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**The Untold Story of the Vietnamese-American third generation in the United States of  
America**

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Research of Communication

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August 21st, 2023

## INTRODUCTION

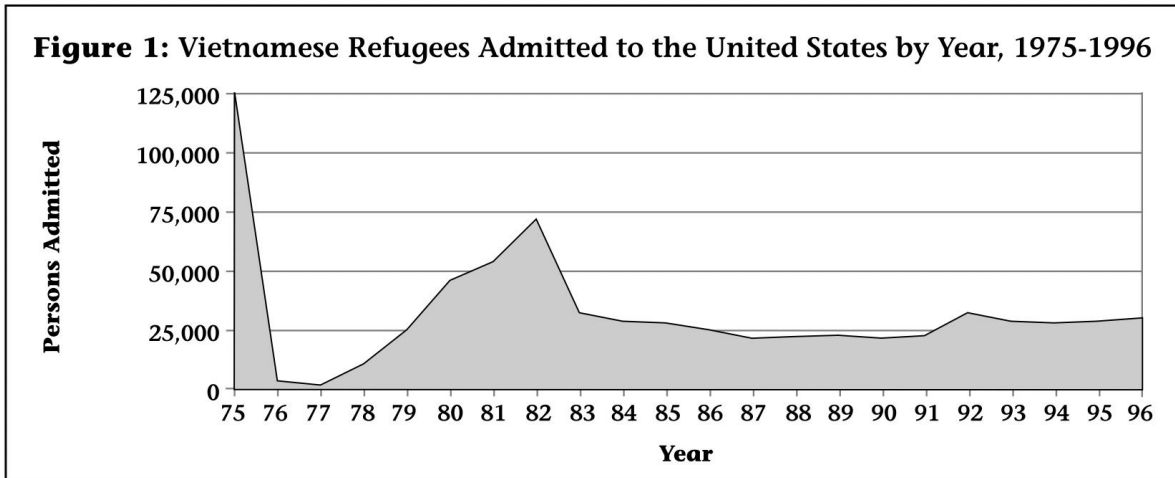
### Historical background

After the Fall of Saigon in 1975 and the ending of the Vietnam War, the first wave of Vietnamese refugees began pouring into America. This group, which numbered about 700,000 people, was mainly composed of South Vietnamese educated elites, high-status individuals, and former members of the armed forces and the government (Freeman, 1995). These people fled by boat, airplane, and many other ways to seek freedom from other countries such as America, Germany, England, etc. Although leaving the motherland was difficult, the initial wave had an advantage over later waves because the U.S. government subsidized their departure and provided vessels, camps, and intelligence agencies (Bosmajian, 2006; Nghia, 2006).

The second wave of Vietnamese migration began in the late 1970s when about 2 million number of South Vietnamese fled the country due to the intensification of political tyranny, they came to be known as “Boat people”. This wave of refugees was composed primarily of fishermen, members of the South Vietnamese military, and blue-collar employees were among those who belonged to the lower middle class (Centrie, 2004). They fled the nation in crowded boats, were frequently attacked by pirates, and were subjected to rape, torture, and murder while traveling. Many others drowned en route. Additionally, they escaped in the middle of the night, making their getaways hasty and extremely dangerous. As a result, several people misplaced their belongings and legal paperwork. Families were split up, and it was typical for these refugees to abandon their relatives behind (Valdez, 1997).

The third wave of refugees/immigrants came around 1980 and primarily consisted of a diverse range of individuals, but it was predominantly composed of Vietnamese Amerasians, who were children of Vietnamese mothers but were fathered by U.S. soldiers and were born in Vietnam. Many of this group immigrated to the U.S. because they suffered discrimination in Vietnam due to their mixed heritage, as well as the fact that they were the reminders of the Vietnam War and the presence of America. Vietnamese-Amerasians, unlike the refugees from previous waves who were fleeing for their lives, this third wave of migrants came because they encountered discrimination within Vietnam, both from the government and fellow Vietnamese citizens. They were stigmatized as offspring of the enemy, leading to their marginalization. Furthermore, apart from being abandoned by their American fathers, some even experienced the heartbreak of being abandoned by their own mothers (Chan, *The Vietnamese Americans 1.5 Generation*, 93 FIX). Third-wave migration was subjected to the sociopolitical factors related to Amerasian identity and the limited communication with older generations and full understanding of Vietnamese culture and traditions. The third-wave of Vietnamese immigrants had a different sense of identity than earlier refugees, and especially experienced the pressure to conform to American culture, which can sometimes lead to a loss of their heritage culture (T.Nguyen, 2019; T.Nguyen and Hamid, 2002).

SOUTH VS NORTH



After the Vietnam War, Southern Vietnamese Americans were regarded as refugees. Following the construction of UN Convention, a refugee refers to a person who is outside the country of his nationality and unable or unwilling to take advantage of that country's protection because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (Shacknov, 275). Figure 1 illustrates the first surge of refugees following the fall of Saigon in 1975, with approximately 125,000 refugees, primarily consisting of South Vietnamese government officials, members of the Vietnamese elite, and individuals associated with the U.S. The division between North and South Vietnam is not only reflected by the fact that the first two waves of refugees were from South Vietnam, but also in the cultural dynamics within the Vietnamese diaspora. There is even a physical manifestation of this division, as observed during church ceremonies or weddings, where Northerners sit to the left and Southerners to the right, with no crossing of the aisle for handshakes (Barber 2018; Silverstone and Savage 2010; Sims 2007).

Additionally, according to scholars Nguyen (2020) refugees from the South often hold negative views of Northerners, frequently accusing them of engaging in criminal activities, and mirroring the stereotypes that exist among Vietnamese communities in the United States today (Sims 2007; Silverstone and Savage 2010; Barber 2018). For example, several of the third generation Vietnamese-Americans from the North said that they felt discriminated against by South Vietnamese-Americans. This geographical division extends to language as well, with Northern and Southern dialects serving as markers of belonging (Nguyen, 2020). An example of this can be seen in a situation where a South Vietnamese American Catholic lay person invited one of the researchers to her family dinner solely because the researcher spoke a Southern dialect. The linguistic forms themselves carry the weight of this larger, transcendent scale encompassing different places and times (Nguyen, 2020). Consequently, determining the extent of reciprocal animosity in this dynamic becomes challenging. While Northerners may hold equally strong resentments towards Southerners, they might hesitate to express them openly to individuals from the South. Thus, inheriting a Vietnamese heritage language implies inheriting historical conflicts and existing biases (Nguyen, 2020).

The use of Northern or Southern Vietnamese linguistic forms, as well as references to North and South Vietnam, signifies a transnational struggle that stretches back in time (Nguyen, 2020). In an English-dominant space, discussing Vietnam and speaking Vietnamese becomes a matter of personal history for each individual, intricately connected to the experiences of the Vietnamese diaspora (which refers to individuals of Vietnamese origin residing outside Vietnam) and the historical divisions between North and South.

In summary, the first and second wave of Vietnamese refugees arrived in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The North-South division is evident not only in the refugee population but also in cultural practices and linguistic distinctions within the Vietnamese diaspora. This division gives rise to biases, stereotypes, and tensions between Northerners and Southerners, perpetuating historical conflicts and shaping individual experiences within the community.

### **Purpose of study**

We will explore three different research questions regarding the experiences of identity formation of first, second, and third-generation Vietnamese Americans, beginning with the question of what it means to be Vietnamese-American in the United States of America today and in the past. There is no single experience that can define and answer this question. Instead Vietnamese- American lived experiences are in part shaped by where they were born, and how connected they are to their family's ethnic origins. However, we first realized that there are many Vietnamese-American third generation who feel miserable because they are confused about their own identity. Third -generation Vietnamese-Americans don't actually prefer to be called Vietnamese-American, they choose to be called American because they believe that when they use the term Vietnamese - American shows that they are just foreigners "Asian - American or Vietnamese - Americans feel like we are guests in someone else's house, that we can never really relax and put our feet up on the table "( Forever Foreigners or Honorary White, Tuan 1998). For them, race is defined as " the category to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations and stereotypes made as a result " ( Cooper & Leong, 2008 pg. 133).

But, some Vietnamese - American third generation are experiencing an identity crisis, especially related to Vietnamese culture. They feel they are losing what it means to be

Vietnamese. “ I no longer came home to the strong smell of my mom’s delicious cooking. Instead, I was on a diet of late-night pizza, chicken nuggets, and TV dinners. I no longer had my dad to constantly lecture me in Vietnamese about the importance of studying hard.” (unavsa.org).

Many of the Vietnamese-American young generations do not feel connected with their Vietnamese identity enough because their cultural identity is lacking.

Our second question examines how Southern and Northern Vietnamese immigrants experience adaptation to U.S. culture differently and what implications these differences have for acculturation. As researchers, we bring our own insights from our perspectives as one Northern Vietnamese and one Southern Vietnamese student in the U.S. Scholars suggests that Southern Vietnamese are more Americanized and also have a tendency to move to the U.S because of the war between the U.S and Vietnam when America invaded South Vietnam( Schlight, 1999). Therefore, the ideology of the older generations in the resistance war was also more or less affected. And that influence continues and is passed onto future generations. In this research, we will use the method of interviewing people who are originally Northern Vietnamese and Southern immigrating to America to see clearly what are the differences between these groups.

The third question examines the differences between Northerner and Southerner cultures, both in Vietnam and in the U.S. For instance, Northern Vietnamese are more conservative and less open to change due to their greater Communist influence. They tend to put more emphasis on traditional culture. Southern Vietnamese, in contrast, pride themselves on being more lively and westernized. They have more financial views and prioritize the future more often. Therefore, by preferring freedom and westernized life, more Southerners tend to immigrate to the U.S. which is considered a free country. Americanization took shape in the minds of southerners and



led to the loss of identity. They have forgotten their native language and can only communicate in English, especially the younger generation. Many people don't even know their origins.

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are several frameworks that will be included in this study. The theoretical framework for understanding the formation of ethnic identity among Vietnamese Americans integrates concepts from the literature review. Ethnic Identity is the active engagement in cultural practices and participation in ethnic communities to shape an individual's ethnic identity. Accommodation refers to integrating into the dominant culture while maintaining cultural distinctiveness; assimilation involves adopting the dominant culture's beliefs and practices; and resistance occurs when conflicts arise between embracing the mainstream culture and maintaining heritage connections. Language identity plays a significant role in shaping ethnic identity, and conflicts can arise when there is a shift from the minority language to the majority language in educational settings. Northern Third-Generation Navigations refers to Descendants of Northern Vietnamese immigrants facing challenges in adapting to new languages and ways of life while balancing their parents' cultural heritage and the new society.

### **Limitations**

This study is subject to various limitations. Firstly, the sample size of Vietnamese third generation college aged adults/adolescents included in this study is small, which raises concerns about its representativeness for the entire Vietnamese third generation population. Additionally, the questionnaire was structured with aims created to elicit detailed responses from the research participants. Secondly, since this study relies on participants' recollections from memory, there is

a possibility of inaccurate information being provided. Thirdly, these young individuals may hesitate to openly share certain details with the researcher due to cultural factors. In Vietnamese culture, people typically exhibit a passive attitude and are reluctant to disclose personal information to strangers, particularly those who are not close to them. To mitigate this limitation, the researchers, who are also Vietnamese, are sensitive and aware of this issue. The questions were carefully constructed to minimize discomfort and anxiety during the interview while still promoting a productive conversation and extracting valuable insights. Fourthly, some participants may encounter language difficulties and struggle to express their thoughts or understand the questions. In such cases, the researcher may not have gathered all the relevant information due to confusion or lack of comprehension of the questions. The researchers also offered the opportunity for conversations in either Vietnamese or English languages, based on whether certain participants found it challenging to articulate their thoughts in English.

## Summary

This introduction provides a historical background of Vietnamese migration to the United States after the Vietnam War. The first wave consisted of educated elites and former government and military members. The second wave, known as "Boat people," included fishermen and lower-middle-class individuals who fled political tyranny. The third wave involved Vietnamese Amerasians, children of Vietnamese mothers and American soldiers, who faced discrimination in Vietnam. The North-South division from the Vietnam War is evident in the refugee population and cultural practices within the Vietnamese diaspora, leading to biases and tensions. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of identity formation among first, second, and third-generation Vietnamese Americans, including their connection to Vietnamese culture and

adaptation to American society. The study also aims to understand the cultural differences between Northerners and Southerners, both in Vietnam and the United States. The limitations of the study include the small sample size, potential inaccuracies in participant recollections, cultural hesitations in sharing information, and language difficulties. The researchers, who are Vietnamese themselves, aim to address these limitations by creating a comfortable and productive environment for interviews and accommodating participants' language preferences

### **Literature review**

#### Ethnic Identity

According to Saylor and Aries (1999), generally speaking, an individual's ethnic identity is established via involvement with the cultural practices and activities of their ethnic group and through experiences with ethnocentrism and racism in society. In a longitudinal study of student life experiences, Saylor and Aries (1999) sent questionnaires to 422 first-year students at a small liberal arts college in the northeastern United States. Of these, 132 students identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group, which included people of African American, Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, mixed ethnicity, and 'other' ethnic backgrounds. The study's main subject matter was these minority students. Saylor and Aries examined the degree to which the minority student participants' ethnic identities were strong. *Without permission, further reproduction is banned. upon starting college and midway through the academic year.* A category named "Affirmation and Belonging" were used to measure positive feelings and belonging toward one's ethnic group. The researchers viewed the students' ethnic identities as stronger if they had a score of six or above on the "Affirmation and Belonging" subscale, and as weaker if they received a lower score. The study found that college students with stronger ethnic

identities sought support from their ethnic community, joined ethnic organizations, and had a higher percentage of friends from their own ethnicity. Those with weaker ethnic identities had more diverse friend groups, including a higher percentage of White friends, and were less involved in ethnic organizations. Saylor and Aries' (1999) findings are significant because they suggest that individuals with stronger ethnic identities will be less likely to assimilate to either the dominant White or other ethnic cultures and more likely participate in their own ethnic and cultural customs.

Based on the above study, we agree that ethnic identity is formed through active engagement in the cultural customs and participation of one's ethnic community. Also, an individual's ethnic identity is shaped by possessing favorable attitudes, experiencing a sense of belonging and pride towards their respective group. It is important to note that ethnic identity is a construct influenced by many factors, such as shared traditions, language, history, and social communication within the ethnic community. Furthermore, it is important to note that individuals develop a strong sense of self in relation to their ethnic background by actively participating in and appreciating the cultural practices and values of their group. Such involvement not only fosters a deeper understanding of one's heritage but also contributes to a sense of connection, belonging, and pride, reinforcing their ethnic identity.

Vietnamese Americans who are English native speakers likely to interact with American society more frequently than Vietnamese Americans who are bilingual or who only speak Vietnamese due to the limitations of speaking Vietnamese. Vietnamese Americans who are native English speakers and have a limited command of Vietnamese may find it difficult to fully engage or communicate with the Vietnamese ethnic group. This might cause a sense of detachment from

some components of their ethnic heritage, which might affect their overall sense of identity and belonging. They might feel more at home and a part of the larger American culture there, where they are free to freely express their linguistic and cultural identities.

Accommodation, assimilation, and resistance.

Minority people are capable of accepting dominant and their own cultures to some extent.

Accommodation, assimilation, and resistance aspects were discovered in this research.

According to Hamers (1993), accommodation refers to the process through which individuals integrate into society while maintaining some degree of their cultural distinctiveness.

Accommodation often occurs because fitting into the mainstream American culture isn't always easy. When people try to adjust to this culture, many of them end up feeling left out. In contrast, some individuals are able to easily blend the practices from their own backgrounds with those of the school and the dominant culture. The differences between these two might be language proficiency, generational differences, etc. A strong grasp of the predominant language within a society often plays a vital role in how well an individual can navigate and integrate into that particular society. Those who possess fluency in the dominant language find it easier to communicate and actively participate in cultural exchanges. Moreover, the degree of cultural fusion can vary across generations. First-generation immigrants might tightly hold onto their cultural customs, while successive generations could be more receptive to embracing components of the predominant culture.

Meanwhile, assimilation is defined as the process of distancing oneself from one's ancestors' ideals, and instead adopting (dominant) American beliefs and practices (Haines, 1989). This type of cultural adjustment is commonly observed in individuals who feel pressured by their traditional cultural values but desire to change their lifestyles to align more with the dominant culture. Resistance occurs when there is a conflict between two situations: first, when those who want to embrace the mainstream culture face rejection from the heritage community, and second, when those who don't want to adopt the mainstream culture they will be connected to heritage community and disconnected from mainstream. Vietnamese teenagers, like other teenagers, have been through significant changes including physical, intellectual, and emotional changes as they grow up. However, Vietnamese American teens face an extra challenge of adapting to a new society while maintaining their traditional values. This can be a struggle as they strive to honor their cultural heritage while also embracing the freedom to pursue their individual interests as American teenagers. Schools play a vital role in this process by providing opportunities for Vietnamese adolescents to preserve their cultural identity while also integrating into Western practices (Haines, 1989).

In the process of finding their cultural identity, Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans, face conflicts between their Asian and American values. Chou (1999) suggests that as they become adults, these people define themselves based on their cultural perspective, whether it's Asian, American, or a blend of both. Vietnamese immigrants and refugees, in particular, have a unique viewpoint of the intersection of Asian and American cultures. Initially, their focus is on survival, and adjusting involves grieving what they left behind and deciding how much of the new culture to embrace. This adjustment can take years, but once they establish some stability, including acquiring English, they can compare the values of their native country, seen as Asian, with the beliefs and attitudes of the dominant culture. Vietnamese Americans, due

to resettlement, are now learning "American" ways of navigating social situations and maintaining family harmony, while also constructing an identity influenced by American culture and unfamiliar lifestyles (Vuong, 1976).

In the United States, where multiple cultures coexist, people have choices when cultures clash. They can adapt to the new society by assimilating, accommodating, or resisting. Gordon (1964) identified various types of assimilation, including cultural, economic-structural, marital, identificational, behavioral, and civic assimilation. Among these, cultural assimilation and economic-structural assimilation seem relevant for refugees, as they may seek equal access, opportunities, and fair treatment in the host society (Paulston, 1992).

Zamel (1997) introduced the concept of transculturation, emphasizing the importance for educators to recognize both the languages students already know and the ones they are currently learning. It is crucial to provide students with learning opportunities that reflect their unique experiences. Zamel notes how this understanding helps teachers grasp students' identities, capabilities, and the kind of instruction that suits them best. Transculturation, as described by Zamel, acknowledges adaptation as a dynamic process that involves active engagement and resistance (Zamel, 1997). Lvovich (1997) recounted her individual struggle as she navigated her journey through Vienna and Italy, eventually integrating into American society subsequent to her immigration as a young woman. This experience significantly effects immigrants' attitudes towards their native language and their efforts to learn the dominant language. Pierce (1997) similarly suggests that second language learners who are invested in learning the target language are also investing their own identities in the process. We are particularly interested in the extent to which North and South Vietnamese Americans navigate these tensions.

Language Identity

Lvovich highlights that the impact of acculturation on language differs based on the environment and the learner's perception of the target language's importance. In a research study by Rolstad (1997), bilingual students were asked to complete a survey about their thoughts about their own ethnicity and three other ethnic groups, which were Blacks, Whites, Koreans, and Latinos. The study found that socialization shapes ethnic identity and affects how youngsters build their sense of self. Additionally, language is very important in defining one's ethnic identity and sense of self. Conflicts that test the child's ethnolinguistic identity and values may occur when schooling requires a shift from the child's minority language and culture to the majority language and culture of the broader society. How these conflicts are addressed by the child, influenced by teachers, parents, and peers, can significantly impact the level of ethnic identification and the effectiveness of educational strategies (p.46).

Language plays a significant role in shaping one's identity, even when individuals maintain both their native language and a second language. Boshier (1997) conducted a study on 101 Asian students across nine post-secondary institutions in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The aim was to explore how the movement towards the dominant language and culture, along with the preservation of native culture, predicted second language acquisition, native language maintenance, self-esteem, and academic success. Interviews with fifteen students provided insights into their acculturation process, experiences in adapting to a new culture, learning a new language, and preserving their native language and culture (Boshier, 1997). The study revealed that individuals who embraced American behavior patterns and had more contact with Americans achieved higher proficiency in learning English. Interestingly, most students in the study had not fully assimilated into American culture nor solely adhered to their heritage culture. The Asian students in the study sought a balance between the two cultures, incorporating elements from both (Boshier, p. 599). For example, students of Hmong heritage embraced American values in areas like education and sports, while maintaining traditional roles within the Hmong community. In the context of second language learning, Pierce (1995) emphasized the



importance of social interactions between minority language learners and speakers of the target language. These interactions contribute to the establishment of social identity. Pierce also noted that language learning allows individuals to negotiate their sense of self and navigate power dynamics within the social network (Pierce, 1995).

Pierce's study on immigrant identity suggests that immigrants' experiences in their native country are influenced by their experiences in the new country, with language playing a significant role. Bankston and Zhou (1995) conducted a survey involving 387 Vietnamese high school students in eastern New Orleans to gain insight into the educational experience of a new immigrant population in a disadvantaged minority environment. They discovered a positive correlation between Vietnamese literacy and identification with the minority group, as well as academic achievement. The researchers concluded that maintaining proficiency in the minority language does not hinder social adaptation and upward mobility for immigrant minorities. In fact, these language skills can contribute to the goals of mainstream education (Bankston & Zhou, p.1). Therefore, immigrants, like most Northern Vietnamese Americans, who choose to come to a new country are voluntary minorities. They tend to adjust more readily to their new environment compared to involuntary minorities, like the first and second generation of South Vietnamese refugees, who may have been forced or unwillingly placed in a new cultural setting.

#### Navigating Identities: Northern Vietnamese American Third-Generation Immigrants

In this study, we interviewed descendents of Northern Vietnamese immigrants who arrived in the United States during childhood, adolescence, or young adulthood. These Vietnamese Americans have life experiences that span multiple nations, cultures, and languages (Roberge, 2002, p. 107). They possess characteristics of both native U.S.-born individuals and newcomers. On the one hand, Southern Vietnamese American third-generation, who are descended from refugees and whose families were more familiar with Americans during the war, seem to be more strongly adapted to American culture from birth. Because Northern Vietnamese American third-

generation individuals had very limited contact with American culture during the war in Vietnam, they face more challenges when they arrive in America, which they experience as a more foreign country. They encounter difficulties in mastering new languages and adjusting to new ways of life. However, they also bring something distinct and valuable with them, known as their "in-betweenness" (Kasinitz, 2007). This "in-betweenness" refers to their unique position between two cultures, blending elements of their Vietnamese heritage with American influences. It is a characteristic that sets them apart and contributes to their rich cultural identity. Compared to descendants of South Vietnamese refugees, descendants of Northern Vietnamese immigrants find themselves in a complex position. They cannot simply follow the traditional wisdom of their parents, which was shaped by a different time and place. Similarly, blindly adopting the ways of the new society, which they are only beginning to grasp, is not a viable option. Instead, they face the challenging task of making choices. They must navigate between their parents' cultural heritage and the ways of the new society, or perhaps even forge a new path altogether. These choices require careful reflection and consideration of their own unique circumstances in various situations, both significant and mundane (Kasinitz, 2007, p. 2). It is a process of discovering their own identity, finding a balance between tradition and innovation, and carving out a path that is meaningful and authentic to them. In addition to their personal self-awareness, Northern Vietnamese American third-generation individuals have the advantage of living and experiencing multicultural environments as part of the third generation. In some cases, unlike South Vietnamese refugees, North Vietnamese immigrants came to the United States with several family generations, or were able to maintain close connections to cousins, grandparents, and so forth. This exposure allows them to develop a distinct worldview compared to other generations. Their unique experiences and perspectives, shaped by straddling multiple cultures and languages, contribute to their enriched understanding of the world. They possess a nuanced perspective that stems from their upbringing and the diverse interactions they encounter daily. This distinctive worldview enables them to navigate complexities, bridge cultural gaps, and embrace diversity in a way that sets them apart from other generations and descendants of South Vietnamese

refugees. However, it is important to acknowledge that the children of immigrants have played a significant role in shaping a more inclusive and diverse society. They have brought with them a broader and more enlightened worldview, which has contributed to a positive perception of multiculturalism in the country (Kasinitz, 2007).

## METHODOLOGY

### **Study Design**

This study mainly consists of a qualitative data collection strategy based on open-ended interviews. The interview questions were set up to promote a one-on-one conversation. There were approximately 20 questions asked during the interviews. Since these questions are open-ended, they were intended to initiate an in depth conversation that will lead the researchers to understand more about the participants. We will focus primarily on the third generation, people born in the U.S. whose grandparents were the first generation of refugees or immigrants to the U.S., as well as second generation people whose parents were the children of the first generation. Interviews will be conducted with third-generation Vietnamese - Americans who struggle with defining their identity and learning their heritage language. From the interviews, we will identify common reasons for struggling to learn Vietnamese language and explore the factors that contribute to helping them define the distinct identity of third-generation Vietnamese-American immigrants. This project will also provide a snapshot of the first and second Vietnamese-American generations as well as some brief historical context that allows for the understanding of identity construction related to Vietnamese immigrants' history in the United States. This study aims to bring out the voices of third generation Vietnamese Americans to raise awareness of their problems and concerns, and design proposals for change.

### **Population and Sample**

The subjects for this research project are Vietnamese American third generation individuals. Of the eight people interviewed, one was a first generation Vietnamese American, one was second generation, and six were third generation. Each person descended from refugees or immigrants who settled in America through different waves of migrations. Of the eight people, three were from North Vietnam, and four were from the South and one is Chinese American. And of the eight people, 3 descended from refugees and 5 descended from immigrants. The interviewees were friends of friends, and two of the interviewees were people we had met before. Their ages ranged from 18 to 40. The interviews took place in different settings -- several will be conducted on zoom and others will be conducted face-to-face, and all were conducted one-on-one.

Table 1, Interview Information

Interviewee	Identity	Refugee/ Immigrants Status	Generation	Age
1. Anonymous	South Vietnamese American	Refugee	second	40
2. Jenny Huynh	South Vietnamese American	Children of second generation( Viet namese American)	third	22
3. Minh Hoang	North Vietnamese American	Immigrants	third	20
4. Linh Le	North Vietnamese American	Immigrants	third	20
5. Trinity Cao	North Vietnamese American	Immigrants	third	18

6. Johnny Nhan	Chinese American	Immigrants	third	22
7. Nancy Bui	South Vietnamese American	Refugee	first	74
8. Antony Nguyen	South Vietnamese American	Refugee	third	22

**Data Collection**

Before conducting the interviews, the researchers completed the Institutional Review Board ( IRB) application and submitted it through Denison University. Our application was accepted and each interviewee signed a consent form required before we conducted the interviews. The researchers thoroughly informed the participants about the project before setting up the interview.

During the interview, the researcher explained the questions clearly and made sure to word them in a way that the respondents could understand. If the participants were confused on certain questions or concepts, the researcher took time to explain and clarify the questions, when necessary.

**Analysis of the Data**

Based on the data collected, we analyzed both the interview transcripts and questionnaires based on themes that arose from the interviewees. We used a combination of both coded and emergent methods of analysis.

The data collected from the questionnaire will be reviewed again. The researcher has to transcribe the conversation word by word since this is a reflective and in-depth case study

interview. The researcher then has to carefully analyze the audio recording of each participant again to organize and record the information that is provided by the subject. Hopefully through this study, their voices will be heard and changes will be made for the future third generation of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese who also experience similar circumstances. .

## DATA AND ANALYSIS FINDING

### **Introduction**

This project will focus on the third wave of Vietnamese migration to the United States, which occurred from the 1900s to the 2000s, and explore how this group constructed their identity in the new country and how they became assimilated into American culture. In particular, we will examine how these migrants and their children and grandchildren related to and retained their heritage culture and language. The interview explored the experiences and the perspectives of these young people. The literature review in this project emphasizes the advantages and disadvantages in constructing and finding their identity as Vietnamese American third generation. Also, the literature reviews in this project emphasized on the influences of family, peers, school, migration experience, social status, environment, and other factors that may lead to helping them define the distinct identity of third-generation Vietnamese- American immigrants and learning their heritage language. This is a pilot study of third generation Vietnamese American adolescents, so the researcher carefully examined each case before analyzing the most frequent findings, which happened to all or the majority of the participants, and then looking at the least frequent findings, which happened to just a few or a single participant.

An exploratory interview with open-ended questions was part of this investigation. The goal of the interview was to thoroughly examine the viewpoints and experiences of third generation Vietnamese American adolescents. The interview consisted of about 10 key questions. These questions would receive in-depth responses from the participants. The participants' responses touched on a variety of topics, including language and communication barriers, connection to heritage culture, experiences of cultural integration, migration-related issues, academic concerns, difficulties of leaving life in Vietnam, perspectives on ethnic identity, perspectives and reactions to racism and oppression, perspectives on minority and majority status, and proposals.

The first limitation of this study was that it might not be as accurate because many responses were based on past memories. Second, because there were only six participants in this study, it did not adequately represent the vast general population. Third, due to personal reasons, some individuals were reluctant to give absolutely honest answers or felt comfortable answering particular questions. As a result, the researcher had to carefully plan and conduct each interview.

Eight participants were included in this study. They are from different parts of America such as Chicago, Ohio, Florida, Texas. Most of them were born in the U.S, only two of the participants arrived from 9-13 years old. Only one participant that came from 1975 after the Vietnam war.

### **Language and Communication Factors**

The most common responses involved language barriers and the influence they had on communication which led to the struggles in adaptation. Four of these participants strongly felt frustrated with their language limitation and felt disconnected when they were back to Vietnam or being surrounded by Vietnamese people.

Participant 7 felt uncomfortable speaking Vietnamese because she was afraid her accent might sound stupid and funny to Vietnamese people. Participant 7 said “Vietnamese people in Vietnam don’t really treat me with any differences but I do sometimes feel a little connected and it is harder for me to communicate with them”. Participant 7 experienced difficulties communicating when they returned to Vietnam. Their language barrier led to disconnection and the loss of sense of belonging. Despite Vietnamese people treating them similarly, Participant 7 struggled to communicate effectively, she said: “I much better understand Vietnamese rather than speaking it so it is kind of hard sometimes to communicate, I know what I want to say but I don’t know how to say the right words or the correct accent” . Therefore, she encountered challenges finding the right words, expressing themselves fluently, and understanding cultural nuances. These obstacles left them feeling isolated and disconnected in their interactions with Vietnamese people.

Even participant 4 from the North side of Vietnam did not really express her frustration toward language barriers and felt very confident in speaking in her heritage language. She chose to live in a Vietnamese community where most people use Vietnamese language to communicate everyday and the environment there provided her with less pressure than the participants 7 who chose to live in a native American community. However, she also revealed the role of using English in her American life “ I speak Vietnamese at home with my parents and relatives and only use English at work”.

In conclusion, language barriers had a significant impact on the participants' struggles in adaptation. Participant 7 felt frustrated and disconnected due to their limited Vietnamese language proficiency, struggling to communicate effectively and understand cultural nuances. Participant 4, residing in a Vietnamese community, expressed confidence in their heritage language skills but recognized the importance of using English in their American life. These



experiences highlight the challenges and varying approaches individuals face in dealing with language barriers.

### **Perspectives on Ethnic Identity**

All of these people eventually felt the urge to blend in and be accepted by the majority society after arriving in America. They maintained their Vietnamese identity, though. Some participants desired to assimilate in order to be accepted because they were once lost and bewildered when they were younger. Despite all the pressures and demands they had to deal with, some people were able to maintain their identities. However, they all agreed that being Vietnamese and being a part of their own ethnic culture are significant. They all agreed that it is crucial to preserve one's language and culture, but they also agreed that being bicultural and bilingual is essential for survival since one lives in America. However, they would all want to preserve and pass on to their children the Vietnamese language and culture.

Participant 3 felt that she had a sense of confusion when she was at a young age. She stated “ During elementary like kind of middle School experience there was definitely like a shameful aspect personally for me I moved to like a really white picket school neighborhood so it was like everyone trying to be like everyone else and I remember my friend group and everyone myself so there was like some sense of shame and wanting to be you know like a different race but that was something I'm glad I grew from but that did happen during that time period for sure.” She feels like she is a Vietnamese person, but she knows she is mixed, meaning her mixed heritage will always be a part of her identity, even though, culturally, she grew up Vietnamese.

In conclusion, the individuals discussed in this conversation about Vietnamese identity in America emphasize the importance of preserving their language and culture while navigating the pressures to assimilate. Participant 3's experience reflects initial

confusion and a desire to conform, but she has since grown to value her Vietnamese heritage. Overall, the participants recognize the significance of being bicultural and bilingual for survival in America, while also prioritizing the preservation and transmission of their Vietnamese identity to future generations.

### **Difficulties during the Interview**

Some of the study's participants tended to not think deeply about the issue and were more inclined to bury them inside until someone dug them up, making it challenging to interview them. At the start of the interview, these individuals did not identify these difficulties or stresses as their own. When they first return to Vietnam, they experience tension. When they discussed the past, though, they appeared to simply accept that going through adversity and stress was usual for them. During the interview process, we encountered a situation where some of the interviewees expressed their reluctance to be recorded and declined to sign in consent form for recording. As a result, we had to adapt our approach and rely on taking detailed notes instead. While this presented some challenges, such as the potential for missing out on non-verbal cues or precise wording, we made every effort to capture the essence of the discussions.

### **Summary**

The Vietnamese American third generation encountered the experiences of language barriers and ethnic identity that impacted their effort to preserve the cultural heritage. Language and communication factors were significant in the participants' struggles with adaptation. Some participants expressed frustration and disconnection when faced with language limitations, particularly when interacting with Vietnamese people. Even though Vietnamese individuals treated them similarly, the participants found it challenging to communicate effectively due to

difficulties in finding the right words and expressing themselves fluently. However, one participant residing in a Vietnamese community felt more confident in speaking Vietnamese and used English mainly in her American life.

Regarding ethnic identity, all participants desired acceptance by the majority society while maintaining their Vietnamese identity. They recognized the importance of preserving their language and culture, but also acknowledged the necessity of being bicultural and bilingual for survival in America. Some participants initially felt confusion and a desire to conform during their younger years but eventually grew to value their Vietnamese heritage. Overall, the participants emphasized the significance of preserving their Vietnamese identity and passing it on to future generations.

## Conclusion

In summary, this study delves into the experiences of Vietnamese American third-generation individuals and their journey of identity formation while adapting to American society. By examining the historical context of Vietnamese migration and the diverse waves of refugees, the study recognizes the varied backgrounds and cultural practices within the Vietnamese diaspora, shaped by the division between North and South Vietnam.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the intricate relationship between Vietnamese Americans and their ethnic identity, focusing on third generations. The study acknowledges its limitations, such as a small sample size, potential inaccuracies in participant recollections, cultural hesitations in sharing information, and language difficulties.

The literature review conducted in this study provides a comprehensive examination of identity formation among Vietnamese Americans. It explores the role of ethnic identity, which is

influenced by cultural practices and experiences with racism. The concepts of accommodation, assimilation, and resistance are discussed, shedding light on how Vietnamese Americans navigate their cultural identities within American society. Language identity emerges as a crucial factor, with bilingualism and language maintenance playing significant roles in ethnic identification.

Notably, the literature review specifically focuses on the unique challenges faced by Northern Vietnamese American third-generation immigrants. These individuals find themselves in an "in-between" space, allowing them to develop a distinct worldview and navigate the complexities of their cultural heritage.

To gather data, this study employs qualitative research methods, particularly open-ended interviews with eight Vietnamese American third-generation participants, encompassing refugees, immigrants, and descendants. These interviews center around language and communication factors, as well as the participants' perspectives on ethnic identity.

The findings of this study illuminate the impact of language barriers on participants' struggles with adaptation, leading to feelings of frustration and disconnection when interacting with Vietnamese individuals. However, the study also highlights that one participant in a Vietnamese community expressed more confidence in speaking Vietnamese, emphasizing the positive influence of a supportive language environment.

Overall, the study reveals a shared desire among participants for acceptance in American society while simultaneously preserving their Vietnamese identity. They recognize the importance of maintaining their language and culture while navigating a bicultural and bilingual existence. Some participants initially experienced confusion and a desire to conform, but over time, they came to value and embrace their Vietnamese heritage.

Despite the challenges and limitations inherent in the study, it emphasizes the significance of preserving and passing on Vietnamese identity to future generations. By gaining insights into the experiences of Vietnamese American third-generation individuals, efforts can be made to provide the necessary support and resources to foster a strong connection to their cultural heritage.

To further enrich our understanding, future research could explore additional factors such as intergenerational dynamics, socioeconomic influences, and the role of community support networks. Such studies would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences and identities of Vietnamese Americans, facilitating the development of inclusive programs and initiatives within American society

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