

VIETNAMESE AMERASIANS: A STUDY
OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

by

KY-GIAO C. NGUYEN

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIOLOGY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2010

Copyright © by Ky-Giao C. Nguyen 2010

All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Linda Rouse is owed much appreciation for advising, suggesting, pushing, prodding, reviewing, and commenting. I continue to be impressed with your patience with me on the meandering path I took to get to here. I am extremely appreciative to Dr. Robert Young for not only being correct in his estimation that pinning me down was like trying to lasso a bumblebee but also for his initial guidance in the field that is Social Psychology. He introduced me to many of the theories I used here. And while I don't think Dr. Heather Jacobson realizes how much she helped me figure out which direction to take, I would never otherwise have thought to apply the ideas she brought up in our conversations in the early stages. Just her advice on how to focus the content made that one conversation worthwhile. And finally, Dr. Debra Branch, who inadvertently put it into my head to attend Graduate School in the first place, we can all give thanks for putting this square wheel in motion.

I have to give major thanks to my Graduate School friends who have watched in morbid fascination as I took the path less traveled to finish this thesis. Louwanda Evans, Kevin Neely and Joshua Olsberg: I don't think I would have even made it this far had I not been continually motivated by your own accomplishments. Thanks for letting me celebrate your successes.

Thank you, Pat, for the snacks, the meals, the sounding board, the 'choklit,' your love and patience. To my family and friends...thanks for not letting me throw in the towel as I took the twenty year shortcut. And special thanks to the participants who shared their stories with me. This study would not have been possible without you.

December 1, 2009

ABSTRACT

VIETNAMESE AMERASIANS: A STUDY OF IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Ky-Giao C. Nguyen, M.A.

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2010

Supervising Professor: Linda Rouse

“We define who we are by defining who we are not” (Daniel 1996). What happens when we don’t know who we are not, how can we determine who we are? What if the markers of family connections, community alliances and citizenship are missing and there are no peers with whom to make comparisons? “What are you? Where are you from?” Hispanic, Filipino, sometimes even Native American rather than Asian, are ethnicities often ascribed to Vietnamese Amerasians (children of Vietnamese and American parents). Curiously, for such a personal question, the reaction from others to the response “Vietnamese Amerasian” is often rejection or disbelief. For years, Amerasians have struggled with their place in society, within the U.S. based Vietnamese-American community as well as in the larger U.S. and Vietnamese societies. The life of the Amerasian born and raised in Vietnam is an example of the identity construction and socialization of persons whose lives were marginalized times three through denial of citizenship by country, desertion by family, and rejection by community. Triple marginalization is defined for my purposes as lack of national, familial, and societal affirmation of self. This triple marginalization offers no tangible core of positively valued identity, thus forcing the Amerasian to either accept the labels assigned or forge on to create their own

identity. Loss of family, lack of community, and statelessness continues to haunt Amerasians today. The quest for a place to belong, a family to come home to, and a country to acknowledge them still influences their decisions and actions, in ways both detrimental and advantageous to the preservation of an identity built without solid foundation.

This project is a historically situated, qualitative research based look into the internal and external construction of identity of the Vietnamese Amerasians born during the Vietnam War, individually and as a group. For primary data collection, I utilized my membership in a local Amerasian organization to participate in regularly scheduled group discussions. I evaluated the transcripts of organized conversations among twenty subjects participating in group discussions sponsored through a local Amerasian organization, over five months, from March 2009 through July 2009. During the course of this research, I discovered that while individual participants' lives were lived separately, there was a commonality to the experiences that helped each come to some definition of self. The members fell into three distinct groups: those who renounce any and all claim of their heritage, becoming wholly Americanized; those who completely immerse themselves in the Vietnamese communities, living much as they did prior to arriving in the U.S.; and those who learn to fluidly move between their two cultures, picking up nuances of themselves wherever they happen to exist, rarely clinging to just one identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| ABSTRACT | v |
| Chapter | Page |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK..... | 5 |
| 3. METHODOLOGY | 13 |
| 3.1 Sample Population | 13 |
| 3.2 Data Collection | 15 |
| 3.3 Ethical Considerations | 16 |
| 3.4 Limitations | 19 |
| 3.5 Data Analysis | 20 |
| 4. AND THEN THE AMERICANS LEFT | 23 |
| 5. LIFE IN VIETNAM | 26 |
| 6. FAMILY | 32 |
| 7. THE GOOSE THAT LAID GOLDEN EGGS..... | 39 |
| 8. WELCOME TO AMERICA | 42 |
| 9. THE SEARCH FOR FATHERS..... | 50 |
| 10. DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS | 55 |
| APPENDIX | |
| A. IRB PERMISSION LETTER | 62 |
| EPILOGUE | 64 |
| REFERENCES..... | 69 |

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION71

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study adds to the body of knowledge about the construction of identity by Vietnamese Amerasians (children of Vietnamese and American parents). The research spotlights the journey Amerasians have taken in attempting to carve out their 'place' in the world, although it does not indicate specific causation or proffer solutions to the ongoing dilemmas experienced today.

I believe this research to be sociologically significant because while the phenomenon of the construction of identity has been studied for each of the underlying basic concepts presented in this work, there has not been an exploration of how the lack of what I term the fundamental trinity of social identity – family, community, society – impacts a group of people (Cullen and Pretes 2000). The Vietnamese Amerasians, while not the only Amerasian population, constitute the group most familiar to Americans as having experienced this exact type of triple marginalization. American writer Pearl Buck (1892-1973) founded the Pearl Buck Foundation in 1965 specifically to aid Amerasian children, whom she described as “a new group of human beings, a group which Asians do not know how to deal with, illegitimate as well as mixed in race” (PSBI 2009). Pearl Buck had no idea how prophetically correct her description has become.

Biracial identity formation is a recently expanding field of study due to the growing population of mixed race people in the United States. The majority of studies currently published involve the interaction of one or both parents' different cultural and ethnic identities (e.g., existing studies focus on mixed parentage in bi-racial persons who are U.S. citizens and were raised with acknowledgement of both cultures) (Cerulo 1997; Kerwin and Ponterroto 1995). In

developing this research, I found compelling evidence recognizing that there remains a need to study the effects of deficient socialization, limited family bonding and ambiguous nationality in Amerasians.

I posit that Vietnamese Amerasians experience “triple marginality,” a position in which they are rejected by their adopted country (U.S.) and their identified country of origin (Vietnam), by their families of origin, and by their immediate communities. In using the term Vietnamese Amerasian, I refer to the children born in Vietnam during the Vietnam War (1961-1975) to Vietnamese women and American servicemen and civilians. While the term ‘anti-miscegenation’ more readily recalls the vehement and sometimes violent opposition to Black/White interracial marriage in the United States, similar social attitudes affected a generation of individuals collectively referred to in this work as ‘Amerasians.’

This topic is of personal interest to me because I am an American Amerasian; I was born in the U.S. and raised by my Vietnamese mother and her husband, also Vietnamese. While he is my stepfather, he raised me and I consider him my father. My birth father was American. When asked, I preferentially answer that I am Vietnamese, although I do not carry the physical appearance or traditional cultural upbringing as such. I am often questioned about my biological father, I only know what little my mother has told me of him, I don’t even know if he was military or civilian. His blood may flow in me, but he did not participate in creating the individual person I have become. I am interested from both a sociological perspective and a personal one in that I have experienced and continue to experience the issue of shifting identity and believe this project would not only help bring light into this still taboo subject for many who are Vietnamese but also enlighten those who have little or no understanding of the plight of Amerasians and their fight for meaning.

The thesis, as a research report, is primarily intended for academics who might, in future investigations, expand upon the ideas presented in this work. For that reason, the terms

and methodologies employed might be beyond the understanding of the layperson. I have attempted, however, to present my findings in an easy to read format to allow for a wider audience. The stories told in this study are the collective voice of Amerasians. While no two individuals experience the exact same situations, similarities of the experiences offer valuable insight into the construction of identity without the typical anchors of citizenship, family, and community. Documentation of the emotional and mental processes experienced by marginalized persons, more specifically those who are triply marginalized, could open the door to further sociological and psychological research on identity construction.

This study is an exploration of the differences and similarities in experiences of identity among Amerasians, which continues to be a powerful subject within and outside the Vietnamese American community today. There is a persistent struggle for identity among Vietnamese Amerasians due to being not only bi-racial, but also bi-cultural, which is especially problematic given the Vietnamese tendency to vilify other races (DeBonis 1993 and Bass 1996). How does the Vietnamese Amerasian merge or delete those aspects of culture that are seemingly different in nature from the American experience? What are the myriad ways in which Vietnamese Amerasians create their identity if significant markers of identity are lacking?

Culturally Vietnamese and physically American, yet accepted by neither government, the search for identity among Vietnamese Amerasians is experienced with a greater degree of psychosocial stress due to associations with an unpopular and highly politicized war. The history of the Amerasian is documented, yet there is a lack of literature related to groups of people so completely marginalized that their existence as human beings becomes one of the sole markers of identity. The concept of alienation will be used as one means of explaining the internal and external struggles in construction of Amerasian identity (Sommer and Rubin 2004). The disconnect experienced throughout their lives created its own norm, a process to which Mertonian Strain Theory (1938) can be applied. Merton's Strain Theory calls attention to

circumstances in which a desired end-goal is present but where socially approved means to reach it are not available. In this case, innovation resulting from the *absence* of family bonds, community ties, and citizenship could be considered the non-conformist means of identity construction.

As the population of Amerasians is becoming more readily accepted in America, my findings representing individual thoughts and feelings reveal the continuing presence of internal difficulties with identity formation. Though we cannot go back in time to undo past wrongs, Vietnamese and Americans may find a way to accept that sometimes admitting the wrong will allow Amerasians to fully embrace the duality of their blood.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although I had identified Vietnamese Amerasians as my population to study, I only had a general idea of what area I wanted to explore. The body of research on Vietnamese Amerasians is limited. The literature I discovered, while qualitative in nature, seemed detached from sociological theory (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Yarborough 2005). The literature that was available was either from secondhand interpretation by known scholars (Bass 1996, DeBonis 1995, Kibria 1993, Lipman 1997, McKelvey 1999, Nwadiora 1996, Phan 2003, Yarborough 2005) or auto-ethnographic firsthand accounts (Lee 1991, Tuan 1998, Valverde 1992). The work that left the most impact on my research was that of Nazli Kibria. A non-Asian scholar, Kibria used a Vietnamese gatekeeper to perform a series of interviews about the difficulties of cultural transition in America. I was immediately suspicious of the gatekeeper/translator because I know how face-saving Vietnamese can be from personal experience. How did Kibria verify that the translations were correct? Yet I read her book with fascination at the content of the discussions. I could not help but wonder what may have been lost in translation or presented without nuance.

It is the knowledge of the Vietnamese culture and practices among non-Vietnamese that caused me to review secondhand interpreted interviews with a 'grain of salt.' I had no way of knowing the actual conversations without physically being present. There was no verification of the data, in my mind the data was compromised simply because of the requirement for translation to a non-Asian. I also had to use the services of a translator; however, the translator was my father. As I am a moderately fluent speaker, I understood the context – I merely needed to confirm the nuance and tone – and I trusted the source.

Given the limitations of existing literature specifically addressing Vietnamese Amerasians, new applications of familiar sociological constructs seemed ideal. It was just a matter of determining where to start. I wanted to find concepts with direct relevance to my observations. The nature of participant observation is more often than not inductive, meaning there are no preconceived hypotheses to guide the data (Jorgensen 1989). For that reason, I chose to integrate most of the pertinent literature I reviewed into the later chapters discussing my findings. However, as an Amerasian myself, I had a catalog of experiences that guided my attention to ideas likely to help in interpreting my data.

The concept of marginality is often used to describe the phenomena of persons living on the fringes of society (Cullen and Pretes 2000). Marginality assumes that those in positions of social or political power exclude groups of people considered non-conformist to the majority group's beliefs (Hogg 2005). Applying marginalization to Vietnamese Amerasians, the governments of both Vietnam and America have historically excluded Amerasians from political authority. Through social ostracism, Vietnamese communities and families perpetuated the exclusion, eventually leading to self-alienation (Fitness 2005).

However, Del Pilar and Udasco (2004) reported that the concept of marginalization lacks construct validity, making it difficult to recognize its extent and consequences. Their argument revolves around difficulty in replicating findings or validating causal relationships in the application of marginality. Del Pilar and Udasco (2004) stated persons could not be completely marginalized because there was always some connection, however tenuous, through family, community or state. However, for the Vietnamese Amerasian there may be an absence of connection through citizenship, community, and family. Thus, my selection of the literature narrowed to the concepts of ostracism by way of external marginalization and alienation through internal marginalization. It was through the readings about marginality that I first saw a connection to Merton's Strain Theory (discussed further in this chapter).

The literature covering ostracism (or rejection) is just as varied as all categories of sociological bodies of work. In a search for 'ostracism' in the EBSCOhost search engine, I found hundreds of readings. Working from the idea that alienation and ostracism were similar concepts, and with possible connections to the absence of identity in mind, I began to explore alternate applications of sociological theory; e.g., ideas such as Merton's strain theory (1957), characteristically applied to work in the sociology of deviance. Due to the background of Vietnamese Amerasians, strain theory might explain some features of their experience. The lack of conventional identity markers (citizenship, community, and family) made *innovation* a means of obtaining the goal of identity. With a focus on identity construction, after reading literature on the sociology of deviance I began to see relationships between concepts not normally applied to identity, or, particularly, to the Vietnamese Amerasians.

I began with a review of Cooley, Mead, and Goffman for ideas related to identity. George Herbert Mead's (1982) perspective was that people behave in a manner based on the perceived meaning of things to them and this meaning is determined through social interaction, adjusted to their purposes through interpretation. My understanding of symbolic interactionism is that individuals make decisions based on the meaning of the objects or events in question. This could be anything from a childhood plaything to a beloved spouse. If it has meaning for the individual, the individual will act accordingly, positively or negatively. In relation to my research, this fits with existing studies documenting that Vietnamese Amerasians were held in low regard by the Vietnamese, and treated accordingly. This perceived devaluation of Amerasians would have been internalized through recognition of others' reactions to them. If Amerasians are treated as having little value to the community, then Amerasian individuals might share these beliefs and expect to be treated poorly. Mead also discusses how interpretation is modified through continuing social interaction and encounters with significant others. The American Homecoming Act, for example, acted as a new "definition of the situation" in Vietnamese

society, evident in the 'adoption' of Amerasians into their families for use as a ticket out of Vietnam.

The looking glass self was a concept originating with Charles Cooley (1902). His concept consisted of three elements: our perception of our appearance to the other person, our perception of his judgment of our appearance, and our perception of how that judgment made one feel (Cooley 1902). As it relates to identity formation, Cooley's looking glass self appears well-suited to the purposes of this study. In my reading of Cooley's work, the concept of another person validating or invalidating one's identity is central to my research. Application of Cooley's concept is evidenced in a later chapter, but in essence the Vietnamese Amerasian child experienced the looking glass self throughout his lifetime – presenting his best side to his community, perceiving rejection from the community and then feeling the rejection and possibly internalizing the negative image conveyed. The Vietnamese Amerasian experience of triple marginalization was effectively rejection of the self's presentation on three fronts: political, social, and familial.

Erving Goffman introduced the dramaturgical perspective in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). His perception is that individuals are in a constant state of face-saving postures while interacting with others. It is this posturing that Goffman (1956) considers a sort of acting persona whose purpose is to present a good side to the other participants (actors) in the interaction. Most relevant about Goffman's dramaturgical perspective to my research is the essence of face saving as a means of confirming one's identity. For example, Asian culture is honor and shame driven. If a certain aspect of behavior is regarded as potentially embarrassing to the actor, the performance during the interaction would be to conceal that shame. Goffman refers to this as "impression management." In concealing the shameful actions and presenting face saving postures, the other participants will either accept the interaction, thereby confirming the actor's sense of honorable self, or reject it, confirming the actor's sense of shameful self.

Accordingly, Goffman (1956) suggests that individuals may remain secretive to ensure concealment of their shame.

Goffman also discusses stigma in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). Stigma refers to social disgrace. Goffman notes that in this process the reactions of others damage an individual's identity. My understanding of his writings showed a relationship between the stigmatized self and impression management. When a stigmatized individual who has come to an understanding of his identity is confronted by a negative reaction to his presentation of self, it would serve to reinforce the stigmatized self. Failure to 'manage' a desired positive impression would in effect strengthen the individual's sense of stigmatization.

I also looked into Erik Erikson's (1956) eight stages of psychosocial development for his explanation of the healthy development of a human being from birth to death. Each stage represents a challenge to be mastered by the individual before moving on to the next stage of development. Challenges not mastered lead to psychosocial problems in the future. When reviewing the application of the stages to the identity development of Amerasians, I was struck by how easily their life experiences were represented through the stages. In their biographical narratives, Amerasian individuals in the group I studied alluded to the challenges of the respective stages. For example, trust versus mistrust would be the first of Erikson's stages and one that was difficult to master in circumstances of social rejection. Revisiting each stage and teaching the self to disregard the past and meet the challenge of healthy development was a similar thread in most of the narratives.

The foundation for the development and presentation of this thesis rests ultimately with the contribution of C. Wright Mills and his 'Sociological Imagination' (1956). Mills' idea of the sociological imagination remains a major influence on sociological analysis today. The repercussions of history in current events that Mills emphasized is of particular interest to me. To set the stage for understanding the dilemmas of Vietnamese Amerasian identity, subsequent

chapters will follow the path of this group's history beginning with the Vietnam War to the present day. Social structure and change provide the backdrop for making sense of the experiences of "ordinary men and women" (Mills 1956). Relevant literature will be incorporated throughout the chapters and connected to the ethnographic qualitative research data gathered for this project.

Through all the seeming randomness of events, there are patterns. With the twist of the kaleidoscope, a new picture emerges. Stepping out of one perspective and recognizing the connection to another is how I have come to view the field of sociology. What I present in this work is what I hope to be a fair representation of C. Wright Mills' (1956) suggestion that we, as sociologists, look past what we know close around us and take in the larger picture, to see the connections between the past and present, "between history and biography." The history of the Vietnamese Amerasians from the beginnings of the Vietnam War, their alienation, and struggles with identity, or lack of identity, is a narrative of war and intolerance, fear and rejection, and, ultimately, survival and life. The aim of telling this story is to grasp the whole picture of what happened, how Amerasians lived it, and how it affected who we became.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample

Initially, the plan was to develop a focus group, utilizing my own Amerasian identity to recruit subjects. An invitation from the local chapter of an organization for Amerasians eventually led to the discovery of its regularly scheduled group discussions. After attending three sessions, I realized that the methodology of this study would be better served with this ready-made sample of Amerasians. Only Vietnamese Amerasians were invited to become members of the organization. There would be no need for special entrée to the group because I would already be qualified for membership as a Vietnamese Amerasian. By the third session, I began to recognize that the group discussions provided a relevant source of information.

Group discussions were open to all organization members who wished to participate, but meetings were limited to twenty participants at a time. This produced a nonrandom sample, though for the purposes of my project, the group I attended reasonably represented a variety of issues faced by this population. My sample consisted only of those Amerasians who were members of the larger organization and actively participated in the group discussions. The two group facilitators were organization members who recognized the need for this kind of group. These two men were not Amerasian but were considered critical to the organization. The group discussions were held for the express purpose of discussing feelings and thoughts about Amerasian life and individual struggles.

The subjects were a somewhat even mix of males and females, ranging in age from 34 to 49. Ages were learned through the introductions process. This specific group was strictly for Amerasians born during the Vietnam War; there was another group for those Amerasians born

after 1975. For transcribing purposes, I identified each subject as either M for male or F for female and by their age (e.g., F38 or M35). For presenting my findings in this paper, I then gave each subject a Vietnamese pseudonym, wholly different from their given names to deter outside identification.

Ultimately, I chose participant observation as the means for obtaining my data. The group discussions provided a social space for the personal narratives collected through intimate conversations among Vietnamese Amerasians. Amerasians themselves were allowed to tell their stories and to compare their experiences. Elsewhere, the silence of the Vietnamese American voice is deafening. Existing literature is not typically authored by Vietnamese Amerasians nor does it convincingly reflect the Vietnamese Amerasian point of view.

Although ethnographic data can be obtained through questionnaires and/or interviews, the Vietnamese experience with authority figures creates what has been called the 'onion effect' (Yarborough 2005). To get to the truth, you have to expect to peel back several layers of perceived truth before you actually touch on the real truth. It is difficult at best to get a truthful answer as the Vietnamese are particularly distrustful of outsiders. Social constraints between Vietnamese in one-on-one conversational etiquette would have made both myself and a lone interview participant uncomfortable at my obtrusive questioning. Instead of one-on-one interviews where there might be awkwardness or embarrassment raised by the topics or constraints keeping the questions too narrowly focused to get the whole story, the group discussions could be open, free-flowing conversation that had no boundaries other than the set topic of the evening. Reviewing my transcripts, I am certain I would never have thought to pursue some of the lines of conversation that were openly discussed during the group meetings.

Because I, too, am Amerasian, I was able to utilize my personal experiences as they related to participants' narratives. This auto-ethnographical approach to the data allowed me to filter through commonalities in experiencing biracial and bicultural upbringing, and differences from other racial and ethnic groups that related specifically to the political and social nature of

being Vietnamese Amerasian. Initially, I was attending the group discussions for the same general reasons other participants attended.

3.2 Data Collection

A discreet discussion with the facilitators of the group about using this setting for a research project revealed that the discussions were already being recorded. My direct involvement in the group allowed me to remain as a participant observer. Not disclosing my research interests was seen as important to permit other participants to speak freely and to avoid disrupting the group. The facilitators readily agreed to my request to transcribe the sessions. Only two conditions were presented to me for acceptance: 1) I could not take the recordings with me, all transcribing has to occur on the premises; and 2) I would not specifically name the location or organization. Their justification to me was that the organization was formed primarily for social and political reasons and they did not want to advertise the purpose of the group discussions openly to outsiders. I deemed their requests to be reasonable and an agreement was reached regarding when I would start observing for research purposes.

As a participant, I knew the sessions were being recorded. I read the sign stating this outside the door, just as I assumed everyone else attending the meetings had seen and read it. Because my prior interactions with Vietnamese people followed the norm of 'do as we say, don't ask questions,' it did not disconcert me that the sessions were being recorded nor did it occur to me to ask why. I had, in effect, become socialized to the ways of my culture. Budding sociology researcher notwithstanding, I was and still am a product of that culture. As a Vietnamese Amerasian, I don't question what Vietnamese people do, I just do whatever it is that they are doing and move on into my American world, where I can be myself. To 'rock the boat' by being too outspoken is to call attention to one's self, and in the world of a Vietnamese Amerasian, it just isn't done.

Though I have been considered fluent in Vietnamese by others, I do not personally believe I have a complete grasp of the language. This was readily evident when, after group

members discovered I was not confident in my Vietnamese speaking abilities, they would tease me by breaking out in Vietnamese (whereupon I could only 'smile and nod' to show I really didn't understand what they were saying). The other participants found this funny, as evidenced by frequent bouts of Vietnamese and then laughter on the recordings.

While the intended purpose of the group discussions was to allow an outlet for the frustrations and challenges lingering in the Amerasian's American experience, I originally questioned my research because there did not appear to be any logical pattern to the topics discussed (Atkinson 1988). As commonly occurs in qualitative studies, patterns eventually emerged and the topics began to repeat themselves after the fifth month. It was at that point I determined I had sufficient data to analyze.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Before I could perform any research, I was required to gain approval to conduct this research from the Institutional Review Board at The University of Texas at Arlington. The requirement was due to the use of human subjects in the course of my study. After completing the initial research protocol and application, I realized that as a result of the revised method of data collection proposed, I was eligible to apply for an exemption to the informed consent and disclosure requirement. I applied for and was granted the exemption based on the limitations of working with subjects who were already hyper-aware of censure and distrustful of authority figures. I did allow for disclosure if the subject asked me specifically about my research, but apparently my being in graduate school for sociology was not interesting enough for any subject to delve further into my academic life. As it was never my intention to identify anyone participating in the group discussions, I believed the ethnographic research would pose minimal risk to my subjects. I chose to utilize a pseudonym for each of the participants, using Vietnamese names far removed from their actual names and their actual ages would not have much relevance as the group participants were of roughly the same age range. I would be using their stories, not their identities *per se*.

Reflecting again on the onion effect (Yarborough 2005), Vietnamese culture does not exclusively value absolute truth. Subjective truth is just as valid as real truth although it may be situational. Typically, Vietnamese are appeasing in the presence of authority or perceived authority. Historically, a wrong answer could lead to imprisonment or death, thus the Vietnamese will answer what they believe needs to be heard to survive (Bass 1996, DeBonis 1995). With that in mind, I did have apprehension that any data collected would not be valid or reliable if the subjects were aware that they were being studied. Obtaining the exemption helped overcome that concern.

It was also part of my protocol that none of the subjects would be identifiable in my work. As stated above, I would only be listing the randomly selected pseudonym from my list of popular Vietnamese names, the age and the gender of my subjects. Only group members might still be able to identify themselves or others, but they were already parties to these same conversations. Further, in presenting my findings, no one person's experience predominates; no single individual's background is described at length. Comments from the transcripts are woven into a more complex narrative including themes derived from the group discussions, existing literature, and my own interpretations. Accordingly, I concluded that these layers of anonymity would be sufficient to protect my subjects' privacy.

As a Vietnamese Amerasian, I know firsthand the difficulty of discussing my mixed race heritage with other Vietnamese. In some ways, only another Vietnamese Amerasian could understand the difficulty speaking about the stigma of growing up this type of mixed race, without a father or country to claim them. In my personal experience, the subject of Vietnamese Amerasians is often swept under the rug in polite conversation. It is very rarely, if ever, addressed, even in private. It was only due to my questioning as a child that it was explained to me that I am different from everyone else in my family but that 'it isn't something we talk about, you are still family,' according to my mother. The cultural taboo of race-mixing led to shame for the Vietnamese parent and for the Amerasian child, a kind of genetic scarlet letter. Keeping a

secret about mixed blood for so many years could make the majority of Amerasians suspicious of anyone who tried to openly question their experiences.

For this deeply personal subject, knowing firsthand how Vietnamese Amerasians tend to live their lives, I chose participant observation and did not reveal my researcher role. I understood the perspectives discussed within the group and was often painfully aware of having experienced on my own the same feelings and thoughts they described. While revealing myself as an Amerasian achieved a connection with other group members, revealing myself as a researcher would likely have compromised those discussions. Looking back over the discussions, I recognize the tone of defensiveness and the protective language that was used to justify past choices and behaviors. There is no question that this was a difficult and sensitive subject for all group participants, and that the group was a unique forum for them to come to terms with such issues.

During the course of the research, I became friendly with several group members. Their fascination with my life, born and raised in America, and mine with theirs, born and raised in Vietnam, led to mutual friendships where discussion flowed readily without judgment on a number of highly personal topics. I believe my willingness to share my experiences created an environment of trust and rapport that allowed them to reciprocate. Disclosing my research project would have changed the relationship to one of scholar and subjects, which I sought to avoid. In instances where highly private information was shared and the feeling communicated that the issue would never intentionally have been made public, I treated it as off limits for my research.

Any deception in conducting research is an ethically debatable decision that is undertaken only with careful consideration. The potential benefits to the participants and others of knowledge gained is weighed against the inherent risks. Ultimately, the lack of literature conveying the personal experiences of Vietnamese Amerasians prompted me to decide that the “subjects” and my own narratives need to be more widely shared. Participant observation using

an existing membership group and not calling attention to myself as a “researcher” appeared to be the best way to encourage honest, firsthand accounts from Vietnamese Amerasians without disrupting the group.

3.4 Limitations

My primary bias as a researcher is my own identity as Amerasian. While I had no specific expectations concerning the findings, the development of topics and themes discovered through the group conversations were sometimes surprising and oftentimes familiar. Because the experiences of the subjects frequently mirrored my own, I forced myself to continuously re-examine my motives to weed out any preconceptions I might have during the course of the research. With this admission of bias, I wish to position my writing as an ethnographic/auto-ethnographic study into the singular minds and also the collective experiences of the Amerasian (Georges and Jones 1980; Madison 2005; Reed-Danahay 1997). Through comparisons of the experiences recounted by group members, including my own, I was able to determine which were shared and which were specifically related to that individual. By telling my story and theirs, the opportunity for understanding is greater than if I were an outsider. My shared identity connects me to their experiences; that connection allows me to give a more genuine representation of their narratives.

Still, I am also obligated to admit my bias in empathizing with Amerasians as they recounted their personal histories from Vietnam and in sharing the anger they felt related to the actions of both governments when the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam, leaving many Amerasian children behind. The relevance of such events for issues of Amerasian identity will be detailed in subsequent chapters.

3.5 Data Analysis

Transcribing the recordings required greater effort than I originally anticipated. Not being able to take the recordings home with me to transcribe was something I had not factored into my research time. Difficulty of access was the first issue. The organization’s office is not

staffed, so appointments had to be made to acquire the recordings for transcription. I often had to rely on the good graces of senior members to open the office on the weekends. Another issue was my lack of confidence in the language. A majority of the group discussions were conducted in English, though many times it was easier for some of the participants to speak in Vietnamese because they couldn't think of the English word to express what they intended. Someone was needed who would respect the confidentiality of my work to verify my translations. I was able to use my father as a supplemental translator and in the process I learned that words I thought I knew the meaning of actually meant something different. He also helped deepen my understanding of the context of the words. As a result, I have become more fluent in Vietnamese.

During the transcribing, I concurrently reviewed my field notes – written down in my car after the group discussions – to ensure that I was appropriately capturing the nuance and meaning of the conversations. I used the line numbering format to make finding references easier. During the course of transcription I also became very familiar with the different voices, to make sure the pseudonyms I selected were applied correctly to the speakers.

I then began coding the data. This process involved reading each subject's words, taking into account the previous and following subjects' direction and classifying the conversation topics. To develop categories, I used index cards, physically cutting and pasting the different conversation themes onto the cards. This resulted in my being able to physically review each card and shuffle them into various appropriate categories. Since these cards showed copies of the actual transcribed pages, I also had line numbers and date information to keep them organized. Being able to physically sort the stacks of cards, moving them around as I could see patterns emerging, made groupings easier. I eventually narrowed all the conversations down to six primary discussions and titled them: *And Then the Americans Left*, *Life in Vietnam*, *Family*, *The Goose That Laid Golden Eggs*, *Welcome to America*, and *The Search for Real Fathers*. These provided the framework for the chapters that follow, telling the

historical narrative of Vietnamese Amerasians that was lived by participants in the group I studied.

And Then the Americans Left traces the history of Amerasians during the Vietnam War to the last days. *Life in Vietnam* revisits the recollections of survival and living conditions after the Americans left and the Communists came. *Family* speaks of their relationships or lack of relationships with blood family members and families of choice or convenience. *The Goose That Laid Golden Eggs* describes the sudden popularity of Amerasians as the golden ticket out of Vietnam for many families after the Amerasian Homecoming Act was signed into existence and the reality of Amerasian life with a family forced to endure living with the very person they formerly reviled simply to escape the oppression and poverty of life in Vietnam. *Welcome to America* examines the support systems that were organized to assist Amerasians once they arrived from Vietnam. *The Search for Real Fathers* explores the Amerasians' efforts to locate their birth fathers and the actions by the American government to thwart those same efforts. Finally, my conclusion takes an in-depth look at how Amerasians have survived living through two cultures, their own personal growth in the process, and what lessons they have learned about themselves.

CHAPTER 4

AND THEN THE AMERICANS LEFT

I was only seven in 1975, but I remember looking for my grandmother the day the Americans left. She was holding my hand one second and the next second she was yanked out of my hand. I went back to my house and waited for her but only my aunt returned. She said my grandmother had been taken away and didn't tell me where. I cried for her for a long time.

Lien, 41

On Tuesday, April 30, 1975, the last American aircraft left Saigon, Vietnam. Hundreds of American and Vietnamese military, their families, and American-employed Vietnamese civilians were flown to a waiting carrier ship. Iconic photographs of that Tuesday show masses of people trying desperately to push, shove, bribe or kill their way onto a waiting helicopter. Hundreds more people were left standing on the grounds of the U.S. Embassy, hoping they hadn't been forgotten, praying there was still one more helicopter on the way back to get them.

Later that morning, North Vietnamese army tanks rolled into the city, effectively cutting off any chance of escape. By the time dusk had fallen in Saigon, the U.S. Embassy was in flames. In Communist Vietnam, April 30, 1975, is celebrated as "Reunification Day," the day North and South Vietnam were reunited under one government. For the countless Amerasians left behind, April 30, 1975 is the day the world forgot their existence.

"The care and welfare of these unfortunate children...has never been and is not now considered an area of government responsibility, or an appropriate mission for the Department of Defense to assume (Bass 1996:34). A perfect storm of political, social and economic events stigmatized an entire category of persons. These events combined to create an environment that was hostile at best and lethal at worst for the Amerasians. Vietnam would attempt to eradicate all things American, including her mixed race children (Bass 1996). Amerasians were a permanent reminder of the Americans who killed millions of Vietnamese people, a ready-

made scapegoat for the troubles of living in Communist Vietnam. Fear and survival overtook love and blood in a time when nothing was certain anymore.

To illustrate, in a conversation with one of my aunts, who had immigrated to the U.S. in the early 70's, I was told of two other aunts who remained in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon. My youngest aunt, Hien, being 18 and idealistic, thought things would change quickly, that the Communists would not stay in power for long. The older aunt, Phuong – born between my mother and the aunt with whom I spoke – stayed behind to keep my family's property intact. This made my older aunt the head of the family in Vietnam and as such all financial assistance and correspondence would be sent to her for distribution to the rest of the family. No other avenue of communication was available. Over twenty years later, in 1995, after Vietnam was officially recognized by the U.S., my parents returned to visit both aunts and other family. It was discovered that Phuong had never passed along any of the money sent over to take care of Hien and, further, had 'sold' parcels of the family property without deeds. Phuong claimed she needed the money to support herself and Hien but it was revealed that Hien had been relocated to the New Economic Zone in 1976 (discussed in Chapter 5) and had only recently returned to Saigon to live. Sister plotted against sister, and no one in my family had any idea of what had been happening (Ngoc Tran, personal communication, December 1997 and April 2009).

If social disorganization had fractured traditional family relations, as in the case of two aunts who were once close, how difficult would it be to discard someone who wasn't even considered Vietnamese? The ostracism and rejection of Amerasians was of no consequence to the Vietnamese. There were two concepts of nationality that came into play when Amerasians were left behind in Vietnam. Vietnam claimed that the Amerasians were Americans, basing their determination on *jus sanguinis* (the rule of blood) since the fathers of these children were clearly Americans. Vietnam expected America to take their children back to the States. America claimed the Amerasians were Vietnamese, basing their determination on *jus soli* (the rule of soil) since the Amerasians were born in Vietnam (Bass 1996). America expected

Vietnam to take care of their children as citizens. Over the next few months, the issue of Amerasian nationality would fall to political negotiations. Both governments believed the Amerasians were their trump card, pawns in a global power play (Bass 1996). The Amerasian children had become stateless, as neither government wanted to claim responsibility for them. Nearly twenty years of off the record limbo would follow. Amerasians had become a new classification of persons – no better than dust to the Vietnamese and things best forgotten to the Americans (GAO 1994).

Lien, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, says she was not the only child left wandering behind on that April day. Through her memories she still feels the fear that she felt when her grandmother's hand left her. She says she often wakes from dreams about her grandmother and what she could have possibly been doing out in the crowded streets that Tuesday. Memories like these were repeated almost verbatim by others in the group. I was struck by how similar their stories were of this one day that stood out among all the other days of their lives, even somehow obliterating their memories of stepping onto American soil for the first time.

CHAPTER 5
LIFE IN VIETNAM

Why don't you go back to America? Tell your father to take care of you! We don't want you here!

Yarborough 2005

Underneath all the theories of identity lies one of the most primal needs in human development. There are numerous theories about the search for identity and how we acquire our sense of self, including Cooley's looking glass self, Mead's symbolic interactionism, and Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, to name only a few theorists. Sociology generally assumes that identity involves a two-way negotiation between society and the individual. Society offers a space for self to arise through language and shared meaning and in so doing allows persons to participate collectively in roles, interaction, and identity formation (Mead 1934). What happens when there is mainly negative interaction?

Communist Vietnam used hegemonic beliefs to systematically erase any and all evidence of anything of America (Ellsberg 2003). Yet Americans left behind incontrovertible evidence of their former presence; their blood flowing through Amerasian children. How could Vietnam claim total victory when there were still Americans among them, and Vietnamese women had given birth to these children who were "half-breeds" and "social outcasts?" Politically, Vietnam had to present a united front to gain control over the South. Attacking the families of Amerasians set an example of their treason to the country.

The bureaucracy utilized a 'household registration' census to determine undisclosed sources of potential dissension. Through the registers they collected, they would know the presence of an Amerasian. Families would be questioned at length regarding their loyalty to Vietnam. Most notably, veterans of the South Vietnamese army would be sent off to re-

education camps, forced to perform manual labor and solidify their allegiance to Communist Vietnam. Upon release from the camps, the whole family would then be sent to 'New Economic Zones,' under the guise of rebuilding Vietnam through agriculture. Effectively relocating entire cities of Southern Vietnamese to New Economic Zones, the Northern Vietnamese eagerly stepped in to inhabit fully furnished homes and established businesses, their reward for sympathizing with the Communists (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Ellsberg 2003; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

Several members of the group recall family members being dragged out of the house by policemen at all hours, only to return ragged and tired. Luan recalls overhearing her foster parents talking about leaving the house in the middle of the night so they could leave her behind. She stayed awake for several nights worrying that they would abandon her. Ultimately, her foster family was relocated to a New Economic Zone.

Families relocated to the New Economic Zones, mainly in Central Vietnam, were given a parcel of land to farm. The majority of the harvest would return to the Communists and a small portion would remain for the families to either consume or sell in an attempt to make money. The lands of Central Vietnam, however, are ill suited to agriculture. Life was harsh and unforgiving and families suffered starvation and drought. For a government insistent upon re-programming her people, these New Economic Zones only served to reinforce the opposition to Communist rule. Although you would be hard put to find anyone to announce such beliefs, it was common knowledge that the populations of the New Economic Zones were those men and women and their families who either worked for the Americans (civilian and military) or had Amerasian children (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Ellsberg 2003; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

Tuan's grandfather, for another example, would walk out into the fields and curse the Communists. He would reminisce about the days of the war and how it was not near as desperate as their lives were now. Tuan is one of the few Amerasians raised by his blood

relatives. His uncle had served in the South Vietnamese army with several American brothers in arms. His grandfather told him stories about his own father and how his mother fell in love with him.

In Vietnam, because of their lack of citizenship and fear of the North Vietnamese government policies regarding *con lai*, Amerasians were socially rejected. Amerasians were not considered equal in the social structure. More often than not, the mothers either volunteered or were forced through family pressures to give the babies up for adoption (Yarborough 2005). If the mothers kept their children, they were frequently ostracized by their families, which sometimes led to the suicide of the mother, which then left an orphan as there would be no record of the child's lineage to trace back to the family (Lipman 1997; McKelvey 1999). These cultural ideas were the basis for the stigmatization and marginalization of the Amerasians. A mixed race child and an unwed mother were probably two of the worst family reputations in Vietnamese society (Bass 1996).

One basic premise of identity theory (e.g., Berezin 1997; Corse 1996; Griswold 1992) is the notion of nationality as a base from which to launch identity construction. Oftentimes the question 'Where are you from?' is a request to discover one's country of origin. The response is customarily a nation, say, 'America...Canada...Spain...' This response typically generates further inquiry as to specificity of place, e.g., 'Texas...Ontario...Barcelona...' which then prompts discussions of commonality. For the Amerasian, there was no commonality experienced, only rejection. When someone asks where you are from, the point is that they sense you are different from them. This feeling of difference is called 'a sense of unbelonging' by Julia Kristeva (1991). The question itself becomes a pointed reminder that you do not belong.

Amerasians were the forsaken in this tumultuous time. Abandoned to orphanages or foster families, they fared much worse than the South Vietnamese army veterans in re-education camps. As mentioned previously, the government did little more than tolerate the

Amerasian population (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005). More often than not, the Amerasian was the repository of all the frustration, anger, fear and hostility from the community. Authority figures turned a blind eye to this discrimination and harassment, often blaming the Amerasian himself for his troubles.

“I told them I was Vietnamese and they laughed and said Vietnamese don’t have brown hair and blue eyes. I would tell them my eyes were a disease and they would laugh and tell me it was a disease from Americans. I felt so much shame for my foster mother,” says Hanh, 37. Hanh has striking blue eyes which she often hides through the technology of brown colored contact lenses. One of the first things she purchased was a pair of brown contact lenses. She rarely goes out in public without her contacts because she fears scrutiny from the Vietnamese community. When she first came to America, she was accused of wearing blue colored contacts by people in the social services agencies. It was only after she presented documentation that she was able to show that she was born with blue eyes.

As teasing from peers became more and more hostile, often leading to physical attacks, Amerasians gradually dropped out of schools, with little more than a third grade education. Without Vietnamese citizenship, there was no right to education or other government services. Most Amerasians are illiterate and cannot even sign an ‘X’ to signify their name when they leave Vietnam (Bass 1996).

Amerasians were the embodiment of all that was wrong with the Vietnam War. Amerasians didn’t look like everyone else, and to a homogeneous Vietnamese society, different was not good. Racial prejudice was expressed through vitriolic hatred towards the Amerasians. Vinh, 41, said, “There was an old singsong the kids would call out whenever I walked by them, ‘Americans have twelve assholes...if you plug up one, it still comes out of the other eleven...’ They would shout and point at me with sticks and call me the stupid American. Why didn’t I go back to my country? I learned to run very fast whenever I had to go out of my home.” Vinh doesn’t remember having any playmates, only that he stayed inside his orphanage for a large

part of his life. He later ran away and lived on the streets of Saigon, selling whatever trinkets he could find to survive. He joined a gang of Amerasian youths when he was 16 and began committing petty crimes. He later went back to the orphanage where he grew up to get out of the gang.

There are a multitude of blanket statements denying any mistreatment or discrimination among the Vietnamese towards Amerasians. The vehemence of many denials brings to mind Shakespeare's oft quoted phrase, "Methinks she doth protest too much." Not just to convince self, but to convince others, too. These denials are opinions, observations, and presumptions expressed by non-Amerasians. To acknowledge mistreatment and discrimination towards Amerasians would be to also admit liability on the part of the full-blooded Vietnamese, and that would never do. That, yes, there is mistreatment and discrimination amongst our people against Amerasians and, no, we did nothing to stop it. It is rare for the Vietnamese to admit liability, as it would put forth a "bad image to the American public" (GAO 1994).

Kibria's (1993) study addressing cultural disparities among Vietnamese families in the U.S. was accomplished by an interpreter who accompanied her on the interviews and also acted as the gatekeeper for the interviews. In a passage by the author, a pejorative phrase, the equivalent of a White using the 'N' word towards a Black, used to negatively describe Amerasians (*bui doi* – children of the dust) is incorrectly identified as a blanket term for Vietnamese youth in gangs or engaged in criminal activity. While it is not the fault of the author for the incorrect translation of the phrase, it is a prime example of the lengths to which some Vietnamese will go to maintain a "good image to the American public."

After speaking to my own mother about my choice of topic, she was fanatical in her denials of any kind of discrimination and even tried to make me feel that I had imagined all that I knew to be true. She practically forbade me to undertake this type of research, telling me that almost all the Amerasians were taken care of by their families and that the stories I had heard were fabrications by journalists to make the public feel sympathy. Yet the recollections of

persons such as Luan, Hanh, and Vinh in my group supported earlier claims made about the harsh treatment of Americans in Vietnam, no matter how often denied. The impact this had on family relationships is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

FAMILY

I brought shame to my family because I was *con lai*. While it was not my choice to be mixed, my family suffered the interrogations because of me.

Binh, 44

The concept of marginality has been criticized for a lack of construct validity. That is to say, replication of findings after applying the concept is difficult, if not impossible, resulting in an incompatibility with scientific methods of research (Del Pilar and Udasco 2004). While acknowledging this concern, I believe that marginality in the specific circumstances of Amerasians remains a useful construct. The literature challenges marginalization from the perspective that there was always some support structure in place to which the marginalized person could return. In the case of Amerasians, this was in fact an exception, not the norm (Cullen and Pretes 2000).

The politically charged atmosphere in the aftermath of the fall of Saigon in April, 1975 created a dangerous environment for the Amerasian and his or her family. A widespread unconfirmed report was that the Communist North Vietnamese were preparing to enter Saigon and would kill anyone known to have any affiliation with the enemy. This led to the wanton destruction of any documentation, including photographs, which would have incriminated the family of associating with an American as evidenced by the obvious existence of an Amerasian family member (Lipman 1997). The resulting lack of documentation would create a bureaucratic nightmare in the future for Amerasians attempting to leave the country through the Amerasian Homecoming Act, but the fear of reprisal blew away any hope of future salvation. Someone who personally experienced the forged documents is Dan, 37. He recounted, "My papers say my birthday is in 1972. And I suppose there may be something true about it. But the papers

are not real. Or I have no idea if they are real. When I was adopted, there was no blood test to determine if the American who called himself my father was really my father. I was just packed up and shipped off to a new country. But I think I was one of the lucky ones.”

Dan was adopted at what he remembers as the age of four from an orphanage by his supposed American father. A sister was also adopted at the same time. He isn't certain that she is his blood relative. They were instructed to forget all things Vietnamese and live their lives as Americans by their adopted father. He was a Vietnam veteran who rarely spoke of the war, much less his mother, of whom Dan has no memory. Dan grew up completely Americanized with no Vietnamese contact until he left home. Dan's legal name was changed at the adoption to a completely American name. He doesn't remember what his Vietnamese name is anymore.

During the Vietnam War, hundreds of thousands of American military and civilians were stationed in South Vietnam and the surrounding areas. During this time, some of the American men would have an evening or a relationship (including marriage) with the Vietnamese women who either worked on the bases or were prostitutes. The results of these relationships, whether a night or longer, were millions of mixed race children born into a culture that revered family lineage, nationality and the purity of their women (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

Economically, Vietnamese women had an opportunity, and a necessity, to find employment to support their families. With most of the men conscripted into the military, the traditional breadwinners were no longer bringing in a survivable income. These opportunities brought them into closer contact with Americans because most employment originated in or around the military bases, where repeated interactions led to mutual attraction and relationships. In some instances, the American would financially support the family of his lover in exchange for her fidelity (DeBonis 1995). This led to a negative societal belief that the Vietnamese woman had 'sold' herself to him when oftentimes the arrangement was actually a love match, whereby he was basically providing for his sweetheart, who was responsible for the

well-being of her entire family. Either way, the Communist Vietnamese culture only reinforced ostracism and classified her relationship with an American as a business exchange, publicly identifying her as no more than a prostitute (Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005). It was usually family connections that secured employment on base. The women who worked on the bases were typically well educated and taught in their upbringing to be proper young ladies. The Vietnamese social construct of 'purity,' however, encouraged a biased perception that only uneducated, lower class prostitutes would have sex with an American, much less give birth to a mixed race child (Bass 1996).

There are cases where women who had relationships with Americans were protected within the Vietnamese family, but familial rejection was the norm (DeBonis 1995). The lack of family protection when meeting the basic goals of survival, such as shelter and food, or when making emotional attachments, as when parents would refuse to allow their 'pureblooded' children to play with the Amerasian children, allowed for a disconnected group of people to be created. Rejection by your own family could be considered the ultimate betrayal (Fitness 2005).

To understand the beginnings of the Amerasian's identity construction, there has to be a basic knowledge of the Vietnamese social structure. Vietnam is a patriarchal society that places great importance on maintaining appearances; family reputation, education and personal conduct carry great weight in evaluating suitability for marriage and in employment. Patriarchal lineage is the basis for identity; one benefits from one's family reputation. The family influence, including extended family – such as aunts, uncles, old family friends, etc., was so strong that an old saying was often repeated that it would be better to marry the dog in the village than to leave the family to marry wealthy. Family elders were to be respected at all costs, even to the detriment of many a young woman who was offered a future in America with her American boyfriend. The family would forbid her to leave, claiming the necessity of her wages to survive (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

“I fell in love with a girl who lived in my village. I worked for a family taking care of their children and I would see her all the time. I used to walk with her sometimes. When I tell her I love her, she would smile and say nothing. Then one day I ask her to be my wife and she say nothing. The next day she ignore me like I was invisible. When I told my foster family why I was so sad, they told me I was stupid to think that such a girl would ever love me back. That even if she did, her family would never let her marry someone like me,” says Vu, 38.

Vu says her rejection scared him from falling in love for a long time until he came to America. He went to every vocational training opportunity offered. He now owns a successful repair shop and recently married a young Vietnamese woman whose family was more attracted to his stability and success than repelled by his mixed blood.

There is a Vietnamese proverb that “a child without a father is like a house without a roof.” The father is typically the parent who records the birth of the child and thus claims paternity. Without a father to claim them, Amerasians were often ‘cast out’ of the family line to protect the reputation of the family. The assumption was made that Amerasians or families that contained an Amerasian could not possibly be of good reputation, that Amerasians were less than full-blooded Vietnamese. The attitudes of the homogeneous Vietnamese society placed stigma upon any type of race mixing. It was thought that mixed race offspring could not possibly be as intelligent or well-behaved as the full-blooded Vietnamese (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

Lack of a biological father also placed strain on familial relations because the implication meant the Vietnamese woman did not maintain her ‘*goc*’ (origin or purity) in both mixing with an American and having said American’s child out of wedlock (Bass 1996). This implication damaged not only the mother’s reputation, but also the family’s. These cultural beliefs played a part in the discrimination against and marginalization of the Amerasian.

The Vietnamese call themselves *chinh goc*. *Chinh* means ‘true.’ *Goc* means origin.’ Put them together and you have the ‘true race.’ ...Basically, we’re polluting God’s chosen people with monkey genes. (Bass 1996, p.91)

Those who were kept in the family were often treated as less than family members. Given the fluidity of family boundaries in Vietnamese culture, I found it odd how Vietnamese treated their Amerasian relatives (Lipman 1997 and Yarborough 2005). The Vietnamese phrase for the children born specifically of American and Vietnamese blood is *bui doi*, children of the dust (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; McKelvey 1999; Valverde 1992). As children of the dust, Amerasians were considered subhuman, regarded less than family pets and only a little more visible than dust bunnies in the corner (Bass 1996). Often, Amerasians were not recognized, or worse, completely ostracized from the family out of shame of the mixed bloodline. They were the last to eat, consigned to an inconspicuous place in the home and sometimes even made to sleep outside. Amerasians were rarely included in family activities, often treated like slaves or worse (Bass 1996).

The other side is that not all Amerasians were mistreated. There are stories of Vietnamese mothers who would try to darken their child's skin (or lighten it in the case of an African-American father) or shave their heads to hide the coarseness of African-American hair texture (Lipman 1997). The mothers wanted desperately for their children to be accepted as Vietnamese without the stigma of being mixed (*con lai*). This was considered the lesser of the two evils in that the mother claimed her child and tried everything to hide the child's foreign identity in an effort to protect her child from the Vietnamese society. Yet all of these actions only served to emphasize to the child that he or she was different and in this case different was not good.

It has been suggested that people who have been consistently rejected start to expect to be rejected and in so doing fulfill their prediction of rejection (Somer and Rubin 2004). Amerasians have a tendency to self-alienate. That is to say, they expect to be rejected so they take themselves out of situations before further rejection. It is possible that by self-alienating, they contributed to their own marginalization. However, given the experiences shared in this study and the literature about the time period after the Vietnam War and before the American

Homecoming Act, there is very little evidence that Amerasians would have been met with acceptance. Nga, 40, remembered that she used to come home crying from school, telling her mom she didn't want to go back "because the kids were mean to me. She didn't believe me and kept making me go back to school. Even when the kids would shout at me on the street, she would not believe that the kids were being mean to me on purpose."

Nga says that even when the police came to question her mother about her Amerasian child, her mother insisted it had nothing to do with Nga. After they were transferred to the New Economic Zone, Nga's mother continued to deny any negative behavior towards her. It was only after Nga's mother married a Vietnamese man who physically abused them both that Nga was able to convince her mother of the awful truth. She believes her mother's insistence that there was nothing wrong was a way of protecting her from the violence.

Khoi's thinking took him in a different direction. "Even though I did well in school with little effort, I still was made to feel I was dumber than my classmates. My teacher would not call on me even though I knew the correct answer and sometimes when I would have a correct answer and my classmates were wrong, my teacher would accuse me of cheating." Khoi says he regrets that he didn't continue going to school when he had the opportunity because he feels it hampered his efforts to become a better student in America. Even after almost twenty years in the U.S., Khoi still speaks with an accent. He completed his GED at 23 and recently graduated from a local university. While his past illiteracy has no bearing on his present educational success, Khoi says he often felt like he was less intelligent because of his educational experiences in Vietnam.

Thus, Amerasians certainly felt alienation, not only from lack of a biological father but more often than not from a distinct physical appearance contrasting with family and the Vietnamese people as a whole. Not unlike an adoptee's search for a physical similarity to develop an "us" identity within the family unit, Amerasians were left with feelings of "otherness" (Tuan 1998). In most cases, the American features were so prominent that there was no

denying paternity (Root 1992). Being stigmatized for biracialism, a circumstance beyond their control, contributed heavily to the marginalization of Amerasians.

CHAPTER 7

THE GOOSE THAT LAID GOLDEN EGGS

One day I was walking home and my foster father come outside and tell me to pack my clothes, that I was going to live with another family. I thought I was going to help this other family. Then I saw my foster father and mother wearing new clothes and fixing their house. I did not know what was happening because no one told me. Later, I figure out I had been sold so that the new family could get a ticket to America. I was their ticket to America.

Tuan, 43

This same marginalization allowed Vietnam to guiltlessly export vast numbers of Amerasians 'returning' to America under the guise of the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988 (AHA) (DeBonis 1995). Enacted by Congress, the Act was to be the righting of the heinous wrong committed in 1975 when America abandoned her children in Vietnam.

The process involved transportation to a re-education camp in the Philippines (which for many Amerasians was actually their first contact with education) for a period of six months, learning basic English and technical/vocational skills. Upon arrival in the U.S., they would be given a special kind of refugee status that offered them government benefits for up to two years, although the average period was nine months, plus job placement and housing assistance (Bass 1996). The original requirement for acceptance into the program was proof of a relationship between an American and a Vietnamese. Unfortunately, due to the hysteria after April 1975, almost all documentation that would have made immediate entry possible to the U.S. had been destroyed. Except for faded photographs and barely legible creased letters that had been carefully hidden over the years, there was little to no documentation that Amerasians existed.

By 1992, the U.S. discovered the problems with using documentation to prove American blood and began accepting physical proof in the form of appearance as entry to the program (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005). This new development

led to the wholesale trade in Amerasians. Wealthy families would 'purchase' an Amerasian from his family and then have documents forged to prove they were members of their fake family all along. The Amerasian's family would have gained a large sum of money with the promise of more income once the family was settled in the United States. At a time when the average annual income in Vietnam was USD\$150.00, a transaction in the range of USD\$2,000.00 to \$4,000.00 was common (Yarborough 2005). The Amerasian could leave the country that denied him or her life and begin living the American dream.

Some Amerasians positioned themselves to be 'purchased' for the benefit of the families they were leaving behind (Yarborough 2005). Securing such an enormous amount of money for their own family, struggling to survive, made the Amerasian a hero; for once, he or she could provide security for the family of origin instead of shame. With new hope for an opportunity to escape the oppressive Communist regime, what other family wouldn't buy a golden ticket out of the country? Amerasians had become a commodity, a passport to a new life. After nearly twenty years of sanctioned hostility, the Vietnamese discovered that Amerasians were worth their weight in gold.

These fake families would find an Amerasian and begin a sort of courting process, inviting the Amerasian and his family (if he or she had one) to lavish meals in restaurants or big family productions to show they never really disliked Amerasians, they merely never had a chance to acquaint themselves with one another (Bass 1996). Often, the Amerasian was from the countryside and knew little or nothing of the Homecoming Act. Lulled into thinking the fake family truly wanted to take him in, it must have been as if his prayers were answered and in the form of his own family. The desire to belong is primal to human beings and the pain of not belonging may be brutal (Fitness 2005).

Unfortunately, the fake families were so socialized to discriminate against Amerasians that it made an awful situation that much worse. Initially treated as a golden child, often given the biggest portion of food over the blood children of his fake family, the blood kin naturally

rebelled and began to treat him as they once did, through taunts and cruel teasing. The parents would reassure him that it was okay, it was just an adjustment period for the children to have a new older 'brother' (Yarborough 2005) Also, preferential treatment might continue only until the application was completed and the entire family was accepted into the program.

After acceptance, the fake families reverted back to treating Amerasians like the dust they always believed them to be. And since it was a criminal offense to defraud the program, there was no recourse (GAO 1994). "After we were relocated to the PRPC, my fake family started keeping food from me, telling me they needed it to feed my new grandmother. I began to lose a lot of weight and when the American teacher asked me why I look so sick, I could not tell her because I was afraid they would not let me go to America. But because my teacher maybe say something to someone, my fake mother got mad and she beat me. She told me I was ungrateful for their help to take me to my country," recalls Luan, 39.

Officials were at first unaware of the deception. After repeated interviews where the family members would be separated, it was discovered that sometimes the fake family didn't even know the name of their supposed Amerasian relative. This resulted in immediate dismissal from the process and the Amerasian would have to start all over again. So rampant was fake family activity that at one point the Amerasian would be severely beaten in public if the fake family did not pass the interview for program acceptance (Bass 1996). As officials became more aware of the fraud, it became more difficult for Amerasians to be accepted into the program, even when skin color would immediately identify mixed blood. Program officials were known to reject applications out of hand; e.g., one interviewer was known as 'Mr. Ten Percent' because he only accepted ten percent of the applications he saw in a given day (Bass 1996).

After the entire family arrived in America, the fake family might take the Amerasian's benefits for themselves or get rid of him altogether (Bass 1996). There are stories of families landing at LAX and dumping the Amerasian somewhere off the interstate on the way to their new community (Yarborough 2005). If it happened that the Amerasian stayed with his fake

family, more often than not he would end up in the same living situation as he had in Vietnam, little more than a house slave, or worse.

The socialization of Amerasians to accept their low standing in the community made it easier for them to fall into the same circumstances with a fake family. Additionally, a strong desire to belong to something or someone created resistance to recognizing that one is still unwanted. Amerasians left everything familiar and known behind in Vietnam in search of a place for themselves, sometimes to discover they were worse off than before. At least in Vietnam, they spoke the language. Here in America, they often felt lost. Linh, 45, says, "When I stepped off the plane in Dallas, there were so many people smiling and talking to me, handing me things...I was so scared because I didn't understand them, couldn't understand where they were taking me, what was going to happen next. My fake family seemed to know what to do and say, smiling and thanking all the people who were there, but no one talked to me, so I didn't understand what was happening."

A fake family rejecting the Amerasian was not always the situation. Many Amerasians, particularly the males, would turn the tables on their fake families once they arrived in the States. The ones who had a decent grasp of English would wait patiently for their opportunity to leave and then take measures to ensure they wouldn't be in trouble for leaving. Tuan, 43, remembers that sometimes he would get mad at his fake family. "Didn't they understand that I was the reason they were able to leave Vietnam and go to America? That with all of their money and family they had not been able to leave before and now because of me, their *bui doi*, they were? When I came here and they treat me so bad, I tell them that I don't have to stay with them anymore, they can't take my money because if I leave, my American money leaves with me. I talk to my case worker and tell him I going to leave and he tell me to make sure I have a place to live before I leave or I will lose my money. I find a friend who has an apartment and I offer to pay to stay with him. Then I leave and don't look back."

CHAPTER 8

WELCOME TO AMERICA

What will a twenty-eight-year-old former goatherd without formal education, who speaks no English, is illiterate in Vietnamese, and has no family to rely on, do in the United States? ...Without English, transferable vocational skills, or a social support network, his life in the United States may be as difficult, and will certainly be more lonely, than his life in Vietnam.

McKelvey 1999

“Acculturative stress is defined as the stress due to the acculturation process between two cultures. Psychocultural stress due to cultural differences found between a host culture and an incoming culture marked by reduction in the physical and mental health status of groups undergoing acculturation” (Nwadiora and McAdoo 1996). To put this another way, culture shock is one feature of the immigrant experience in America. For Vietnamese Amerasians, what was the impact of going from marginalized subhuman to what I call “insta-human, just add America?” How did Amerasians in the United States deal with their new status and social identity in contrast to their standing in Vietnam?

American culture has generally acknowledged bi-racial children. There are pockets of communities where mixing races is still considered an oddity or stigmatized, but most major metropolitan areas have integrated bi-racial families into their communities. Though not fully accepted everywhere in the U.S., bi-racialism in Vietnamese culture remains a heavily loaded emotional and political subject (DeBonis 1995), with adverse implications for individual sense of self. How Vietnamese Amerasians would fare in acculturation depended in part on what structural supports were in place.

The available organizations and programs fell short of providing all the assistance essential for the adaptation of Amerasians to American culture. The result of this systems failure was that Amerasians were given short shrift after arriving in the States. Mediocre education and jobs training, deficient healthcare, and inadequate housing were the welcome

mat placed in front of Amerasians arriving in the early 90's. Unable to obtain more than a rudimentary comprehension of the English language, jobs earning above minimum wage were difficult to obtain. The AHA provided some financial support for a short period of time, but the funds would typically run out before solid footing was gained (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

America was simply not prepared to deal with the multitude of issues created by a generation of Amerasians who were unwanted in Vietnam and ultimately unwanted in America. Instead of making sure Amerasians were acclimated to American culture, or at least comfortable moving through the communities, the first effort was made for vocational training to ensure Amerasians were gainfully employed, not draining the Federal coffers (GAO 1994). While the training did place them in immediate low paying jobs, once they were employed it was assumed they would no longer need social services and they were dropped from the program rosters. By closing off efforts to introduce Amerasians into American culture, few Amerasians were able to improve their employment futures or their living conditions. Stuck in low paying jobs that just barely covered their living expenses, Amerasians were relegated to low cost housing, which usually placed them square in the middle of crime ridden neighborhoods. Little to no English language skills made them prime targets for local criminals (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Lipman 1997; Yarborough 2005).

As time went on, bustling Vietnamese communities evolved from the original pockets of refugee placements. California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and New York were the four main states that were assigned the growing immigrant populations of Amerasians. California holds title to the largest Vietnamese population, while Texas contains the largest Vietnamese populated city in the United States. The Vietnamese communities of California and Texas have grown (e.g., in cities such as Westminster, CA and Arlington, TX) to the extent that State organizations have added Vietnamese translation to the various forms and applications required for businesses and

other organizations. A walk into many restaurant restroom facilities in the Arlington area shows the employee hand washing sign in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish.

These communities built schools, churches, and retail areas comparable to those you would find in any typical American town but for one difference; the clientele are, first and foremost, Vietnamese. By catering to their own, these Vietnamese-Americans have, in a sense, developed their own utopian Vietnam based on an image of what they think Vietnam should have been. Shy of the random tourist trips to Little Saigon for authentic Vietnamese food, there are few non-Vietnamese to break the sea of black hair and Vietnamese language.

Generally, there were two paths for Amerasians once they arrived in America. The first path involved an almost total immersion in the American culture, speaking only English no matter how broken and changing their names to give them a sense of belonging in their new country. There are quite a few Amerasians born in Vietnam who no longer speak Vietnamese. Dan, 37, says, "I haven't spoken Vietnamese since I walked into my father's house. He wanted me to forget all aspects of Vietnam. I understand just enough to order food, but that's it."

Dan is married to an American woman and they have twin boys. The boys' middle names are Vietnamese to reflect their father's heritage, but that is where the acknowledgement ends. He stopped his attempts at re-learning Vietnamese when he discovered a popular language program utilizes the North Vietnamese dialect. He mentioned that he doubts seriously his sons will ever speak Vietnamese. His boys are fraternal twins, each child resembling a parent; he jokes that he has a mini-mom and a mini-dad. He says that it doesn't bother him that his sons will eventually grow up and marry American women, further diluting the Vietnamese blood that is apparent in his features. He figures three generations down, his progeny will never even realize their patriarch was Asian, much less Amerasian.

These Amerasians live completely as would a Caucasian born and raised in the U.S. Without their almond eyes and olive skin, they could be mistaken for the generically appearing Americans (Lee 1991).

On a different note, Dan mentioned that his friends were also from minority groups. His best friend in high school was an African American raised by white adoptive parents. He also talks about the advantages and disadvantages his minority status has been for him in seeking employment. "My first job out of college was for an Indian man who owned a construction company. I applied for a construction worker's position because I had no experience in the business. When he noticed I was getting a degree in Occupational Psychology and Business, he placed me in the position of Construction Manager. He later told me that he was convinced that my minority status would make me a better manager than a construction worker. In hindsight, he was right."

Dan owns his own consulting business in construction management. He is affiliated with several Federal agencies and has numerous small business awards under his belt. He does not recall receiving any negative feedback due to his minority status. Again, his minority status is a benefit to him in his career field. The only time he can recall having an issue with being Amerasian is when he applied for security clearance with the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP). It was during his background check for a Federal contracting opportunity with the BEP that he discovered his Vietnamese birth certificate was most likely a forgery. Although this did not obstruct his security clearance, the discovery came as a shock to Dan, causing him to re-examine his family structure. In the end, he pragmatically decided that even if the people he believed were his family ended up not being his family, they were the only family he knew. He accepted that there may not be blood binding him to his sister or his deceased American father.

The second path was a complete one hundred eighty degree turn from the first in that the Amerasian cocooned himself within the many large Vietnamese communities located throughout the United States. Offering himself up to Vietnamese business owners, living as a boarder with Vietnamese families, he rarely ventured outside the Vietnamese community. Later in life, he would marry an Amerasian woman, a result of social pressures in the Vietnamese

community that kept him in his 'place.' Many of the beliefs about Amerasians in Vietnam were kept after moving to America. Being *con lai* was a stigma that would follow him anywhere he went inside the Vietnamese communities.

Linh, 45, is a widow, whose husband died shortly after he came to America. A bittersweet life, as Linh came to America through a fake family and had to leave him behind, only to later save up enough money to bring her husband to the States. "I work as a cook in a pho restaurant. The owner pays me cash. She keeps me in the back because of my appearance, but sometimes, she will bring me to the front to deal with American customers...I only get one day a week off work. She cannot find another cook to work for the same wages I do." Linh is a pragmatic woman. She understands that at her age and in the current economy, it will be difficult for her to even attempt to find a better job. She speaks passable English with a heavier accent than the other group members, often switching between languages.

She has made the best of her life here and knows that with more time, eventually, being Amerasian won't have the stigma it does today. She says, "So many times I see young Vietnamese girls come to the restaurant with their American boyfriends...I wonder if maybe they will marry American men and have Amerasian babies; will her family accept their grandchildren? I see Vietnamese families with one American man at the table and I wonder how their daughter convinced her family to accept her American husband. I know that it is part of life, that we learn new things, I wonder if my grandparents would accept me if they were still alive now. It makes me sad sometimes when I see the Vietnamese families with their American son-in-law. They look happy together and they talk to their Amerasian grandchildren. I wonder if they call them *bui doi* behind their backs or if they treat them differently at home."

One observation that I did not follow up on but believe would be a fascinating research topic is that Vietnamese men rarely marry American women. Most of the women in the group did not appear to be opposed to dating or marrying an American man. In this group the men also did not seem to be against women intermarrying, but in the community at large it appears

that Vietnamese men are not very open to marrying an American woman. I personally only know three men who are married to non-Vietnamese women and of those three only one is an American woman, the other two are of other Asian ethnicities. This may be a lingering effect of the patriarchal nature of Vietnamese culture, in which fathers establish the family lineage and have a vested interest in their children remaining '*chin goc*' to preserve family honor. Ties between father and child are of great social significance as well as both emotional and practical importance to Vietnamese Amerasians.

CHAPTER 9

THE SEARCH FOR FATHERS

He hopes to meet his biological father but doesn't even know his name and will, like almost all other Amerasians, probably never find him. And if he were to locate his father, what then? Would this fifty-or-sixty-year-old man, probably married and with other children, welcome this now adult child of his youth, not seen or heard from in over twenty-five years?

McKelvey 1999

You know what happened to America in the Vietnam War? It started with 'hugging beer' (*slang for the girls who serve beer and sit with the clientele*) and got stuck for life. The Amerasian Homecoming Act is the biggest paternity settlement in history.

Bass 1996

Overriding other necessities, one of the very first things Amerasians did upon arriving in the U.S. was to seek out their birth fathers. Not only were Amerasians seeking their fathers, they were also searching for their identities. Who is this man I resemble? Previous studies have suggested that paternal acceptance or rejection plays a distinctive role in predicting future behavior and depression, with sons experiencing a greater impact (Fitness 2005). The sad truth is that while the AHA brought thousands of Amerasians to America, there was no protocol in place to address the reunion of father and child. In fact, measures were taken to prevent this reunion from happening (Bass 1996).

In 1994, the U.S. General Accounting Office prepared a qualitative study for Congress to determine the status of the Amerasian Homecoming Act. In this report topics such as employment, education, and family welfare were addressed, alluding to the perception that Amerasians had a strong work ethic that allowed them to fast track through the vocational programs to find employment quickly, thereby reducing the strain of financial assistance provided by the government. In this aspect, the resettlement program was considered successful without any undue negative after effects. Surprising about this report was the omission of any mention of American fathers. The impression left is that the efforts made had

been limited to retrieving the Amerasian children and providing them with rudimentary schooling and vocational skills, with the expectation they would thereby be adequately equipped to live an American lifestyle. Other resettlement agencies, both secular and religious, were also noticeably silent on the subject of American fathers.

The Veteran's Administration placed the interests of the fathers over the interests of their children, recommending that measures should be taken "to protect the veteran from unwanted and embarrassing disclosures" (Bass 1996: 189). The Pentagon's initial perspective was that "...fatherhood of an illegitimate child during youth is at worst embarrassing and at a minimum highly personal. Contact by any individual, particularly a long-lost illegitimate child, is clearly intrusive, whether welcome or not" (Bass 1996: 190). The Pentagon's argument was struck down by the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, stating that soldiers' children have three interests more irrefutable than their fathers' right to privacy: They should know their hereditary and medical histories; they might be heirs; and they have a psychological need to authenticate their identities (Bass 1996 and Yarborough 2005).

Most father search requests filter through the American Red Cross agency locations that comprise almost all of the relief organizations overseas. A report presented by the Red Cross (1988) mentions that only 3% of their searches end successfully, with only 3% of those successful searches ending in happy reunions. Alternatively, there are individuals outside the Red Cross who devote their time and energies to assisting Amerasians find their fathers.

A notable example is Joseph Love. Love, a veteran who never served in Vietnam, started out as a volunteer at one of the resettlement programs. After getting acquainted with several Amerasians, he began to receive requests to help find fathers. As a military veteran, he has access to information that most civilians don't even know exists. He has been able to locate many fathers, but he also tries to respect the father's wishes. Reactions run the gamut: "I knew someday you would call;" "Do I have a son or a daughter?;" "Why are you bothering me?;" "Don't do this to me;" "Please let me off the hook. I have a whole new family."

(Yarborough 2005). He has been able to match up 30% of his searches with their Amerasian children. Sometimes it's a onetime meeting, just to establish knowledge of one another; other times, the fathers will ask about their mothers, curious about past loves. Love believes that Amerasians seeking their fathers just want to know for a fact that they have a father: "If the dad won't see the kid, then that kid knows he's everything bad anyone ever said about him in all the years he was growing up...[but] the minute they have a real dad...they are no longer the dust of life..." (Yarborough 2005).

What seems to be the most common result of father searches is rejection. The son of a deceased veteran threatened the Amerasian with deportation (Yarborough 2005). A Vietnamese mother filing for public assistance, who was asked to give any identifying information on the father, had all of his military documentation and provided copies. The first time her daughter saw her father was in family court being sued for child support. During the hearing he did not once look at his daughter, even to see if she resembled him (Bass 1996; Yarborough 2005). According to Love, about a third of the fathers will say yes to a meeting. Another third are deceased and the final third will hang up or threaten legal action (Yarborough 2005).

Almost all members of the group I observed made an attempt to find their American fathers, including myself. Only two considered themselves fortunate in their search, one was able to meet his father before he died and the other is considered a family member even though her father was already deceased. "My father talked to his new family all the time about the daughter he left behind in Vietnam. He talked about me every holiday and even his mother and father, my dead grandparents, knew about me before they died. My grandmother told my father to give me something from her if he ever found me so I would have something to help remember her. When I finally found him, his wife answered the phone and she started to cry so I had to speak with my half sister. They were so excited, I could not understand everything she

said but they were very happy to hear from me. It made me feel happy to know that he was looking for me and it made me sad that I never got to meet him," *Khanh, 47*.

Khanh's reunion with her father's family was one of the best narratives from the entire series. When she started to tell the group about her family life, it seemed like the whole room lit up with excitement. She doesn't live with her family, but she travels often to visit and spends her holidays with them. The memento from her grandmother was a ring that had been passed down for four generations. Khanh wears it proudly on her right hand. She has pictures of her American grandparents and her father on an altar in her house. Her story is the fairy tale that it seems every Amerasian wants to experience.

Unfortunately for most, including myself, father searches are unsuccessful. In truth, my search wasn't so much unsuccessful as it was half-hearted. I can't recall my exact motives at the time, but my recollection is that I felt it would have been disrespectful to my dad, the stepfather who raised me, because in all the ways that counted, he is my dad. I was one of the lucky ones who was not only born in the U.S. but also raised by my Vietnamese parents. Others still haven't given up their search, insistent that one day they will find him or at least find his grave.

Vu and Tuan made attempts to find their respective fathers. Tuan said that he even had his father's papers that his maternal grandfather kept hidden away. So far, he has not been able to locate the man who loved his mother and was a friend to his uncles. While he is disappointed at the lack of information, he hasn't given up hope that he will get to meet his father someday. Vu, on the other hand, found his father, but faced rejection and disbelief when he attempted to make contact. It appeared to be a striking blow to his emotions from his tone, but I observed Vu as private, so it was hard to evaluate his feelings about the issue of his father. I can only imagine how hard it must have been to find success and be struck down, seemingly without empathy.

Where their real fathers were absent, many of their mothers remarried and had other children, children who got to grow up with both parents loving and raising them. Amerasians more often confronted the circumstance of a step-family. Being the only Amerasian in the family, even when a step parent treated them the same as their own children, raised some feelings of otherness. Luan, 39, illustrates: "I finally was able to bring my mother over from Vietnam fifteen years ago. She married a Vietnamese man twelve years ago. She is only eighteen year older than me. I have a twelve year old brother. It is strange because I am old enough to be his mother but he is my brother. I see how happy and young he is, he doesn't have fear being alone. I don't have much in common with him, he is very American...plays video games and goes to school. I tell him to make good grades make his sister proud. It is strange having a twelve year old brother, you know?"

So while there are happy endings to father searches, there are many more unhappy ones (Bass 1996; DeBonis 1995; Yarborough 2005). What stands out most was the blanket suppression historically of attempts to locate American fathers immediately. Given the Vietnamese patriarchal culture, having a father's name would have been sufficient for many Amerasians.

On Father's Day, 2009, more than 300 Amerasians made a pilgrimage to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. to pay their respects to their suspected fathers listed on what they call 'The Black Wall.' Lined up in the rain, they made a striking image with their hands pressed to the walls, heads bowed. Senator John McCain and other Vietnam vets who are now politicians attended the event. While I was invited to the event, I chose not to attend because I felt this should have been a more private gathering. I understood the political posturing and even accepted the reasons for making it a public affair, as there was a bill working its way through Congress to confer automatic U.S. citizenship on all Amerasians. I agreed that the bill should become a law, but didn't think the Father's Day pilgrimage was the

time or place for politics. The Amerasians search for fathers remains a deeply personal as well as political issue.

CHAPTER 10

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

...individuals who found themselves placed between two cultures would develop a “hybrid” personality, that is, the marginal personality...because they lived and functioned in two societies...

Del Pilar and Udasco 1999

My original belief was that triple marginalization had an impact on Amerasians when defining themselves in America. I wanted to know how Amerasians developed an identity without family, community, or country. While my research did not fully answer that question, nevertheless, clarifications provided by participants in the group studied supported my idea of triple marginalization. Previous studies have suggested marginalization through ethnicity and gender (Del Pilar and Udasco 2004), nation and ethnicity (Berezin 1997; Corse 1996; Griswold 1992) and gender and politics (Fuss 1989; hooks 1984). Those studies also led me to believe there was some merit in a triple marginalization application addressing Amerasian identity.

I expected that the alienation and ostracism experienced while growing up in Vietnam would impact Amerasian identity development in America. My original assumption was that it would have been a negative impact and I found the opposite to be true. It would appear the negativity of their childhood only strengthened the resolve of those who survived being outcast to make them more likely to rise to the challenge of becoming American instead of Amerasian. Perhaps the struggles only served to inure them to the future difficulties and made Amerasians try harder, for want of a better word. Life was difficult in Vietnam; they now had the opportunity to improve their lives in America.

There were several examples of Amerasians ‘gone bad’ in the literature – young Amerasian men joining gangs, cultural behaviors brought to America (domestic violence and spousal rape), etc., but, for the members of this discussion group, all had made some effort to improve their lives in America. Some became more successful than others, and during those

conversations, a dialogue was opened about assisting those who still needed help. To evaluate identity development, I considered where participants in the group are in their lives today.

Linh is going to night classes to improve her English and Vu has agreed to hire her in his office so that he might expand into American clientele for his auto repair businesses after she completes her coursework. In the meantime, Linh plans to save more of her money to move into her own apartment. She has been renting a room from a Vietnamese family for the past ten years.

Luan became engaged to an American man shortly after my group recordings ended. Her mother and stepfather are planning a traditional Vietnamese wedding ceremony for her and her fiancé. As I have recently participated in my own sister's Vietnamese wedding ceremony, I can say with certainty the pomp and circumstance will definitely make her feel more Vietnamese than she can imagine. She says he was just a friend for a very long time and only in the past few months did they begin to see each other.

Vinh is still taking night classes at a local community college. He remains a loner in the sense that he does not readily join us after the group meetings for coffee and pastries at the nearby café. He was recently laid off from his position as technician for a copier company. It has appeared that networking may become the new *raison d'être* for the group discussions given the economy.

Khanh was also recently laid off and is planning on moving in with her father's family in Austin.

Lien and Nga developed a friendship outside of the group as it was discovered they both have a passionate interest in Vietnamese soap operas. It was also discovered that they had even grown up in the same village but because of their circumstances, neither knew of the other's existence. They spent most of the discussion group time gossiping about people that used to live in their village and were now in the U.S.

Hanh still wears her brown contact lenses. She is single and has an active life outside of the Amerasian group. Her purpose in coming to the group was to connect with other Amerasians. Her primary friendships are with other Americans. She told us later that her American friends are jealous of her blue eyes and Asian features. Out of all of us, Dan and I excluded, Hanh is the only other Amerasian I would think would not identify as such, but she does call herself Amerasian. She does embrace the American way of life, but she wanted to stay connected to her heritage, too.

Khoi was my only African Amerasian subject. For this study, I only focused on his Amerasian identity. Exploration of his African Amerasian self is another broad dimension reaching beyond the scope of my research. It was during the meetings that we learned he is engaged to an African American woman. He also recently took a position with a local Asian bank branch.

Binh and Khoi were the only members of the group who knew each other outside the group before it was established. He didn't participate in all of the discussions so I don't know as much about his life then and now as I do about everyone else's. Khoi has mentioned off the cuff that Binh is a very shy quiet man who doesn't often speak of his life in Vietnam.

Such observations reflect that, at least for these Amerasians, time in America has lessened the impact of marginalization and helped solidify a positive identity as Amerasians. Even those Amerasians who stay entrenched in the Vietnamese community are pretty grounded in their identity as Amerasians but with a decidedly American emphasis. With the exception of myself and one other, the Amerasians in this study self-identified as Amerasian. Understanding they are Vietnamese Amerasians was merely a distinction in language and culture, they are Amerasians. The apparent impact of triple marginalization is the determination to not let others label them, but to label themselves as they choose. In America, they embraced what Liu (1998) described as identity libertarianism, the freedom to choose one's affiliation.

Dan considers himself Asian. He does not identify with the Vietnamese at all. Being completely submerged in American culture and language, he was transformed through his family circumstances. Nonetheless, there is no denying his Asian features. He wonders if the opposite would have been true. Would he have identified with the Vietnamese or even the Amerasians had he been raised in a Vietnamese home? There is no way to consider his experience differently other than to point out that the other members of the group identified as Amerasians and yet they had only been raised on the fringes of Vietnamese households.

I previously mentioned that I identify myself as Vietnamese. I acknowledge my mixed race heritage, but I believe being raised with Vietnamese parents in a hybrid 'Vietnamese' culture gave me greater appreciation for the things that made me Vietnamese rather than simply American. My experiences growing up held the same ostracism and rejection as did many of the group members, but there was a different nuance to them. With Vietnamese, I was American and with Americans, I was Vietnamese. The constant feeling of being the 'other' made me consider the best parts of each personality identification and consequently, I treasure my Vietnamese roots to some extent more than my presumed American ones.

Although there is still some discrimination against Amerasians, the bulk of it is from the older generations. Many of the younger Vietnamese actually express admiration for Amerasians, mimicking their American features and dyeing their hair. At the same time, still trying to hide their differences, some Amerasians keep to themselves, not recognizing that their communities have changed. In the future, I see the possibility of greater inclusion of the original Amerasians because of the acceptance of mixed marriages in the Vietnamese communities. As a result of new generations of Amerasians born and raised in the U.S., I think it likely that Vietnamese families will have to reconsider their former treatment of Amerasians.

I believe the Amerasian Homecoming Act prompted feelings of self-worth through the Act itself. By making an official proclamation to bring Amerasians 'home,' America gave Amerasians in Vietnam formal recognition of their humanity. It is unclear whether Amerasians

recognized this action as positive immediately, but when outwardly discussed, it is a source of pride that they were able to leave Vietnam just on the basis of their American fathers, the one thing that made them unloved in Vietnam was the same thing that made their departure possible.

In keeping with my original assumptions about triple marginality, I think being acknowledged in their characteristics fostered a positive environment for Amerasians to examine their new selves and build positive identities. While still not fully recognized by either government – Amerasians must go through the same ten year residency period as refugees before naturalization as Americans and Vietnamese still consider Amerasians to be American – the Amerasian has laid claim to a dual identity. Whether claiming their American heritage or their Vietnamese, there is a sense of innovation by rejecting that they have no identity and staking claim to their own definition of self.

In reviewing the discussions, some presented here in my research and others reserved out of respect for the gravity of the topics, I came to realize that what I thought during my literature review regarding Erikson's developmental stages was somewhat true. Each subject, in his/her own manner and most likely unknowingly, re-invented themselves through time and effort to evaluate what was internalized and made a determination of validity. Those ideas about themselves that they believed valid were kept and those ideas that were not valid were forcefully phased out of their identities. There was no foundation to tear down and rebuild, they started with what was present – all the negativity, the alienation and the stigmatization. In effect, they looked at themselves as sort of a *tabula rasa* and began from the beginning to determine who they were so that they could figure out who they weren't.

For the most part, they weren't survivors, they now had the lives to live as they defined themselves living. They were no longer the *bui doi* and they were no longer unwanted, not belonging. Each in his own way found a place in the US to belong, whether through marriage, families of choice or friendships. Those that could not reconcile who they used to be with who

they are now continue to struggle to find their place in this community. There continues to be shame and alienation in the Vietnamese American community towards the *my lai*.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL NOTICE



Office of Research Administration
Box 19188
202 E. Border St., Suite 201
Arlington, Texas
76019-0188

T 817.272.3723
F 817.272.1111

<http://www.uta.edu/research>
[Expertise at UT Arlington](http://www.uta.edu/expertise)
<http://www.uta.edu/expertise>

November 3, 2008

Ky-giao Christaine Nguyen
Dr. Linda Rouse
Sociology and Anthropology
Box 19599

TITLE: Case Study of Social Construction of Identity

Re: Exempt Approval Letter

IRB No.: 2008.00139e

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (UTA IRB) Chair (or designee) has reviewed the above-referenced study and found that it qualified as exempt from coverage under the federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects as referenced at Title 45--Part 46.101(2)(b)(2). You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of October 29, 2008.

Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to this office within 24 hours. In addition, pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB any proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without IRB review and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject."

All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented *CITI Training* on file with this office. The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human research subjects. Should you have questions or require further assistance, please contact Robin Dickey by calling (817) 272-9329.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia G. Turpin, PhD, RN, NEA, BC
Associate Clinical Professor
UT Arlington IRB Chair

BcAMbark:~

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

During the thesis defense in December 2009, the subject of research ethics and deception was discussed as related to my data collection procedures. As explained previously, I was researching as a participant observer. My membership in the group had occurred prior to my research and participation in the group did not begin solely with research in mind. It was only after attending a few sessions that I recognized the group as ideal for my research purposes. There was no pre-meditated intent to deceive.

According to Erich Goode (1996) and David Shulman (1994), one of the main criteria defining deception is that the researcher is pretending to be someone he or she is not. As I am myself Vietnamese Amerasian, no pretense was involved in my joining the group. And I was already qualified for membership in the larger organization. My subsequent research role as a participant observer, however, was not disclosed to group members. This is another form of deception, in effect, a sin of omission. Because the group sessions were also helpful to me in a personal context, I did not wish to recuse myself from membership or change my status in a way that would compromise my acceptance. For reasons discussed earlier (Chapter 3), newly presenting myself as a researcher and staying in the group posed concerns about altering the group in negative ways; not only threatening the validity of my data, but also making group members self-conscious and inhibiting their discussion. The group facilitators who first knew of my research interest did not request further disclosure.

Diana Baumrind (1985) and Erich Goode (1996) clarify that deceptive research practices are to a degree situational. That is, the circumstances that exist at the time of the research serve to help delineate the methodology employed by the researcher (Goode 1996). It happened that the group sessions, recorded by someone other than myself (and the mention of recording was noted with a sign outside the meeting room – in both Vietnamese and English),

appeared to serve the purposes of my study. Knowing the sessions were recorded allowed me to formulate the idea of requesting permission from the facilitators to transcribe the meetings and then code those transcripts for research purposes. Further, I did not hide my status as a graduate student from the group. One of the preliminary meetings included a round robin mini-autobiography. We all were aware of who others were and what they did in their daily lives. Though group members had the opportunity, no questions were asked about my course of study or professional interests, and I did not volunteer these details.

My deception was in not stating outright that some of what I learned in group from their stories would be used for my research. At the same time, I did not perceive any direct harm to the subjects. I avoided the one-on-one questioning that would have appeared intrusive and possibly made the subjects feel uncomfortable or worse (Baumrind 1985). There were no reported identifiers that could be traced back to the subjects unless one listened to the session recordings and came to recognize the voices of the members of the group (Shulman 1994). The possibility of harm to the subjects was low enough to request and receive an exemption from the Informed Consent form requirement of the IRB. My research primarily involved using data from taped conversations obtained from the facilitators but more accurately understood through being a member of the discussion group. I did not manipulate any discussion to obtain information not freely discussed during the group sessions. While I routinely made field notes in my car after the discussions, it was to make sure I recorded my interpretations of the participants' feelings and to confirm the gender count at that particular session.

A related ethical issue is whether research participants are being exploited by the researcher without benefit for themselves (Baumrind 1985, Goode 1996, and Shulman 1994). In this case, I was as much a participant as an observer. Contributing to the group discussions and sharing my own experiences provided reciprocation, a payment of sorts that was relevant to their own lives.

Debriefing is one of the ways social researchers handle deception of subjects (Singleton and Straits 2010). During my thesis defense, the possibility of debriefing group

members was raised. This would involve going back to the group to disclose that while I was a member of the group, I was also a researcher. In this way I could assess the reaction of group members to my findings and to disclosure of my researcher role. I was advised to approach one of the group facilitators to discuss my reasons for wanting to disclose to the group and then act on his recommendation.

In field research, the concept of a right to privacy covers an individual's decision "when, where, to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors will be revealed" (Singleton and Straits 2010: 60). The experiences discussed in group did include sensitive topics (though not those most widely recognized in treatments of research ethics, such as sexual behavior and illegal activities). In addition to debriefing sessions, sharing copies of one's work with subjects is another way to ascertain whether they are comfortable with what is being revealed about them. This would provide truly informed consent at the end of a project.

Implementation of these plans proved more difficult than expected. As the group routinely disbands for the winter season, I was not able to address any concerns immediately. Then I was unable to make contact with the facilitator despite several email and telephone attempts. After attending a meeting in March with the intent of talking to the group as a whole, I realized that the purpose and structure of the group had changed and discussions of previous events was not appropriate. Instead of being a discussion forum for issues related to Vietnamese Amerasians as the group was originally created, concerns about the economy transitioned the group into a job networking and career advice meeting. The composition of the group had also changed. Several of the original members were no longer attending and a few had moved out of state. The facilitators did not keep records of the original participants' names and contact information. I decided to disclose what I could to those individual members I could easily locate on my own.

I had maintained friendships with three of the members and I contacted them individually to disclose my research. Each was open to the idea of the research project yet only one actually asked to read this work. Conversation with them revealed what I had previously

suspected, that they knew they were being recorded for the group sessions and like myself didn't think to question why. (They didn't ask me what I had found out the reason was, either.) Two also mentioned that they understood my reasons for not disclosing my research earlier and they were not upset. The other didn't mention my non-disclosure in any manner after I revealed it. All three readily agreed to sign a release for transcribing and translating the meetings and using them in my work. The non-problematic follow-up reactions I received did serve as some reassurance but these were individuals with whom I had a closer relationship.

The one individual who chose to read my work told me that he had never thought of our collective experiences as anything that meant something. In reading my writing, he felt honored that I chose to include his story in my work. We talked about the different experiences and he further shared stories of things he didn't have an opportunity to present while we were meeting as a group. He did remember two of the narratives I wrote of but only for their meaningfulness to him. He could not name the person nor did he remember the gender of the person whose narrative was used. Similarly, during the group meetings, I did not dwell on the narratives as much as I did on my internal struggles and attempts at resolution of those same issues. Later reflection on the transcriptions in light of relevant literature and sociological theories allowed me some distance to step into the researcher role, though not always with a desired degree of objectivity.

Integrating facts and feelings brought to life a story of Vietnamese Amerasians drawing on the experiences discussed by members of the group in which I participated. This narrative is intended to honor all the group members. I trust that the deception of not disclosing my researcher role was balanced by my personal contributions to the group and by not restraining other group members' participation. The benefits to Amerasians generally of making my work available is improved public understanding of the experiences of mixed race Vietnamese Americans and any insight gained about their own personal identities.

As Singleton and Straits (2010) and Ceci, Peters, and Plotkin (1985) have suggested, the topic of research ethics remains controversial and cost-benefit analysis can be ambiguous.

There are no simple solutions. Practical difficulties may also arise in following up with participants in field work. The specific decisions made in each situation will vary but should always be based on respect for the well-being of participants urged by federal regulations (45-CFR-46) and professional ethical guidelines (ASA 1997). In the end, I failed to debrief the group as a whole, but learned more about the ethical dilemmas involved in research.

REFERENCES

- Atkinson, Paul. 1988. "Ethnomethodology: A Critical Review." *Annual Review of Sociology* 14:441-465.
- Bass, Thomas A. 1996. *Vietnamerica*. New York, NY: Soho Press.
- Baumrind, Diana. 1985. "Research Using Intentional Deception, Ethical Issues Revisited." *American Psychologist* (Feb.):165-174. (Retrieved from Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost on June 10, 2010).
- Berezin, Mabel. 1997. *Communications of Feeling: Culture, Politics, and Identity in Fascist Italy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Cerulo, Karen A. 1997. "Identity Construction: New Issues, New Directions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23:385-409.
- Ceci, Stephen J., Douglas Peters, and Jonathon Plotkin. 1985. "Human subjects review, personal values and the regulation of social science research." *American Psychologist* 40(9) pps. 994-1002.
- Cooley, Charles H. 1902. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York, NY: Scribner's.
- Corse, Sandra. 1996. *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Cullen, Bradley T. and Michael Pretes. 2000. "The Meaning of Marginality: Interpretations and Perceptions in Social Science." *The Social Science Journal* 37(2):215-229.
- DeBonis, Steven. 1995. *Children of the Enemy: Oral Histories of Vietnamese Amerasians and Their Mothers*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Del Pilar, Jose A. and Jocelynda O. Udasco. 2004. "Marginality Theory: The Lack of Construct Validity." *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 26(1):3-15. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Ellsberg, Daniel. 2003. *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Erikson, Erik. 1963. *Childhood and Society*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Fisher, Celia B. 2005. "Deception Research Involving Children: Ethical Practices and Paradoxes." *Ethics & Behavior* 15(3):271-287. (Retrieved from Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost on June 10, 2010).
- Fitness, Julie. 2005. "Bye Bye, Black Sheep: The Cause and Consequences of Rejection in Family Relationships." pp. 263-278 in *The Social Outcast: Ostracism, Social Exclusion, Rejection and Bullying*, edited by Kipling D. Williams, Joseph P. Forgas and William von Hippel. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Fuss, Diane. 1989. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Georges, Robert A. and Michael Owen Jones. 1980. *People Studying People*. London: University of California Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1956. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Goode, Erich. 1996. "The Ethics of Deception in Social Research: A Case Study." *Qualitative Sociology* 19(1):11-33. (Retrieved from Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost on June 10, 2010).
- Government Accounting Office, U.S. 1994. Vietnamese Amerasian Resettlement. Washington, D.C.: Program Evaluation and Methodology Division. Retrieved January 26, 2009 (<http://archive.gao.gov/t2pbat4/151037.pdf>). In-text citation: (GAO 1994).
- Griswold, W. 1992. "The Writing on the Mud Wall: Nigerian Novels and the Imaginary Village." *American Sociological Review* 57(5):709-724.
- Hooks, Bell. 1984. *Feminist Theory From Margin to Center*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

- Jorgensen, Danny L. 1989. *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kerwin, Christine and Joseph G. Ponterotto. 1995. "Biracial Identity and Development: Theory and Research." pp. 199-217 in *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling*, edited by Joseph G. Ponterotto, Manuel J. Casas, Lisa A. Suzuki, and Charlene M. Alexander. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kibria, Nazli. 1993. *Family Tighrope: The Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Lee, Joann Faung Jean. 1991. *Asian-American Experiences in the United States: Oral Histories of First to Fourth Generation Americans from China, the Philippines, Japan, India, the Pacific Islands, Vietnam and Cambodia*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Lipman, Jana K. 1997. *Mixed Voices, Mixed Policies: Vietnamese Amerasians in Vietnam and the United States*. Providence, RI: Wayland Press.
- Liu, Eric. 1998. *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Madison, D. Soyini. 2005. *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics and Performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McKelvey, Robert S. 1999. *The Dust of Life: America's Children Abandoned in Vietnam*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Mead, George H. 1982. *The Individual and the Social Self: Unpublished Work of George Herbert Mead*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Merton, Robert K. 1957. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Merton, Robert K. and A. Halberstam. 1974. *Perspectives in Social Inquiry: The Collected Papers of Robert Ezra Park, Vol. 1, 2, 3*. New York, NY: Arno.

- Miller, Robin L. 1992. "The Human Ecology of Multiracial Identity." pp. 24-36 in *Racially Mixed People in America* edited by Maria P. Root. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Sociological Imagination*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Nwadiora, Emeka, and Harriette McAdoo. 1996. "Acculturative Stress Among Amerasian Refugees: Gender and Racial Differences." *Adolescence* 31(122):477. (Retrieved from Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost on June 12, 2008).
- Park, Robert E. 1928. "Human Migration and the Marginal Man." *American Journal of Sociology* 33:881-893. (Retrieved from Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost on June 12, 2008).
- Pearl S. Buck International. 2009. "Our Mission Statement." Perkasio, PA: Pearl S. Buck International. Retrieved August 12, 2009
(http://www.psbi.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PSBI_AboutUs_History). In-text citation: (PSBI 2009)
- Phan, Shandon. 2003. "Vietnamese Amerasians in America" *Asian-Nation: The Landscape of Asian America*. Retrieved October 11, 2008
(<http://www.asian-nation.org/amerasiains.shtml>) In-text citation: (Asian-Nation 2003)
- Reed-Danahay, Deborah E. 1997. "Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social." pp. 123-144 in *Leaving Home: Schooling Stories and the Ethnography of Autoethnography in Rural France*. New York, NY: Berg Publishers.
- Shulman, David. 1994. "Dirty Data and Investigative Methods: Some Lessons from Private Detective Work." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 23:214-253. (Retrieved from Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost on June 10, 2010).
- Singleton, Jr., Royce A. and Bruce C. Straits. 2010. *Approaches to Social Research, 5th ed.* New York: Oxford University Press.

- Somer, Kristin L. and Yonata S. Rubin. 2004. "Role of Social Expectancies in Cognitive and Behavioral Responses to Social Rejection." pp. 171-184 in *The Social Outcast: Ostracism, Social Exclusion, Rejection and Bullying*, edited by Kipling D. Williams, Joseph P. Forgas and William von Hippel. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Tuan, Mia. 1998. *Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Valverde, Kieu-Linh Caroline. 1992. "From Dust to Gold: The Vietnamese Amerasian Experience." pp. 126-143 in *Racially Mixed People in America*, edited by Maria P. Root. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yarborough, Trin. 2005. *Surviving Twice: Amerasian Children of the Vietnam War*. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Ky-Giao (Ky) Nguyen began her academic career twenty years prior at East Texas State University, now known as Texas A&M Commerce. Taking the scenic route to completion, she interspersed academic life with daily life until she realized the time had come to achieve her goal. She entered as a full-time undergraduate in August 2002 and upon graduating with her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Texas at Arlington in August 2004, she immediately commenced graduate studies in the same field.

Her interests include cultural studies, social psychology and deviance. Ky participated in the Sociology Students Association as an undergraduate and is a member of Alpha Kappa Delta – the International Sociology Honor Society – and the American Sociological Association.

Originally intending to continue her studies, Ky later decided that academia was not her career goal. This course of study represents the culmination of a journey began twenty years ago. Having discovered her passion in the field of Contract Administration, she successfully utilizes the research skills and quantitative methodology applications acquired in her studies to the bulk of her work.

Ky received her Master of Arts in Sociology from the University of Texas at Arlington in December 2010.