⁵⁶ The mayor has established a Vacant Lot Task Force made up of community members, leaders, and politicians, but the effectiveness of this council remains questionable. This respondent's comment leads me to believe that the task force has yet to fully involve the Southeast Asian community in its work. Increased attention to inner-city neighborhoods where most members of the Southeast Asian community reside can not only instill a sense of pride and stewardship but also attempt to erase some of the negative perceptions of government that members of this community have.

⁵⁶ Simon Kue, personal communication, October 23, 1996.

Discrepancy In Perceptions of the 'Urban Environment' Must Be Recognized

Urban environmental issues are far from ignored by the Southeast Asian community. In fact, my findings reveal a clear concern for the health of the city. The problem lies in the identification and categorization of the problem. The concerns reported by respondents often included distress about vacant lots, dirty streets, unsafe parks, and contaminated rivers, yet issues were rarely associated with the word “environment” and the environmental movement. Chapters 8 explained how “environmental” issues were often unclear to respondents and more importantly did not represent the urban concerns of vacant lots, fishing, and clean neighborhoods to them. I found that the exclusion of the term “environment” in the fourth interview protocol seemed to reduce the biases that the term “environment” represents and focused on the urban concerns of greatest salience to the respondent.

Chapter 5 explored the possible sources of this confusion. Mainstream environmental organizations dominate media’s coverage of environmental issues and therefore dictate the public’s perception of the environmental movement. With urban issues still struggling for inclusion on the agendas of mainstream environmental organizations, it is no surprise that respondents failed to recognize their urban concerns as environmental concerns. Recognizing the existence of this discrepancy in perceptions of “environmental” issues may help to explain why members of the Providence Southeast Asian community are perceived to have little interest in urban environmental issues. Lack of interest in environmental issues within the Southeast Asian community may simply be a misperception of what “environmental issues” include and how their experiences and concerns fit into that discourse.

Therefore, I recommend that in addition to including urban issues on the agendas of mainstream environmental organizations, academics (namely the Brown University CES) must ensure communities they are working with understand how environmental issues affect them and their inner-city neighborhoods. Furthermore, I would recommend future research be conducted in a manner that also takes into account this discrepancy. This would mean using protocols such as my fourth protocol version that excludes the term “environment” and therefore reduces the confusion and misperception that the term may carry. Finally, I recommend that policy also take into account the discrepancy in perceptions of what makes up an “urban environment” ensuring that affected communities are aware of their role in the environmental movement and how their urban concerns can fit into the agenda of environmental organizations, academia and policy-makers.

Increase Funding to Providence Southeast Asian Community Organizations

The interest and potential motivation for stewardship for their urban environment presented itself among both the youth and adult respondents. Although the youth population showed a stronger willingness for stewardship than the adult population, I would not dismiss the possibility of stewardship and activism within the adult community. Findings revealed a concern for the lack of resources as a determinant to successful activism and organizing. Therefore, I suggest an exploration of the resources available to members of the Southeast Asian community on environmental programs, environmental justice actions, and community organizing. As more environmental academics and organizations reach out to the Southeast Asian community, level of

awareness within the community will likely increase. Members of the community can then begin to take advantage of the opportunities for activism and stewardship in the city more readily. One respondent who showed great interest in planting trees along Broad Street, the main street of South Providence where the majority of Southeast Asian residents live, was unaware of the Street Tree programs available to Providence communities (I connected him with the Mary Elizabeth Sharpe Street Tree Program). Access to appropriate resources for stewardship may indeed affect the level of activism and continued stewardship among members of the Southeast Asian community. Providence Southeast Asian Community organizations face the often impossible task of serving a growing and diverse community of Southeast Asians under the limitations of a small budget and small staff. Even with the passion and commitment of the community members who staff these organizations their ability to provide adequate resources to everyone is limited. Therefore, I recommend continued and increased state funding to Southeast Asian community organizations who are already suffering from a lack of funding and small volunteer staff. Community leaders that I spoke to showed concern and potential drives for activism that could extend to the remainder of the community. With adequate funding and paid staff, the community organizations that serve the Southeast Asian community can once again properly provide members of their constituency with the resources they need to act as stewards to the urban environment.

Concluding Remarks

The conversations I shared with my respondents revealed concern for the environmental health of their families and neighborhoods not necessarily through active protest but through personal concern - concern that has the potential to transform into action if the opportunity presents itself. The environmental movement and the issues and people it represents can often seem daunting, intangible, and elite. Environmental justice activists continue to challenge this misperception so as to ensure the inclusion of issues that affect urban minority communities - much like the Providence Southeast Asian community - in their working agendas. My respondents have showed me how aware they are of environmental issues affecting them. Now they need the resources to act on these concerns.

These people need not *qualify* to join the environmental movement; instead they must be *offered the opportunity* to join the environmental movement. These opportunities can take the form of clean-up days, street tree programs, and lead poisoning education. The responsibility of providing those opportunities lies upon the shoulders of the academics and activists that make up the current environmental movement. Simple outreach efforts to advertise programs and events in the Southeast Asian community can increase the level of interest and participation in the community. Once the initial steps are taken, members of the community will look for activism and stewardship opportunities in the future. By simply talking to members of the Southeast Asian community about their environmental concerns, I was able to connect environmental academics to this

population - providing opportunities for Southeast Asians in Providence to join the environmental movement.

Although my experiences have been at times discouraging and confusing, small sparks of appreciation and understanding from my respondents inspire me to continue to broaden people's perceptions of the environmental movement in order to encourage and offer opportunities for a greater diversity of people to join the march for social and environmental change.

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APPENDIX A:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

PROTOCOL DRAFT #1

Introduction

Hi my name's Clara and I'm a student at Brown in the Environmental Studies Department. I'm interviewing you today so I can get some idea of your perception of the urban environment and especially waterways in Providence. When I say "urban environment" I mean the natural spaces in the city such as parks, open green spaces, community gardens, and waterways. I'm focusing my study in the Southeast Asian community in Providence. Your responses will be used to help myself and others in our department understand how some members of the SEA population use waterways, what you think about them, how they can be improved, and how your needs can be met. All your answers will remain confidential and will only be used for this study. Shall we begin?

Interview questions:

Descriptions/uses of Waterway sites

1) Have you ever visited a local river since living in Providence?

If no, why not?

If yes, do you know what river(s) it (they) is (are)?

2) Where do you visit the _____ River?

3) What is this place like? Describe the area where you visit the River.

4) What do you do there?

Possible improvements of waterway sites?

5) Are you able to do all the activities (i.e. swimming, fishing, walks, picnics) that you like to do at the river site? If not, why?

6) How could the landscaping of the _____ River be improved to meet you and your family's needs?

7) Do you think the river site is safe for kids to go to? Why or why not?

8) How do you think the area around the _____ River that you visit could be improved so kids could go there by themselves?

9) *Would the way you use the River change if the landscaping around the River was to change? How would it change?*

10) *How often do you visit the _____ River ?*

11) *If the area around the _____ River was to be changed, would you visit the River more frequently?*

Who goes to the river?

12) *Have you noticed what type of people visit the park? Do they live locally? Or do they come from other areas of the city/state?*

13) *Do you think the River is accessible for elderly people? For kids? Handicapped? Why or why not?*

Accessibility of Rivers

14) *How far is the river site from your home?*

- ___ *Within walking distance*
- ___ *< 20 minute bus/car ride*
- ___ *>20 minute bus/car ride*

15) *Is this the closest place for you to visit the _____ River?*

16) *If not, why do you go as far as you do to visit the River?*

17) *Would you visit the river at the nearer location if it was changed? What type of changes would you like to see at this site?*

Water Quality of the River

18) *Describe the water of the _____ River. What do you see?*

19) *Would you swim in the _____ River? Why or why not?*

20) *Would you fish in the _____ River? Why or why not?*

21) *Have you seen others fish or swim in this River?*

22) *How would you define "clean water"?*

Waterplace Park

23) Have you ever visited Waterplace park in downtown Providence?

24) If yes, what did you think of it?

25) Which park do you prefer to visit, Waterplace Park or the site near your home? Why?

Personal Responsibility to local waterways

26) Would you be willing to help clean/improve the river and its surroundings? Why or why not?

27) If the city were to organize a neighborhood river clean-up day, would you participate?

Relative importance of natural spaces

28) Do you think natural spaces such as parks, open spaces, community gardens, and waterways are important to have in the city? Why or why not?

29) How important do you think the maintenance of natural spaces, like the rivers in Providence is compared to other needs in your community?

30) Do you think other members of your community think maintaining natural spaces is as important as other community needs? Why or why not?

31) How does access to natural spaces fit into the other priorities of your community's needs?

Residency

32) Where in Providence do you live?

33) How long have you lived there?

34) Have you always lived in the same neighborhood in Providence?

35) If not, where else have you lived?

Wrap-up

Ok, that's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you for your time. I really appreciate you're help. Do you know of any others who would not mind participating in a similar survey? Could I get their numbers? Is it ok if I tell them you referred me to them?

DRAFT #2

My Central Question: What perceptions do members of the SEA community in Providence have regarding their urban environment?

Interview Questions:

1. When you hear the words “urban environment” what do you think of?
2. How important do you think it is to have natural spaces such as parks, rivers, and green spaces for community gardens in the city? Please explain.
3. Do you visit any such places?
4. Can you describe these places? Please give names if known.
5. What do you do there?
 - A. If you visit rivers, do you fish or swim in the water? Why or why not?

Do you eat the fish you catch? Why or why not?
 - B. If you use gardens, do you use chemicals to help your vegetables, herbs, and roots grow?

Where is your garden?
6. How far do you have to go to visit these places? Are they in:
___ walking distance (15 minutes)
___ short car/bus ride (<20 minutes), or
___ long car/bus ride (>20 minutes)
7. Are you able to do all the activities (i.e. fish, swim, take walks, etc.) that you like to do at these places? If no, what else do you wish you could do there?
8. How do you think these places can be improved to meet you and your family’s needs?
9. Compared to other needs and concerns in your community, how important is it to have these natural spaces and keep them safe and clean?
10. Whose responsibility do you think it is to take care of the rivers, parks, gardens, and vacant lots in the city?
11. Would you be willing to participate in a neighborhood clean-up of a river, park or vacant lot? Why or why not?

12. Have your views of the urban environment changed since moving to Providence? Please explain.

Identification:

13. Where in Providence do you live?

14. How long have you lived there?

15. How long have you lived in the U.S.?

16. What ethnicity do you identify yourself as?

Thank you very much for participating in my study. If you have any questions please feel free to call me.

PROTOCOL DRAFT #3

Fish Consumption Protocol

Introduction:

Hi, my name is Clara Pang and I'm conducting a study of fish consumption in Providence. Everyone who participates in the study will receive \$10 for their time. I have just a few questions that will take about 10 minutes to answer. Could you help me out? Shall we begin?

Protocol questions:

1. How often does your family eat fish at home?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> never | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> almost everyday |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> every day |

2. Do you buy this fish in a store?

- Yes NO

2b. What type of store do you usually buy the fish from?

- Grocery store
 Seafood store/stand
 Hmong, Cambodian, or Vietnamese store

3. Does anyone in your household like to go fishing?

- No: Go to
 Yes: Continue with #4.

3b. Who in your family usually fishes?
PROBE: Does anyone else go with them?

4. How often do they go fishing?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> almost every day |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> every day |

5. How long have members of your family been fishing in Providence?

6. Where do you (or family member) go fishing?

- local river → PROBE: Do you know which river it is? Where along the river? (SHOW MAP!)
 bay
 other: _____

7. Have you always fished from the same area? If not, where else have you fished in the past?

8. What type of fish do you usually catch?

PROBE: Do any of these look familiar? (SHOW photographs)

IF YES to any photograph, continue with questions 8a - 8g for each type of fish.

IF NO: Describe the type of fish you usually catch.

(Ask 8a - 8g for this type of fish.)

8a. Where have you caught this type of fish?

8b. How often would you say you catch this type of fish?

8c. Have you ever eaten this type of fish after you have caught it?

8d. How often do you eat this type of fish after you have caught it?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> 2-3 times a week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> almost every day |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> every day |

8e. How do you usually cook this type of fish?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> boiled in stew | <input type="checkbox"/> baked in oven |
| <input type="checkbox"/> broiled in oven | <input type="checkbox"/> fried in pan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> steamed | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____ |

8f. How do you prepare this fish for cooking?

- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> skin is removed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fat from top and sides is removed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> whole |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER: _____ |

8g. Which photograph would you say best resembles the portions of fish you and your family usually eat for one meal. (show photos of fish meals)

8h. Has you or any member of your family ever felt ill after eating this fish?

PROBE: Can you describe how you or that person felt?

9. Have you ever heard anything about a health advisory warning people to eat fish caught from the Woonasquatucket river?

9a. If yes, where did you hear it from?

9b. When did you hear about the health warning?

9c. Would you say that your fishing and fish eating habits have changed since hearing about the health warning?

10. Have you ever since others fishing along the Woonasquatucket river?

10a. How often do you see people fishing on the river?

10b. Are you aware of any of them eating the fish they catch?

Biographical information:

11. What ethnicity do you identify with?

Cambodian
 Hmong

Laotian
 Vietnamese

12. What language is spoken in your home?

Vietnamese
 Hmong
 English

Khmer
 Cambodian

13. Where in Providence do you live?

14. How long have you lived in Providence? The U.S.?

PROTOCOL DRAFT #4

Hi my name is Clara and I'm a student at Brown University. I'm interested in finding out what people think of their neighborhoods here in Providence - specifically what you like, what you don't like, and what you think can be improved. I have a few questions to ask you. This will only take about 10 minutes and your responses will remain confidential. May I begin?

1. Putting aside issues of violence and crime, what would you like to see improved in you neighborhood?

PROBE: How would you improve [issue(s) mentioned]?

2. Are there any other things you would like to see improved?

{NOTE: If any of the following issues are mentioned in response to the above questions, disregard those questions}

3. What about the **parks** in Providence?
 - 3a. Are there any parks you like to visit in Providence?

3b. Why do you like it (them)?

3c. Do you have to go far to get there? Can you get there by [car, foot, bike, bus]?

3d. Is there anything about the park you would like to see change?

4. What about the **rivers** in the city?
 - 4a. Have you ever visited any of the rivers in the city?

4b. Tell me about those visits.

4c. What do you think about rivers?

4d. Is there anything about the rivers you would like to see changed?

5. Do you **fish**?
 - 5a. Where do you usually go fishing?

5b. Have you ever fished from any of the rivers in the city? Why or why not?

5c. Have you ever seen anyone else fish from the rivers in the city?

- 5d. Do you ever eat the fish that you catch?
- 5e. What type of fish do you catch/eat?
6. Have you ever noticed any **empty lots** in your neighborhood?
- 6a. Tell me about them.
- 6b. What do you think can be done to improve these lots?
- 6c. Do you think there is anything you can do to improve these empty lots?
7. Have you heard anything about **lead poisoning**?
- 7a. If so, what do you know about it?
- 7b. Where did you hear about it?
8. Are there a lot of **trees** in your neighborhood?
- 8a. Have these trees always been in your neighborhood?
- 8b. Do you like having these trees along your street?
- 8c. Would you want more trees on your street? Why or why not?
9. Out of all the issues that we talked about today.....[list issues]....which three would you say are the most important to you?
- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

Now I would like to finish off the interview with some basic questions about yourself for my records. Remember that all this information will remain confidential.

10. How long have you lived in the U.S.?
11. How long have you lived in Providence?
12. What ethnicity do you identify yourself as?
13. Where in Providence do you live?
14. I'm going to be interviewing other people on these same issues, is there a specific question that you suggest I begin with?
15. Can you suggest anyone else who would have an interesting point of view on these issues?

APPENDIX B:
RESPONDENT PROFILES

APPENDIX C:
SELECTED RESPONSES

APPENDIX C: Selected Responses to Interviews

Roger Williams Park

Q: Do you visit any such natural spaces [a previous question described natural places as parks, river, and other green spaces]? Can you describe these places?

#7: Roger Williams Park, other parks, zoo.

#18: Roger William

#19: William Roger's Park

#20: Roger Williams Park. Grassy with water and a big playground.

CP: Are there are any parks you like to visit in the city?

#26: We like to go to Roger Williams Park.

Q: What do you do there?

#18: We have picnic and play and watch the kids play and run around and stuff.

#19: The large spaces allow people to visit there.

#20: Hang around, go shopping, swimming, fishing, and cookout.

CP: Do you fish or swim in the water?

#11: Other people do

CP: Why don't you?

#11: I don't know....

#12: No one fishes or swims in the water because it's too deep and dirty and green. [#11 nods in agreement]

CP: Why don't you fish or swim in the water?

#13: The water's dirty. We only go fishing in the ocean.

CP: Can you describe the park?

#9,#10: The water's dirty.

CP: Do you fish or swim in the water?

15: *No. The water's dirty.*

Q: What do you do there?

#7: Play, hang out, feed ducks.

#11: Walk around with our friends and sometimes our family

#13,#14: Have picnics, play, go there with our family. Sometimes with just our friends.

#16: Play soccer, go to the playground

#17: Play on swings

Fishing

#7: *No, I don't visit rivers or fish.*

#8: *No, my father fishes in Massachusetts.*

#9,#10: *No, Our brother has to go real far to fish.*

#11: *I've seen other people, but I don't think they eat them.*

#12: *No one fishes in the rivers. It's deep and dirty and green. Usually we have to drive one hour to fish.*

#13: *No. The water's dirty.*

#14: *We only go fishing in the ocean.*

#15: *No, the water's dirty.*

#17: *No. We buy fish not catch them.*

#18: *No, cause there is trash in the water.*

#20: No, because we don't know if the water is dirty or not.

CP: If you visit rivers, do you fish or swim in the water?

#5: I fish at Roger Williams Park, but just for fun. I fish for real in the Naragansett bay. .salt water. Fishing is my favorite pastime. I also go to Exeter in Southern Rhode Island or Smithfield. I like to fish those areas to get away from urban area...I haven't visited any rivers in the city. They are toxic and polluted...Can't really enjoy them.

#22, #23, #24: We never fish. Yes, we just fish in the store. We don't have the transportation to go anywhere. We've never even been to the ocean. We just go fishing in the store.

CP: Does anyone in your household fish?

#25: Not anymore. Seven or eight years ago, they fished in Massachusetts.

CP: Have you ever visited any of the rivers in the city?

#26: We go out of state to fish.

#27: The rivers here are too dirty. They look polluted.

CP: Have you ever seen anyone else fish from the rivers in the city?

#26: I've seen kids fish for fun there. Our kids fish for fun, but after they catch the fish they just throw it back. We don't eat the fish from the river.

CP: Have you ever fished from any of the rivers in the city?

#28: No. I used to fish at Newport - from the Ocean.

#1: You tend to stay away from the river in Merino [Park]. With all the trees blocking the river and the glass all around...it's filthy. It's just not safe. I would never fish from it.

CP: If you visit rivers, do you fish or swim in the water?

#6: Yes, both because I enjoy this. When camping deep in the woods you don't want to carry any more than you have to so catch the food you need to eat.

#16: Sometimes.

#19: Fish in the water because the rivers I visit is for fishers.

#1: There's a nicer part of [Roger Williams] park.... Temple of Music. It's clean. People fish and catch fish there. They eat the fish. The water is clean.

#2: When I was in my teens, I used to go fishing along the Coast..... Usually near the Jamestown area or Naragansett.

CP: So how far do you actually have to go to catch fish?

#3: Jamestown and Connecticut border. If you need freshwater fish a lot of people go there or they go to Fox Point Park.

CP: Are people able to catch fish there?

#3: No I don't think so...a few fish...but no.

CP: Where do people usually fish then?

#21: People usually fish in the Naragansett Bay, Jameston, Westerly, Charlestown, Newport, Bristol. A lot of Asians fish these areas. They all leave Providence to fish. The rivers here seem too contaminated for species to live in.

CP: How often do you eat fish?

#25: Two to three times a week.

CP: Where do you get this fish? Do you buy it from a store? Or does someone in your family catch the fish?

#24: I buy it at the Asian market.

#22,#23,#24: *Yes fish is part of our regular diet. We very rarely eat red meat. Fish isn't new to our diet. We eat chicken and fish quite often, pork rarely.*

CP: Where do you get this fish? Do you buy it from a store? Or does someone in your family catch the fish?

#22,#23, #24: *We buy the fish from an Asian grocery store or Little Chinatown*

Interpreter: *The Hmong people are not really into fishing.*

#26: *Sometimes we go to the ocean to fish, but fish is not a main food product for us.*

#28: *I don't like the smell of fish....we buy it from Asian stores.*

#1: *There's a river in Merino Park. We are going to take the kids there to clean it up. The kids always say, "You don't want to go there, Ms. K!" . The river there is filthy, dirty, old tires...I would like to use the river just to look at it, but the river here at Merino, you can't touch or go to it. There's just too much trash and trees.*

#2: *"As long as I...I've never seen any use for the rivers. I mean my point is as long as I've been here the water's been dirty...uh...like you said there's a lot of shrub, and a lot of trees, debris, garbage that have been dumped next to the river."*

Water Quality

#5: *Water Place Park gives a good look to the city....I go to Water Place Park because I work in the city. So I go there by myself at lunch not with my family.*

CP: Have you ever visited Water Place Park in downtown Providence?

#3: *Yes, myself but not the kids.*

CP: Did you like it there?

#3: *Nice place, but you know the water just surrounded by many companies. No fish. Water is not safe. The water's okay for people to see because you don't see any fish around and you don't see many...[inaudible]around. The water's just not safe.*

CP: Have you ever been to Water Place Park? If so, what did you think of it?

#4: *It allows for a lot of imagination with the fish. It tries to romanticize the river.*

CP: Have you ever visited Water Place Park in downtown Providence?

#26: *Yes, we've been there. The kids like to go there once in a while to play.*

#27: *But the water there is still dirty.*

#1: *"The water's kind of green. They could clean it. There's plastic cups and trash around. A shovel has been left there."*

CP: Does the water smell?

#1: *"No. But there are things buried. I wish they had a machine to dig them up"*

CP: You mean you can see things through the water?

#1: *"Yes. You can see through the green water, branches from trees, trash, cans, brown bags, but the ducks are still swimming in it"*

CP: Can you describe [Roger Williams Park]?

#8, #9, #10: *We like it, but the water's dirty.*

CP: Have you ever been to Roger Williams Park?

#22, #23, #24: *We know the pond there is dirty. We never go anywhere.....*

CP: What do you think can be improved at [Roger Williams Park]?

#13: *just the water.*

#20: *Clean water.*

CP: Are you able to do all the activities that you like to do at [Roger Williams Park]?

#16: *I wish I could swim there. But I wouldn't swim there now.*

#17: *The water's dirty and nasty.*

CP: *Is there anything about [Roger Williams Park] that you would like to see changed?*

#28: *The past few years, it's been filthy and dirty. This year it looks a bit better, but the water is still dirty and there's still garbage around.*

Vacant Lots and Garbage In Residential Areas

#26: *The only thing we have to complain about is there was a nearby house that burned down where gangsters used to hang around. But now they're gone. But in the warm weather, kids hang out there and it's noisy*

#27: *The city is too dirty. There's too much garbage on the streets.*

Personal Responsibility

CP: *Whose responsibility do you think it is to take care of the rivers, parks, gardens, and vacant lots in the city?*

#6: *Everyone's. We must all take care not to destroy nature!*

#8: *president of the park*

#11,#12: *Everybody's. It's a public park. It belongs to everybody.*

#13,#14: *All of us. People are the ones that put trash in the water. It's our responsibility not to do that.*

#16, #17: *Us. Because if we don't pollute the park than we can let kids play there.*

#18: *I think the mayor.*

#19: *The government and the people who use the river, park, etc.*

#20: *The governor or mayor of Rhode Island.*

#27: *The whole city needs cleaning. Once when we were at the park, in an area that wasn't supposed to be a fishing area, my daughter fell down on the grass and got a fishing hook stuck in her knee. We couldn't get it out so we had to take her to the hospital. The city needs to hire people to do their job to keep the park clean. I want to sue them because the people aren't doing their job to keep it clean.*

#26, #27: *The city makes the owners clean up the lots by writing violations, but the people don't do it. And some areas get missed. Only the main street are inspected, so those lots, if they're behind or between houses, don't get noticed and so people don't clean them up.*

#27: *We pay taxes to keep city clean so they should. If neighbors don't clean their area it's not going to help to clean up our area.*

Stewardship

#6: *I do this all the time with the boy scouts.*

#2: *Uh...If my schedule allows me to...yes I would.*

#3: *Yes. I like to clean so kids have cleaner place, cleaner water so they can touch it.*

#4: *Yes I think people in my community would be willing to do it....but to maintain...maybe not.*

#8, #9: *We already have. We helped in the Olneyville clean-up.*

#11, #12: *If we had time. We're really busy. We think some people would help but not everyone.*

#13, #14: *Yes.*

#16, #17: *Yes, We've done it before. Someone asked whether people wanted to clean up the neighborhood so everyone just joined in.*

#18: *Yes, cause it's nice to clean.*

#20: *Yes, because in a safe and clean neighborhood you don't have to worry about kids getting hurt.*

#1: *Our school has received a grant from an agency to clean up the park and river - pick up trash, plant plants, and flowers. The grant gives money to our science department. People in this neighborhood [Olneyville] especially parents were not willing to clean up until maybe kids and teachers from Perry get involved. The parents will see kids and teachers and help but they probably won't continue to clean up over the summer when school's out.*

#1: I collect leaves and....see those pieces of tree trunk?. I found them [at Roger Williams Park]. I bring them back to my class to teach the kids about leaves and trees.

#2: I'm always interested in helping people and how to understand what issues affecting Southeast Asians.

#4: SEDC is working with City Year to try to organize gardens. Our community members have no [previous]link through community gardens.

#5: I'm a co-programmer of a project called Design Main Street, sponsored by the city to renovate Broad Street in South Providence. As part of the program I want to plant as many trees as possible along Broad Street.

#8, #9: We already have. We helped in the Olneyville clean-up.

#16, #17: Yes, We've done it before. Someone asked whether people wanted to clean up the neighborhood so everyone just joined in.

Activism

#4: Before SEDC, there were separate ethnic groups, but due to funding cuts, SEDC was formed.....From 1988 until now we have had no paid staff to do the work.. We still try to organize cultural and traditional functions, new Year's , Soul days. We get donations from people - individuals. That's how we survive these last years.

#3: I think most the people, I think if you not get information to the community they might go fishing [in local rivers]. They think that like our country they can fish anywhere without ...uh...any chemical. But you go near the river you can see the water is like a color...scare yourself.

#2: “ We haven't done an extensive study in terms of environmental issues and how it impacts the Hmong community. Actually this is the first time. So there's a great deal to learn from and there's a need for concentration efforts on education....not only in the Hmong community but all Southeast Asian communities.”

Saliency of Environmental Issues

#2: We haven't done an extensive study in terms of environmental issues and how it impacts the Hmong community. Actually this is the first time. So there's a great deal to learn from and there's a need for concentration efforts on education as well as the.... not only the Hmong community but the Southeast Asians communities...[Vacant lots] affects everybody but in particular it doesn't affect the SEA community because we haven't addressed the issue yet. Most of our attention has concentrated on providing services to people we don't have the resources and the manpower to really work on this particular issues. I mean I'm involved in so many projects and I'm training myself to try to know what's impacting my community as whole besides the social service issues. I try to participate as much as I can to know as much as I can.”

#7: I think it is very important

#8,#9: It's important. [#10 nods in agreement.]

#11: It's good for the environment

#12: It's good to have trees.

#13, #14: It's important. It's part of the environment. Then we can have a place to relax with trees. Habitat for animals. Good for people especially little kids.

#18: So we don't have pollution. So we could relax. So we could have more clean environment for our children.

#19: Very important. Children need a place to play and also a green spaces will help to give oxygen.

#20: It's important because if we're bored the only thing you go to is stores and malls. Pretty soon you'll be getting sick and tired of these malls.

#4: It's very important to me

#6: I don't think the city is a healthy place to be. Everyone needs to have a quiet place to go and relax.

#5: Having natural spaces and keeping them clean is just as important as other needs because people are living there. They need to keep their living area clean and clear of litter.

#6: Nothing is more important to me.

#3: A lot of people are concerned about vacant lots - a lot of garbage and rats.

#11, #12: We think it's important because some people just don't care. They throw litter anywhere.

#13: It's important to have spaces where people can enjoy themselves...like a park for our community. So we should take care of it.

#18: It's important so we don't have disease.

#19: It very important to have this natural space clean and safe so that the air is clean to grow vegetable. Also that the children and people can breathe clean air.

#20: So if you go there you don't have to worry about broken glass and other things.

APPENDIX D:

BAR GRAPH

PERCENT ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER,
PROVIDENCE, RI, 1990

APPENDIX E:

MAP

ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER POPULATION
PROVIDENCE, RI, 1990

