

CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN ONE AND ONE-HALF AND SECOND GENERATION VIETNAMESE
IMMIGRANTS

by

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Abstract

This study is designed to provide insight on one and one-half and second generation Vietnamese immigrants' experiences with cultural preservation and acculturation in areas that are not densely populated with Vietnamese immigrants. Participants from Columbia and Plymouth, North Carolina were interviewed to shine light on how they construct their culture to fit their current environment. It was found that the microsocial and macrosocial systems interact on different levels across immigrants to produce a unique culture. It also further supports the idea that culture is dynamic. This research shines light on areas not previously research; however, the data is limited to two eastern, rural towns in North Carolina. Therefore, the findings are not readily generalizable. Instead, the unique social constructs of the interviewed participants in the study can hopefully assist in providing a fuller picture for understanding the immigrant experience of those in America in rural areas.

Cultural Preservation in One and One-Half and Second Generation Vietnamese Immigrants

Introduction

The United States is home to numerous immigrants hailing from various backgrounds. As immigrants migrate, they bring their unique cultural practices while also adapting to the host culture. It is oftentimes a difficult task that induces individuals to construct a new way of life in the host country. Presently, numerous immigrants are doing such in their efforts to acculturate into the United States. Acculturation into the host culture is obviously essential to make a living and to thrive; however, cultural preservation is also equally important to maintain a sense of ethnic identity. This is a process that I have dealt with throughout my life in creating my cultural identity since I identify as a second-generation Vietnamese immigrant. Being raised in Plymouth, North Carolina, a small town with only two Vietnamese families, has pushed me in the direction of acculturation while Vietnamese culture remains alive in the household. However, during my first trip to Vietnam when I was 16 years of age, I experienced a dual-identity crisis. That experience has since imprinted on me and has inspired me to learn more about cultural preservation and how Vietnamese immigrants construct their way of life around their native culture and their environment.

Background

Cultural preservation, defined as the efforts of individuals to uphold the distinctiveness of the cultural group to which they belong (Jeffers, 2015), has become an uphill struggle among Vietnamese immigrants through the generations. According to Hien (2016), second generation Vietnamese immigrants, who were born in the United States, integrate into America without giving much thought into preserving their roots. The lack of interest in Vietnamese customs and values may be because the younger generation has grown up mostly around American peers

(Hien, 2016). Some may argue that there is nothing wrong with assimilation as culture is in itself dynamic and always changing to better fit its environment; however, completely neglecting cultural ties can be detrimental.

For some Vietnamese immigrants, especially the one and one-half and second generation, there is conflict within the dual identity which was created from experiences with their Vietnamese families and experiences with other Americans at school or the worksite (Hien, 2016). This identity negatively affects the sense of belongingness since individuals in this category feel to not entirely fit in with the Vietnamese culture nor with the American culture. This may also be one of the contributing factors of why young Vietnamese adults scored higher in a study in risk factors that increased the likelihood of psychological distress (Shapiro et al., 1999). Shapiro et al. (1999) also highlighted increased levels of dissatisfaction with life, family conflict, and acculturation.

To battle a loss of cultural identity, returning to roots may assist in reestablishing loss connections and cultural practices. In more populated areas where there is a larger Vietnamese community, similar to Hien's (2016) case study in California, Vietnamese Americans usually meet in larger groups to revive traditional practices in areas of language, religious rituals, and social relations. These interactions with people who possess a similar background help reinforce traditional values that may have been lost during the acculturation process. Ultimately, cultural preservation is vital to immigrants as it rekindles lost connections, thus, strengthening their sense of belonging.

Cultural preservation, however, must not label adaptation to the host culture as negative. Adaptation is just as important as cultural preservation in the construction of identity for immigrants. For instance, in Neto's 2002 study of Portuguese immigrants residing in France,

increased social difficulties were reported in participants who labeled themselves as Portuguese and only intended to reside temporarily in France whereas subjects who possessed attitudes favorable to acculturation presented with less social difficulty (Neto, 2002). With these findings, it goes on to prove that cultural preservation and acculturation work together on various levels to maintain an individual's cultural identity while also thriving in the host society.

Purpose of the Study

Culture entails a plethora of elements ranging from large scale holidays and rituals to socially acceptable behaviors and values. Among native Vietnamese, ancestor worship, rice-based diets, and high-context communication is common. Because Vietnam is heavily influenced by Confucianism, filial piety is highly valued. In addition, decisions are made by the family since it is a collectivistic culture rather than an individualistic society which is largely the U.S.'s.

Vietnamese culture, unsurprisingly, is fostered in areas with a dense Vietnamese American population, like Los Angeles, Washington, and Houston (Hien, 2016). In areas such as these, temples and centers for the community to gather are constructed to allow traditions to be celebrated. It is also a learning platform for offspring who have never visited Vietnam to be in touch with the culture outside of their homes. These ethnic communities greatly assist the movement toward cultural preservation.

Despite various works detailing the reality for Vietnamese immigrants, the findings are largely based in larger cities and metropolitan areas. It does not necessarily translate to Vietnamese immigrants in rural areas that usually lack the community-based support systems that assist in transmitting cultural practices through the generations. Zhou and Bankston (1994) explain that the microsocial system which is ethnically based and the macrosocial structures of the host society both determine the effect of ethnicity on the individual. This, in turn, predicts

whether immigrant cultures are advantageous or disadvantageous to the upward mobility of the second generation immigrants (Zhou & Bankston, 1994). This poses a problem for Vietnamese immigrants outside of heavily populated areas since they may lack interactions in the microsocial system. Ultimately, it raises concerns about an imbalance between cultures that can further lead to the problem of cultural identity loss.

Focusing on Vietnamese immigrant populations in outlying areas with fewer said immigrants is especially important since workforces are recruiting foreign-born individuals to work in non-metropolitan areas due to the lack of native workers attracted to those areas (Kritz, Gurak, & Lee, 2011). With more immigrants flocking to such areas, the concern arises of how do the Vietnamese offspring and future generations construct their social lives and maintain their cultural identity despite assumed less exposure to Vietnamese customs. To better fill the gap and gain knowledge in an area that has been neglected, research conducted in rural areas is needed on one and one-half and second generation Vietnamese immigrants and their experiences of cultural preservation. By the end of this research, the obtained data can highlight efforts in Vietnamese cultural preservation in rural areas. The knowledge can then be utilized to assist Vietnamese immigrants to feel a sense of belonging with their roots and to reduce conflicts with acculturation and preservation.

Demographics

Due to my experiences growing up as a 2nd generation Vietnamese immigrant in rural Eastern North Carolina, I have conducted my study in the towns of Plymouth and Columbia, North Carolina. These areas do not have a large population of Vietnamese descent and were ideal in gaining insight for Vietnamese immigrants who resided outside of densely populated areas. What also sets these research sites apart from previous research sites is that these towns do not

have established cultural centers for places of gathering. By not having these centers, the research is more directed on how participants strike their *own* balance between preservation and acculturation to construct their own culture.

Columbia, North Carolina

The town of Columbia, which is the smallest of the two research sites, has a total population of 867 residents (Town of Columbia, 2009). African Americans comprise the majority of the population (51.6%) while Whites and Hispanics are the next largest as their percentages are 40.4% and 7.9%, respectively (Town of Columbia, 2009). The Asian population is the smallest, recording as 0.5% of the total population of Columbia (Town of Columbia, 2009). However, the Vietnamese ethnicity comprises the majority of this reported Asian percentage (Town of Columbia, 2009). A reason for this can be partially explained by the crabbing and seafood industry in Columbia which employs many members of the Vietnamese community.

Plymouth, North Carolina

According to the United States Census Bureau [USCB] (2016), the town of Plymouth has a total population of 3,684 residents. The majority of the population is described as African American and White; they measured to be 68.2% and 30.6% of Plymouth's population, respectively (USCB, 2016). American Indian was recorded as 0.1% (USCB, 2016). A detailed Asian population census by USCB (2010) found that there were 10 individuals of Chinese descent, 7 who were Asian Indian, 8 Vietnamese individuals, 3 Korean immigrants, and 2 persons who identified as Filipino.

Methodology

Qualitative data is central to this study, so data was collected by primarily interviewing participants who identify as one and one-half or second generation Vietnamese immigrants. These individuals must have resided in the towns of either Columbia or Plymouth, North Carolina for at least one year. Participants were required to be 18 years of age and fluent in written and verbal English. The participants were interviewed individually on their experiences and perceptions on culture; however, prior to the conduction of the interviews, all participants were informed that the research data will be anonymous.

Because this study involves human subjects, IRB approval was first sought before initiating any data collection. Once approval was obtained, interviews were conducted in-person in the towns of Plymouth and Columbia, NC. Before the start of each interview, participants were informed of the risks and of the study. After signing the informed consent forms, the interview was initiated. They were also prompted to select an alias to protect their identity. For ease of data analysis, the interviews were recorded on a cellular device and transcribed on a laptop computer. All recorded answers were kept confidential and anonymous.

Any data gathered from participants on paper such as consent forms were secured in the locked office of the Principle Investigator. Transcripts were saved to a pass-protected file on the Principal Investigator's flash drive and backed up in a pass protected file on the Pirate Drive. The flash drive was also stored in a locked cabinet in the office of the Principal Investigator.

Process of Analysis and Research Questions

The interviews were analyzed to highlight areas of similarities between participants on the basis of their current cultural practices and views on culture in general. Participants' answers were also examined to identify any pressures to preserve Vietnamese culture and any external

forces that will cause feelings of pressure to acculturate into mainstream US society. Ultimately, these factors can give a clear representation of how the participants create their *own* culture based on their unique environment and social interactions.

The following are the major areas and questions that this study detailed:

Demographics

1. Are you a 1.5 generation or a 2nd generation Vietnamese immigrant? (1.5 = being born in Vietnam but migrating to the U.S. at an early age and entering the school system; 2nd generation = being born in the U.S but both parents are originally from Vietnam)
2. How long have you resided in the United States?
3. How would you describe your current community in terms of the racial makeup? Are there many Vietnamese immigrants? Are there any Vietnamese community centers?

Establishing a Basis

4. How important is culture to you?
5. Is it something that you are conscious about all the time?

Culture

6. Are you able to speak Vietnamese?
7. Do you have any Vietnamese cultural practices at home (Religious altar, wear traditional dress, etc.)?
8. How would you describe your culture in your household? (Combination of American and Vietnamese culture?)

Social Constructs

9. Do you feel connected to your native culture? How about your current community?
10. In past research, it was found that 1.5 and 2nd generation Vietnamese immigrants preserved their culture by being around other Vietnamese immigrants and participating in cultural events. In your current community, how do you preserve your native Vietnamese culture?
11. Do you feel any pressure to preserve your cultural traditions?
12. Do you feel any pressure to fit into mainstream U.S. society?
13. Culture is different for everyone, so how have you created your own culture in your current community?

Results

A total of 7 interviews were conducted for this study. There were four (4) one and one-half Vietnamese immigrants while three individuals identified as second generation Vietnamese

immigrants. Of the interviewees, three individuals were female while the other four were male. Additionally, five of the seven interviewees currently reside in Columbia, NC. The average residential stay in the United States for all participants was about 30 years. Table 1 represents the pseudonyms of the participants and the demographic information associated with them.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Generation	Sex	Residence
Ms. A	2 nd	Female	Columbia, NC
Sarah	2 nd	Female	Columbia, NC
Speedy	1.5	Male	Columbia, NC
John	1.5	Male	Columbia, NC
Mr. Jay	1.5	Male	Columbia, NC
Mr. Thomas	2 nd	Male	Plymouth, NC
Ms. Sue	1.5	Female	Plymouth, NC

Ms. A

The first participant, Ms. A, is a second generation Vietnamese immigrant. She mentions that there are quite a few Vietnamese immigrants in Columbia, NC; however, she notes that there are no Vietnamese cultural centers for community gatherings. Miss A also regards culture as something that she holds important. She is conscious about culture at some points in time because of existing stereotypes. As for Ms. A's cultural practices at home, she describes them as mostly American. She does own some Vietnamese traditional dresses; however, her mother keeps them for her. Ms. A ultimately names her mother as her source to Vietnamese culture as she is the only person Ms. A would speak minimal Vietnamese to. She also celebrates some

Vietnamese traditions and holidays with her mother. However, Ms. A noted that when she lived in bigger cities, like Maryland, there were actual Asian communities and restaurants everywhere.

In the Social Constructs section of the research questions, Ms. A states that she does not feel connected to the Vietnamese culture due to her being born in a small community with very few Vietnamese people. She expressed that other than her mother, she does not have any connection to her roots. On the other hand, Miss A does feel very connected to her community in Columbia because she is very involved.

In the final questions, Miss A did describe some pressures to preserve her native Vietnamese cultural practices. Her brother and brother-in-law have been learning and making her mother's recipes, and she feels pressured because of time constraints, and she feels that if she could not learn them then she could pass it down to her offspring. Ms. A, however, does not feel pressured to fit into mainstream US society because she was born in the United States. She does feel more intimidated in the Vietnamese community because she cannot speak Vietnamese fluently and cannot cook the cuisines.

The concluding question described how Miss A has created her own culture as a result of her current community. She noted that she grew up very Americanized as she did not want the "Vietnamese feel"; her tastes did not exactly fit her mother's traditional tastes. She also stated it was very hard to be more rooted in the culture because her father was not around. In the end, though, she did state that she likes the Vietnamese culture and the foods, but it is hard to live out in her current community.

Sarah

Sarah, a second generation Vietnamese immigrant in Columbia, has lived in the United States for 36 years. She feels that about 10% of Columbia's population is Vietnamese. She also

states that Columbia does not have any Vietnamese community centers. Sarah regards culture to be fairly important to her. She ranked it an eight out of ten in importance. Culture is also something Sarah is conscious about since she wants her children to be well-rounded. She stated she wanted her offspring to be aware of all cultures in general.

Sarah is able to speak minimal Vietnamese; she claims to understand it more than she can speak it. Sarah says her household is very American as she does not have any common Vietnamese cultural practices such as a religious altar or traditional dresses. The participant only feels connected to her native culture through her mother and her mother's food. Her mother would speak Vietnamese to her sometimes, and they would celebrate both the Chinese New Year's and the American New Year's. However, Sarah feels more connected with her community as she is very involved as a member of the Southern Baptist Church.

Preserving her Vietnamese culture is something Sarah regards as a struggle because the Vietnamese community in Columbia does not have anyone her age that she can connect with. Sarah goes on to say that the Vietnamese residents in Columbia are mainly employed in commercial fishing. Because her husband is a farmer and a White American, they do not have many interactions with the other Vietnamese residents of Columbia. Her husband, however, did learn to make his mother-in-law's egg rolls and two other Vietnamese dishes. Sarah believes this is one way to keep the tradition for her children once her mother passes away.

The participant has also responded that she does feel pressured by her mother to preserve her Vietnamese traditions. At the time when she was to wed her husband, Sarah's mother wanted her daughter to have a Vietnamese wedding, where the groom's family paid for the wedding expenses. She also wanted the ceremony to be performed according to the Vietnamese practices; however, to meet her mother's preferences was difficult for Sarah as she was a member of the

Baptist church and her husband is American. In the end, the wedding did not go as Sarah's mother planned. Consequently, Sarah's response was that she was not born in Vietnam. She was born as an American, so she feels as if it is her culture. This response also supported the interviewee's answer that she does not feel pressured to fit into mainstream US society. She believes this is just her way of living, and she would not know how to live any different.

As for the way Sarah has constructed her own culture, she believes raising her children in faith and having a good work ethic are important. Sarah also finds time to meet with her friends. Her friends would sometimes tease her saying that she is just another "white girl" because she does not have a Vietnamese lifestyle. Sarah explains that she does not interact much with other Vietnamese residents because they are all in their "own little bubble". The participant states that it would be different if she actually saw other Vietnamese people at church because she thinks that they could actually build a friendship that way.

Speedy

Speedy is a 1.5 generation immigrant who has resided in the US for about 35 years. He describes Columbia as having only about 40 Vietnamese residents and no Vietnamese cultural centers. Speedy also regards culture as something very important to him. He does not want to forget his native culture, and this is why he is conscious of his Vietnamese identity since he was raised in Vietnam for part of his childhood. Due to Speedy's time in Vietnam, he is also fluent in his native language.

The participant's household is described as a combination of both American and Vietnamese cultures. Though he does not have any traditional dresses or religious altars common in a Vietnamese household, Speedy has a duality where he cooks both Vietnamese and American foods. He can also speak both languages fluently. The interviewee states that he feels a 50/50

connection to both Vietnamese and his community in Columbia. His weekly routine is to go to work, sing karaoke, and visit Vietnamese friends on the weekends. Visiting other Vietnamese residents, cooking, and singing karaoke are ways Speedy preserves his culture. He goes on to say that that is all he can do in Columbia.

Speedy also mentions that he does not feel any pressure whatsoever to preserve or to acculturate. He states that he is just living as he wants. In terms of how one creates one's culture, Speedy remains strong in the ways in which he was raised. He believes his current culture is heavily influenced by how his parents raised him. He believes in bowing and being respectful of elders, and this is one of the practices Speedy preserves while making his own culture.

John

John is a 1.5 generation immigrant of roughly 30 years. He states that Columbia has very few Vietnamese families and no Vietnamese cultural centers. John views culture as something very important as he is conscious about it. He goes on to say that he does think about it a lot, but sometimes he does not express it. In addition, John is fluent in Vietnamese. In his household, he owns both a religious altar and Vietnamese traditional clothing. Furthermore, John describes his lifestyle to be a combination of both Vietnamese and American culture. His household is strictly into Vietnamese practices; however, when he is outside of his house, John behaves more American. With that, John states that he feels connected to both his native culture and to the community of Columbia. For ways in which John preserves his culture, the participant says that he preserves his culture by talking to other Vietnamese people and by learning about Vietnamese history before the war.

John noted that he does not feel pressured to preserve his Vietnamese practices nor to acculturate into the main society. He goes on to say that the socialness factor of gathering with people through church and the community is one way that he has created his own culture.

Mr. Jay

Mr. Jay is a 1.5 generation immigrant since 1989. Before coming to America under his uncle's sponsorship, he was in a refugee camp in Thailand for a short time. Mr. Jay says there are probably about 100 Vietnamese people in Columbia. They majority of them gather together on the worksite as they are employed in the crabbing industry there. The participant also points out that there are no Vietnamese cultural centers in Columbia.

The interviewee regards culture to be important, but he believes it to be more reliant on community. Mr. Jay wishes that there was a more communal feeling in Columbia because having people to speak with and understand his practices are some things he holds dearly. Mr. Jay speaks more Vietnamese than English. He does not own any religious altars or traditional clothing in his household, but he did note that up North, like in Maryland, the Vietnamese community there has more traditional practices. This is why the participant describes his household culture to be a combination of both American and Vietnamese practices. He can eat both American and Vietnamese foods as long as they are tasty. Just as Mr. Jay is able to have a combined culture, he also feels connected with both cultures. However, it took time to build a connection. When the participant first came to America, he admitted he felt lonely at first but he gradually opened up to his community members so that they can understand him better.

Mr. Jay has speaking with other people and explaining his thinking to them as a central way of how he preserves his culture. Though, he does mention that it is sometimes difficult to preserve his native culture because people around him do not understand his practices or find

him to be too different. On the contrary, Mr. Jay does not feel pressured to fit into mainstream US society. He believes he gets along well with everyone because race is not a factor for him. Mr. Jay has created his own culture as a result of his experiences and current community. He feels that living out his own life without worrying about other people misunderstanding is how he has made his own culture in the US. He just wants to live out his life the best that he can.

Mr. Thomas

Mr. Thomas, a second generation immigrant, has resided in Plymouth for 24 years. He believes that the Vietnamese population in Plymouth is below one percent, and he also mentions that there are no Vietnamese community centers. Mr. Thomas' viewpoint on culture is that it is important to incorporate new things into one's culture. For example, he embraces Vietnamese foods and the language; however, Mr. Thomas also likes to add his own experiences on what he has learned about his culture to make it better for himself. He is not too conscious about culture and he says this is probably because he attended school in the US. Thus, his culture is more of a blend of Vietnamese and American practices. Mr. Thomas goes on to say that it is blended to a point where it is not distinguishable on whether it is Vietnamese or American. He believes that he takes the best of each culture.

Mr. Thomas is not fluent in Vietnamese, but he is able to understand it better than he can speak it. A reason the participant provides is one from his childhood. His parents would usually discipline him in Vietnamese, and, of course, while being disciplined, Vietnamese children are not to speak back to their parents. As a result, Mr. Thomas did not practice his Vietnamese speaking skills and only developed his understanding of it.

As for Vietnamese cultural practices in the household, the participant finds his mother's karaoke, where she sings in Vietnamese, and the food that he eats in his house to be the main

Vietnamese practices for him. Despite this, Mr. Thomas does feel somewhat disconnected from his native culture. He feels that the language barrier is the major source of disconnect for him. Ways for him to keep a connection with his culture, however, is to continue learning certain Vietnamese practices and why they are practiced. This way of actively learning reduces the disconnectivity that Mr. Thomas feels.

Mr. Thomas, however, does feel a full disconnection with his current community in Plymouth. He describes Plymouth as being a very small town filled with people of the same ideology, which, therefore, leads to a limited scope, or narrow point of view. The participant states that Plymouth is more geared towards a southern, White lifestyle. Mr. Thomas detailed his experience with the mayor of Plymouth while on a local river cruise in town. He said that the mayor noticed that his family looked foreign and addressed them as if they knew nothing about Plymouth when, in fact, Mr. Thomas has grown up in Plymouth and knew everything that the mayor was explaining to him. Mr. Thomas found it very dissettling because he feels that residents in Plymouth have such a limited scope that they automatically assume that immigrants do not practice an American lifestyle or that they jump to conclusions about foreigners in general. Because of that experience, Mr. Thomas limits his exposure to other residents in Plymouth. He feels that their lifestyle does not fit his current lifestyle.

Ways in which Mr. Thomas preserves his native culture is to have a unity amongst people. His greatest source of unity and cultural preservation is from his immediate family. He learns about his parents' experiences in Vietnam and how things have changed. Those are some of the ways that Mr. Thomas preserves his culture. Despite that, the interviewee feels pressured to preserve his native traditions from his parents who would like for him to speak Vietnamese. Vietnamese is very difficult for him to learn because most of his social interactions are with

people who speak English. Just as he feels pressure to preserve, Mr. Thomas also feels pressured to fit into mainstream society, especially when growing up. He wanted to fit in with other students during his teenage years, but he knew he was always different. He tried to be close to the “norm” as he could; however, as he got older he started to veer off that path and started to make his own “norm”. The pressures to drink sweet tea and listen to country music were dissipated by his own interests. The decision to do those things was more dependent on whether he liked sweet tea and enjoyed listening to country music rather than following the current trend.

In terms of how Mr. Thomas has created his own culture, he states that his own culture is stratified. In public, he does not use Vietnamese terms or look at things as a “typical” Vietnamese person would. He says that if it is American then he would look at it as an American would. In other words, he tries to shift his perspective to try to understand what is going on around him. Mr. Thomas goes on to describe his blended culture that he has created. In preparation for Thanksgiving most Americans would buy a turkey because that is their tradition. Well, Mr. Thomas prefers duck, which is used more widely in Vietnam for celebrations, because it is more succulent. Thus, Mr. Thomas believes that his own culture is taking the best from the American and the Vietnamese cultures and practicing them to his taste or his liking.

Ms. Sue

Ms. Sue is a one and one-half generation immigrant of Plymouth for about 35 years. Plymouth, in her eyes, has only a couple of Vietnamese families. There are also no Vietnamese cultural centers. She holds culture to a moderate degree of importance as it is not something that she is conscious about all the time. Ms. Sue is able to speak fluent Vietnamese since her household is very much like a Vietnamese household. She cooks and eats Vietnamese foods, listens to Vietnamese music, and even watches Vietnamese movies. From all of these practices,

Ms. Sue feels very connected to her native culture. However, she does not feel connected to her community in Plymouth because there are not many Vietnamese people that reside there. She instead speaks with her mom whom she feels very connected to. Ms. Sue finds that she is more associated with people who have a similar background to her because they understand how she lives, and they are easier for her to engage in a conversation.

The participant says that she preserves her culture by actually living it in her household. This is why she does not feel pressured to preserve her native culture because she is basically living it every day without a thought to it. Ms. Sue also does not feel pressured to fit into mainstream US society because she has a mutual respect for it. In fact, she has found some strengths in American culture that she has incorporated in her household. This also describes how Ms. Sue has created her own culture through her unique experiences and her current community. The participant mainly has a Vietnamese lifestyle, but she also likes to learn from other cultures and combine the “good things” with her current lifestyle to make it her own unique culture that is suitable for her family.

Data Analysis

Among the participants there were several important themes and similarities that arose which not only supported previous literature but also shone light on the unique experiences of Vietnamese immigrants in rural areas. Even though it was previously stated that cultural preservation flourished in areas with a dense Vietnamese population and areas possessing Vietnamese cultural centers, it is important to not make the assumption that Vietnamese immigrants outside of these cities would not be as connected to their native culture. Culture is an internal system just as it is a social one. The participants in this study have found ways to preserve their native culture in their own ways without having a cultural center or large

Vietnamese community that is characteristic of several research sites. One common way was through social gatherings. Each of the participants has cited either their parents or their friends to be ways to connect or learn about their Vietnamese culture. It was quite interesting to see that despite not having the cultural resources found in larger cities, the participants still found methods to preserve their culture which was appropriate for their current rural community. Preservation is still evident in the rural areas; however, the degrees of acculturation and preservation are unique across individuals.

Upon closer inspection of the study participants, just as Hien's (2016) findings have depicted, the one and one-half and second generation Vietnamese immigrants has a blend of the American and Vietnamese culture; however, it is at varying degrees. It is found that the participants who were one and one-half generation immigrants had more of a connection with their native culture. For instance, all of the one and one-half generation participants were able to speak fluent Vietnamese and had more Vietnamese cultural practices in their households. This is expected because of their prior exposure in Vietnam during their childhood.

The second generation participants, on the contrary, either had a more blended lifestyle or led almost completely American lives. For example, Sarah, one of the second generation participants, describes her lifestyle to be very Americanized. Sarah has stated in her interview that she was born as an American and she would not know how to live any different. One may feel that this is extreme being that Sarah's background is Vietnamese; however, it goes on to support Zhou and Bankston's (1994) stance that the microsocial and macrosocial systems around the individual determine the effect of ethnicity on the individual. For Sarah's case, her microsocial system was largely formed around her mother as her mother was the participant's sole source of the Vietnamese tradition. The community (the macrosocial system) has heavily

influenced Sarah because those are the people that she mostly interacts with. The interviewee has emphasized that she is an active member in her church and she spends time with her friends who are of different ethnicity. Therefore, this has somewhat explained how Sarah's constructed culture has come to be, as a result of her environment. This same idea of the interaction of the social systems and the age at immigration can be applied to each of the participants to explain their unique degree of preservation and acculturation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to better fill the gap in studies involving Vietnamese immigrants and their experiences in cultural preservation and acculturation. Research was conducted in Columbia and Plymouth, North Carolina, areas that are entirely rural with a very small Vietnamese population. One and one-half and second generation Vietnamese immigrants were interviewed on their cultural experiences and feelings about their community. It was found that despite limited cultural resources, social gathering, no matter how small scale it is, is an important factor for cultural preservation. Another finding in this study supports previous research where it was established that the interaction of the microsocial and macrosocial system largely governs the ethnic identity of the individual. Understanding the interplay of these factors can explain levels of acculturation and preservation. It also shines light on some of the processes of how one creates one's culture through internal and external forces. It also goes on to support the largely accepted notion cultural identity is dynamic and is modified through different situations and context (Hien, 2016). Though the sample size may be a limitation for this study, the results from this study can be readily utilized to provide a fuller picture for Vietnamese immigrants. Results may be reflective of the current acculturation and immigrant issues affecting current and future generations of Vietnamese individuals living in all segments of rural America.

This research study on Vietnamese immigrants is one of the first in its field to focus exclusively on rural areas and adaptive and preservative cultural strategies. Ultimately, the results from this study are intended to be a step in the direction to assist Vietnamese immigrants to feel a sense of belonging with their roots and to reduce conflicts with acculturation and preservation.

Researcher's Note

Conducting this research has hopefully shone light on the different adaptive skills and social constructs of Vietnamese immigrants in rural areas that have not been discussed in past studies. Understanding the needs and unique issues specific to non-metropolitan areas are also beneficial in addressing cultural problems to create a better environment for immigrants. I, myself, had to establish my cultural identity and found preserving my native culture was difficult and lacked a complete picture when I only had my parents to look to for my inquiries. I did not fully understand the background of Vietnamese holidays and did not know how Vietnamese culture has changed over the years because I did not strive to learn during my childhood. Now, I am actively seeking resources to help deepen my understanding of the history and culture of Vietnam.

As a former student of the public school system in Plymouth, NC, my siblings and I were the only Asian students. I grew up being misunderstood for several different races other than my own that I soon grew blind to my native culture, trying to keep it to myself as much as possible. I was the subject of various Asian stereotypes, such as the typical beliefs of Asians performing well academically and not being athletically talented. I did not want to be different from my peers because, after all, I was a native of Plymouth just as they were. However, I knew that I will never truly “fit in” because due to the rural area, my peers did not know much about my culture and treated me based off of previously held beliefs of Asians formed by the media. I also did not

openly share my Vietnamese culture because I lived the typical “dual life” of second generation immigrants where I practiced some aspects of the Vietnamese culture within my household and tried my best to acculturate into the mainstream society while at school. I would not describe my experience as quite as an acculturation into the mainstream culture, however, as I kept to myself more and had a select few friends who I would interact with. In afterthought, I was greatly influenced by my Vietnamese culture in my household, but I kept all of those elements to myself while in public.

The turning point occurred when my brother left Plymouth to attend the North Carolina School of Science and Math. It was a boarding school in Durham, North Carolina where the student population was filled with various Asian students. Whenever my brother came home to visit, he would show me a plethora of Asian products that he was recommended by his friends. I was introduced to various animes and mangas, Korean pop (K-pop), and Korean and Chinese dramas. Learning about the Asian entertainment, media, and seeing other Asian celebrities definitely expanded my view. It shone a more positive light on my culture and I was more accepting of it.

Though many of my classmates did not know of Asian entertainment or may have thought of it as weird, I was content with learning more about it. I even ignored the fact that I was being different from my friends because I had finally found an interest in life that I liked which made me more comfortable to express my culture in public. Learning about my culture through the entertainment industry was definitely a start, but what started my cultural preservation was my visit to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

My three weeks in Vietnam while visiting relatives was challenging as I was immediately immersed in the culture. I was placed in a large city in a tropical climate but no air conditioning

unit. My family stayed with my grandmother where we slept on the hard, tile floors and, sometimes if we were fortunate, wooden beds. I learned how to wash dishes without running water and even learned some formalities in Vietnamese weddings. Each day I learned something new by simply living there. It was quite surprising how different I was from native Vietnamese individuals despite my original belief that I lived a very “Vietnamese” lifestyle in my household in America. It was a shock at first, but, more notably, it made me want to learn more about how my relatives live and ways to connect with them better. Though I did not experience this initially, I also felt a stronger sense of belonging when I was around other Vietnamese people who lived similarly to what I was learning. When I returned home from Vietnam, I did not feel as a new person, but rather I unlocked a door of the Vietnamese culture that I have kept sealed during my childhood.

Upon entering East Carolina University, I was no longer worried about fitting in with the students there. I understood that culture was dynamic even within ethnic groups, so it was no use to pretend to be similar to the larger group. Instead, I enjoyed learning more about other cultures and met other Vietnamese students through the Asian Student Club. I am still on the path to learning more about my native culture; however, I have found that I also include elements from the mainstream society in America when I can use it for my upward mobility. For example, I believe in gender equality and that women should be able to have major roles outside of the household. These were some beliefs in Vietnam that were nonexistent. Instead, females in Vietnam did all of the cooking and housework while males could smoke and socialize. For instance, if I was a female residing in Vietnam, it would be highly unlikely for me to be in a physician role; I may have been accepted in a nursing role. In America, however, females have more power and are applying for more non-traditional roles.

Based on my life experiences being a second generation Vietnamese immigrant in addition to living in a rural area with minimal Vietnamese, I wanted to learn how other Vietnamese immigrants create their own culture, juggling preservation and acculturation. Though there have been past studies on Vietnamese immigrants and their methods of preservation and acculturation, the cultural construction for immigrants differ across individuals, and it is important to include immigrants living in rural areas because their experiences are just as insightful and unique. Hopefully in the future, all cultures and cultural learning can be celebrated everywhere despite it being urban or not.

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