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May, 2014

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF VIETNAMESE SORORITY WOMEN:
ACCULTURATION WITHOUT ASSIMILATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Anthropology

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory research in which I wish to examine the role of ethnic organizations and whether they create ethnic assimilation or ethnic separation in American society. An Asian sorority is used as a case study and Vietnamese sorority members as informants to represent one particular type of Asian ethnicity within an ethnic organization.

I used one of the data analysis methods called axial coding to compare the categories and subcategories while re-reading the text to make sure that the categories and subcategories accurately represent interview responses and to explore how the categories and subcategories are related. The analysis of the interviews elicited thematic material which the researcher finally came up with four Categories of Explorations: Self-Identity, Kinship, Friendship, and Sorority Participation. In this research document, the researcher explored these four Categories of Explorations and analyze whether the beliefs and behaviors of the informants can be related to the role of the sorority, and to answer my main thesis question whether it creates more separation from or assimilation into American society.

The results gained from doing the ethnographic analysis represent a paradox: the sorority creates more ethnic separation and at the same time stimulates acculturation without assimilation in American society.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese women have been and still are relegated to a submissive role in Vietnamese society with respect to the males in their lives. This is based on the “three submissions” for females that are thought to have derived from Confucian teachings. First, as girls at home, they must listen and follow their fathers. Second, when they marry, they must obey their husbands. And third, if they survive their husbands, they must obey their eldest sons (Chung, Bemak, & Wong, 2000). This tradition has been practiced for centuries by both men and women, who have handed it down uncritically from parent to child. As Chung and his colleagues note, many Vietnamese women have psychologically internalized and built personal identities based on gender role oppression Chung et al. (2000).

As an Asian woman who has lived in the United States for three years, I had always wondered if Asian-American women were facing any of the same conflicts or difficulties adapting or adjusting--trying to fit in or assimilate in American culture--that I was facing. For example, Vietnamese-American women who were born in the United States might be either raised in a traditional Vietnamese culture, or in a more modern American lifestyle, depending on their family’s values, beliefs and background.

Living in a more traditional way for these women can also mean being less independent, as they usually are very close to their family members and often do not move out until they marry. The elderly grandparents and parents are taken care of until they die. Having to defer to the decisions of older members of the family may seem out

of date or might not share common aspects of American culture. For instance, speaking in a loud voice and with excessive gestures is considered rude, especially when done by Vietnamese women. They also try to avoid disrespect by not disagreeing with their elders and keeping silent to prevent negative communication.

Other traditional constraints Vietnamese women might have are strict curfews, being prohibited from having a boyfriend, or being expected to date only men of whom their parents or grandparents approve. In addition, personal image is a major concern in Vietnamese traditional culture. It dictates that the style of dress, for example, should not be too revealing or sexy, as it is considered inappropriate for women, with the implication that people--particularly the elders--might look down on them. Unlike common practice with their American counterparts, Vietnamese women are not supposed to hug their male friends by way of greeting, as it is also deemed inappropriate.

In several other respects, modern culture in American society provides quite a contrast to the traditional Vietnamese culture. Women can be very independent and can leave the home at a relatively young age. They can be close to their family but might not have to follow as many rules or curfews as in the Vietnamese culture. In addition, it is not considered rude to discuss or argue with elder grandparents or parents. American young people are not expected to remain silent in disagreement, like in Vietnamese traditional culture.

Women who were born and raised within a traditional Vietnamese family in the United States might find themselves having to lead double lives--behaving in traditional Asian fashion at home--while having an uncomfortable time adjusting themselves to fit in with both cultures. Membership in ethnic organizations seem to be one of the methods to

help ethnic minority people who are undergoing change, and who are trying to find their way within the force and influence of the mainstream American culture.

My curiosity was engaged regarding personal problems of racism or prejudice and the importance of ethnic organizations as a potential antidote. During the course of my research, I learned that the subject of ethnic organizations is hardly a settled issue. There is an ongoing theoretical and research debate as to whether ethnic organizations promote more ethnic integration, or actually create more ethnic isolation or separation from the mainstream American culture.

Hughes (1992) stated that recent American history has witnessed a dramatic increase in the degree of racial and ethnic diversity on university campuses. However, rather than this increased ethnic heterogeneity leading to a broad intermixing and blending of different cultures and ethnic traditions on campuses, a number of observers have remarked that it has led to the tendency for students from different ethnic groups to remain relatively segregated and isolated from one another (Broadway et al. 2000).

One of the factors contributing to this continuing ethnic and racial segregation on the American campus is the prevalence of ethnic and racial student organizations, primarily consisting of student members from minority groups. A number of observers have argued that such organizations are “destructive to the creation of a common student identity and merely serve to maintain and even exacerbate ethnic tension, as well as to maintain the alienation and isolation of minority groups on campus” (Chavez, 1982:15).

By contrast, and using what could be regarded as the “multicultural perspective,” others have argued that ethnically oriented student organizations actually help provide

minority students with a social support system and “a safe harbor” that could be extended out to the campus community as well as other ethnic community members (Hurtado et al. 1999). The little empirical work that has been done on this question suggests that students join ethnic organizations for the purpose of identity enhancement. Increased comfort with one’s identity may, in turn, lead to a greater interest in cross-cultural contacts, a greater sense of belonging to the university community, and a greater integration into broader campus life (Rudiger et al., 2003:5).

These studies have focused specifically on the effects that minority ethnic organizations have on minority academic achievement (Gilliard, 1996), attrition rates (Reyes, 1997), and integration into campus life (Trevino, 1992). They have not, however, focused on the broad effects of these student organizations on intergroup attitudes and behaviors. All three of the cited studies conclude that participation in ethnic organizations enables minority students to experience less of a threat to their social identities and thus a greater sense of inclusion in campus life. They also conclude that this, in the long run, will contribute to greater intergroup contact and an improved intergroup atmosphere on campus.

My thesis aims to examine the roles of ethnic organizations by using an Asian sorority that has 80 percent Vietnamese as members at the University of Houston as a case study and Vietnamese sorority members as informants to represent one particular type of Asian ethnicity within an ethnic organization. Having done the snowball sampling technique before actually conducting the formal interviews, I had participated in informal conversations with several sorority members who told me that the majority of this sorority’s membership is Vietnamese. Realizing that, I became aware that these sorority

women seemed to illustrate many of the aspects of Asian culture, society and identity in American society.

Anthropologists usually use cognitive theory in narratives, which is a learning theory of psychology that attempts to explain human behavior by understanding the thought processes. The assumption is that humans are logical beings that make the choices that make the most sense to them (Quinn, 1997). Therefore, we can “organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on” (Bruner, 1991).

My thesis question is explored by culling narratives from Vietnamese sorority women to understand how they perceive themselves with respect to their own culture and the broader American culture. This study of the sorority and the participation of my Vietnamese-American informants, by analysis of their narratives, will shed light on two issues. The first is the issue of acculturation in American society, whereby the Asian women emulate European-American culture but choose to join an Asian organization. The second issue is the wider one of the role of ethnic organizations in American society.

Statement of the Problem

The role of ethnic organizations--and whether they create ethnic assimilation or separation in American society--has become a topic of active research and debate. In order to understand how individuals from particular ethnicities behave after joining an ethnic organization, the research should first focus on the issue of ethnicity. In order to provide a better understanding of my thesis subjects, who are Vietnamese-American

women, I will attempt a brief review of the Asian-American population as background information.

Issues of ethnicity have been one of the major problems throughout American history and are still of concern today in this “melting-pot” country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), the total Asian-American population increased by 46% between 2000 and 2010-- the largest increase of any major racial group during that period. It is my hope that this research will provide an important contribution to the understanding of American culture and “Americanization,” as perceived by racially distinct populations. I also hope to shed additional light on the debate concerning whether or not ethnic organizations foster more ethnic assimilation into mainstream American society.

Thesis Layout

In the following chapter, *Chapter 2 - Literature Review*, I have reviewed three major areas of interest that form a better understanding of my thesis question on the role of ethnic organizations. The first section reviews research on prejudice toward Asian women and concerns racial problems in the United States encountered by Asian women. This review is intended to give a general background of studies on prejudice, which relates to my five informants who are all Vietnamese women.

The second section in the *Literature Review* chapter reveals the historical background of the Vietnamese in the United States and specifically covers emigration to the United States and the adaptation and assimilation to American culture. The third section describes the role of ethnic organizations and the sorority as a subtype of the ethnic organizations, their effects on the participants, and whether they facilitate

integration into or separation from the broader American culture.

In *Chapter 3 - Theoretical Background and Methodology*, this chapter is classified into two main parts, theory and methodology.

In *Theoretical Background*, I review the major theoretical perspectives dealing with racial minorities in the United States, as well as ethnic identity and its changes due to participation in ethnic organizations. This chapter comprises two distinct sections:

Section 1, Social Constructivism, describes an anthropological perspective in which Ethnic Identity will also be discussed to better understand this concept.

Section 2, Organizational Culture, in which I discuss Ethnic Organizations and the effects of participation in them, which reveals how the organizational culture changes members, also called “enculturation,” or provides participants with different perspectives and strategies.

In *Methodology*, the data collection process of the thesis is described. This chapter details how informants are recruited and how the interview is conducted, along with the time frame and techniques used. I have chosen the narrative approach to data collection for my study of five Vietnamese women to better understand their behaviors and describe one subject matter deeply. In addition, the chapter describes how I started doing my research since the beginning until the end, as well as how I classified the data into the four categories of exploration in order to analyze how the organizational culture changes people or provides people with different perspectives and strategies. In sum, this section consists of four parts: (1) Participants and Data Collection Technique; (2) Narratives as method; (3) Interviewing Process; and (4) Data Analysis.

In *Chapter 4 - Report from Fieldwork*, I assume the role of investigative reporter. I report on the results of my exploratory case study of five Vietnamese women who are current or former members of an Asian sorority at the University of Houston, Texas, and from whom I culled narratives. I report the data with some of their quotations and categorize them into four categories of exploration in order to answer the thesis question. The actual names of the informants are given the aliases of flowers as pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Chapter 5 - Summary, Conclusions and Direction for Further Study, I classified this chapter into four sections. First, I present the analysis and conclusions of the four categories of exploratory (self identity, kinship, personal relationships and sorority participation) from chapter 4, *Report from Fieldwork*, in which I came up with the three findings, described in detail in the second section. In the third section, I chose six important emic terms, used by the informants, that I gained from the interviews and finished the chapter with the potential significance for future research.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

To answer the research question, I have chosen to review the literature in three fields of study that I feel have a direct bearing on the goal of my research. These are: (1) Prejudice against Asian Women, (2) The History of Vietnamese Women in the United States and Effects on their Acculturation, and (3) The Role of Ethnic Organizations and the Sorority as a Subtype of Ethnic Organizations.

Part 1: Prejudice against Asian Women

The internment of Asian-Americans--particularly of Japanese heritage--during World War II made them especially easy to exploit: they had lost their homes, possessions, and savings when forcibly interned at the camps. Asian women who immigrated to the United States prior to the 1960s were usually treated unfairly and were employed as servants or laundresses in the San Francisco Bay area (Sonia, 1997).

Furthermore, The Houston Chronicle (2002) published the results of a survey of 500 Asian-Americans led by Stephen L. Klineberg, a Rice University sociologist, indicating that Asian immigrants in Harris County, Texas tend to have a higher level of education as compared with other immigrants or White Americans when arriving in the US. However, it is interesting to see that those who do well in this country have not earned their achievements as they expected due to the difficulty of language barriers and the obstacles that come from being a foreigner in a foreign land.

Li and Beckett (2006) summarized that Asian-American women in the academic and business worlds are still treated as “strangers” in their own workplace due to *race*

and *gender stereotypes*. Chen compared this to the experience of White women, who had no perceived language difficulties (e.g., accent discrimination), different leadership styles (e.g., lacking authority), and suffered less from over-feminization images (e.g., cute, passive, small), a “chilly climate” for women, white privilege, “male values,” and “Euro-centric male norms” (Chen et al, 2001). Because mainstream U.S. society regards Asian-Americans as foreigners and second-class citizens at best, Asian-Americans in general receive unequal treatment in job training and hiring (Huang et al., 2010). This causes problems by inhibiting career advancement, job security, and career satisfaction for Asian-Americans and particularly for Asian women.

Part 2: The History of Vietnamese Women in the United States and Effects on Their Acculturation

According to the American Immigration Law Foundation (2005), the history of Vietnamese immigration to the United States is fairly recent. Most Vietnamese-Americans are either first or second generation Americans, due to the recent migration, the first wave of which was prior to 1975. By the 1990s, most Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. had come to join their families and friends in metropolitan areas and had started their own ethnic Vietnamese communities.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 1,223,736 Vietnamese-Americans in the United States, making them the fifth largest Asian immigrant group after Chinese, Filipino, Indian and Korean. The Census statistics further reported that one million Vietnamese-Americans spoke Vietnamese at home--making Vietnamese the seventh most spoken language in America, which could certainly impact the tendency to preserve

language and culture. According to one expert, in 2005 Houston had 32,000 Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Americans, making it the second largest Vietnamese-American community in the United States, after that of San Jose, California (Harkinson 2005).

The large number of Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. has caused concern over the impact of this immigration on the political, social, economic and cultural spheres of American society. Some cross-cultural researchers view culture as encompassing “the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group” (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs 1989).

A Special Study of The U.S. Bureau of the Census, called *Population Profile of the United States: America at the Close of the 20th Century*, also notes that each Asian ethnic group has its own cultural background and history that may affect health. It is therefore essential to study deep cultural backgrounds of an ethnic group in order to provide a better understanding of situations or problems encountered (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999).

Mai Le Del Buono, a professor in Ethnic Studies Department at the San Jose University states that many Vietnamese refugees suffered from mental health problems during immigration to the United States. They faced sudden and drastic transplantation to a foreign culture, being held in political prisons in Vietnam for over a decade or spending years in harsh conditions in refugee camps (Del Buono, 2008). After the Vietnam War, there were many who suffered prior, during, and after refugee immigration, due to political and economic problems, and the struggle of acculturation and adaptation to Western life (Del Buono, 2008). This occurred chiefly among elderly Vietnamese, who

were at higher risk of psychological distress than younger Vietnamese, due to fewer buffers and coping strategies to deal with their distress (Del Buono, 2008).

Del Buono identifies several conditions that distinguish the adaptation and acculturation patterns of recent Vietnamese immigrants. The transformation in the U.S. labor market, the ethnicity of the immigrants, and the geographic location of where they settled are the main conditions. Obviously, economic conditions in general always affect new workers into the labor market. The ethnicity of immigrants can also affect how they are perceived or stereotyped by the dominant culture (Del Buono, 2008).

Del Buono further mentioned that financial status of the laborers also relates to the location where they settle, as the economic conditions of any particular location factor into the success of immigrants in their adaptation. To understand the adaptation experiences of Vietnamese women immigrants in the United States, one must take into account the intersection of race, class, and gender: race is “gendered” and gender is “racialized” (Del Buono, 2008). Therefore, the combination of race and gender can create unique experiences, not just women with colors, but for all groups .

The study of the Vietnamese women’s adaptation to the U.S. culture revealed a selective assimilation approach. The older women who came to the U.S. later in life seemed to have had more difficult challenges in overcoming the loss of their home country and in making shifts in their outlook and behavior. On the other hand, the women who came to the U.S. early in their lives have similar feelings but different experiences and challenges than did the older ones. Most of the Vietnamese women, regardless of age, have experienced conflicts and tensions in their relationships and families related to role expectations brought from Vietnam. The significant differences between Vietnamese

and U.S. cultures have a significant impact on the mental and physical health of these women.

According to W.K. Yee (n.d.), Vietnamese culture values traditional health beliefs and practices that are handed down through the generations. In addition, Yee claims that acculturation stress, depression and mental health issues are not often incorporated into physical health research designs for Asian and Pacific Island (API) populations.

Pamela M. Peeke and George P. Chrousos, researchers in Developmental Endocrinology Branch, National Institutes of Health, claim that acculturation stressors can be measured by high cortisol levels, which can be risk factors for cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, as well as cancer. Some of the Vietnamese elders still continue to use backache remedies containing opium to cope with their acculturation stress in the United States. The main focus of mental problems among Vietnamese people has shifted to serious issues of chronic and genetic health concerns and diseases, such as cancer, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes (Peeke and Chrousos 1995).

In considering Vietnamese acculturation in the U.S., Bhatia, S. and Ram, A. (2001) claim that acculturation can be classified in varying degrees. For example, Vietnamese who come to the U.S. for economic gain seem to have more enthusiasm than political refugees for adapting themselves to American culture and encouraging their children to act accordingly. Those who believe that they are only staying temporarily in the U.S. tend to have less enthusiasm in trying to adapt themselves to American ways of life and may not see the importance of learning English as a priority.

In a similar fashion, those who live among members of their own ethnic group, in both their neighborhoods and in job situations, do not have a lot of exposure to

mainstream American people or culture. This may limit their adaptation to acculturation.

Gender role differences, marital and family conflict, language barriers, generational differences, feeling different, prejudice and stereotypes, discrimination, cultural engagement, preparation and education, raising children and financial problems are the main cultural factors contributing to the mental and physical health of most Vietnamese female immigrants. Del Buono claims that “Vietnamese women experience a high rate of discrimination in employment, making them particularly vulnerable to economic oppression” (Del Buono 2008:3). This discrimination could have a decided impact on how these women and their children experience life in America.

Culture defines the expression and experience of psychological distress, according to Nguyen, Messe, and Stollack (1999). The authors suggest that “illness is shaped by cultural factors governing perception, labeling, explanation, and evaluation of the distressing phenomenon.” Some cultural factors that are related to acculturation and adaptation of female refugees are as follows:

Family Roles

Family-centered social support systems play the most important roles in emotional, financial, and social supports among Vietnamese immigrants in the United States. Vietnamese value family above themselves, as they show great respect and obligation to their parents and other family members--which plays out in both shame and harmony in order to reinforce appropriate behaviors and encourage moderation in lifestyles. However, Z. D., Gellis (2003) submits that much of the past research has shown mixed results about the role of social support on psychological distress.

Gellis claims that the research can be classified into two schools of thought. One body of research holds that individuals with a strong social network or kinship tend to function better in crisis situations than those with a weak support system. Other research, however, found that immigrants with close kinship ties tend to have more psychological distress than those who have a weaker support system.

Gender Roles

Del Buono (2008) notes that many Vietnamese women became the leaders of the family instead of their husbands. They had to take on all responsibilities while their husbands were fighting in the wars. As in many other Asian cultures, women are subordinate to men. By tradition, they must obey their parents, husbands, and eldest sons. Hurtado (1996) claims that white women can be excluded from various types of power as well, but they are not encumbered with a cultural tradition of subordination. Interestingly, as concerns the issue of domestic violence, Del Buono (2008) discovered that Vietnamese women tend to ask for more help compared with other ethnic groups in the United States.

Health Issues among Vietnamese Female Immigrants

Depression and other mental illness can be perceived as the leading health issues among Vietnamese immigrants that can easily lead to other chronic diseases that can pass on to later generations. Pre-migration trauma, political prisons and refugee camp experiences were significant contributors to mental distress even after five years or more post-immigration.

Many researchers found that Vietnamese women may be more likely to

experience distress than their male counterparts due to the switching of gender roles, discrimination, rapid changes in acculturation and adaptation to Western life, female traditional beliefs and practices expected by elders in the family, and expectations from the dominant society.

Identifying with specific social categories not only shapes attitudes but affects behavior as well. Examining the primary significance of an ethnic or gender identity, Shih, Pittinsky and Ambady (1999) found that the performance of Asian American women on tasks shifted depending on which identity, Asian or female, was more salient. When an Asian identity was made salient, women scored higher on quantitative tests and lower on verbal tests than when their female identity was made salient. In that second scenario, the reverse outcomes were produced (Shih et al. 1999). By considering individuals' multiple identities, and focusing on how they can play different roles, the researchers uncovered an important aspect of stereotypes that might have been missed if the intersection of ethnicity and gender were ignored.

Part 3: The Role of Ethnic Organizations and the Sorority as a Subtype of Ethnic Organizations

Because of difficulties encountered with acculturation, assimilation or adaptation in the host society, ethnic minority people often seek ethnic organizations to learn, facilitate, and improve their way of living in the host society. In order to understand what effect ethnic organizations might have on the ethnic minorities with regard to integration, a brief description of the concept would be in order.

Integration means the process by which people who are relatively new to a country (i.e. whose roots do not reach deeper than two or three generations) become part

of society by assimilating to a homogeneous culture along with other ethnicities and their set of values (Rudiger et al., 2003: 5). Ethnic organizations, therefore, are created to facilitate and encourage cultural cohesion, bonding through social networks, and assimilation into the host culture (Rudiger et al., 2003: 5).

One school of thought holds that, by recognizing the multi-dimensional aspects of identity and multiple senses of belonging, ethnic organizations create self-confidence, as well as a layer of respect and recognition in social interaction. It is further thought that this deepens and stabilizes the interconnection of the members of an ethnic group and helps them, as a whole, assimilate or fit into a larger society.

The role of ethnic organizations, however, is still the subject of active debate among anthropologists and sociologists. This is particularly true on the question of whether participation in ethnic organizations will lead to affirming inclusion or separation in society. Harvard Psychology professor, James Sidanius and his colleagues found that much of the previous research on ethnic student organizations (ESOs) has failed to examine closely intergroup attitudes in relation to ESOs. Sidanius found that among both European-American and ethnic minority students, membership in an ESO was associated with increases in the “perception of group victimization, intergroup bias, and the view that each ethnic group had to compete against other ethnic groups for resources, jobs, and so forth” (Sidanius et al. 2004).

Abner and Lewit (1967) discovered that contact with *racemates* stimulate better group performance when they were high in ethnocentrism and aggressiveness. The issues became more controversial when forming a club or organization that focused

exclusively on the celebration of European-American culture, such as fraternities or sororities. Even though these organizations do not have that stated purpose, they have historically excluded minority students from varied ethnicities and aimed to serve the interests and needs of European-American culture (Sidanius et al. 2004).

This indicates that the object of the ethnic organizations can be seen in two different lights: (1) to encourage integration and a sense of being part of the larger culture; and (2) to promote exclusion and a feeling of marginalization and prejudice of the ethnic groups (Rudiger et al. 2003:6).

Talking about most of any sororities, they have based their strategies on supporting women and informing about idea of role behaviors about femininity strategies including of identifying themselves as a gender, ways of understanding their relationships with both men and women, their potential with career, the kind of supports one another- both within the sorority members and with other women or men (friendships), and any sexuality related issues. Also, since cultures have histories and always stay the same in a very long period of time or probably go on forever, they created their own ethics which sororities can be a good example to be studied as an organizational culture or as we also call them, “adaptive strategies” or teaching people how to deal with the world.

Therefore, culling narratives from the Vietnamese sorority women, and understanding their college experiences before and after joining an Asian sorority, will, it is hoped, clarify which of these two perceptions is more valid. This speaks to my research question of how participation in an ethnic organization facilitates a sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group within the larger society.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The theory section will draw upon two major theoretical perspectives: (1) Social Constructivism in anthropological perspectives, in which Ethnic Identity will also be discussed to better understand this concept; and (2) Organizational Culture, in which I will focus on Ethnic Organizations and the effects of participation in them.

The Methodology section in this chapter consists of four parts: (1) Participants and Data Collection Technique; (2) Narratives as method; (3) Interviewing Process; and (4) Data Analysis.

Theoretical Background

Social Constructivism

Among the important works of James Clifford, an anthropologist specializing in Constructivism, are *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) and with George Marcus *Writing Culture* (1986). Clifford's work attempts to answer what reality is, and how we come to know and describe another culture. *Social Constructivism* emphasizes how meanings and understandings grow out of social encounters. According to Anthropological Research Methods at the University of Idaho (Clifford 2012:2), *Social Constructivism* contends that:

"Categories of knowledge and of 'reality' itself are actively created by and are the products of social and symbolic relationships and interactions, all within the given temporal and spatial boundaries of a

cultural context. They are contingent on convention, language, human perception, and social experience. These interactions affect how we organize all aspects of our lives, from the way we define and know the sacred, to the way we conduct scientific investigation. What is thus real is that moment of intersection of those participating. Reality is ultimately understood as an event, as a 'process' of becoming, and not as a concrete, discrete object, though as a construct, reality could be defined in a multiplicity of ways. A concept or practice which may appear to be 'natural' and 'obvious' to those who accept it, but in reality is an invention or artifact of a particular culture" (Webpage).

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz also considers himself a social constructionist that he believes "meaning is socially, historically, and rhetorically constructed" (Geertz, 1973). He suggests, "Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their actions" (Geertz 1973:145). *Social Constructivism* may be defined as a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences (Gergen 1985). This means that there is no absolute truth and nothing caused by universal laws of society and nature.

Ethnic Identity

In order to understand what Social Constructivism is in particular culture, it is also important to understand the concept of ethnic identity. Anthropologist Martin Sokefeld states that the original meaning of "identity" was "sameness," which means "selfsameness" in psychology (Sokefeld 1990: 417). Identity is understood as a set of basic personal features of character developed since childhood and more or less remaining with the person once integrated. This identity creates a "human being," a person and an "acting individual." Sokefeld further states that the "inconsistency of personality" or "nonidentity" can lead to disturbance or even psychic illness. "Ethnic

identity” can be used as the concept of “identity” in cultural anthropology. Ethnic identity is the sameness of the self with others, sharing certain characteristics, such as language and culture, within that ethnicity or group that finally creates a group’s identity. According to Erikson (1980:109), “the term *identity* expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sharing of some kind of essential characteristics with others.”

The relationship between “identity” and “self” tend to be separately identified in anthropological studies. As Sokefeld stated:

“Non-Western (concepts of) selves—the selves of the people anthropology traditionally studies—are defined by the negation of these qualities. Similar to anthropological conceptualizations of identity, this understanding of non-Western selves points exclusively to elements shared with others and not to individual features. Consequently, anthropological discourse diverts attention from actual individuals and selves” (Sokefeld, 1990: 417).

Anthony P. Cohen, a social anthropologist with specialist interests in personal, social and national identity, proposes “a view of society as composed of and by self-conscious individuals” (Cohen 1994: 192). Also, obviously, while individuals are formed by society, at the same time culture and society are not mechanistic reproducers of themselves. Cohen stated:

“The self is [not] autonomous--such a claim would be facile. Selves are acted upon; they are social. They are also cultural. But the self is not passive as a subject of society and of culture; it has agency, is active, proactive, and creative. Constituted by society and made competent by culture, individuals make their worlds through their acts of perception and interpretation. The external world is filtered, and, in the process, remade, by the self” (Cohen, 1994:115). Thus the self, according to

Cohen, "can be made competent by culture without being subjugated by it" (Cohen 1994:117).

Following the social constructionist view, ethnic identity refers to how individuals choose to identify with a particular group based on cultural similarities, including religion and language, as well as perceptions of political and material interests (Cornell and Hartman 1998; Omi and Winant 1994). Many scholars agree that ethnicity is a socially constructed phenomenon that can embody various social meanings in multiple contexts (Barth 1969; Cornell and Hartman 1998; Omi and Winant 1994).

Cohen further suggests that for anthropologists to take the approach he advocates is "to give others back their selfhood," thus contributing, however simply, "to the decolonisation of the human subject." Hence, the analysis of Self Identity of The Flowers hopes to provide further examples of selfhood, and to what extent it has been taken away by the predominant society or has remained attached to its own roots (Cohen 1994:192) .

Organizational Culture

Bruce M. Tharp, an anthropological researcher from the University of Chicago, claims that a 1998 study identified 54 different definitions of organizational culture within the academic literature between 1960 and 1993 (Tharp 2005). One of the best definitions is from a highly respected management theorist, Edgar Schein of MIT's Sloan School of Management. He offered a clear definition of organizational culture: "A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid

and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein 1992:12).

Schein states that even though there is the role that values play in organizational culture, many researchers agree that, "it is erroneous to ascribe values, which are inherently human and located only in individuals, to a corporate entity or to a group of individuals." To clarify this position, the values of a few particularly influential leaders can influence the other workers or participants and finally influences company behavior. These assumptions are unconsciously created under "determinants of an organization's attitudes, thought processes, and actions." These assumptions are central to its culture. They usually provide a tacit sense of security and an unquestioned impetus for perceptions and behavior (Tharp 2005).

Tharp believes that "scholarly understanding of the social and symbolic processes of the workplace continues to expand in breadth and refine in depth as organizational behavior and organizational management scholars build upon social scientific theories and methodologies. A function of industry type, national culture, environmental factors, as well as the vision, goals, and strategy, an organization's culture affects its structure, practices, policies, and routines" (Tharp 2005). Therefore, understanding and analyzing organizational culture can empower the corporate leaderships in knowing how best to influence individuals or the group to maximize performance and achieve their goals.

Ethnic Organizations

Techniques of organizational culture can be applied to ethnic organizations as well. One school of thought states that the role of ethnic organizations is to promote the

individual's sense of belonging, self-confidence, and assimilation into the larger society, as well as contributing to better social interaction by respecting people from different ethnicities. However, Abner and Lewit (1967) hold that the interaction of people from the same ethnicity who participate in the same clubs or organization that aim to promote their ethnic culture, like sororities or fraternities, can stimulate ethnocentrism and racial bias. As mentioned previously, the role of ethnic organizations is the subject of debate among theorists in anthropology and sociology. The key issue is whether participation in ethnic organizations will lead to affirming inclusion in or separation from the broader society.

The Effects of Participation in Ethnic Organizations

Scholars in social identity start with the premise that people classify themselves and others based on various social or demographic groups, for example, gender, ethnicity, religion, and occupation (Turner 1982). This social classification scheme provides individuals with a means of defining themselves through a sense of oneness, or identification with a particular group. Therefore, identity is essentially the set of beliefs or meanings that answer the question, "Who am I?" (Mead 1934), or in the case of an organization, "Who are we?"

Immigrants to the US face numerous challenges as they struggle to assimilate into American society while trying to retain their cultural and ethnic identity. Immigrants, as a group, also have had difficulty maintaining their cultural and ethnic identity. In fact, certain groups of immigrant populations that have not been homogeneous have had the hardest time keeping their distinctiveness.

Many immigrants have described a fear of losing their ethnic identity and the need to take steps to find it or regain it. They also talked about needing to guard their

identity and did this by being cautious about who they associated with, their lifestyle and their activities. Family alone is not sufficient in attempting to maintain ethnic identity. Ethnic organizations, therefore, are created to help retain ethnic identity.

As people from the same ethnicity normally share the same culture—framing how organizational members perceive, think and feel—it is acknowledged that each organizational culture has its own social structure which drives the individual behaviors within it. According to Kilmann (1986), "People define culture as when they perform tasks, solve problems, resolve conflicts, and treat members in a consistent way... culture is defined as “the informal values, norms, and beliefs that control how individuals and groups in an organization interact with each other and with people outside the organization” (Kilmann et al. 1986:89).

Most systems of social organization, therefore, attempt to control the variability of member behavior. Whether it is a business organization, a club, community or nation, social systems need to limit certain behaviors and encourage others. Consequently, people in organizations emphasize certain aspects of identities, present certain histories and selected traditions to claim their identities and represent their interests (Kurien 2005: Kurien 2004). It can be implied that ethnic organizations can be a big influence on the identities of members and, at the same time, identity formation of members can also demonstrate the power of such organizations to construct and impose authoritative versions of ethnicity.

Researchers have been attempting to determine whether ethnic organizations really help enhance integration and lessen feelings of prejudice or, alternatively, if they actually produce exclusion and a feeling of marginalization. Sidanius et al. (2004)

question the claim that ethnic organizations create integration and a sense of belonging for the ethnic minority participants in the host society. They suggest that modern theories of intergroup relations, such as social identity theory, should be applied in research in order to find straightforward predictions on the effects of ethnic organizations on the identities of its members. Duckitt (1989) stated that the major theme of social identity theory has been broadly interpreted to mean that in-group identification is causally related to intergroup bias and intergroup discrimination.

Turner (1999) also believed that in-group identification is most likely to lead to intergroup bias when: 1) the individual categorizes “the self” in terms of membership in the relevant group; 2) the social identity is salient with respect to some comparative judgment; 3) the in-group and out-group are perceived to be interrelated within an overall social structure; 4) the dimension of intergroup comparison is relevant to intergroup status relationships; and 5) the out-group is relevant to the particular comparative judgment being made.

This application of social identity theory would lead American ethnic groups or other minority racial groups to expect that—rather than generally improving the sense of intergroup relations—activities that further increase the degree of racial and ethnic identities (e.g., ethnic organizations) may increase rather than decrease the amount of intergroup bias, intergroup tension, and ethnic separation from the dominant culture.

METHODOLOGY

Part 1: Participants and Data Collection Technique

Over the course of several months in late 2013 and early 2014, I met with five Vietnamese-American women--Lily, Lotus, Orchid, Jasmine and Rose ("The Flowers")--on multiple occasions, using the snowball sampling technique. From the interviews, the research identified the women about their thoughts and opinions on the categories of exploration of self-Identity, kinship, personal relationships, and sorority participation. I will explore these four categories and analyze whether the beliefs and behaviors of the informants can be related to the role of the sorority, and whether it creates more separation from or a sense of belonging into American society.

I also conducted participant observation by joining in some sorority events, e.g. the philanthropic and sport events, and by simply "hanging out" with the women on certain occasions. My relationships with The Flowers have been growing stronger each day. In fact, with one particular Flower, I have a high level of trust and the closeness that I would feel with my own sister. These Vietnamese sorority women have been very kind and helpful to me. They have been willing to help me whenever I needed some more information. Even when I was not seeking their input, they would ask me to join them for dinner or simply to be together.

The process of learning different cultural perspectives from them--in both Vietnamese and American ways--and exchanging ideas and attitudes was very interesting to me. Our mutual trust developed by being honest and straight-forward with each other. Even though I was not able to join the sorority officially (only open to undergraduate students), I realized that I had gained some insights that served to open my mind and give

me a better understanding of the Vietnamese and American cultures, while simultaneously fostering our relationship.

The data that was gathered in this research, therefore, was based on culling narrative accounts of the Vietnamese sorority women's experiences, perceptions, social relationships, and the sense of inclusion and belonging or, alternatively, exclusion and marginalization in social settings. The analysis of the interviews elicited thematic material, which was then used to formulate conclusions that help us learn about identity development and the process of integration or exclusion that could accompany one's years in sorority life. The interviews were free and open-ended. The six emic terms gained from the narratives of the informants will be described as a guideline for future research.

To guide the interviewee to a standard list of issues, however, I oriented the dialogues according to the following aide-memoire, which is a list of the topics I wanted to cover, including:

- Reasons for Joining Sorority/ Compare Sororities/Organizations
- Stereotypes/Changing Perceptions of Vietnamese women
- Perceived Diversity among East Asian Americans
- Ownership of Vietnamese Identity
- Sorority and College Experiences
- Building Bonds with other Vietnamese Women/ Other Ethnic communities
- Fitting In: Vietnamese-American Identity/ Americanization
- Sense of Belonging/Assimilation/Acculturation/ Separation before and after Joining a Sorority
- Challenges faced: Cultural/ family perception/community perception
- Most memorable moments in sorority life

The requirements for the subjects recruited are as follows:

- 1) The subjects must be at least 18 years of age

- 2) The subjects must have been active in the sorority for at least one full semester or have become graduate alumnae
- 3) The subjects have to be Vietnamese women who were born in the United States or have been living in the United States for at least eight years

Once a sorority member expressed her interest in being a participant in this in-depth interview through my initial contact (cell phone or email) or through personal interaction at an event, I offered the subjects a consent form to read, as well as the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the research goals before the actual interview. They were also informed that their interview would be confidential.

I also informed the potential subjects that they were free to refuse or to withdraw from doing the interview at any time without any negative consequences. If the participants agreed to be interviewed, they would be asked to sign and return the consent form.

Part 2: Narratives as Method

The concept of Narratives--the method I chose to describe my research findings--is a method that has been employed only very recently. Bruner (1991) states that it was only around the 1980s that psychologists began to explore the possibility of the use of narrative as a form to present and constitute reality. In the Introduction to this thesis, I noted that anthropologists usually use cognitive theory in narratives, which includes learning theory of psychology that attempts to explain human behavior by understanding the thought processes.

Linde (2009:5) gets the meaning of individual life stories by looking at the “life story of groups” and asking “what is it, how is it told, who tells it, and what is it used for.” In order to understand those questions within those “life story of groups”, we need to get the essence of narratives, which is “to make connections to link events, feelings,

experiences into a neat, tidy, logical and consequential sequence” (Sikes et al. 2006). And in order to get those life story connections, there are storylines that help clarify the data. Hence, storylines can provide people with templates or scripts for shaping or making sense of their lives in that they show how others have dealt with particular events, problems and experiences (Sikes et al. 2006).

Part 3: Interviewing Process

I conducted one-on-one interviews with five Vietnamese sorority women. They were recruited through the snowball sampling method. This means that the subjects that I had interviewed could suggest other potential subjects among their peers to be interviewed via email, cell phone, and Facebook sorority group messages, as well as through personal interaction at social events held by the sorority.

Each interview took about an hour and I conducted possibly two or three more interviews with the same subject, if more information was required. In addition to the consent form, and in order to protect their privacy and confidentiality, the names of those agreeing to participate were replaced by the names of flowers.

The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and the data coded to observe patterns of the culture. I made sure that the subjects could feel free to take a break during the interview, choose to answer only the questions they wanted to answer, and choose to withdraw from participation in the research with no negative consequences. The interviews took place in a public location, with adequate protection for privacy, such as a booth at a coffee shop or, if the subject preferred, at the library.

Some interview questions had the potential to cover negative or uncomfortable

events related to ethnic identity experiences and cultural adaptation in ethnic communities and in college life, which might cause stress or discomfort. The subjects were assured that they had the freedom to stop the interview or skip any questions. The risk associated with this study was no greater than in everyday life. The consent document also informed potential subjects that, if they experienced any stress or discomfort from the interview, they could visit Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the University of Houston main campus. I reminded the subjects of this concern again before the interview began.

Part 4: Data Analysis

Once I transcribed all the interviews from The Flowers, I used the process of open coding to gain the conceptual categories in the data, which will form the basic units of my analysis. In other words, the data was broken down into first-level concepts, or master headings, and second-level categories, or subheadings, for further and deeper analysis. By means of open coding, the thematic or conceptual categories could be linked with the repeating subtopics from each interviewee.

I used highlights to distinguish concepts and categories from all the interviews. For example, every time an interviewee mentioned family, or something related to the family, I put the same color highlight and used different colored highlights to distinguish each broad concept and category (Biddix 2009). This resulted in four different colors and that were transferred into a brief outline, with the categories comprising main headings and subcategories comprising subheadings.

The data led me to formulate four categories of exploration, namely self-identity,

kinship, personal relationships and sorority. I used one of the data analysis methods called axial coding to compare the categories and subcategories while re-reading the text to make sure that the categories and subcategories accurately represent interview responses and to explore how the categories and subcategories are related (Biddix 2009). In analyzing this relationship, I had to ask the following questions: What conditions caused or influenced categories and subcategories? What is/was the social/ political context? and What are the associated effects or consequences? (Biddix 2009).

At the conclusion of this process, I analyzed the data in order to understand the inter-relatedness of the thematic categories, which resulted in shedding light on the questions posed in this study (Biddix 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR- REPORT FROM FIELDWORK

An Exploration of the Role of Sorority Participation in the Lives of Five Vietnamese-American Students

INTRODUCTION

My engagement with my interview subjects and the methods that I used in investigation will be described at the beginning of this chapter. Discussion of each of the four categories of exploration--self-identity, kinship, personal relationships, and role of the sorority--will follow a similar pattern. I will first explain why this particular category was chosen, followed by the attitudes and opinions of my interview subjects and the impact of sorority life surrounding each category. The organizational culture theory and the social constructivism theory will also be applied to some categories if needed. This information is culled directly from the narratives of my interview subjects and I provide direct quotations as appropriate.

As an Asian woman and an immigrant, I held some assumptions about what the responses of my informants would be. Analysis of data that I collected from these interviews validated my assumptions in some cases. In others, my assumptions proved not to be valid.

Engagement with “The Flowers”

In both formal interviews and informal social settings, I engaged with the five Vietnamese-American sorority sisters over a period of several months in 2013 and 2014. I attended at one of their birthday parties, sorority events, the Lunar New Year party, and

dinners. Doing participant observations at these events allow me to see how The Flowers interact with each other when they get together, what language they speak, how they perceive or behave towards one another or other people around them. All of these will reflect their "behaviors" and "self-identities," which can be used as a means to evaluate the data that I gained from the interviews.

I conducted open-ended interviews by using snowball sampling, which means that once I interviewed one person, that person recommended me to another sorority sister for me to interview. I kept repeating this process until I had five informants. I interviewed The Flowers--each on multiple occasions--recording and transcribing our interviews, until I had enough data to be analyzed. In addition, I also did the participants observation with The Flowers to see their behaviors or how they acted towards different situations. I also socialized together on many occasions such as the sorority events or just simply hangouts, either one-on-one or in small groups.

Part 1: SELF-IDENTITY

Choice of Category

I chose this category, Self-Identity, because every one of The Flowers had mentioned it when talking about her Vietnamese or American identity. I found this category to be quite important, in that it reveals the attitudes of the informants toward the American and Vietnamese people, language use, discrimination and stereotypes. The frame of reference in terms of time was the period including high school through entering the University of Houston and joining the sorority, as well as general family background beginning in childhood. For purposes of study, I have classified this category into seven

sub-categories, in which I explore the attitudes and opinions of The Flowers:

- 1.1 Other Vietnamese who are Recent Immigrants from Vietnam
- 1.2 Vietnamese People who were Born in the United States
- 1.3 Use of the Vietnamese Language
- 1.4 Traditional Roles of Vietnamese Women
- 1.5 Cultural Differences between Vietnamese and Americans
- 1.6 Ease of Interaction between Vietnamese and Americans
- 1.7 Discrimination and Stereotyping by Westerners

Attitudes and Opinions of The Flowers

1.1 Vietnamese People who Were Born in the United States

Four of the five flowers--Lily, Jasmine, Orchid and Lotus--had some common attitudes of the Vietnamese people who were born in the United States. They mentioned that Vietnamese people who were born in the United States are losing their Vietnamese culture, becoming Americanized and preferring to speak English rather than Vietnamese. Having spent time with them, I have also seen that they all communicate with each other in English. Some of them told me that Vietnamese “sounds weird” and that they feel uncomfortable speaking it. However, Lily is the only one speaks Vietnamese the most as she raised by her grandmother who does not speak English, and she also has other Vietnamese friends who speak Vietnamese that are not in the sorority. She also got married a Vietnamese man who is an international student who just came to the United States a couple of years ago. She mentioned that the Vietnamese people here want to be American and are losing the Vietnamese language and culture. In Lily’s words:

I think that they have lost a lot of culture, majority of them ‘cause most Vietnamese girls do not speak Vietnamese anymore. They don’t understand, or they kind of understand but they can’t speak it. For sure.

Pretty much 80% cannot write. That was for the ones who were born here. And the ones who come here from Vietnam, of course they can do that still, but the culture is just gone. Everyone wants to be American.

Rose, on the other hand, had a different perspective:

I'm glad I was born here. I get to interact with more people since America is like a melting pot, like they just talk to everyone and learn their culture, whereas Vietnam is just like one culture that you are exposed to. So I like that, learning about everyone else, what they do and.. I don't know I just like it here. It's different.

1.2 Other Vietnamese who Are Recent Immigrants from Vietnam

Of the five Flowers, Orchid is the only one who was born and raised in Vietnam and had immigrated to the USA within the past three years. She shared her views concerning the language barrier and being judged as a “nerd” or a “fob” (Fresh Off The Boat) who does not know how to socialize:

I lived in Vietnam for 15 years since I was born. At first, my English is really bad and then hmm.. at first I was in La Porte, Texas and then there was no Asian there so it was really really hard for me. Most of them are white so whatever I tried to say something I was like, wait, am I gonna say something wrong? Haha. Or wait, say it again, I can't hear you. Some people call you “fob,” it's like people who just came to the U.S. and their English is not good. So they call you fob. Haha they have a word for you. Haha I learnt a lot talking to them.

Orchid went on to say that the white people she encountered did not want to be friends with a “fob” because it is hard to talk with them, so she changed from being a very social person to a shy girl who lacked confidence. Sometimes she got laughed at when talking to people, so she ended up not having many friends.

From doing participant observation, it appeared to me that none of The Flowers-- except for Orchid--have any Vietnamese friends that have recently emigrated from

Vietnam. From time to time, Lily would mention to me, while we were having dinner together, that she does not mind being friends with recent immigrants, and it is good for her so that she can practice her Vietnamese with them. However, she thinks that she might not feel any closer with them because their thinking might be different. Lily said:

I think Vietnamese people who were born here think that the [newly-arrived]Vietnamese people are just hard to understand, difficult people I would say. And then difficult people are difficult people if you don't know how to deal with them. I think they would give respect to the older people. But with the same age people in America, like the international students, they think they're weird, they don't understand what we are doing. They don't understand American culture. They just don't want to interact with them because they feel like they're not American enough and they don't speak [English]... and they won't understand what we're talking about. And maybe some of them are shy to speak Vietnamese but the majority of them, they just cannot do it, and they just don't want to.

Lotus also added some more views on the Vietnamese who have recently come to the United States, and the difficulty of getting along with them due to the trust issues and cultural differences. She mentioned that the Vietnamese international students “dress up flashy,” and she prefers the ones who are already Americanized. However, she sees Orchid as different and she can get along well with her because she is more Americanized.

Rose has a different opinion, in which she thinks that the Vietnamese immigrants who just came to the United States are smart and realized that it is the land of opportunity and make the best out of it, unlike a lot of American people she knows that might overlook this point and might not make the best out of it.

Jasmine's perspective is similar to that of Lily and Lotus. She thought that

language is an issue and she could not understand the recent immigrants, but they are just another person even though her friends thought that these Vietnamese immigrants are “fob.” She added that she does not usually communicate with them either, but that is more because she is shy and does not like to approach someone first, not because they are immigrants.

I just think they’re another person, no big deal. But I heard people saying they’re fob because I know one of my friends kind of ignore them because she can’t understand them. The language barrier you know. But if they approach, I’m not gonna be, like, why you’re approaching me? I wouldn’t be like that, but I wouldn’t approach anyone to hang out or be friends. For me, I’m not that kind of person to approach anyone, anyway. That’s not me.

1.3 Use of the Vietnamese Language

Lily and Lotus also share the same view that the Vietnamese who have recently arrived in the United States have tried to be American and fit in, and they are difficult to get along with because of the language barrier. Lily mentioned that her Vietnamese friends do not like speaking in Vietnamese because it sounds weird and the Vietnamese immigrants who have just recently moved to America do not want to speak Vietnamese because they want to improve their English. There should be a balance.

Orchid is a relatively recent immigrant from Vietnam and she is the least fluent in English. The other four Flowers--Lily, Lotus, Jasmine and Rose--were all born in the U.S. and raised in the English-speaking public school system. When I asked them about the frequency with which they spoke Vietnamese, their answers illustrate whether they were raised with their elders enforcing the speaking Vietnamese at home. Lily speaks

fluent Vietnamese because of the family in which she was raised. She said:

My grandma raised me up speaking Vietnamese actually. I have a really small family and my mom always works. We just got closer when I got older. But she never was around when I was little. And I never met my dad until I grew up. So I was raised by my grandmother and my uncle. And my grandmother doesn't speak English, so that kinda helps me. We all speak Vietnamese at home.

Having been close to her grandmother who does not speak English at all, Lily has spoken Vietnamese with her and other members of her family since birth. She also spoke in Vietnamese with everyone in her family with whom she was living before she married an international Vietnamese student. Her marriage made her want to preserve the Vietnamese language and culture to pass on to her future kids.

The enforcement at home also applies to all of The Flowers who were born in the United States. Neither Lotus, Jasmine nor Rose speak or write Vietnamese as well as Lily because there was no enforcement of speaking Vietnamese at home. For example, Lotus revealed, in answer to my question on language use:

Vietnamese and English, but mostly in English. The only time I talk Vietnamese is with my grandma or my aunt and uncle, but most of the time in English. 'Cause my grandma doesn't know English. Me, I understand and I can keep the conversation you know, but when they start talking slang or like high vocabs [difficult words], then I don't understand it. Lily's Vietnamese is much better than mine though. But I can understand when she and David talk, I can keep up the conversations with them you know. But I cannot write, sometimes I can read it, but not a lot though.

She further mentioned that the later generations, her younger siblings, are even worse because they speak only English, except the youngest one who stayed with his grandmother most of the time when her parents went to work, just like in Lily's case, so he can still get to speak Vietnamese more.

In the case of Orchid, who just recently moved from Vietnam to the United States, her family speaks in Vietnamese all the time. Orchid's English skills have been much better developed because she is a social person and gets to speak English a lot at school. Orchid's parents and her older sister's English-speaking ability has not been improved as much as hers because they lack social opportunities with native English-speakers.

1.4 Traditional Roles of Vietnamese Women

When asked about their perceptions concerning traditional Vietnamese women, three of the five Flowers, with the exception of Lotus and Jasmine, mentioned traditional Vietnamese clothing and cooking. Jasmine and Lily think that traditional Vietnamese women are demanding and difficult people and hard to please. As Jasmine said,

I think they are demanding, like you have to be a doctor or a pharmacist or engineer, like you have to bring a lot of money. I feel like they're too forceful, like the parents want us to be successful. They forgot about what do their kids want, do they even know. And that's scary. Like I will be very like omg, "I have to do it, or they will punish me." I think they're also strict, close minded. But I don't think it's just the traditional Vietnamese women, I think it's the traditional Asian women in general too, cause other races are like that too if they're mom, it's just the traditional thing, doesn't matter what race you are. They expect so much that you can't give to them.

Lotus also mentioned that her mom is a good example of the traditional Vietnamese women, in so far as she viewed them as proud and always having to look presentable, and that image is everything. Lotus also believes that traditional Vietnamese women can be ethnocentric or do not understand why Americans do certain things and they think it is not normal. For example, they would not think greeting different genders

by hugging is appropriate as well as couples staying together before marriage.

1.5 Cultural Differences between Vietnamese and Americans

The women who were born here mentioned that they are more American than Vietnamese, and they are losing their culture, but they usually adhere to some traditional values, such as language use, food and lifestyle, for example cooking and taking care of the house and the kids. Lily, Lotus and Rose all expressed the same considerations about being Vietnamese: giving respect to older people and parents, practicing their culture (such as listening to traditional music and dressing in traditional clothes), and speaking Vietnamese.

Lily mentioned that being American means: “You work in the business with them or you work in a company with them instead of doing things that separate you from American culture such as a nail salon.” Lily (even though she married a Vietnamese immigrant) holds the opinion that the traditional Vietnamese are difficult people compared with Americans, and it is hard to approach them sometimes. They also still have their own mindset and think the way they did in Vietnam, which is hard to please and not being open minded enough to try to learn the language and fit in with American culture.

On the other hand, Jasmine (who was born in America and was raised in the American way) has some interesting opinions on this, as she believes that everyone is different and there is no category in each ethnicity and culture.

I've risen up more Americanized than Vietnamese. I wouldn't know how I would be expected to be if I were in Vietnam. If I was raised up in Vietnam and still there, I think I would be expected to.. I don't know. Like for example, there are so many people in America, everyone is so different, there's no certain category--that not all Americans are open-minded or closed-minded. So I wouldn't say that American has one identity and the Vietnamese has one identity. There're so many people you know. That's my perception.

I can't have a general theme because I can't measure every American theme or having something in common. They're just American, that's it. We're just Vietnamese, that's it. Like some Vietnamese could be very traditional and some could be very Americanized like my parents, but some Vietnamese family could be very traditional or Vietnamese. Same thing as American culture I guess. Some parents are very traditional too, but then some parents could very Americanized. It depends on what kind of family you've raised in.

Orchid, who is a recent immigrant, has another perspective on Vietnamese traditional women. She thinks that the women try to keep their traditional way of living. As for herself, Orchid finds that there is a great deal of freedom in America. She talks about the first day she went to school and found that women can dress really sexy to school. Also, the ways students treat their teachers at school which could be considered disrespectful if they were in Vietnam. The students can do whatever they want in class such as sleeping, eating, putting their legs on the table. At first she thought that they are lazy, lack of discipline and would fail in class, and the teachers do not care about them. However, she realizes that that is how American students do. If they do not study, they would fail without doubts. This could be one way of building personal discipline without having someone to tell how to behave or having to follow lots of rules and enforcement like the schools in Vietnam. She also found a lot of her college friends moving out from their parents and are able to earn money at their ages. She used to get culture shock when

she first arrived in the United States, but she likes the freedom in American culture because it helps her become more independent and learn to survive in the big world without the help of her parents. She is being more acculturated than assimilated in American culture. She has been trying to fit in and learn how to think like the American people but at the same time still wants to keep following her Vietnam norms or tradition. Even though her parents pretty much let her do whatever she wants in the United States because they trust her, she still thinks of respecting and following her Vietnamese cultures such as being respectful to older people or teachers at school or not dressing too sexy in public.

1.6 Ease of Interaction between Vietnamese and Americans

Four of the five Flowers had the same attitude about the ease of interaction between Vietnamese and Americans after joining the sorority. From my participant observations, it would appear that most of The Flowers have more Asian friends than other ethnicities. However, they thought that it does not depend on the ethnicity but on a person and how close you are to that person, as well as if they are friendly and get along well with each other or not. Four Flowers expressed the same concept--that they do not judge people on ethnicities or clothes they are wearing. For example, according to Jasmine:

I wouldn't choose because of the ethnicity, and I wouldn't choose on how she's wearing. It doesn't matter what race you are to make me feel comfortable or uncomfortable. It could be Asian but look really mean and like don't talk me, I wouldn't talk to you even though you're Asian. And then it could be white girls and they look so nice and they talk to everyone, see I would rather approach those girls because they look nicer, and approachable. So, it's not a race thing. I don't like judging people

though, so why am I judging people you know.

Only Lotus has a different perspective on this, as she believes that American people are easier to get along with. She would also rather choose to be American as she thinks American people have more freedom and are independent. Lotus also felt awkward hanging out with Asians even with the sorority girls sometimes. She also has to take time to be close with someone even if they are not Asian.

Lily, on the other hand, also prefers hanging out with American-born people as she mentioned that Vietnamese people are difficult and hard to get along with; however, it depends on the person. Getting married to a guy who is an international student from Vietnam proves the point that ethnicity, for her, is not the whole reason that she chooses or does not choose to be with someone, but it is the personality and attitudes that count. However, even though she thinks it is difficult to get along with the traditional Vietnamese people, but she is okay with being or talking with them because she was raised by a very traditional grandmother. In addition, getting along with the traditional Vietnamese might not be as hard to do for her, as compared with the the other Flowers.

1.7 Discrimination and Stereotyping by Westerners

All five Flowers have experienced discrimination to some extent, especially during their elementary school years. They feel less discrimination when they get in higher education or in a diverse sphere. Lily expressed how bad she felt about discrimination against Asian people:

I heard recently that a group of a sorority performed with the white fraternity and they were attacked with racial slurs. And I still see that occasionally, and I take really offense to that. Cause I feel like the white

people do that kinda thing. They just narrow minded. I don't know, I really despise those people a lot. You don't know how much I hate them (giggling) oh my goodness!

Orchid seemed to experience more discrimination than the rest of The Flowers because she just recently moved to the United States. She did not have that many friends because they do not want to be friends with a “nerd” or a “fob” (recent immigrants to the United States who cannot speak English well). She talked about discrimination when she was in high school and said that she did not have many friends because of her poor English. She was laughed at sometimes and she really hated it when people made fun of her like that. She was upset because she has an outgoing personality and likes to talk a lot. Orchid's experience, however, has helped her develop empathy. She has a friend who recently moved from Taiwan and experienced the same type of discrimination.

The Role Played by the Sorority

The sorority seems to be a place where both American-born Vietnamese and the Vietnamese who are recent immigrants would have their social needs met. It is an American institution, open to all ethnicities, and formed to help create friendship and sisterhood. For example, Orchid found that, even though she had just come to the United States, the sorority has helped her to adapt to the American way of life and has helped her with the English language and the American culture. Though all of The Flowers had experienced minor discrimination such as being teased of being Asians during their childhood, they feel less discriminated in college because it is a big diverse community and people are grown up and tend to not bullying around like in the schools. Therefore, finding one's self, knowing people who are more like them, and helping to “fit in” can be what they expected to have in the sorority.

Part 2 - KINSHIP

Choice of Category

I chose this category, Kinship, as it portrays the general family life surrounding The Flowers. This was an attempt to find the similarities of Vietnamese cultural experience from the perspective of the four Vietnamese subjects who were born in the United States. More specifically, I was interested in how they were raised in America, how their families treated them, and how they evolved as they did. I was also interested to see if the informants changed any of their attitudes or behaviors regarding Vietnamese culture after joining the sorority.

Understanding the perspectives of the women on kinship could perhaps give us some insights on what change, if any, has occurred in their lives. It could also help us determine whether and to what degree membership in the sorority has affected their attitudes and behaviors on separation, acculturation or assimilation. For purposes of study, I have classified this category into three sub-categories:

1.1 Grandmother

1.2 Parents

1.3 Family as a Whole

Attitudes and Opinions of The Flowers

1.1 Attitudes towards the Maternal Grandmother

This sub-category, Attitudes towards the Maternal Grandmother, can be very important as Vietnamese older generation is always play big roles in a household because

Vietnamese people are taught to respect and listen to what the older people said in order to show them respects. Therefore, having an older generation at home usually plays a big role, regarding the ways of living and thinking in a family. Only Lily and Lotus still had their grandmothers living with them at home. The other Flowers had either never met their grandmothers or do not live with them. Lily, since her marriage, no longer lives with her grandmother. Lotus still lives with her grandmother.

Both women shared similar attitudes toward their grandmother. They mentioned that both of their grandmothers are very traditional and always stay at home and do housework, such as taking care of their young cousins, cleaning the house and cooking. They do not speak English nor do they seem inclined to learn it. They are “difficult people,” which to their granddaughters means a traditional Vietnamese woman who is demanding and hard to please.

In Lily’s case, for example, it was really hard for her grandmother to approve Lily’s former boyfriend (now her husband) who was from Vietnam. Grandmother did not trust him because he is an international student, who she thought just wanted a green card to stay in the United States. There was a political consideration as well. Lily’s husband from the north of Vietnam, which is governed by communists, whereas her grandmother was from the more democratic south, even though Lily’s husband David does not support communism.

Lily wanted to marry David, as she was convinced that he was a good guy and the right man for her. Her decision led to alienation between Lily and her Grandmother. Lily mentioned that her grandmother expected her to reciprocate for all the years that she had

spent taking care of Lily. The way that her Grandmother treated Lily, however, was to attempt to get Lily's attention by being critical and difficult. Lily decided to move out, "explore the world," and stay with her husband and live a life of "freedom," more independent of her grandmother. Lily said:

Oh man, that's so hard for my grandma cause if she wants to go traditional, she's a traditional ideal Vietnamese woman mother because she did everything; She cooked, she cleaned, and took care of her kids and grandkids. She doesn't know how to drive. She got into the right attitudes; she just goes for the right things and the best for people, but like... when it comes to her own children, sometimes she oblige to their mistakes sometimes because it's her child, it's different. It can.. most majority of the time, she's really fair, but there are certain things. For example, like... someone that marries into the family, she may or may not treat them differently depending for boys that marries into the family, she usually gives him a hard time because no one are good enough for her daughter her granddaughter, and she thinks they can always do better. And for girls who get marry in the family like my aunt, she doesn't wanna get to the bad side. She wants them to treat her son very well but they do but they don't really have the same amount of respect they do for her as she does everything. She still does the cooking and everything.

Lily and Lotus told me that they no longer want to stay at the same house with their grandmother because they are not treated like adults. Lotus also rarely talks to her grandmother. She had the habit of rushing to her bedroom and avoiding speaking with her grandmother because her grandmother always yelled a lot. It appears that the young women have absorbed themselves in the American way of living while their grandmothers have remained unassimilated or acculturated. This is most likely because the work of the elder women is home-based and they have no motivation to communicate in English or make American friends. Lily and Lotus found that living with their grandmothers can be difficult as their grandmothers do not understand how American

culture that Lily and Lotus grow up is like, which caused them arguments sometimes.

1.2 Attitude towards Parents

Only Lily has never met her father. The other four Flowers had shared similar attitudes about their fathers. All four women found their fathers to be quiet men who allow them to do what they want, compared with their moms. Moms usually do housework and also have other jobs too, while dads are workaholic but usually do not do housework. Moms are often seen as the boss in the house where dads and kids need to follow.

The parents of the Flowers have become less traditionally Vietnamese as time goes by, and their fathers are not as strict as their mothers, particularly after joining the sorority, as they want their daughters to be independent. The Flowers also mentioned that their fathers speak more Vietnamese than English, with the result that all five Flowers find it easier to communicate with their moms.

While the parents are very fashionable and follow the American fashion trends, they can also be ethnocentric and think that their culture is better or that American culture is unusual. Rose said:

I do talk to him but there's still some language barrier because he talks only Vietnamese but I do talk to him, but I do talk to my mom more in a sense. I mean I see her more often and she knows more English and she works at the place where she has to use English.

In the case of Orchid, who just recently came to the United States, her parents really trust her and let her do what she wants, just like those who were born or have been raised in the United States. Orchid said that her parents had a very different perspective

on living in America from that of traditional Vietnamese people, who were forced from their homeland as refugees. They are open-minded, want Orchid to become independent and are willing to adapt themselves to American culture while keeping their traditional Vietnamese culture in balance. For example, Orchid said that:

It's like holidays, like Chinese New Year. Here, we don't celebrate it, but my mother still celebrates it. Like then, she told me it's weird to call people the way like friendly because in Vietnam, whenever we see each other we are like hi, wave, or shake hands, but here whenever we see each other, we are like hugs. She's not really used to it so whenever I hug my friend or something, she told me you should not hug people like that as it is considered inappropriate. So it's like cultural difference.

1.3 Attitudes towards Family as a Whole

The four Flowers who have been raised in American way still follow some Vietnamese traditions to a certain extent. If there is a grandmother staying in the same household, there is a tendency that there will be a lot more rules and more traditions to follow. Also, there is more opportunity to keep speaking Vietnamese, as most of the grandmothers speak almost no English.

Lily felt strongly that she was forced to make a change in her living arrangements. She was raised from birth by her grandmother, and had many more rules and traditions to follow than did her contemporaries. In the end, traditional rules, expectations, misunderstandings, and arguments finally led to adaptation and change in her life. Lily finally decided to move out of her home, as she needed more independence and wanted to open her world.

Many of the family conflicts that the Flowers related to me occurred because of cultural differences. Regardless, it eventually depended on a person and the degree of

closeness with their grandmothers. Lotus's grandmother let her do whatever she wanted even though she might complain a lot. Her grandmother seems to be less strict than Lily's, but it could also mean that they do not have as close a relationship as Lily does with her grandmother.

Lotus and Lily both mentioned that felt that their personal growth had been held back because of the way their family treated them. Lotus said:

I'm not sheltered anymore because I go out and explore the world now. Back then, I knew nothing about the world. Back then, I don't understand even the concept of boyfriend and girlfriend, I didn't understand that. During the time when I was in highschool, I don't understand that either. Yea, and I don't understand the concept of like, why people do that stuff or you know, it took me awhile from high school until I finally caught on to how.. it's also like slang and bad words and stuff, I don't even know it. My friends don't swear back then, it's a private middle school, but high school, they did. But the middle I went is private. It was really sheltered, other middle schools, like in public schools, they know all those stuff. So, I grew up really slow. I just figured. I don't know if that helps. Cause that when I joined the sorority, I still didn't understand what the heck is this.

Surprisingly, Orchid, who came to the United States with her family in her teens, lives a more American lifestyle, compared with Lily and Lotus. She lives with her mother, father and an older sister. Her parents let her do whatever she wants because they trust her. They want her to be independent and they try to adapt themselves to American culture.

Her parents are still traditional and follow their ways of living in Vietnam to a certain extent. For example, if Orchid lived at home, she would also have more rules and probably a curfew as well, but they allowed her to live on campus in a dormitory. They trust her and they did not keep on checking her while she is staying on campus because they knew she had to study and be independent.

Moving to the United States was a huge challenge for all of them but, unlike forced refugees of earlier eras, they hoped for a better education for their kids and to pursue the American Dream, which is indicative of their intentions and the personality traits of the family. This makes it easier for Orchid to adapt and fit in to the American culture.

The ways the Flowers are treated at home by their grandmothers and parents illustrates how Vietnamese kinship operates within American culture. Those who stay with their grandmothers tended to have more restrictions and rules to follow, which meant that they tend to have more naive and unrealistic view of the world around them than those who do not. Being Vietnamese and having to follow traditional rules at home made them very slow to evolve and they did not know how to socialize or communicate with other people. This led to a sense of isolation and loneliness with a very limited number of friendships in their early years.

The Role of the Sorority

The Flowers looked to the Asian sorority to help them open up their world by meeting more people and gaining more experiences while still having the comfort of a shared cultural background. Sorority is a word that is derived from the Latin word soror, meaning “sister.” It is a very relevant relationship model, therefore, in an ethnographic discussion of kinship.

Orchid, who had recently came to the United States, and even though given more independence by her parents, had trouble socializing because of her limited English skills. Since she joined the sorority, her parents have allowed her to become more

involved in university life and have permitted her to live on campus in a dorm. She has made more friends who understand and are willing to help her with improving her English, without the discrimination she experienced in high school. She has also learned more about American culture and has tried to fit in better with both other Vietnamese and people of other ethnicities that she has encountered through sorority activities.

The sorority plays the additional role of a Vietnamese-American home, while at the university, where sorority sisters actively support each other. The sorority enables them to feel comfortable with university life, learn new experiences, reach out to more people from different ethnicities, and be independent. It also provides them with a balanced life where they can demonstrate their Vietnamese identity, while at the same time living like Americans.

Part 3 - PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Choice of Category

Personal Relationships was a recurring category in my discussions with The Flowers. My conversations and interactions with them permitted me a glimpse into their socialization skills, their friendship preferences, their changes in attitudes and behaviors, and how they saw that change in themselves from middle school time through college. In addition, I was able to determine the extent to which joining the sorority had any impact on their attitudes and behaviors. In particular, I was able to examine the degree of interaction with different ethnicities and friendship choices, from which I drew conclusions on whether the sorority creates more ethnic separation or ethnic assimilation in American society. For purposes of study, I have classified

the reports of The Flowers into three categories of attitudes and opinions:

- 1.1 Friends during Middle and High School Years
- 1.2 Friends in College
- 1.3 Boyfriends

Attitudes and Opinions of The Flowers

1.1 Friends During Middle and High School Years

Four of the five Flowers attended ethnically diverse schools where white people were in the majority, followed by Hispanic, African-American and Asian, in that order. Only Rose went to a school where the majority of students were African American. My assumption had been that The Flowers would feel closer to the other Asians in their high schools, as they might want to stick within their own ethnic group. This assumption proved to be incorrect.

Three of The Flowers usually hung out with European-American and Hispanic, and not necessarily with other Asians during their school period. Three out of the five Flowers mentioned that they purposely did not hang out much with Asians during high school, as they found that they are too sensitive, difficult and too clannish. According to Rose,

I don't really have a problem besides with the Asian, they are too close to each other and they tend to have drama, so I kind of like stay away. I don't have a problem with associating but not being too close. I'm not the type that .. I prefer having like a small circle of close friends than a big loose set of friends you know. But I don't like that one person that.. wow, I'm closest with.

The remaining two Flowers preferred hanging out with Asians. Lily, who was raised in a very traditional family and speaks Vietnamese most of the time, had faced

difficulty with socialization due to her difficulty with English until she was in the 8th grade. Orchid had the same problem, as she recently came to the United States. Neither of them felt comfortable talking with people and did not have a lot of friends at the beginning of their high school years. Lily said:

I don't have any friends before I was in the 8th grade. It's because of my language. I never went out or anything. My family didn't know. They didn't understand that there are a lot of opportunities out there and you should go out and try to make friends with people and everything. But it's really hard being in a different country, not knowing the language so they used to not knowing what to do. They used to be doing what they do in Vietnam but you can't do it here. It's a different culture. So they never encouraged.. and they also work in the nail salon so there wasn't any way for them to go out. They were not really social or making friends.

So same with me, I didn't do that until 8th grade I finally made some really good friends, who are my best friends now. I got to go out with them more and that's why I started to have more friends and go out more. Actually I went to the movie theatre that wasn't someone in my family and started doing everything else. But before that point, I always went to school and went home, not anything else.

In middle school Orchid felt far more comfortable talking with other Asians because her school was kind of racist. She explained as follows:

Well, I have to say that my old high school in Houston was kind of racist. Whenever you see people hanging out, you will see like a group of Asian, a group of white people or black people, so it's hard to talk to them. yea, so most of my friends are like Asian whenever I moved to Houston.

1.2 Friends in College

The Flowers are no longer close with their friends from the middle and high school as they went on to different universities. They do, however, still keep in touch with them and their feelings are always the same with their old friends. College forced

them to make new friends. All five Flowers felt that joining the sorority was the right choice in order to make more friends and experience real campus life. According to Rose,

I think I'm closer to the sorority girls because I see them more. My friends from the younger year, they are so close to me and even though we didn't get to see each other, we just picked up our conversations like nothing ever change but it's different just because I don't see them as often. So you can't really compare it. It's just about the same. Like one gets to see me more and the other doesn't, that's all.

Sorority helped the Flowers make more friends. Lily and Lotus never had many girlfriends and were not comfortable making new friends. They had their own little group of friends before getting into college, who were mostly guys. Lily and Lotus joined the sorority, both thinking to make more women friends, and they wound up best friends themselves. Lily mentioned to me that Lotus has become really close to her because they get along really well. Whenever I got invited to go out with Lily, Lotus would always be there. Lotus also told me that Lily invited her to her wedding, to which she had only invited three women from the sorority. Though Lily had graduated and was no longer in the sorority, their friendship was as strong as ever. Lily said:

Mm, before the sorority, I have 3 before that. But I have guy friends more. So at that time I think I had 10 boyfriends and 3 girlfriends. Yea, that's how it would be. Like at the wedding, if I didn't bring.. if the guys didn't bring the girls, I wouldn't have so many. There were 20 people and the majority was.. well, I think there's more guys and girls. Yea even when everybody brought a date, it was still more guys than girls. For girlfriends, I have some that known for sorority. They gave me some really good ones, like Lotus, and they continue to give me more.

I felt much better than before. I really enjoyed school a lot more. That year I got to do so much. I think activities brought me more friends and give me opportunities to meet people and you wouldn't otherwise. No one gonna out themselves out there and think I'm gonna go make a friend

today. So it's easier when you have the common thing you share with other people, or you just talk about something that you understand. So it helps a lot.

Lily talked about Lotus and her term as president of this particular Asian sorority. Lily said that Lotus is trying to make the best of the situation, and that she tries really hard to be neutral about things and never take sides unless she has to for the good of the sorority. Hanging out with them made me realize that they have always been there for each other, just like sisters, and they talked about such personal issues that sometimes they forgot that I was there, causing a lot of laughter.

The other Flowers also found their best friends within the sorority. For example, recent immigrant Orchid said that she used to hate going to college because she felt weird and did not have that many friends. Membership in the sorority, however, had changed her thinking and the way she lives. She has been interacting with more people with more people--both from her own ethnic group with others, as there are many events and activities that involve cooperation with other sororities. The sorority gives Orchid a sense of being appreciated as the members always support each other and will always be there for her. Rose and Jasmine had attended the same high school and, when they both got accepted into University of Houston, they joined the same sorority and continue to be best friends.

1.3 Boyfriends

The attitudes of the Flowers toward their boyfriends reflect their racial preferences and their thoughts on personal relationships and life in general. Four of the

five flowers currently have a boyfriend. One of them, Lily, is already married to an international Vietnamese student who came to the United States three years ago. Lotus and Jasmine have American-born boyfriends of Vietnamese heritage, and Rose's boyfriend is Hispanic. As we can see, most of them ended up having Vietnamese boyfriends.

Having been raised in a very traditional family, it is not surprising that Lily got along really well with her husband culturally and ideologically. When I visited their apartment on New Year, a relaxing barbecue party, I discovered that Lily and her husband usually speak Vietnamese together, eat various kinds of Vietnamese food, and listen to the traditional Vietnamese songs that the other Flowers do not know. Lily mentioned to me several times that she speaks the best Vietnamese of anyone in the sorority and that she will always want to preserve traditional Vietnamese culture, as she considers it important not to forget her own roots.

It is interesting that all The Flowers, except for Rose, prefer having Asian boyfriends. They were raised in both traditional Vietnamese style and more American style. They went to ethnically diverse public schools, where Asians were in the minority, and they did not want to hang out with them (except Orchid who just came to the United States). Most of The Flowers claim to be open-minded about other ethnicities as well, but just not their first choice for boyfriends. Rose, as a notable exception, has been together with her Hispanic boyfriend for three years. Her family really likes her boyfriend and she claims not have any preference on the ethnicities of a potential boyfriend, except for African-American, because of parental caution. Rose said,

Well, my mom, she's like up to me but try not to date a black guy, I was like okay... she does it discretely but like, try not to. Haha and my dad is like whatever, I mean they both like sports so I guess they both have something in common, and my mom, at the first time, he asked me to go to the prom and I asked my mom, and she said she has to meet him, so we had to drive to his house, so like asked him questions, like what are you going to do with your life, and .. haha it's like omg, to see if he's good.

The other Flowers mentioned that their parents would prefer Vietnamese boyfriends so that they can communicate with them easily; however, most of them eventually leave that choice to their daughters, as long as they know their daughters' boyfriends are good persons and can take good care of them. Jasmine said, "They don't care about nationality, culture, religion, as long as he's a good guy, then it's ok."

The Role of the Sorority

The Flowers went to diverse schools and had diverse friends, chiefly European-American and Hispanic. Several of The Flowers did not have many Asian friends in their middle and high school years. Joining an Asian sorority gave them the opportunity to have a greater number of Asian friends who would welcome, support, share common interests and build bonds of sisterhood with them.

Orchid, on the other hand, preferred having Asian friends because, as a recent immigrant, she felt more comfortable with them. Her European American and Hispanic classmates in public school sometimes made fun of her accent and did not understand Asian culture. She believed that the sorority could help her feel more comfortable in American society. She expected that her sorority membership would enable her to feel more appreciated, enlarge her circle of friends from other ethnicities, learn more about

American culture, and get as much from her college experiences as she could. She felt that her membership in the sorority had more than exceeded her expectations.

All of The Flowers felt that the sorority had influenced their personal relationships in that it had changed their behaviors and minds to be more confident and open-minded, as they have to deal with lots of different kinds of people and situations. Having to interact with different types of people given the events created by the sororities, The Flowers felt that their personal and social lives had improved considerably.

In the view of The Flowers, the sorority creates better understanding between ethnicities or among people of the same ethnicity, fulfills their need of fitting into a larger society. This means that the sorority creates more acculturation rather than assimilation in American society. In my observation, it was clear to me that most of the friends of The Flowers are Asian, possibly due to the composition of the sorority. Without the sorority, however, they might probably have less chance to learn to assimilate in the multi-ethnic American society, and this is particularly true of Orchid.

Part 4 - SORORITY PARTICIPATION

Choice of Category

In this final category, I relate my findings to the role played by the sorority and draw conclusions, in order to determine whether the sorority creates more ethnic integration or more separation from American society. I analyzed the interviews with The Flowers about their participation in the sorority and have chosen the three most critical sub-categories that were mentioned most frequently during the interviews. The last section, the Role Played by the Sorority, summarizes and compares the previous categories and subcategories of exploration in order to view the broader perspectives of each one of the sorority members regarding changes in her life and the part the sorority plays in that. This analysis will provide some answers to the thesis question of whether the sorority creates more ethnic separation or acculturation into American society.

- 1.1 Expectations before joining Sorority and Decision Process
- 1.2 Bonds with Sorority Sisters
- 1.3 Realities of Sorority Membership

Attitudes and Opinions of The Flowers:

1.1 Expectations before Joining Sorority and Decision Process

This subcategory is intended to reveal the perceptions, expectations and decisions of The Flowers before participating in the organization. This reflects their thoughts about themselves, the people around them, and the sorority itself. These attitudes will be compared with the After Joining the Sorority sub-category, which will allow us to see the changes in behaviors and attitudes in the hope of clarifying the role of ethnic organizations.

When I first asked what The Flowers thought about the sorority, they all gave me the same answer: that they got their idea of what a sorority is from the movies. As far as they knew, there were a bunch of girls hanging out together, and that's about it.

None of the flowers seemed to have as many friends as they had in high school, as most had gone to different colleges. Their expectations were that the sorority could (1) help them make more female friends; (2) help them get to know more Vietnamese people; (3) help them find people with common interests; and (4) help them try something new and deepen their college experiences.

Lily and Lotus, who have become close friends in the sorority, had shared a similar life background, namely a lack of female friends in high school and being raised in very traditional family. Lily expressed it this way:

It just seems really interesting and the idea of the sorority you see in the movie, I was wondering what's it gonna be like. Is it gonna be like that or not...they seem like a nice people, maybe it's a good change for me. Maybe I'll make a lot of new friends. That was the main thing and I want new things in my life. I saw a lot of Vietnamese girls and everything so I really really want to meet more friends who're Vietnamese. Because like I said before, even though I know the language, I don't really interact with Vietnamese people. Like, even though I was raised by traditional way, but I did not get to hang out that much back in high school. Anyway, they seemed sincere and really nice but that was different from the other sorority that I just met in a few minutes and they're like they didn't seem real. They seem kind of fake about it.

Lotus also shared her attitudes towards being raised in a traditional family and how that affected her life before joining the sorority:

I grew up kind of slow cause my family back then was kind of

strict you know. So by the time I started to get in highschool, I started to understand more stuff you know. Because I lived in a sheltered family lifestyle during my private middle school, when I got to high school, things started to get different. Like the way people think, the way people act, the way things are, you know. Like going out into a real world, so yea, that's why I kind of grow up really slow. So that's why I don't understand what sorority/fraternity is when I got into college either.

When I asked about the decision to join this particular sorority, some of The Flowers said that they wished they could have seen the other sororities before choosing this one. They think it is a new experience, however, they do not regret joining this Asian sorority. Apart from feeling good and getting along well with her sorority sisters, Jasmine also added that she did not want to join the white sororities because they are much more expensive than this Asian sorority. Jasmine said:

I wish I saw the other sororities and I picked one, but I just didn't think about it. But it's ok, something new I guess ... it's very comfortable, like immediately comfortable. I think the only thing I didn't join the white sorority was because it's too expensive. Like best reason why I didn't try. If I tried, I would have more reasons of why you want to join it. I just don't care if I will have more Asian friends or white, but it just feels comfortable in this sorority already.

Some of The Flowers also joined other organizations in college. For example, Lily used to belong to the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA), but she did not like it because she thought it the members were unaware of Vietnamese culture. Lily had hoped to help promote Vietnamese culture but the VSA members did not appreciate what she was capable of, such as speaking Vietnamese. She therefore decided to resign from the VSA and participated more fully in the activities of the sorority. She mentioned that the sorority had given her more than the VSA in terms of interpersonal and social skills. She said:

In VSA, the new people that kept coming in, I didn't like them. I was kind of disappointed of the VSA because I was hoping that the VSA would be more people like me that speak Vietnamese, that are more culturally aware to our culture, but there wasn't. All of them are Americanized, and some of them I had known in the past through other interactions like when my family tried to be involve in Asian community and I don't want to walk pass across them again just because I didn't like them back them really, so I don't wanna like them now. I probably not gonna like them now. I like to be appreciated. But Vietnamese, I don't feel like they really appreciated. They don't really understand that oh hey she's really good at it. We should applaud her for it. And this is really pointless. You and I are both Vietnamese, why you don't speak Vietnamese? It's so lame.

Lily also mentioned that all of the members of VSA are "Americanized." I asked her how that was different from sorority, as I assumed it was Americanized as well. She replied that it was the bonds that were built within the sorority that VSA did not have. She felt appreciated and supported, so it was worth her time to do something productive. She said:

The difference between them is that the sorority, we still got bonds there. And I had more opportunities to be in charge the things I wanted to be. With VSA, I don't really get anything out of it. I wanted to do something bigger. But I actually ran for the vice president of the VSA, and I got it, but I resigned because the way that I was being around by that president when I was going to be the Vice President, I didn't like it. Because they have meetings every week and for nothing really. There wasn't anything important to talk about. It was a waste of time. I wanted my time at home and enjoyed it with my family. But we have to keep doing it far away. You know, I just don't like that.

1.2 Bonds with Sorority Sisters

Understanding how bonds are created between sorority sisters can help us answer the thesis question--whether the personal and social effects of sorority membership

creates more acculturation or more ethnic separation from mainstream American culture. When we talked about bonding, all five of The Flowers mentioned hazing. In this sorority, however, hazing is unlike what is found in the other sororities.

This Asian sorority uses hazing as a process that enables the members of the sorority work through a challenge together and does not involve any violence or any potential harm to individuals. Everyone enjoyed this process except Lily and Lotus. They did not appear to enjoy it and did not understand the meaning behind the process. Everyone agreed, however, that working together on a common mission ordered by the sorority helped them pass through hardships, which built memories, bonds and friendships.

These bonds have been strengthened as time goes by, and as they have learned more about each other along. Engaging in all the philanthropic activities, as well as any sacred or non-sacred rituals together has made them feel closer as sisters, unlike the other clubs or organizations.

In addition, every Flower, except Lotus, mentioned that they finally ended up having best friends in the sorority because of those tasks organized by the sorority. Most of them feel much closer to their sorority sisters than they do to their old high school friends, as they rarely met as often with them as they do with their sorority sisters. Jasmine explained:

Just hang out, it's just a natural bonds I guess. Like compared to my high school friends, I'm closer with my sisters because I don't see

them anymore that much. So, my closest friends would be my sorority sisters right now.

Lotus mentioned previously that she preferred hanging out with European-American or Hispanic friends because she felt weird hanging out with Asian people, especially in a big group of girls. The reason that she joined the sorority was because her classmate persuaded her to join. She took a year off, however, because she thought it was not her thing. She admitted that she did not realize the real meaning of sorority.

After her year off, Lotus decided to rejoin the sorority because her cousin was no longer in Houston and she wanted to get to know more women friends. She also wanted friends who would always be there for her or hang out with her, like the sorority sisters do. After she came back, she decided to take the position of this sorority President. She mentioned that she still has closer friendships outside the sorority, based on old family ties since childhood.

1.3 Realities of Sorority Membership

The practicalities of sorority life reflected The Flowers' identity and ways of thinking--how and who they are. These traits can be very important depending on whether they see themselves as Americanized or traditional and if the sorority plays a role in determining the ways that the women behave or perceive things. This could have the effect of either alienation or assimilation.

All of The Flowers are Vietnamese. Four out of five Flowers were born in the United States. Only one, Orchid, moved here three years ago (2011). Most of them were raised in fairly traditional Vietnamese homes--particularly those homes where a grandmother is present. Only one Flower, Lily, can speak and write Vietnamese well.

Even though this is an Asian sorority, most of the members were born and raised in the United States. By and large, they understand the American culture well and probably almost all of them are “Americanized.”

I was having lunch with Lily on one beautiful Saturday, and we were talking about Lotus, who had served as president of the sorority. This led to our discussion of the positions or tasks that the members are given to perform. Lily told me that those members have to be capable of doing their tasks, be logical and understanding of people and situations, and know how to communicate with them. It does not depend on ethnicity at all--for example, their former president was African-American. In addition, she used the phrase “bond or gone,” which means that sorority the members need to build strong bonds together or else it would be just like the other normal clubs. Lily said:

Sometimes we don't get along well. Haha, that's kind of complicated because these events are supposed to work together. So, after each event, you suppose to get stronger as a group. Yea, so even though I don't get along with her during that process, we did manage to work together as much as we could. That's good enough. And then afterwards, as you know we went separated way but that's because we didn't have any friendship. We just do it because we wanted to get this done. We had the same goal. That's it. Other than that.. that why we don't talk anymore.

Rose talked about the tricks the sorority uses to try to maintain strong relationships among the sorority sisters. She said:

I don't really have a problem talking with anyone in the sorority but just like other organizations concern with is like, some people just click to some people more so like as a whole they don't have a problem talking to each other but I guess it's more comfortable talking to certain people more. I guess like pledge sisters you know you join in the same semester so we try to break that by doing sister dates. Yea, we just randomize like who goes on the date with who, just to know more about each other and to break that whole clique thing cause I know it's a problem with most organizations, like you're more comfortable with that person and you're gonna stick with that person all the time.

All of The Flowers talked about the philanthropic work that is done by the sorority, in which they try to help the women who are faced with domestic violence. They also mentioned that their sorority is very Americanized and open to learn and accept women from every ethnicity to stand up for women. Lotus said:

The last president, it is surprising 'cause she's not Asian cause she's African right. What happened was she was 40 at that time, or middle 40. She was studying French in undergrad, but she's already graduated last semester. The reason she joined, you know rush event? She went out to the rush event and she thought it was cool, but at the same time, she asked if it's ok because she's not Asian you know, and the girls at the time was like, oh no, you're fine, you can come! Just come by and just have fun! So she came to the rush event and got accepted to the sorority, and she loved it ever since. She's my big actually. Another family member of her was also in a sorority but not in Asian one, but the reason they chose to join this sorority is because the history of this sorority is the same as her. Like the history culture, because it used to be like a group of Japanese women got together because of the war right. And because of how many people shutting them and ignore them, and you know, it's the same as her culture back then because she's African. How they treated them back then.

Enjoying friendship and company with a bunch of Asian girls is not for everyone. Lotus talked about taking a year off, and that she had felt awkward being surrounded by a lot of Asian girls at first, and she thought it was not her thing.

It's actually like I got in the two semesters, the first semester is when you tried to get into the sorority, and that's when I got it, and then there was another semester that I was there, and I found out that it wasn't my thing. But then I came back eventually. When I came back doing whatever during that semester, and then the next, I became a president after cause nobody wants to step up. I thought that I a lot of people would want to be a president because it looks such a big deal.. Yea, but I still feel awkward. Like if it's a group of Asian people that I don't know, I still feel awkward. I know them but I don't know them like close enough, so it's awkward. I mean I hang with my friends who are Asian now because I

slowly know them you know, but with the sorority, all the same time, it's still awkward you know. I have been in the sorority for two years, but it's still awkward. Haha that took me awhile just to talk to Lily before we are close.

The Role of the Sorority

In this section, I would like to make a comparison with the previous categories and subcategories I have done earlier--in particular as they relate to the role of the sorority. My analysis reveals the changes in behaviors and attitudes of The Flowers that participation in the sorority enabled, towards themselves, their sorority sisters, and towards other people in general.

Lily was raised in a very traditional Vietnamese family and largely by her grandmother. She did fit in with sorority life at first because the way she was raised made it hard for her to get used to being friends with everyone. Even though the sorority girls were really nice and they talked about everything, Lily still did not feel close to them all.

Lily and Lotus said that they got along well with each other, as they shared pretty much the same beliefs and thoughts. In any event, they felt that religion is not an issue in this sorority as all the sorority sisters appeared to be open-minded. According to Lily, the sorority did not change the way she interacted with people outside the sorority, as it was her practice to take a long time to get to know someone, whether or not they were sorority members.

The women felt strongly that the sorority helped them get close to each other much quicker, since they had to work together and meet with each other once a week,. This interaction had the effect of creating bonds and feelings of sisterhood. Some of the

sorority rules bothered Lily (like having to say hello to everyone she met outside the sorority). She believed, however, that these rules could help her to become more considerate and detail-oriented in the future.

Lotus did not use to feel much like going out with the Asian girls, but is much more accustomed to this now. Lotus feels, as do the other Flowers, that adaptation is the key. Lotus now likes hanging out with Asians or people of other ethnicities a lot more as she feels she has become more open-minded and wanted to get to know people. In general, The Flowers felt that the sorority did not fundamentally change the way they view people, but it did help them not to be so quick to judge someone and to be more open minded.

All The Flowers wanted to make more women friends and have more friendship choices during their time in college. They realized that joining the sorority could make positive changes in their lives. All of them feel that membership in the sorority has met their expectations and improved their social skills. The Flowers felt more empowered in their lives by rising to new challenges and learning to deal with new people. They also feel that membership in the sorority has helped to improve their professional skills by learning new things and getting better organized. Two of the major benefits cited were being more appreciated as an individual and enjoying their college experience much than before they joined the sorority.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This final chapter is divided into two sections--Summary and Conclusions:

The Summary section addresses my research question and defines in brief my methods in conducting the research.

The Conclusion section is classified into four parts: the first part will summarize and analyze the four categories of explorations from chapter four (Report from Fieldwork), which will be related to how the informants' lives have changed before and after joining the sorority; the second part will describe the three findings of my research as related to separation and acculturation and the related theories; the third part will conclude some suggestions for future study using six important emic terms, culling from the narratives, recommended for the future research; lastly, a description of the significance of the research be explicated.

Summary

This thesis is an exploratory research intended to examine the question of the role of ethnic organizations and whether they create ethnic assimilation or isolation from broader American society. In order to address this question and be more specific, I used a sorority as a case study to represent ethnic organizations as a whole. In addition, I chose five Vietnamese women--Lily, Lotus, Orchid, Jasmine and Rose ("The Flowers")--not only to represent one ethnicity, but because they represent the majority ethnic group in this Asian sorority.

I collected data by interviewing five Vietnamese sorority women and by doing participant observation by joining in some sorority events and by simply “hanging out” with The Flowers on certain occasions, in which mutual trust has been developed. Interesting results, culled from their narratives, revealed the attitudes of the women regarding their self-identities and how they perceive the world around them.

Analysis of the data from doing ethnography was grouped around the four Categories of Exploration. I had chosen from the narratives--Self-Identity, Kinship, Personal Relationships, and Sorority Participation. Using the lens of anthropological inquiry, I reached a clearer understanding of how these women perceived their identity, their adaptation and their life changes in American society, before and after joining the sorority. This led to some answers to the question of this thesis, that is, to learn from the interview subjects about the role the sorority plays in their lives, and whether it has led them to becoming more assimilated or more isolated in American culture.

As an Asian women and an immigrant, I had my own assumptions about the results I would gain from the data analysis. I supported the position of Edward Abner, David Lewit, Anja Rudiger, and James Sidanius (See Chapters Two and Three -- Literature Reviews and Theoretical Background) that ethnic organizations create more ethnic separation in American culture. Much to my surprise, the some of the results of my investigations proved my assumption wrong. For example, I assumed that the sorority would create more ethnic assimilation, but it actually created more ethnic separation and ethnic acculturation in American society. After analyzing the four Categories of exploration, I had come up the three findings which answer my thesis question that the sorority actually creates ethnic acculturation instead of ethnic assimilation as I first

predicted. These findings will be discussed in the Conclusion section.

Conclusions

This section is classified into four parts: the first part will summarize and analyze the four categories of exploration from Chapter Four (Report from Fieldwork), which relates to the informants' life-changing process; the second part will describe the three findings of my research as related to separation and acculturation and the related theories; the third part will identify six important emic terms culled from the categories of exploration, recommended for future research; and the fourth part will describe the significance of the research.

Part 1: The Summarization and Analysis of the Report of Fieldwork

Category of Exploration 1: Self-Identity

1.1 Americanization

Participating in the sorority does not help the American-born Flowers speak more Vietnamese or preserve their culture, as most of the members were born in America and have become Americanized. They do not feel more separated from American culture and they still retain the traditions that they usually follow at home, which means they are acculturated in American society. Their attitude towards recent Vietnamese immigrants is that they are difficult people and hard to get along with due to cultural differences and the language barrier. In addition, no matter how Americanized The Flowers consider themselves, they actually have more Vietnamese and other Asian ethnic friends from the

sorority than the Euro-American, Hispanic, or African-American mix that comprised their circles of friends in early childhood. This, however, concludes that the sorority creates more ethnic separation in American society because The Flowers perceive themselves as American, speak English most of the time, and live an American lifestyle, unless they live in the home of their parents or grandparents. After joining the sorority, The Flowers seem to socialize most frequently with their Asian sisters because of the sorority's activities and the bonds of sisterhood.

1.2 Sorority Helps in "Fitting in"

In the case of the Vietnamese who have recently moved to the United States, like Orchid, the sorority tends to help international students to acculturate more into American culture. The mission of the sorority--to treat each other like sisters--helped Orchid to boost her self-confidence, improve her English-speaking ability, create many more friendships, and enjoy her life in the United States even more.

1.3 Personality Preference not Ethnicity Preference

An analysis of the life sequences of The Flowers--with regard to the ethnicities of their friends from high school days until entry into the sorority--shows that the thinking of The Flowers towards ethnic preference has not changed. They all claim to judge potential friends not by ethnicity but by their personalities. If those people are Asians but do not look approachable, they would not want to communicate with them and would prefer talking with friendly people from other ethnicities.

The Flowers retain old friends from other ethnicities from high school, but due to their differing lifestyles and campuses, it is hard for them to keep in touch, particularly as

compared with the sorority sisters they meet every day. The sorority, therefore, does create more ethnic isolation with regard to self-identity to certain extent. However, it also helps them acculturate or fit into both the American culture and their own roots and to build their confidence. In sum, the sorority enables them to make more friends from various ethnicities, and to be more open-minded, as they are compelled to deal with different kinds of people in both their own ethnic group and others, by virtue of the many inter-organizational activities on campus.

Category of Exploration 2: Kinship

1.1 Older Generation at Home

Only Lily and Lotus still have their grandmothers living in the same household. They shared similar attitudes towards their grandmothers, which is they are very traditional, difficult and hard to please, and always wanting everything their own way. Their grandmothers hold traditional female roles of staying at home and taking care of the house and kids. Consequently, they know little about American culture nor do they have American friends. In addition, they cannot speak English as they came to the United States as mature adults, and did not make the effort to learn it.

As a result of this exposure to resident grandmothers, both Lily and Lotus can speak more Vietnamese than can the other Flowers. Having being born in the United States, however, made it hard for them to live with their grandmothers. They were raised in a very traditional way and did not know much about the world. They felt that their growth was stifled as a result. Their lives consisted of just going to school and coming home.

Neither of the women felt that they got to explore the world and make many friends because of the way they were sheltered by their the families. Participating in the sorority helped them to open their minds, make new friends from the same ethnicity and other ethnicities, and become more comfortable and confident in talking with people and living their lives, particularly as compared with their early childhoods.

1.2 American Lifestyle

In terms of attitudes of The Flowers toward their parents, their mothers seem to play a bigger role than their fathers in terms of taking care of them, keeping in touch with what is going on in their lives, and taking care of the house. Their fathers are generally more quiet, reserved and hard-working. Mothers often play the role of “boss” in the household. The mothers also tend to have become more and more Americanized and acculturated into American culture as time goes by, for example in the way they dress and in the ways they treat their kids--becoming less strict and less traditional.

The mothers also want the Flowers to be able to take care of themselves and be independent. There are, however, some standards of deportment for Vietnamese women that the mothers still try to instill in their daughters. Examples of these are not dressing too sexy like American women, not hugging guy friends just to say hi or do anything inappropriate with them, and still feeling compelled to instruct their daughters on where to go and when to return (for those who are still living at home). They also keep their traditional ways of eating, speak in Vietnamese, and celebrate cultural festivals or occasions as if they were in Vietnam.

Even though The Flowers acknowledge and follow the Vietnamese traditional

value of respect to their parents and grandparents, having been raised in the United States makes them think more like Americans. Living an American lifestyle--being independent, having more freedom, meeting more people and gaining new experiences--are a part of growing up in American culture that every Flower wishes to follow. Therefore, even though The Flowers still keep some of their traditions at home, participating in the sorority helps them to live a more balanced life, meeting their socialization needs, and learning to fit well in the broader American society.

In the case of Orchid, a recent immigrant to the United States, joining the sorority has had a big positive change in her life. Her sorority participation has helped her improve her English by interacting with more native speakers, learn American culture, make new friends (with their support of sisterhood understanding), and feel less discriminated against and more comfortable with her college life.

Category of Exploration 3: Personal Relationships

1.1 Fresh off the Boats (FOBS)

My assumption had been that The Flowers would want to be with other Asians in order to stick within their own racial group, but this proved to be invalid. All of them, except Lily and Orchid, preferred socializing with other ethnicities during high school as they regarded other Asians as too sensitive and difficult. Given that, it puzzled me why these women decided to join an Asian sorority. The answer was that they think the sorority can help them make new friends during their college years and help them get to know more Vietnamese women or other Asian women on a deeper level.

The difference is that the sorority members treat each other like sisters, which is quite different from having a small group of friends in high school that can often lead to teenage drama. Most of The Flowers found new best friends in the sorority, like Lily with Lotus and Jasmine with Rose.

Another goal was to gain new experiences in life and feel comfortable seeing people similar to them, who shared similar attitudes and values. At the same time, they could connect more with people from different ethnic sororities through sorority activities and events. All of them felt like they made the right choice in joining the sorority, as they now have a much wider circle of friends, close bonds with their sorority sisters, and positive experiences in their campus life. These attitudes demonstrate that the sorority increases ethnic acculturation without assimilation into American culture, at the same time, makes them feel more comfortable within their ethnic group and increases their sense of belonging.

1.2 No Race Preference for Boyfriends

The Flowers' attitudes towards boyfriends show that they have no racial preferences for their romantic relationships and their friends. They prefer the ones that they are attracted to and can get along well with them. In addition, most of them have Asian boyfriends, and the one exception has a Hispanic boyfriend. They are open-minded in terms of race, and the sorority has not changed their perceptions on race.

Category of Exploration 4: From Sorority Participation

1.1 Personality not Skin Color

Most of The Flowers said they did not initially know what exactly a sorority was,

but that they have not regretted joining an Asian sorority instead of a white prestige sorority. Two reasons given were (1) because the white sororities are more expensive; and (2) the immediate sense of camaraderie displayed by the women in this particular Asian sorority. In sum, the sorority choice had nothing to do with ethnicity preference, but more about the personalities of the other members. Interestingly, the previous president of the sorority was an African-American woman, and it is open to every ethnicity.

1.2 College Experiences

All of The Flowers acknowledged the positive changes in their lives after joining the sorority and having had to adapt themselves to fit in. In addition to becoming more organized in their daily lives, they have learned the critical socialization skills of becoming more open-minded, understanding of people by putting themselves in other people's shoes, and learning not to be judgmental. They all consider themselves more confident to speak and deal effectively with different types of people. This might be a part of their growing to adulthood, but they all feel that the sorority definitely plays a big role as well.

Even though The Flowers have more Asian friends and socialize more with them than with any other racial group, they feel strongly that the way they think and act towards other racial groups has not changed. Engaging in sorority activities enables them to know and interact a lot more with other ethnic groups from other sororities. From the perspectives of The Flowers, even though sorority created ethnic isolation to certain extent, the sorority membership has also helped them develop acculturation within their

own ethnic group and among other ethnic groups in American society.

While most Vietnamese-Americans have sought to adapt themselves to American culture, they still practice their own traditions and religious practices, due to their deep cultural and traditional values. Educational expectations and a strong commitment to the family are deeply-held cultural values among the Vietnamese. The value placed on education has contributed to the disproportionately high number of Vietnamese-Americans in elevated professional, managerial, and entrepreneurial positions within a relatively short period of time, helping them to acculturate more readily into American society.

Part 2: The Three Findings

Culling narratives from the Vietnamese sorority women and understanding their college experiences before and after joining an Asian sorority speaks to my research question of how participation in an ethnic organization facilitates a sense of ethnic acculturation and ethnic separation in American culture.

After choosing the four categories of exploration from my data analysis of the interviews, I distilled the three findings that address my research question. Contrary to my expectation, the sorority does not foster assimilation. Instead, it stimulates ethnic separation and acculturation into the broader American society.

The three findings are: 1) The Sorority helps building of sisterhood; 2) The Sorority promotes ethnic relations, that is, it creates stronger ties among these Vietnamese women; and 3) The Sorority helps its members engage with its organizational culture, through participation in community service projects and outreach

to other ethnic groups. Each one of these findings will reveal how the sorority plays its roles in terms of the acculturation of these Vietnamese-American women.

Finding 1: The Sorority Helps Increase Sisterhood

From the perspectives and experiences of four of The Flowers, who were once members of other ethnic organizations, each ethnic organization has its strengths and weaknesses. The Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) at the University of Houston, for example, does not have the same mission or goals as the sorority. The VSA does not create bonds and does not fully appreciate and support its members in the “kinship” fashion of the sorority. The sense of commitment and engagement, given the bonds of sisterhood, is much higher for the sorority.

The VSA does not engage in sacred ritual and hardship survival, which can build memories and forge common bonds and friendships. Neither does it give its members the interpersonal and social skill training that the sorority does. Most importantly, the VSA is rarely involved with other ethnic groups on campus. In sum, every ethnic organization has its own characteristics and this sorority could differ significantly from other ethnic sororities.

As an ethnic organization, the sorority is a good example of social constructivism as it relates to organizational culture or ethnic organization. According to Geertz, "Social Constructivism" may be defined as a perspective which believes that a human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences (Geertz 1973:145). This implies that the social and symbolic relationships of the informants have changed due to the social and interpersonal influences. Therefore, the organizational culture of the sorority can influence the sorority sisters in thought and behavior to further the goal of the sorority,

which is to create stronger bonds between the sisters who come from similar backgrounds or interests.

The Flowers reported that they now felt more comfortable talking to other Asian women and that they have more Vietnamese and other Asian friends compared to when they were in high school. Most of them did not have many Asian friends and did not feel motivated to acquire more Asian friends before joining the sorority, due to their stereotyped perspective that Asian girls are difficult and dramatic. Most of their friends during middle and high school, therefore, were boys from various ethnicities. The Flowers also mentioned that they communicated more with the Asian friends than other ethnicities now. The Sorority then seems to have created more ethnic separation to a certain extent.

Finding 2: The Sorority Helps Create Vietnamese Ties

Since 80% of the sorority's members are Vietnamese-American, the informants felt that they share a lot of things in common with other members, such as social norms and cultural background, having been raised by Vietnam-born parents. Having something in common makes them feel more comfortable talking with each other. The Flowers credit the sorority with their interest in making new friendships among Vietnamese women in college, unlike their high school experience. They realized that joining the sorority meant that they would have a big group of women to socialize with and perhaps forge bonds of sisterhood.

Because of proximity, and as in family dynamics, when some of the members argue with each other, they usually talk it out and forgive. Being friends with Asians in high school, however, could lead to uncomfortable feelings. Three of the Flowers

mentioned that, as there were not a lot of Asian students in their schools, they were forced into closer relationships to other Asian girls, whether they liked them or not. They have a perception that Asian girls are too close to each other, which leads to a lack of independence, a smaller circle of friends, and a lot of drama.

All of the Flowers reported more support and closer relationships with sorority members that have the effect of making them feel more self-confident, particularly when compared to their school days. They have become more outspoken, they know how to approach people, and they have closer connections with Vietnamese-American friends who share similar family and social backgrounds.

Given this, the sorority seems to create ethnic separation from the broader American society. However, since four of the Flowers were born in the United States and are Americanized, their ways of living might not have changed drastically upon joining the sorority. Even though they are now acquainted with more Vietnamese people, those people are also generally Americanized. Even if these Vietnamese-American sorority sisters still follow and respect their own Vietnamese culture, they still think like Americans. As a consequence, all of the sorority members become more acculturated to the American society. The feelings of confidence and support gained from sorority sisters also enhance the sense of "belonging" or "fitting in" better in the American society.

Finding 3: The Sorority Helps Members Engage with its Organizational Culture of Outreach to Other Ethnic Groups and Community Service

The paradox is whether the sorority creates more ethnic separation or ethnic acculturation. It appears to do both. The sorority clearly creates more ethnic separation in

that its members became more bonded with Asian friends and do not have many friends of other ethnicities, particularly when compared with their lives before they joined the sorority. The activities of the sorority, however, help to create ethnic acculturation in the American society as well.

All of the Flowers found that sorority membership has enhanced their self-confidence. They have learned to be more open-minded, to communicate with other people, and to reserve judgment. They have made many friends and connections in other student organizations since joining the sorority. Sorority membership helped them to broaden their horizons, as most of them did not have the opportunity to go out and experience things during their school years. Traditional Vietnamese parents would expect their daughters to be at home and to not go out at night, thus limiting opportunities.

Joining the sorority helped the women increase interaction—not only with Vietnamese but with people of other ethnicities—due to the sorority’s philanthropic and community service projects and other related events. The Flowers feel like they create and give back something important to the society, which enhances self-confidence and the sense of acculturation and belonging in the larger society. Therefore, sorority membership helps with identity development, better adaptation and acculturation of the Asian-Americans within American culture. In addition, sorority membership increases the sense of community and belonging in their own ethnicity and helps to minimize alienation and prejudice for the Vietnamese-American minority populations.

Part 3: Significant Terms for Future Study

This exploratory research of the impact of a sorority on Vietnamese-American women, points to a strong need for additional research and study on the effects of Asian or multicultural “Greek” organizations on college campuses and on their participants. These significant terms for future study are called "emic" terms, a concept used by anthropologists and others to study social and behavioral sciences. The "emic" account comes from the dialogues of the informants within the studied culture and portrays their beliefs (consciously or unconsciously), attitudes and behaviors (Headland; Pike; Harris 1990). The chosen emic terms, culled from the narratives, could be useful for further related research, particularly in the areas of self-identity, kinship, personal relationships and sorority participation.

Emic Terms

1) FOB (Fresh off the Boat)

Orchid, who had just come to the United States, used the word "fob." She described the word as:

Some people call you ‘fob,’ it’s like people who just came to the U.S. and their English is not good. So they call you fob. Haha they have a word for you.

Lily also had a definition of the Vietnamese people who had recently immigrated, which could be applied to "fob". She said:

I think Vietnamese people who were born here think that the

[newly-arrived]Vietnamese people are just hard to understand, difficult people I would say. And then difficult people are difficult people if you don't know how to deal with them. I think they would give respect to the older people. But with the same age people in America, like the international students, they think they're weird, they don't understand what we are doing. They don't understand American culture. They just don't want to interact with them because they feel like they're not American enough and they don't speak [English]... and they won't understand what we're talking about. And maybe some of them are shy to speak Vietnamese but the majority of them, they just cannot do it, and they just don't want to.

Jasmine also added about her opinion about "fob":

I just think they're another person, no big deal. But I heard people saying they're fob because I know one of my friends kind of ignore them because she can't understand them. The language barrier you know. But if they approach, I'm not gonna be, like, why you're approaching me? I wouldn't be like that, but I wouldn't approach anyone to hang out or be friends. For me, I'm not that kind of person to approach anyone, anyway. That's not me.

Lotus also added some more views on the Vietnamese who have recently come to the United States, and the difficulty of getting along with them due to the trust issues and cultural differences. She mentioned that the Vietnamese international students "dress up flashy," and she prefers the ones who are already Americanized.

2) Melting Pot

Rose used the term "melting pot" in the following context:

I'm glad I was born here. I get to interact with more people since America is like a 'melting pot,' like they just talk to everyone and learn their culture, whereas Vietnam is just like one culture that you are exposed

to. So I like that, learning about everyone else, what they do and...I don't know I just like it here. It's different.

3) Americanized

Lily sees "Americanized" as:

I think 'Americanized' means that you work in the business with them or you work in a company with them instead of doing things that separate you from American culture such as a nail salon.

4) Fitting in

Lily had spoken about "fitting in" during the interview:

They also still have their own mindset and think the way they did in Vietnam, which is hard to please and not being open minded enough to try to learn the language and 'fit in' with American culture.

5) Shelter

Lotus spoke of "shelter" during the interview. She indirectly implied this term when talking about her family house rules which is related to her freedom and personality development:

I'm not sheltered anymore because I go out and explore the world now. Back then, I knew nothing about the world. Back then, I don't understand even the concept of boyfriend and girlfriend, I didn't understand that. During the time when I was in highschool, I don't understand that either. Yea, and I don't understand the concept of like, why people do that stuff or you know, it took me awhile from high school until I finally caught on to how.. it's also like slang and bad words and stuff, I don't even know it. My friends don't swear back then, it's a private middle school, but high school, they did. But the middle I went is private.

It was really sheltered, other middle schools, like in public schools, they know all those stuff. So, I grew up really slow. I just figured. I don't know if that helps. Cause that when I joined the sorority, I still didn't understand what the heck is this.

6) Bond or Gone

Lily used the phrase “bond or gone,” which means that sorority the members need to build strong bonds together or else it would be just like the other normal clubs. Lily said:

Sometimes we don't get along well. Haha, that's kind of complicated because these events are supposed to work together. So, after each event, you suppose to get stronger as a group. Yea, so even though I don't get along with her during that process, we did manage to work together as much as we could. That's good enough. And then afterwards, as you know we went separated way but that's because we didn't have any friendship. We just do it because we wanted to get this done. We had the same goal. That's it. Other than that.. that why we don't talk anymore. It's either 'bond or gone', you know.

Part 4: The Significance of the Research

Several studies have shown that Greek-letter fraternal organizations (fraternities and sororities on college campuses) have a negative impact on the participants' acceptance or tolerance of diverse groups of people and fail to encourage racial understanding. (Milem 1991; Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn and Terenzini 1996). Little or no literature has been published on the roles of multicultural Greek-letter organizations and whether they promote assimilation or create separation in American society, despite their rapid growth in recent decades. It is my goal to contribute to that body of inquiry.

Even though Vietnamese-Americans have become much more visible in the United States, the research on how Vietnamese women perceive their identity and assimilation in America is very limited. It is hoped that this study will contribute to this much-needed analysis and dialogue, which has strong implications for the field of higher education. It provides insights into the identity-relevant needs of Asian-American students on diverse college campuses, and challenges researchers to recognize ways in which their current ethnic organizations, such as sororities, may actually create more separation among Asian-American students in ways that are not immediately obvious.

Neither Vietnamese-Americans, nor Asian-Americans represent homogenous communities--ethnically, culturally, or racially. Learning about a specific target group, such as the Vietnamese-American collegiate women, through a qualitative study, might provide insight into any hidden problems such as isolation, self-doubt, and conflict within the context of their identity and its definition.

Understanding from their narratives how these Vietnamese sorority women make meaning of their identity development and experiences provides a perspective which is missing within Asian-American identity literature. This has the potential to improve the collegiate ethnic-based organizations with better and more appropriate strategies on ethnic assimilation and identity development of the Vietnamese collegiate women at the University of Houston.

The research could be of benefit in four ways:

1. It could help us learn more about the impact of ethnic organizations on their members' identity perceptions concerning incorporation in the larger society or, alternatively, the perceptions of prejudice and marginalization.

2. It could contribute to theories on ethnic identity and organizational culture.
3. It could increase the understanding of higher education practitioners in terms of the values, leadership styles, and perspectives within diverse racial communities on campus, in order to better serve them.
4. Learning about the lives and attitudes of Vietnamese female students through the significance of narrative study could provide a perspective which is missing within Asian-American identity literature.



**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

PROJECT TITLE:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF VIETNAMESE SORORITY WOMEN:
ACCULTURATION WITHOUT ASSIMILATION

You are being invited to take part in a research project conducted by Natchaya Wanissorn from Anthropology Program at the University of Houston. This project is part of my Master's thesis conducted under the supervision of Dr. Andrew Gordon.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Taking part in the research project is voluntary and you may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any research-related questions that make you uncomfortable. If you are a student, a decision to participate or not or to withdraw your participation will have no effect on your standing.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine how Vietnamese collegiate women perceive and respond to their ethnic identity development and their degree of affiliation (or assimilation) in a diverse college campus before and after joining an Asian sorority. Understanding how these Vietnamese sorority women make meaning of their ethnic identity development and their college experiences through their narratives provide a perspective which is missing within Asian American identity literature and creates awareness for the higher education practitioners to increase their understanding in terms of values, leadership styles, and perspectives situated within diverse racial communities on college campus in order to better serve them.

PROCEDURES

I intend to do an in depth-case study research by conducting individual interviews of 15 Vietnamese sorority women. The initial interview should last about an hour and you may be required to meet me up to three separate occasions if more information is needed. The interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed and coded data to observe themes. Also, you can feel free to take a break during the interview, choose to answer only questions you want, and withdraw or refuse to participate in this research if you like to with no negative consequences. The interviews will be taken place in a public location, with adequate protections for privacy such as a booth at a coffee shop or at the library, as they prefer.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's pseudonym will be paired with a code number by me, the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's pseudonym to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Any identifiable data stored on the laptop during the study is protected by password protection of file. Also, no identifiable data will be retained on my personal laptop or private study following data analysis, and any audio records will be destroyed following transcription to further protect subjects.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

In the interview, we might be discussing about negative or uncomfortable events related to your ethnic identity experiences and cultural adaptation in ethnic communities and in college life, which might cause stress or discomfort. You can always have the freedom to stop the interview or skip any questions if you wish. The risk associated with this study is no greater than everyday life. However, if you experience any stress or discomfort from the interview, you can always visit the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at the University of Houston main campus.

BENEFITS

While there will be no direct benefits of the research to you, I anticipate the results may prove beneficial to sororities in the future.

COSTS

There is no cost to you for participation in this research and there is no compensation either.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT TO BE RE-CONTACTED FOR ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS

- ☐ I agree to be re-contacted for additional interviews.
- ☐ I do not agree to be re-contacted for additional interviews.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO RECORDS

If you consent to take part in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio recorded during the study by checking the appropriate box below. However, your audio recorded will not be used in any publications or presentations. Please check below.

- ☐ I agree to be audio recorded during the interview.
- ☐ I do not agree to be audio recorded during the interview.

*You can still take part in the research if you have not agreed to the audio recording.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also skip any questions I do not wish to answer.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me, as have any potential benefits.
4. I understand the protections in place to safeguard any personally identifiable information related to my participation.

5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Natchaya Wanissorn at Email address: nwanissorn@uh.edu or Anthropology departmental number: (713) 743-3987 I may also contact Dr. Andrew Gordon, faculty sponsor, at room 260B McElhinney building or email: Andrew.Gordon@mail.uh.edu.

Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713-743-9204). All research projects that are carried out by Investigators at the University of Houston are governed by requirements of the University and the federal government.

SIGNATURES

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions to my satisfaction. I give my consent to participate in this study, and have been provided with a copy of this form for my records and in case I have questions as the research progresses.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. An explanation of the research was provided and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

General Interview Guide Questions and Aide Memoire:

1. Why did you decide to join a sorority?
2. How did you pick Sigma Phi Omega? Compare that option to other Asian American sororities? Compare that option to other sororities in general?
3. How does this involvement in the sorority compare to other organizations you are involved in?
4. How has this experience impacted your college experience?
5. Do you see a difference between Vietnamese Americans vs. other East Asian Americans?
6. What are some of the challenges you face personally as a member of the sorority?
 - a. Culturally?
 - b. Parental Perception?
 - c. Community perception?
7. Share one of your most memorable moments in this process.
8. What have you learned from joining this sorority?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

The interview will also be guided by an aide memoire, which the subjects may provide additional information within the conversation that occurs, and I will follow their lead. The topics I will try exploring are as the following:

- Reasons of Joining Sorority/ Compare Sororities/Organizations
- Stereotypes/Changing Perceptions of Vietnamese women
- Perceived Diversity among East Asian Americans
- Ownership of Vietnamese Identity
- Sorority and College Experiences
- Building Bonds with other Vietnamese Women/ Other Ethnic communities
- Fitting In: Vietnamese American Identity/ Americanization
- Sense of Belonging/Assimilation/Separation before and after Joining a Sorority
- Challenges faced: Culturally/ family perception/community perception
- Most memorable moments in sorority life
- Changes in self-perception/ ethnicity perception/ perception of American culture
- Anticipation of how American would see them
- Family background/educational background/social economic/shared commonality with the sorority members/ career ambition/ religion/ how are they close with the most (same ethnic?)
- What to do on leisure times with sorority sisters (Vietnamese/non- Vietnamese)
- What to do on leisure times with the others non-sorority sisters

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