Not Quite/Just The Same/Different: The Construction of Identity In Vietnamese War Orphans Adopted By White Parents

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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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*Pseudonyms used to protect participants' privacy. Where participants' adoptive parents kept their original Vietnamese name, a Vietnamese pseudonym is used.

Preface

I was born in October 1971, a birth date given to me by Buddhist nuns at the Thong Thien Hoc orphanage in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam. On December 23, 1972, I was flown to Sydney, Australia, to join my white adoptive parents and their two biological sons. In my first five years with them, 'assimilating' into my new environment, my memory tells me that I was raised to feel no different in terms of racial or cultural identity. In short I felt the 'same' as my family. However, once I entered the schoolyard and then wider society, I began to regularly interpret from others in society that I was 'different'. I was 'not quite white' and, after experiencing racism, I felt inferior because of it. I believe my family and I were completely unprepared for such challenges.

I have spent the last three years as a community activist, working at a grassroots level, meeting with other individuals who were also adopted from Vietnam during the Vietnam War. My dedication to community activism began with my interest in joining a support network for individuals adopted from Vietnam, only to find none existed. In April 2000 on the 25th anniversary of the Vietnam War (also marking 25 years since the main mass migration of Vietnamese orphans to the West) I decided to take action and launched a cooperative called Adopted Vietnamese International www.adoptedvietnamese.org in Sydney.

Over the past three years I have been meeting online hundreds of other adopted Vietnamese residing in various locations in Australia, Europe and North America. I have also been able to meet many in person, through co-organising conferences, independently leading a trip for adoptees to visit Vietnam in January 2001 and in my role coordinating contributions and conducting interviews with adoptees as a 2003 Rockefeller Fellow in the *(Re)constructions of Place and Identity in the Vietnamese Diaspora* project at The Williams Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

It is important to acknowledge that most of the adopted Vietnamese I have met report having loving and supportive families. However, commonalities emerging in our discussions of adoption included our experiencing uncertainty and tensions within our sense of identity. As we were growing up many adoptees spoke of confusing and unsettling encounters in society with racism and cultural stereotypes. We also grew up knowing only a little of our pre-adoption history constructed from scant records, speculative orphanage stories and media representations of the Vietnam War. In addition, despite our enthusiasm, often with our adoptive parents support to explore our Vietnamese heritage in adulthood, there was a new anxiety emerging from our interactions with the wider Vietnamese community. I would sum it up as an experience of feeling 'not quite Vietnamese' because our Western upbringing and white families made us 'different' again.

Laming wrote of British Caribbean exiles in *The Occasion for Speaking* that 'on the political level we are often without the right kind of information to make argument effective; on the moral level we have to feel our way through problems for which we have no adequate reference or traditional conduct as our guide' (Laming, 1995: 12). An outstanding issue is that, at present, the qualified researchers working in the still developing field of inter-country adoption have rarely studied adoption from Vietnam. In addition, adoption researchers more generally do not have the personal experience of being trans-racially adopted from overseas. Although this does not invalidate their work, I believe that there are benefits from also adding work generated by adopted individuals, who might have access to unique insights and perspectives through their direct personal experiences.

The decision to conduct this research is partly inspired by a desire to address this lack of research but also the lack of representation of adopted Vietnamese perspectives informing the research. My position is therefore as an 'insider' within the adopted Vietnamese community. My role as an activist has provided an awareness of community issues and access to community members. This thesis thus offers an occasion for adopted Vietnamese to speak about their lives, and for readers to gain a deeper understanding of this community’s circumstances and concerns.

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Abstract

Global diasporas caused by wars carry many streams of people - in the 1970s one of these streams contained orphans from Vietnam delivered to white parents in the West. On arrival, the social expectation was that these children would blend seamlessly into the culture of their adoptive parents. Now some adoptees, as adults, reflect on their lives as 'Asian' or racially 'Other' children in white societies, charting the critical points in their maturation. This thesis interrogates their life histories to explore the role of birth-culture in the self-definition of people removed from that culture at birth or in childhood. Thirteen adult adopted Vietnamese participants were interviewed. These interviews provided qualitative data on issues of racial and cultural identity. These data were developed and analysed, using a framework drawn from symbolic interactionism and cultural studies, in order to reveal the interpersonal dynamics in which people were involved, and the broader cultural relations that sustained them.

The findings reveal that in early childhood the adopted Vietnamese identity process was shaped by a series of identifications with, and affirmations of, sharing their adoptive parents racial and cultural identity. Such identifications were then challenged once the adoptees entered society and were seen by others as different. The participants' attempts to locate a secure sense of self and identity within the world they are placed in are disturbed by numerous uncertainties surrounding racial and cultural difference. One of the most crucial uncertainties is the adopted Vietnamese knowledge about their cultural background. While most felt they lacked positive knowledge about Vietnam and racial diversity, their sense of identity was unsettled by experiences with racism and negative cultural stereotypes throughout their late childhood to adolescence.

As their recognition and acceptance of their difference develops in adulthood, they experience a degree of empowerment due to their being able to access more knowledge about their cultural background and a greater appreciation of racial diversity. Many participants have formed closer ties with other people born in Vietnam, most notably other adoptees; most returned to visit Vietnam. The thesis concludes that those adoptees who were able to develop an understanding of the Vietnamese and other backgrounds to their complex identities, tended to be more integrated as adults than those who either rejected or were unable to come to terms with their Vietnamese ancestry.

Laming, G. (1995). 'The Occaision For Speaking'. In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.* (Eds, Ashcroft, B.;Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H.). London: Routledge. pp. 12 - 17.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Highlighting the Problem

> Apart from physical differences, families adopting an inter-country child frequently assert that over time such differences grow less and that they regard their inter-country adopted child the same as any other natural or adopted child – *Study of white parents with Vietnamese children 5 years after their arrival to the West* (Harvey, 1980: 35).

> To me it (growing up) was negative as I was the only Asian in the neighbourhood. I stood out as the Black sheep…as a child I wanted to meet other Vietnamese people to feel more comfortable – *Ann, a Vietnamese child adoptee, as an adult.*

Although adopted Vietnamese may identify closely with their white[1] adoptive parents during early childhood, in their overall construction of identity, 'difference'[2] matters. How do the physical appearances and cultural background of Vietnamese orphans continue to shape their identity as 'different', even when they were placed as infants with white adoptive parents in the West [3] who raised them to be the 'same'? As we will see, central to understanding this process is their positioning within a society where race is used as an all purpose marker 'which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies'; this includes questions of cultural boundaries (Omi and Winant, 2001: 370).

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[1] The term white or 'whiteness', also referred to in this research as the 'same' has been identified as '…an unmarked or neutral category… the unspoken norm' (Frankenburg, R, 1999 :197). Other racial classifications, such as Black, are capitalised to acknowledge that they have become a site of political struggle. 'Different' or 'Other' in this research refers to racial and cultural categories outside 'whiteness'.

[2] 'Difference' is used in the context of the 'Politics of Difference' to refer to the struggle for recognition rather than a belief in essential differences. It is a strategic identification against assimilation/ 'sameness' ideologies that 'structures privilege and oppression' against differences that includes racial and cultural identities (Young, 2001: 207)

[3] The West or Western refers not only to white European locations in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand but also to 'economic, institutional, political, ideological [and] cultural' practices (Hall, 2001: 89).

Adopted Vietnamese currently occupy a complex and uneasy position within society. Studies of such marginal identities can be guided by understanding the workings of racial categories in a racially stratified society. While the adopted Vietnamese appear visibly different to the white populations among whom they came to live, they have been re-located, since infancy, into the privileged centre of white culture [4] having been adopted by white parents. They were culturally and physically relocated from Vietnamese society and re-positioned as a racial minority within their new society. For most this applies equally within their adoptive families. This transposition and its implications have been explored through interviews with thirteen adopted Vietnamese. All were 'war orphans' adopted during the end stages of the Vietnam War, and then brought to the West.

The life histories of adopted Vietnamese were collected from in-depth interviews. These life histories provide a well-suited empirical setting to explore how social constructions of whiteness and 'Other' racial categories shapes identity, inside and outside the family environment. Due to an early separation from their biological parents, country of origin and cultural heritage, and to their 'assimilation' via an upbringing consisting of the roles, culture and social networks of their adoptive parents, an exploration of the identity of the adopted Vietnamese can focus on 'routes, rather than roots' (McCrone, 2003: 1). Their alternative upbringing provides a dynamic context to expose potentially overlooked uncertainties and transformations to how racial and cultural identities develop.

Are adopted Vietnamese *not quite* the 'same' or 'different', or are there transformations that can situate their identity as not *just* one or the other? The slash between not quite/just and the same/different in the title of this thesis is used to highlight a parallel between the construction of identity in adopted Vietnamese and the 'cut-and-mix processes' as well as 'links and splits, connects and disconnects' that Ang uses to describe 'Alter/Asians' in the context of Asia-Australian identity formation(Ang, 2000: xix). Ang states that the slash is used to capture 'intricate and heterogeneous entanglements and interconnections' (Ang, 2000: xix).

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[4] White culture also described as 'whiteness' refers to European influenced traditions, language, religion, social practices and values. However, white culture also 'designates a subjective sense of identity as much as it designates activity or practice' (Frankenberg, 1999: 234).

This research is guided by the position that, while all racial identities are socially constructed, a 'colour-blind' worldview fails to acknowledge or resist existing racist ideologies and practices that are a reality in society (Frankenberg, 1999; Mercer, 1994; Torres et al., 1999). The participants' physical appearances are shown to have become a problematic part of their identity due to their experiences with racism and/or cultural stereotyping while they were growing up. The social construction of racial categories and their relationships to power, using various readings from contemporary social theory such as post-structuralism, critical race theory and post-colonial studies, is interrogated to gain insight into how adopted Vietnamese 'difference' is subordinated.

Another uncomfortable and problematic part of the participants' identity while they were growing up was their cultural background. Their 'Other' (non-Western) heritage was socially, politically and historically fixed into essentialist categories, racialised and subordinated by others in the West (Said, 1991; Stam and Shohat, 1994). Adoptive narratives and the Western mass media represented Vietnamese people as not just 'different' but also as inferior, exposing Western hegemonic[5] 'historical and conjunctural' (Hall, 2001: 97) practices. Further insight into this process are provided by work that posits that all cultural identities are flexible but historically situated and shaped by discursive practices and dualisms (Grossberg, 1996; Hall, 1997; Minh-Ha, 1995; Sarup, 1996; Woodward, 1997).

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[5] Further theory in Chapter 3, particularly on Orientalism, details how hegemony operates in the West

The adopted Vietnamese were able to gain access to a greater appreciation of racial diversity and more positive knowledge about their cultural background as they reached adulthood. Various tensions surrounding their racial 'difference' to white began to decrease as they relocated to more multicultural environments and saw Vietnamese people. The participants' desire to identify as Vietnamese increased. However, essentialist attitudes towards Vietnamese ethnicity, in both the adoptees and the Vietnamese people, contributed to new challenges. New ways to re-conceptualise the adoptees ongoing construction of identity once they began interacting with Vietnamese culture are developed from theories on hybridity (Bhabha, 1996; Bhabha and Rutherford, 1990; Meredith, P., 1998; Papastergiadis, 2000; Werbner and Modood, 2000).

1.2 Why Identity?

Identity in this study is viewed as a way people position themselves in relation to others and act accordingly (Burkitt, 1991). Studying identity can bring to light not only why 'difference' matters, but also how it can shift from being a negative to a positive part of the lives of the adopted Vietnamese. The research reveals patterns of how 'differences' to whiteness are symbolised as socially inferior. This created strain for adopted Vietnamese while they were growing up and in some participants it became a deep source of shame. Analysing the attempts by the adopted Vietnamese to reclaim particular 'differences' in adulthood assists with exploring what social changes or processes led to a re-evaluation of their Vietnamese heritage as a potential source of empowerment and pride.

Taylor asserts in *The Politics of Recognition* 'consider what we mean by identity. It is who we are, "where we're coming from" '(Taylor, C., 1994: 79). Taylor believes that identity is a 'fundamentally dialogical character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity through acquisition of rich human languages of expression…we learn these modes of expression through our interaction with others who matter to us – what Mead[6] called “significant others” ’ (Taylor, C., 1994: 79, 80).

An exploration of the identity of the adopted Vietnamese using this understanding of selfhood begins with their early childhood interactions with adoptive parents or ‘significant others’ (Mead, G. H., 1972: 6) where they were encouraged to be and feel the ‘same’. Piaget’s model of childhood development is also used as a guide to understand how this is learnt.

The social construction of identity is also reliant on its development through interactions with others outside the family, with what Mead called ‘generalized others’ (Mead, G. H., 1972: 164). Mead failed, however, to account for potential liabilities such as the self and identity becoming *mis*recognised, stereotyped and ‘spoiled’ (Goffman, 1963; Katovich and Reese III, 1993).

Honneth offers an alternative to Mead’s cooperative social world, and Taylor’s less complex understandings of the politics of recognition, with his investigation of individuals who encounter what he terms, forms of *disrespect.* Honneth identifies three main forms of disrespect: physical, moral and evaluative. The first form of disrespect leads to a loss of control over one’s body, the second results in the denial of rights and the third involves devaluing the lifestyle of the group experiencing disrespect (Honneth, 2001).

When disrespect is intense, Honneth argues that emotional damage such as social shame emerges. His social actors are however, capable of using the impact of negative emotions as a ‘motive for political resistance’ (Honneth, 2001: 45). Honneth’s model was broadly[7] used to guide the exploration of the impact of various challenges faced by the participants’ where from late childhood and adolescence, their ‘difference’ made them vulnerable. This approach uncovers the experiences the adopted Vietnamese had with racism, cultural stereotypes and a devaluation of their cultural background, all of which had an impact on their sense of identity. The various strategies the participants developed as they reach maturity in order to resist disrespect are explored later.

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[6] George Herbert Mead (1972) in *Mind, Self and Society.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Where there are authors who share the same last name, the initials of their other names are featured in the citations.

[7] Honneth (2001) gives closer attention to an internal emotional process that includes reference to psychoanalysis, however, this research follows Mead’s philosophy remaining in the realm of a conscious negotiation process detailed further in Chapter 3.

1.3 Introducing The Research Question & Hypothesis

Past studies suggested, that in early to late childhood, the adopted Vietnamese were able to adjust and 'assimilate' successfully into their new families (Calder, 1978; Harvey, 1980). These early studies downplayed questions of 'difference' but were limited to research data based on interviews with adoptive parents and were undertaken before most children had engaged with the wider society. The voices of the adopted Vietnamese and how they viewed themselves and their place in the world around them as they matured was overlooked.

This research is now being conducted with adopted Vietnamese at an age where they can offer mature insights into complex issues of 'difference' and how 'where they come from', pre and post-adoption, has relevance to 'where they are coming from' in their ongoing process of identity. The research question chosen to conduct an in-depth investigation into this complex process is: what role does the authentication of cultural background have on the development of an integrated identity in adopted Vietnamese War orphans? By addressing this question, this work has two main aims. The first aim is to add new insights about the experiences of the first generation of adopted Vietnamese, now adults, who grew up with white parents. The second aim is to open up further debate on the value of recognition and respect of 'difference' in trans-racial adoption.

Cultural background refers to the cultural heritage of their biological parents and country of birth. This can include, but is not limited to, language, food, values, lifestyle traditions, history, artistic expressions and family background. Authentication refers to the possession of knowledge, level of worth, familiarity with its practice and the verification of membership an individual has with their cultural background and others who share it.

The first hypothesis to be tested is: Although adopted Vietnamese orphans may have been offered the racial and cultural identity of their non-Vietnamese adoptive parents during early childhood within the family environment, such identifications were likely to be challenged by others as the adoptees matured and engaged in society.

This is followed by a second hypothesis: In families where there was an appreciation of racial diversity and inclusion of Vietnamese culture, adopted Vietnamese orphans were more likely to have been prepared to cope with challenges to their identity in their interactions with others in society.

1.4 The Research Perspective

Two research perspectives were adapted to explore the identity of adopted Vietnamese as they developed from childhood to maturity. When combined both perspectives offer a framework that rejects essentialist notions of racial and cultural 'difference' but still view them as having distinct symbolic meanings that might shape the adopted Vietnamese experience of the world. The symbolic interactionist perspective is based on the premise that, 'the personality – along with intelligence and self-awareness – arises only in society' (Burkitt, 1991:30). This perspective also supports research that uses a micro-level qualitative research approach which is set out by one of its founders, Blumer (1969). Further aspects of symbolic interaction on selfhood and research methodology will be discussed with more depth in following chapters.

The life experiences of the adopted Vietnamese participants are also interpreted using knowledge associated with contemporary social theory such as cultural studies including Orientalism to hybridity theories (Bhabha and Rutherford, 1990; Hall, 2001; Said, 1991). Contemporary interactionists agree that cultural studies, for example, provide a complementary macro-view that takes into account wider social problems that may affect the subjects under investigation (Denzin, 1992; Katovich and Reese III, 1993; Wolfe, 1999). Denzin proposes that cultural studies figures such as Stuart Hall offer 'a cultural subject [that] is partly symbolic interactionist, for his social actors define for themselves the conditions in which they live. But the meanings [a] subject brings to his or her situation are shaped by the larger ideological forces in the culture'. Denzin believes that cultural studies' theory of the cultural subject and the state which is historical' offers contemporary interactionists a way to address gaps in more traditional approaches (Denzin, 1992: 118).

Some cultural studies with post-modernist, post-structuralist and psychoanalytical elements are not completely compatible with symbolic interactionism (Wolfe, 1999). Katovich and Reese III warn that the symbolic interactionist tradition is not as 'radical' as poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory, but agree that the 'current conceptions of postmodernism, especially in relation to the social self, also can be reconstructed in terms of the pragmatic traditions of which Meadian interactionism played a vital part' (Katovich and Reese III, 1993: 395).

Reymers proposes a synthesis between the idea of a symbolic interactionist reflexive self and more radical ideas stating, 'Our identities are created through our symbolic understanding of the world (as fostered through our particular historically social contexts/biographies); but our symbolic understanding, although limited, is based upon some empirical reality' (Reymers, 1998: 10). Symbolic interactionism and cultural studies, along with other contemporary social theory, are viewed as offering useful approaches for this research to explore the interpersonal dynamics adoptees have with their white adoptive parents and the broader cultural relations that shape their understanding of their world and overall construction of identity.

1.5 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 'Background Information' begins with an overview of the history of adoption from Vietnam. The overview outlines the migration history of Vietnamese War orphans adopted into the West, the main countries involved and how the adopted Vietnamese population is rapidly increasing through contemporary adoption practices. The adoptees migration is then framed within the larger non-adopted overseas Vietnamese community (also known as Viet Kieu). The chapter then discusses some of the social issues of adoption from Vietnam that have been identified in earlier academic studies and other texts (such as print media and documentaries).

Chapter 3 'Reviewing Literature On Identity' explores intellectual thought on selfhood, race, cultural background and identity development. The role of power and why identities might be manipulated and negotiated in order to manage 'difference' and attain greater salience are also considered.

Chapter 4 'Methodology' details the qualitative approach used to test the hypothesis and investigate the research question. This includes the strengths and constraints of using life histories, the Internet for the interview process and having the same background as the target population under investigation.

Chapter 5 'Encounters With 'Difference'' is the first section of the research findings presenting data from the interviews. It begins with a descriptive profile of each of the participants summarising key stages of their identity development. It then explores the participants' construction of identity in early childhood. This period focuses on their interactions with adoptive parents where they are raised to feel the 'same' but encounter 'difference' through adoption narratives introducing the concept of 'Vietnam' to them.

Chapter 6 'Experiencing 'Difference'' explores the participants' identities from late childhood to adolescence. Over these stages the participants' interactions are limited mostly to white people. Here they experience a sense of their own 'difference', mostly through discrimination against them.

Chapter 7' Investing in 'Difference'' explores the participants' transformations in adulthood. This period includes their interactions with other Vietnamese people in the West and Vietnam. At this stage an investment in 'difference' occurs, including their exploration of Vietnamese culture and developing relationships with Vietnamese people.

Chapter 8 'Discussion' will examine the main points to emerge from the research findings. Key themes from Chapter 3 will be further discussed to understand how academic theory brings a deeper understanding to the adopted Vietnamese experiences. Symbolic interactionism provides a methodology that aids an understanding of the conditions in which participants shared the racial and cultural identity of their adoptive parents and the need to renegotiate their sense of self and identity once they interact with others outside the family. Writings from cultural studies assist with uncovering particular tensions and power relationships that caused significant challenges to their identity as racial minorities from a non-Western cultural background.

Chapter 9 'Conclusion' will summarise the research findings, hypotheses and research question. It reviews the key challenges participants experienced in their identity process and the main resources that affected their ability to cope. It concludes that a sense of pride and empowerment in the participants are strongest when an appreciation of racial diversity and positive knowledge about their cultural background are made available. The outcomes demonstrate that the authentication of cultural background has an important role in the development of an integrated identity for the adopted Vietnamese. This chapter then considers the implications and future directions for this research. Considerations include how the findings might offer guidance for recent and potential adoptive parents as well as researchers and adoption professionals focusing on adoption from Vietnam.

Chapter 2 –Background Information

2.1 From War to Contemporary Adoption from Vietnam

Individuals are considered orphans and legally available for adoption when their 'natural parents are unable, or unwilling' to care for them, and 'have been legally freed of any ties' (Kadushin, 1970: 1). Trans-racial adoption refers to when a child is placed in a situation where the adoptive parents are identified as racially 'different'. Inter-country adoption more generally refers to when a child from one country is placed with adoptive parents living in another. Both types of adoptions in the US 'almost without exception has involved the adoption by white parents of children of racial or ethnic minority groups from the United States or other countries' (Hollingsworth, 1999: 444). The pattern of children from the developing world and minority groups being adopted into the care of white adoptive parents is similar throughout other Western countries.

Weil highlights in a migration study review that 'the worldwide availability of data on foreign adoptions is uneven in both quantity and quality' (Weil, 1984: 277). However, general estimates demonstrate that the practice has grown in popularity throughout the 20th Century. In the first half of the 20th Century most children 'supplied' for inter-country adoptions came from Europe. Various reports estimated that over 30,000 children, from Spanish and Jewish refugees[8] to orphans from the United Kingdom (UK)[9] were transported overseas into inter-country foster care or adopted (Buti, 1994; HLS, 2003; Thompson, 2003; Wright and Dalrymple, 1937).

Adoptions of children from Asia, Africa, South America, indigenous and minority groups began to dominate trans-racial adoptions in the latter half of the 20th Century. Korean researchers estimate that since the 1950s approximately 150,000 orphans from the Republic of Korea have been trans-racially adopted into Western countries (Kang, 2002; Yoon, I., 2001). Hollingsworth states that between '1967 and 1972 approximately 10,000 African American children were trans-racially adopted within the United States' (Hollingsworth, 1999: 444). In addition to these groups of children, over 100,000 orphans from indigenous nations such as Native or First Americans, Inuit and Aboriginal Australians are reported to have been domestically placed into white families (IITC, 2001; AGPS, 1997; HREOC, 2000; Harper, K., 2000).

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[8] Located to countries such as the United Kingdom

[9] Located to countries such as Australia and South Africa

There are no official figures on the exact number of orphans who have been adopted from Vietnam into the West. Only a small number of adoptions were documented during the French occupation (Chi, 2002). The administration of most operations by foreigners became restricted to South Vietnam following the collapse of French rule in the North of Vietnam in 1954 [10] (Mackerras et al., 1988). Taylor, who worked as an Australian adoption administrator during the Vietnam War, offers some insight into the general figures of overseas adoptions from South Vietnam that occurred prior to 1975(Taylor, R. and Grant, 1988). Palmer states 'From 1968 to 1972 Rosemary (Taylor) and her staff managed to place a total of 1132 orphans, having arranged the majority of all adoptions of Vietnamese children during those years'(Palmer, 2001: 2). Taylor's work with Terre des Hommes initially placed most children with families living in Switzerland, Germany, France, Belgium and Luxemburg. However, she would soon be sending children to a larger selection of countries.

As pressure for adoptions from waiting adoptive parents, adoption agencies and various humanitarian workers in the US, UK and Australia grew, President Gerald Ford agreed on April 3rd in 1975 to approve the airlift of thousands of orphans from Vietnam[11] (Peck-Barnes, 2000). This evacuation of war orphans from Saigon, known as Operation Babylift, was the largest mass migration of

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[10] Geneva Agreement 21 July, 1954 "The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam" declared a demarcation line on the 17th parallel with Viet Minh regrouping to the North and France to the South (Mackerras et al,1988: 21)

[11] All children were removed before 30 April 1975 when Communist forces took over control of Vietnam and the country was reunified as The Socialist Republic of Vietnam. All foreign troops withdrew and relations between Vietnam and the West, particularly the US, were hostile (Mackerras et al,1988: 35). Relationships began to ease following a policy of Doi Moi in 1986 initiating a more flexible approach to economic relations and private enterprise. The US and Vietnam re-established their diplomatic ties in 1995 (Tipton. 2001).

Vietnamese children to enter the west for adoption. Various reports estimate that over 2,000 children were flown to the United States (US) and over 1000 were flown to Canada, Europe and Australia (Harvey, 1980; Martin, 2000; Peck-Barnes, 2000). In consideration of this distribution, the participants for this research consist of individuals who were placed in the US, UK, Australia and France.

Taylor states that the Vietnamese orphans selected for foreign adoption, 'were healthy and handicapped babies; the fully Vietnamese and the mixed-race; the legitimate and the illegitimate ... These babies came by dozens each month to the already overcrowded orphanages' (Taylor, R. and Grant, 1988). Western orphanage workers and volunteers working in Vietnam during the war expressed a special concern for the fate of mixed-race children fathered by foreign soldiers (Clarke, 2000; Peck-Barnes, 2000; Thieman, 2000a). Ferguson, an Australian who worked for the Red Cross and World Vision in Vietnam from 1967 to 1975, reflected upon the concerns for mixed-race children:

> Many of my Vietnamese friends were ambivalent or completely opposed to these adoptions. However, for those orphans of mixed-race, it could be argued it was the best option. The general population despised women who bore children to black Americans. So much so, that World Vision's nurses were reluctant to be seen in public with a mixed race black baby. Most of these children had a poor future in store if they remained in Vietnam (Ferguson, 2002).

The mixed-race children who were not evacuated in 1975 are reported to have suffered discrimination and exclusion from education and employment (Johnson, 2002; Lederer, 2000; Nguyen, 2001; Yoon, D. H., 1999). Some Amerasians entered the US later through programs like the 1982 Orderly Departure Program and the Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1987 (Johnson, 2002; Yoon, D. H., 1999). However, the process was complicated by the conditions of entry that demanded applicants provide 'evidence that they had American paternity' (Valverde, 1992: 151).

Some adoptive parents report that they decided to adopt children from Vietnam in response to the atrocities against Vietnamese children they were observing from their homes via media reports (Harvey, 1980; WV, 1973). Media images during the Vietnam War that motivated their sense of altruism included napalm attacks on children[12] and the My Lai massacre[13] of women and children (Chong, 2000; Hammer, 1971). Infertile couples are also reported to have decided to adopt from Vietnam.

Australian families reacted positively towards the prospect of adopting the Operation Babylift arrivals. In the state of New South Wales (NSW) far more families expressed an interest in adopting than was expected or practical. Harvey reports that, ' over 4,000 sets of adoption application papers were despatched from telephone enquiries' when only 14 children were left awaiting adoption (Harvey, 1980: 41). Various reports estimate that at the end of the Vietnam War between 292 to 537 Vietnamese orphans were eventually adopted into Australian families (Coughlan, 1989; Harvey, 1980; Harper, J., 1986; QLDGOV, 2002).

Since 1975 Australia has had no bilateral agreement with Vietnam with regards to foreign adoptions. Further adoptions from Vietnam after the war were made extremely difficult without such agreements in place. The only process that makes adopting from Vietnam possible is restricted to Australian citizens who have lived abroad for more than twelve months in a country where an adoption agreement exists[14] and such adoptions are rare (AIHW, 1990; Altman, 1995; ALII, 2000; Buckley, 2000).

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[12] The attack captured by the media of Kim Phuc running naked, burnt from a napalm attack on 8 June, 1972 made world headlines (Chong, 2000).

[13] 16 March, 1968 a unit of the U.S. army American division, led by Lt. William L. Calley shot unarmed civilians, including women and children: the final army estimate for the number killed was 347(Hammer, R).

In 1975 *The Daily Mail* newspaper in the United Kingdom (UK) was responsible for the most publicly controversial airlift of Vietnamese children. The paper's editor David English arranged for 99 orphans to be removed from Saigon so they could arrive at Heathrow airport with him for a front-page photograph and news story. British reporter Jacobus (1984) accused English's motives of being more about self-publicity than humanitarian concerns for the children and labelled it *Operation Propaganda*.

Investigative journalist Greensdale (2001) was also critical stating that, "the stunt he pulled off in 1975 remains one of the most controversial journalistic enterprises of all time and illustrates the dangers of playing with people's lives" (Greensdale, 2001: 1) . He revealed that only 51 of the 99 orphans were eventually adopted. The children who were not adopted were sent to special homes and several were never offered post-placements from the Ockendon Venture children's home to which they were originally consigned.

An official estimate of the number of Vietnamese adoptions to the UK is hard to quantify. The UK Department of Health only began a registration of foreign adoptions in 2003 and it has yet to register documents dating as far back as 1927 (UKDOH, 2003). France's figures are also difficult to verify but the International Resources Centre of International Social Services reported that 731 Vietnamese children were adopted by French families in 1999 alone (Selman, 2001).

Interest in adopting Vietnamese orphans during the Vietnam War in the US was high in 1975 and American families received the largest number of children from Operation Babylift but due to international tensions between the US and the reunified Vietnam, only 44 adopted Vietnamese entered the US in the fifteen years following Vietnam's reunification(Peck-Barnes, 2000). When diplomatic relations were resumed in 1995, the number of adoptions from Vietnam doubled that year and have continued to increase each year (NAIC, 2002). The US currently takes up to 75% of foreign adoptions worldwide and 'Immigrant orphan visas issued by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services nearly tripled between 1991 and 2001: from 7,093 to 19,237…more than 139,000 children have been adopted internationally in the last ten years' (Volkman, 2003: 1). They take a number of orphans from Vietnam each year reaching a peak of 737 in the year 2001, thus making it the 7th most popular foreign country from which US families choose to adopt (USDOS, 2003).

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[14] For example Australian Diplomat Amanda Buckley adopted a Vietnamese child in 1998 using an American adoption agency while she was posted at the Australian Embassy in Washington, DC, USA

Table 1: Immigrant Visas Issued to Orphans Coming to the US

TOP *COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FY 2001*

4,681	CHINA (mainland born)
4,279	RUSSIA
1,870	S. KOREA
1,609	GUATEMALA
1,246	UKRAINE
782	ROMANIA
737	VIETNAM
672	KAZAKHSTAN
543	INDIA
407	CAMBODIA
297	BULGARIA
266	COLOMBIA
219	PHILIPPINES
192	HAITI
158	ETHIOPIA
129	BELARUS
86	POLAND
74	THAILAND
73	MEXICO
51	JAMAICA
51	LIBERIA
19,237	Total

Figures are from the US Department of State (USDOS), Office of Visa Processing, 2001 (USDOS, 2003). Note that the "Child Citizenship Act of 2000" effective on Tuesday, February 27, 2001 streamlined the process to allow foreign-born children adopted by U.S. citizen to automatically become U.S. citizens (USDOS, 2001).

Observers of migration flows in globalisation studies have long seen the vast changing nature of migration (Hefti, 1997). Globalisation has also changed the nature of trans-racial and inter-country adoption change from a humanitarian solution in times of war to a regular practice for individuals [15] wishing to become parents. Typical adopting parents are still 'white, English speaking, college-educated, middle class, urban living' with the typical adopted children still coming from minority backgrounds, developing and/or war torn countries (Smith Mann, 1988: 1). However, some studies argue that the main motivations are no longer altruistic but due to the lower costs such adoptions offer to people wishing to start or expand their family (Cox, 1999; Haviland, 2002; Serril, 1991; Smith Mann, 1988).

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[15] Includes infertile, Gay and Lesbian couples and single parents.

Serril defines the contemporary popularity of foreign adoptions in economic terms stating the practice is, 'driven by classic causes: faltering domestic supply and rising demand' (Serril, 1991: 87). There are some ethical concerns expressed within the adoption community over the link between the contemporary practice of foreign adoption and 'market forces' (Freundlich, 2000: 1). Gerow (2002), an industry analyst, claims that Marketdata Enterprises of Tampa, Florida placed a 1.4 billion US dollar value on adoption services in the US, with a projected annual growth rate of 11.5 percent to 2004. Babb (in Groenig, 2002) warns of potential trafficking arguing that 'when money is as central to a human service as it is in adoption practice, money not only drives the process, but it also shapes the results'.

Various members of the adoption community concerned about the growing problem of the trafficking of children for adoption, have begun to lobby all countries to ratify the Hague Convention 33 "Convention On Protection Of Children And Co-Operation In Respect Of Inter-country Adoption" also referred to as The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption (HCCH, 1993). This is a multilateral treaty designed to protect children's rights and applies to all international adoptions between countries that ratify the treaty. Supporters believe that The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 'will hopefully mark an important step in strengthening the position of the most vulnerable parties in inter-country adoption' (Meier, 1998).

Vietnamese adoptions abroad have a history of being complicated by the question of whether 'orphans' are legally relinquished by their natural parents. The first problems began during the Vietnam War where, 'Lost or inaccurate records were the norm and, in several cases, birth parents or other relatives who later arrived in the U.S. demanded custody of children who had previously been adopted by American families' (NAATA, 2000: 2). Erichson (2001) details this problem further.

> While children of the Baby Lift were being placed in adoptive American homes, some of their parents, who survived the fall, were making their way toward freedom…Within a few years, they were holding a green card and searching for their children. Custody suits - the only ones to ever result from an international adoption – followed (Erichson, 2001: 1).

Concerns over whether the Vietnamese children who are ‘available’ for adoption abroad are legitimate orphans continue to be an issue. The US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) began to warn potential adoptive parents in 2002 that ‘irregularities in the methods used to identify children for adoption in Vietnam make it difficult to classify some children as orphans under U.S. immigration law…in Vietnam, several instances of child buying have been documented over the past two years’(INS, 2002: 2).

There are also reports in Vietnam that ‘About two dozen people, including some government officials, have been jailed in the past two years for soliciting children from unwed mothers and poor families and falsifying documents for hundreds of children sold to brokers for foreign adoption …Vietnamese newspapers have accused some foreign adoption agencies of illegally trafficking hundreds of Vietnamese children over the past six years’ (WTOP, 2002). The negative side effects such activities have for the welfare of Vietnamese parents and adoptive parents are numerous. The adopted Vietnamese are negatively affected due to being left with false or lost birth records. Contact with any surviving relatives at a later date is then made extremely difficult as their birth name and birth dates are seen as questionable and hard to authenticate.

Vietnam has decided to not ratify the Hague Convention. The adoption community’s awareness that some ‘orphans’ from Vietnam have not been legally relinquished by their natural parents created a series of controversial debates over how future adoptions should proceed. The Vietnamese Government introduced a decree in July 2002, to begin in January 2003, to tighten controls over foreign adoptions of Vietnamese children in an attempt to halt fraud and child trafficking. Countries wishing to adopt children from Vietnam must now have a Memorandum of Understanding set in place.

2.2 Other Overseas Vietnamese Populations

The Vietnamese communities abroad are often viewed as a monolithic unitary group. However, it is argued that identities are 'made up out of partial fragments…Identities can, therefore, be contradictory and are always situational' (Grossberg, 1996: 91). The backgrounds and present cultural, political and social identities of Vietnamese 'to some degree presupposes uniformity, yet there is enormous regional, religious and ethnic diversity in Vietnam (and abroad). Also, …individual mobility across ethnic boundaries over time mean that categories represented as fixed and immutable are constantly changing' (Thomas, M., 1999: 5).

The first generation of Vietnamese to migrate to the West included political refugees and their families who escaped after the Vietnam War; they constitute a diaspora dimension (Dorais, 2001; Wahlbeck, 2002). Other Vietnamese people who began to move abroad included Vietnamese women who married foreigners, university students and professionals (Thomas, M., 1999). The flow of people out of Vietnam to the West during the war also included Vietnamese children who were exposed to a range of situations beyond their control resulting in migration. This group includes children who were adopted but also many unaccompanied minors who spent years residing in detention camps and whose lives have been described as '…a violent and destructive arena…a temporary social order vastly different from the world of children in Vietnam' (Freeman and Nguyen, 2002: 210).

Vietnamese people are now visible in many western societies and in some cities in countries like Australia and America, they have even developed 'little Saigons' such as Cabramatta in NSW, Australia (Thomas, M., 1999). The overseas Vietnamese population now includes a large number of overseas born or second-generation Vietnamese. Dorais (2001) states that the total number of Vietnamese living overseas 'is difficult to assess, but some estimates put it at some 2.6 million. About half of them now live in the United States, the rest being scattered over 60 different countries, including France (400,000), China (300,000), Australia (200,000), Canada (200,000) and Thailand (120,000)' (Dorais, 2001: 3).

The adopted Vietnamese make up only a small fraction of the total number of Vietnamese born people that have migrated to the West. Their experiences are overshadowed in research by more general studies on the larger overseas Vietnamese community made up of refugees and their second generation living abroad. Many studies of overseas Vietnamese populations focus on a range of the hardships they are reported to have experienced, including discrimination and feelings of alienation from being excluded from the mainstream (Jakubowicz, 2003; Thomas, M., 1999; Zia, 2000). Due to their designation as racial 'Others' and their Vietnamese cultural background, the adopted Vietnamese are also vulnerable to encountering such challenges.

Reports of racism against the physical appearances of Asian people highlight just one of the many possibly shared disadvantages that adopted and non-adopted Vietnamese people face. Borooah and Mangan's (2002) study of discrimination against South East Asian people in an Australian context argued that, 'Asian people suffered from a general disadvantage, arising from the very fact of being Asian' (Borooah and Mangan, 2002: 40). Thomas more directly observes that Vietnamese people experience 'a sense of being unwelcome members of the Australian society…expressed through the experience Vietnamese people have of their bodies…The memory of the past through the body is reinforced by interactions with non-Asian people, who will often comment on or question a person's ethnic identity' (Thomas, M., 1999: 33).

2.3 Trans-racial Adoption Literature

Groenig (2002) claims that in the adoption community 'Opponents of trans-racial adoption have argued that this is nothing more than cultural imperialism, which exploits developing world women and children and denies children their culture' while others have the 'attitude that inter-country adoption provides hope and homes for children otherwise destined for a life of poverty, with little cultural advantage to appreciate'. A review of trans-racial adoption research literature reveals that until recently, there has been a lack of studies investigating the role of culture. However, a variety of views from public debates are now also reflected in trans-racial adoption studies.

Most research on trans-racial adoption has emerged from social work, psychology and adoption agency studies. Although such studies offer particular insights, it is criticised that some approaches fail, 'to analyse the question of cultural difficulties' (Penn and Coverdale, 1996: 1). A recent "Special Transnational Adoption Issue" in *Social Text* notes that 'in other disciplines adoption has just begun to emerge as a serious topic. Even in anthropology, with its traditional core focus on kinship and the making of culture, adoption…has been oddly absent' (Volkman, 2003: 3).

Some recent studies have increased their focus on cultural issues to reflect on the growing concerns over the asymmetrical power relationship between white adoptive parents who dominate the practice of trans-racial adoption, and the non-white children of different cultural backgrounds who join their families (Armstrong and Slayton, 2001; Hübinette, 2003; Patton, 2000; Shiu, 2001; Volkman, 2003; Yee, 2002; Yngvesson and Mahoney, 2000; Yoon, I., 2001). Such analysis has begun to use theory from cultural and post-colonial studies, critical race theory and feminist critique to examine how race and culture are also inseparable to trans-racial adoption issues and practices. For example, Patton's (2000) study of trans-racial adoption implicates a connection between race and an unequal power relationship in trans-racial adoption between adoptees and their adoptive parents.

> Among trans-racial adoptees, the apparent differences in commonly identified "racial characteristics" between their families and themselves are the subject of discussion and serve to regularly remind them of the "constructedness" of their families and identities. They are always visible, they cannot "pass" ' (Patton, 2000: 172).

Trans-racial adoption literature is useful in developing an awareness of more general issues emerging in how trans-racial adoptees develop their identities. However, most literature on trans-racial adoption is limited to studying the adoption of Korean, African-American and Indigenous children (AGPS, 1997; Baden, 2002; Berkely, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1999; IITC, 2001; Jacobs, 1999; Kang, 2002; Meier, 1998; Shui, 1999; Simon, R. and Altstein, 1992; Simon, R. J., 1998; Simon, R. J. and Alstein, 1977; Trenka, 2003). The absence of research featuring adopted Vietnamese perspectives and context is partly because the adoptees have only now reached an age where they can offer mature insights into their experiences.

Some social workers, academics and Operation Babylift volunteers in the years following the main arrivals of the Vietnamese war orphans did begin to suggest that the children's settling in process may have required special attention (Calder, 1978; Harvey, 1980; McDonald, 1980). Harvey (1980) began to investigate, 'what kind of people do adopt an overseas child?' five years after the main arrival of Vietnamese orphans in the West (Harvey, 1980: 50). His study explored the emotional and financial security of adopting parents and concluded that, at the time, the children were 'assimilating' without significant problems. However, Harvey acknowledged at the time of his study that it was 'too early to establish by research in fact how…inter-country adopted children adjust as adults and whom they identify with' (Harvey, 1980: 99).

Some Operation Babylift volunteers began to express a more critical view about adoptions from Vietnam once the Vietnamese war orphans began to reach maturity. Briand (in McHugh, 1993), an Australian volunteer in Operation Babylift reports to have 'seen some orphans grow up alienated and disturbed, rejecting their families to live on the streets, where a few have succumbed to drugs, crime and prostitution' (McHugh, 1993: 193). A recent Swedish study addressing similar observations claims incidents of suicide and drug dependency are higher in individuals who are trans-racially adopted compared to the rest of the Swedish population due to the added stress they encounter due to racism affecting their access to various social opportunities, including marriage and employment (Berg-Kelly and Ericksson, 1997).

The concerns of Australian adoptive parents' and adoptees on issues of racism and cultural heritage combined when one study in the 1990s resulted in *Report 81: Problems in Current Inter-Country Adoption Practice* (NSW, 1994b). This report called for the amendment of *The Adoption of Children Act 1965.* The main issues to emerge in this publication are highlighted in *Recommendation 68* that concludes 'parents should understand and be sensitive to the issues involved in adopting a child from a different culture and/or race; foster a positive perception in the child of his or her culture and racial identity and heritage; and help the child should he or she encounter racism or discrimination in school or the wider community' (NSW, 1994a).

In 2000, on the 25th anniversary of Operation Babylift, the Vietnamese adoptees re-emerged in public as a collective group with a high media profile when they began two main activities. The first main activity was attending reunions with other adoptees with whom they had been airlifted. The second was going on group trips with other adoptees to visit Vietnam. These activities offered many adopted Vietnamese their first opportunity to meet with others who shared their adoption history and cultural background. Adoption agencies and humanitarian groups that had worked in Vietnam during the war were the first to organise the activities. Some adopted Vietnamese then self-organised further trips to Vietnam, social events in the West and utilised Internet technology such as email, instant messaging and websites to further community networking and development (Mundy, 2002; Williams, 2002a).

> The Reunion gave us the opportunity to hear success stories of adoptees who travelled back to our motherland and found their biological families. This helped me to decide that it was time to search for my biological mother and journey back to Vietnam – *Adopted Vietnamese Stacy Meredith* (2000: 1).

A survey by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute at one of the largest reunions run by the Holt International Adoption Agency found that, '(66%) of adoptees grew up in Caucasian neighbourhoods, although some lived in neighborhoods that included Vietnamese and/or other Asians (16%) or individuals of other (non-Asian) ethnic backgrounds (13%)'(Lieberthal, 2000). Class is not a key issue that is addressed in this study yet it should not be entirely disregarded as contributing to the reason behind why many adopted Vietnamese grew up in relative isolation from other Vietnamese people. Frankenberg (1999) argues that for children of colour with white parents, 'Given their economic upward mobility and the stratification of US society by race linked by class, the family's class and their racial or cultural identities were now in contradiction with each other: they could either live among their economic or their ethnic peers, but not both' (Frankenberg, 1999: 131).

The reunions and return trips to Vietnam attracted broad mainstream media attention and gave the adoptees a new opportunity to articulate what impact adoption had on their lives (Minh, K., 2001; Moe, 2000; Schneider, 2000; Ryan, 2000; Tran, 2000). An exploration of the migration history of adopted Vietnamese was also promoted by women who assisted as volunteers during Operation Babylift and had began to write memoirs about their involvement and reunions with the orphans twenty-five years later (Clarke, 2000; Harrington, 2000; Peck-Barnes, 2000; Thieman, 2000b). Adopted Vietnamese writers also began to produce articles and conference papers that drew attention to issues of racial and cultural identity (Lam - Song and Williams, 2002; Minh, J. A., 2003; Minh, K., 2001; Thomas, L., 2001; Williams, 2002a; b). Reports of the adoptees struggling with racial and cultural identity while growing up are common in all these accounts.

> Growing up I rejected being Asian, period. Anything that had to do with Asian culture, music or movies, I would avoid…when you're growing up, the last thing you want to be is different…(yet) I knew nothing would help until I came here and saw Vietnam for myself (Tran, 2000: 1).

> I was raised white, but I didn't feel white because of my dark skin, and I wasn't black because I didn't talk black or dress black. I didn't feel Asian because I didn't know Vietnamese or any Asians (Minh, K., 2001: 42).

The activities being undertaken by mature-aged adopted Vietnamese, such as their trips to Vietnam, also began to be explored in film documentaries. Recent documentaries on adopted Vietnamese include *Secret Lives: Orphans of the Airlift* (Lee, 2001) about the British airlifts of orphans, *Precious Cargo* (Gardner, 2001) about the American Operation Babylift and *Missing Vietnam* about an adopted Vietnamese who was raised in Australia (Bancroft, 2000). The most recent documentary release on the subject of adoption from Vietnam is *Daughter from Danang* (Franco, 2002) which followed the reunion of an adopted 'Amerasian' with her birth mother in Vietnam after 25 years of separation.

The adopted Vietnamese 'difference' from whiteness and their estrangement from Vietnamese society are common themes in all these documentaries. Many patterns found in the documentaries can all be observed in adopted Vietnamese Leigh Bancroft's self-directed documentary *Missing Vietnam* where she reports being told to 'go visit Cabramatta, it's just like little Saigon' as a way to reconnect with her heritage. When Bancroft visits Cabramatta she expresses a sense of isolation remarking that she doesn't feel like she belongs there and '…is even allergic to fish sauce' (Bancroft, 2000), a typical Vietnamese condiment used daily by many Vietnamese. Bancroft reports being even more frustrated at not fitting in during her visit to Vietnam because she cannot speak Vietnamese or be competent in her birth culture.

This research took place three years after the 25th anniversary of Operation Babylift. Many adopted Vietnamese life experiences now include them having recent meetings with other adopted Vietnamese and overseas Vietnamese people in multicultural environments. Most of the participants in this study have also had the opportunity to visit Vietnam due to political tensions between the West and Vietnam easing[16] thus making travel there easier (Tipton, 2001).

The texts reviewed in this chapter introduce a historical overview of adoption from Vietnam and introduce some of the issues that affect adoptees. However, there exists a gap in academic literature of more in-depth qualitative studies on the process of adopted Vietnamese identity from childhood to adulthood. The next chapter will discuss academic literature on race, culture and identity that assist with a more in-depth investigation of how adopted Vietnamese identity is constructed.

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[16] Tipton's (2001: 158) report of Vietnam in 2000 observed 'The State of Vietnam is going through a period of profound transition as the Party and the Government cautiously…open up the country to the economic, political and social influences of the rest of the world'.

Chapter 3 –Reviewing Literature On Identity

3.1 An Overview

> There are no ready-made identities or categories that we can unproblematically slip into (Rutherford, 1990: 25)

The adult perspectives of the adopted Vietnamese are revealing they experienced a sense of confusion and ambivalence towards their identity, feeling not quite Asian, Vietnamese, Black or white while growing up. Why are their attempts to locate a secure sense of racial and cultural identity so strained? What tools and theories exist to guide an investigation into the identity process and the politics that emerge from the transitions that take place in trans-racial adoption?

Research perspectives that explore the role that family, culture, language and symbolic processes have on complex identity constructions begin to offer some insight. However, leading theorists who address how racial and cultural difference shapes identities generally have not had their own identities 'altered' in childhood by acquiring different parents nor considered the implications of such a transition. The absence of trans-racially adopted academics poses many challenges for research into the construction of identity in Vietnamese orphans adopted by white parents. One of the greatest challenges is that most studies of racial and cultural identities still fail to address an overwhelming and constraining presupposition that such identities are developed within a family environment where members are biologically related.

Some post-modern scholars are beginning to address how trans-racial identities challenge mainstream understandings of how racial and cultural identity develops. For example, Sarup (1996) gives a brief reference to the experience of one trans-racial adoptee. His observation highlights how for one trans-racially adopted individual, others presume Chinese culture is fixed to his identity, no matter how removed he has been from that culture. Others strain at being able to differentiate cultural identity from racial appearance. The individual's contrasting self-interpretation compared to how others see him is perceived as 'odd'.

> A 'Chinese' boy was adopted by a white family. Now an adult, many people see him as 'odd' because 'he goes on about foreigners, but he himself is a 'foreigner'. He has been brought up as English, he sees himself as English, but he is seen by others as Chinese. Here 'race' has become culture…there is a split between how he sees himself and how others see him'. (Sarup, 1996: 172)

A number of Asian American writers are also beginning to refer to trans-racial adoption to further illustrate their observations or arguments about racial and cultural identities. For example, Nam uses the poem of an adopted Korean female about 'dolly rage' to challenge the female submissive 'China Doll' stereotype (Nam, 2001: 142). Wu uses an anecdote of an Asian adopted by a Jewish family and airlift orphans 'adopted into the good life' to satirise model minority stereotypes (Wu, 2002: 6, 48). Zia refers to 10,000 adopted Koreans in one city alone who are beginning to, 'push against ethnic, racial, generational and class boundaries' to detail Asian American political movements (Zia, 2000: 265).

These combined works introduce how the trans-racial adoption experience has the potential to unhinge a series of certainties surrounding racial and cultural identities. However, most works do not provide an in-depth investigation into the construction of the adoptees identities. A review of literature exploring issues of race, culture and identity in broader contexts is necessary to begin to bridge the overall constraints of easily placing and drawing upon trans-racial adoption within the majority of literature dealing with identity.

Debates on the 'innate or blank slate' concepts of selfhood and identity found in disciplines ranging from traditional philosophy to psychology are considered in this chapter. There is a need to refute the view that knowledge of racial or cultural identities are a biologically given or fixed part of the adopted Vietnamese identity process. Work that supports the view that all identities are socially constructed, flexible and negotiated through interactions is explored through writings from anthropology, social psychology and sociology.

The concept of race and its controversial history is then explored to develop an understanding of how the different physical appearances of the adopted Vietnamese to their adoptive parents become classified as racial ‘differences’. The ideologies and practices that sustain conditions of racism in the Western societies where the adopted Vietnamese grew up in are then interrogated using critical race theory and cultural studies concepts. This approach reveals how socially constructed racial identities and cultures are overlapped and projected onto specific groups of people as natural and unbreakable attributes.

In the final part of this chapter, studies of diasporas, post-colonial and hybrid identities are considered to develop an understanding of how the cultural background of adopted Vietnamese is constructed and gives meaning to their sense of identity. Perspectives from cultural studies and other areas in contemporary social theory that pay close attention to the role of power and discursive practices offer insight into the sense of inferiority that surrounded the Vietnamese heritage of the adoptees while they were growing up. A critique of essentialism brings further understanding into the tensions adoptees experienced when negotiating whiteness and Vietnamese ethnicity. Theories from hybridity studies then provide the potential for a more inclusive re-conceptualisation of identity for the adopted Vietnamese.

3.2 The Self

> Look wise I’m – not English. Culture wise not Vietnamese. Realise I’m who I am because of how I’ve been brought up – *Mina, Adopted Vietnamese*

> Intellectual life today is beset with a great divide. On one side is a militant denial of human nature, a conviction that the mind of a child is a blank slate that is subsequently inscribed by parents and society…At the same time, there is a growing realization that human nature won't go away (Pinker, 2002a: 1)

Debates about whether the self, from where various identities emerge, is 'innate' or a 'blank slate' are found across a wide range of literature. Descartes (1596 – 1650) introduced, "I think therefore I am" in the Renaissance period (Mansfield, 2000: 14). His search for the 'truth' concluded that the self was born complete and established with innate ideas. This form of selfhood belongs to the 'theory of nativism' (Burkitt, 1991: 5). Kant's (1724 – 1804) philosophy from the Enlightenment period continued the view that innate forms of selfhood exist and shape our behaviour (Kant, 1964). Kant proposed the self inherits categories that are *a priori* (prior to experience) and used to classify and make order of the world. However, Kant's philosophy on innate forms of self-knowledge are weakened by criticisms that 'cultural background and ethnicity are excluded from relevance…Any considerations of individuality, gender, or culture would be set aside in order to act like a purely rational being' (Hinman, 2002: 1).

This research takes the position that Vietnamese orphans do not biologically inherit any significant forms of knowledge prior to their adoptions that might shape their construction of racial and cultural identity. The ideas of Locke (1632 – 1704) on the self introduced empiricism and stand as an early challenge to nativism. He dismissed the idea that innate forms of selfhood exist, arguing that the self is a 'blank slate', with knowledge and ideas gained only from experience processed through sensation and reflection (Leahey, 1992: 100).

> Ideas, especially those belonging to principles, are not born with children If we will attentively consider new-born children, we shall have little

> reason to think that they bring many ideas into the world with them(Locke, 1690).

Piaget's (1896 – 1980) work introduced four main stages of childhood development to understand how language and knowledge emerge through experience (Piaget, 1954). His childhood development model aids with the development of an understanding as to how the adopted Vietnamese develop knowledge through their interactions with their adoptive parents. Piaget's model begins with the 'sensorimotor' stage that proposes little is comprehended and there is no object permanence in a child before the age of two.

The preoperational stage occurs when a child is aged between two and seven years. Piaget theorised that during the 'preoperational' stage children begin to develop language and describe people, events, and feelings. They are also able to interpret some symbolic meanings, although these are mostly restricted to their own perspectives. The participants' removal from Vietnam and transition into the care of white parents living in the West falls across both stages.

Piaget also introduced the idea of a 'concrete operational' stage from seven to twelve years and then a 'formal operational' stage where thinking might reach an abstract, formal, and logical level. It is during the concrete operational stage that the participants move from close family to a wider range of interactions with others in society.

Recent studies argue that internationally adopted infants develop differently to stages set out by rigid time-defined models like Piaget's due to previously having a different cultural upbringing and exposure to institutional environments (Gindis, 2003; Glennen, 2002). Some findings have revealed that inter-country adopted children aged as young as twelve to twenty-four months, 'exhibit severe developmental delays…further compounded by the introduction of a second language ', that of the adoptive parents (Pearson, 2003: 1). However, Piaget's model is useful for understanding how the language and knowledge offered to the adopted Vietnamese by adoptive parents eventually over-rides any initial exposure and comprehension the infants/children might have had in Vietnam.

Socialisation theories were pivotal to establishing the view that behaviour and identity develop only through familial and societal influences; this is especially the case with anthropological work that focuses on the role of culture. For example, Margaret Mead's (1901 – 1979) anthropological research in the Pacific was seminal in demonstrating how gender roles are culturally and socially nurtured (Mead, M., 1927; 1928; 1930). Although M. Mead's interpretations of particular cultures are open for questioning (such as her lack of Samoan language), her work challenged ideas about cultural identities being biologically inherited.

> At what points a child's cultural environment impinged sufficiently upon its consciousness to make it an Indian (culturally) as compared with an American? Of course there would be a whole series…The most obvious - and then more complex points like the comprehension of matrilineal organization as compared with the comprehension of a fostering family group(Mead, M., 1927: 1).

Social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931), whose work influenced symbolic interactionism, shared the belief that the self is developed entirely through social interactions (Mead, G. H., 1972; 1913). His exploration of childhood development in *Mind, Self and Society* introduced the theory that an internal, conscious and ongoing process of negotiation produces the concept of self and its various identities. G. H. Mead's focus on the inter-play between social interactions and an individual's mind (using an internal negotiation process), alongside Piaget's work that assists with framing language and intelligence development, offers a more detailed framework for understanding the adopted Vietnamese identity construction within their adoptive family environment.

G. H. Mead believed the self begins to develop in early childhood through a ‘play stage’ where language and gestures are role-played but symbolic meanings are not yet understood (Mead, G. H., 1972). The next stage is the ‘game stage’ where children are able to see things from the perspectives of others and share symbolic meanings to aid self-adjustment and negotiation. The game stage provides an understanding as to how the identity of the adopted Vietnamese arose from a process of learning to be the ‘same’ as their adoptive parents through negotiating a set of culturally homogenous roles, objects and discourses into their sense of self in childhood.

Individuals are also objects to themselves, gaining social reference from what G. H. Mead called ‘significant’ and ‘generalised’ others. Individuals learn to anticipate what others will do in response to their own acts then plan their own subsequent acts, obtaining control over their own behaviour. This is done in a state of consciousness (through an internal conversation between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’). The ‘I’ is closer to an individual’s personal interpretations of their sense of selfhood and the ‘me’ is closer to interpretations of their self as an object unto others. This results in a variety of social identities that are used to negotiate communication and inclusion with a wide variety of others in society (Hensley, 2000; Wolfe, 1999). G. H. Mead’s theory of an internal conversation between the ‘I’ and ‘me’ can be broadly adapted into understanding how an adopted Vietnamese might say ‘I’ felt white and my adoptive parents treated ‘me’ as the ‘same’.

G. H. Mead’s work does not adequately address the problem of when an individual’s sense of self fails to gain acceptance by others in society. In other words, it does not offer a useful framework to understand the process that can occur when an adopted Vietnamese ‘I’ may feel the ‘same’ as white peers, but their ‘me’ is constructed as ‘different’ to them. Harter (1999) argues that symbolic interactionist work identifies ‘several processes in the normative construction of a self that is highly impacted by social interactions…However, they did not emphasize the fact that the development of the self could go awry, leading to numerous potential liabilities'(Harter, 1999: 682).

Later symbolic interactionists addressed G. H. Mead's oversight by focussing on, 'a reconceptualization of the self as the focal point of the situated act and, specifically, its changing definition from cooperative and reflective to strategic and imaginary' (Katovich and Reese III, 1993: 391). For example, Goffman (1922-1982) focussed on a more strategic self through the concept of stigma that can include 'the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion' which is 'transmitted through lineages'(Goffman, 1963: 4, 5). Goffman believed that identities go awry or become 'spoiled' when 'an individual who might have been received easily in ordinary social intercourse possesses a trait that can obtrude itself upon attention and turn those of us whom he meets away from him' (Goffman, 1963: 3). The impact of stigma is not dissimilar to Honneth's (2001) theory of disrespect. Stigmatised people suffer negative stereotyping, discrimination and devaluation.

Goffman details how stigma is situational by observing that if a stigmatised individual is isolated with 'wise' or sympathetic others, such as family during early childhood, his or her sense of self can be buffered from harsh treatment and judgements. However, a 'heavy dependence on what other people think of the self will lead to fluctuations in the self across contexts…If one needs to create different impressions within different relational contexts, multiple selves must necessarily be constructed' (Harter, 1999: 687). Once the individual moves beyond 'wise' others, their identity needs to be 'managed'.

> The public school entrance is often reported as the occasion of stigma learning, the experience sometimes coming very precipitously on the first day of school, with taunts, teasing, ostracism and fights (Goffman, 1963: 46).

Goffman revealed how the stigmatised sometimes 'pass' with a more legitimate and valued identity (Burkitt, 1991). However, people of colour who are adopted into white families and then devalued in society for being racially 'different' cannot 'pass' as white (Patton, 2000). Literature that explores racial categories and racist practices are reviewed in the next section to bridge this gap in the understanding more challenged identities.

3.3 Racism and Cultural Identities

> I wanted to be everything that I wasn't – a white Anglo Saxon – *Sasha, Adopted Vietnamese*
>
> While I was forgetting, forgiving, and wanting only to love, my message was flung back in my face like a slap. The white world, the only honourable one, barred me from all participation (Fanon, 1967: 144).

The view that biological differences between the races are insignificant is supported by research from fields such as evolutionary biology and genetic science (Gould, 1987; Lewontin, 1974). However, some researchers continue to dismiss or play down the role of family, culture and society (Crick, 1994; Pinker, 1999; 2002b). Theories of the self and identity that focus on biology, at their most controversial, have been used argue that behaviour such as lower intelligence or deviancy can be matched to race[17] (Gates Jr, 1986; Mansfield, 2000). *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994) is one of the more recent 'scientific' attempts to find genetically based differences connecting lower intelligence to poorer classes and non-white races. The research was contested in *The Bell Curve Debate* (Kamin, 1995) and numerous other counter attacks.

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[17] Mansfield (2000: 120) cites Gates to highlight how the concept of 'race' has had a destructive past. Gates states that as far back as the Enlightenment Kant believed race affected 'mental capacities' and Hegel believed 'since black people had no history, they had no humanity'. Mansfield also lists the 'Nazi-genocidal program of racial purification' and states that racial 'Segregation and assimilation remained a common practice (in the West) at least until the 1970s'.

However, *The Bell Curve* is a recent example of how scientific pursuits to measure race continues to be destructive.

Although the concept of race in this research is regarded as a social construct, the term *race* is used throughout this study, especially for ways to define the trans-*racially* adopted Vietnamese and the challenges they faced. What definition can adequately begin to ground an understanding of what race means? Racial identity in this study refers to a set of biologically inherited visible characteristics and these characteristics fall into socially constructed and strategic racial classifications. It is argued that for non-whites in Western societies, 'racial markers function as important identity markers' (Luke and Luke, 2000: 52). Thus, trans-*racial* adoption refers to individuals who are transferred into the care of adoptive parents who do not share their general visible characteristics and their associated socially constructed racial classification.

Work such as that of Fanon (1925-1961) dismissed scientific research measuring race and instead focused on racist relationships, 'to probe deeply into its causes and, more particularly, its effects on the people who are its victims' (Wood, 1967). Fanon's critique of 'culture imposition' where 'a white totality' (Fanon, 1967: 192) maintains superiority over non-white subjects under colonialism is useful in uncovering how the adopted Vietnamese perceived racial 'differences' are subordinated and positioned as inferior in Western societies. This is in contrast to their adoptive parents' experiences where 'whiteness' in the West is given 'a location of structural advantage, of race privilege' (Frankenberg, 1999: 2).

Singh states that some 'people think of racism as just a matter of prejudice but supremacy defines a power relationship' (Singh, 2001: 1). Race privilege is an important factor to consider in how adopted Vietnamese experience 'difference'. Foucault's (1926 – 1984) influential study of the 'genealogy' of knowledge through discourse analysis contributed a seminal model for exploring the role of power (Boyne, 1990; Cousins and Hussain, 2000; Foucault, 1988; McHoul and Grace, 1995). His work refutes that there is any external position that individuals can occupy outside of relationships of power but his work does offer ways that power can be 'exploded, or remodeled' (Mansfield, 2000: 64).

Lo (2000) illustrates how 'difference' and the role of power interconnect through her study of Asians in the Australian context. She argues, 'Whilst their ethnicity is generally accepted as part of Australian culture, their collective status is often racialised as other whenever the political or economic power of the 'non-ethnic' center is threatened' (Lo, 2000: 159). The relationship between racist practices and power is also found in recent investigations of 'whiteness'. Power and knowledge are dominant themes used to expose how 'whiteness' secures privilege by essentialising differences of the 'Other' into positions of inferiority (Frankenberg, 1999; Hartigan Jr, 1999; Henry, 1994; Hurtado, 1999).

Critical race theorists and writers of colour have drawn attention to how non-whites are strategically removed from being too familiar, even culturally. For example, Wu (2002: 79) claims 'otherness' to 'whiteness' in the Asian context in America results in a situation where 'everyone with an Asian face who lives in America is afflicted by the perpetual foreigner syndrome. We are figuratively and even literally returned to Asia and ejected from America'. Ang believes the 'Othering' of Asians in Australia, 'still depends on the lumping together of all of 'Asia' as if it were a monolithic entity, on a process of racial/cultural othering that still continues to be reproduced' (Ang, 2000: xviii). Such observations highlight how an Asian identity for adopted Vietnamese has the potential to complicate their sense of belonging (and salience) not only within their family but also in the Western societies in which they live.

Structuralism provides an understanding into how differentiation is not based on 'things' but concepts or ideas, although such work is criticised for being ahistoric (During, 1993; Mansfield, 2000). Structuralists theorise that it is through signifying practices that identities take their definition and build a centre from that which they are not. This understanding is developed from de Saussure's (1983) study of the system of signs known as Semiotics. Binary oppositions such as good/bad or us/them cross into a whole series of divided relationships controlled by a structure of language that in turn produces reality (Boyne, 1990; Woodward, 1997).

Essentialist views set different races and cultures into binary oppositions and take the position that different identities are 'fixed and unchangeable' while 'non-essentialist perspectives allow for differences and commonalities to exist with other ethnicities' (Woodward, 1997: 9, 11). Minh-Ha explains that there are strategic benefits in keeping identities demarcated within clear boundaries because, 'Essential difference allows those who rely on it to rest reassuringly on its fixed gamut of notions. Any mutation of identity, in essence, in regularity, and even in physical place poses a problem, if not a threat, in terms of classification and control. If you can't locate the other, how are you to locate yourself?' (Minh-Ha, 1995: 218).

Derrida (2000) introduced the idea that signs are arbitrary and identified how there is privilege of one term over the other in binary oppositions which can be collapsed or deconstructed (Derrida, 1976; 2000; Gasche, 1994; Kamuf, 1991). For identities this means that they are constructed around binary oppositions of the privileged and the inferior, although there is no 'origin' or fixed 'sign'. Stam and Shohat (1994) argue that in this stage in history, white Western European binary oppositions create a permanent, essentialist racial but also cultural Other, subordinating and making inferior what is then constructed as 'different'.

> Eurocentricism appropriates the cultural and material production of non-Europeans while denying their achievements and its own appropriation, thus consolidating its sense of self and glorifying its own cultural anthropophagy. In sum, Eurocentrism sanitizes Western history while patronising, even demonising the non-West (Stam and Shohat, 1994: 297, 298).

Western constructions of the East are critically exposed in detail in Said's (1935 – 2003) seminal and re-visited work, *Orientalism* (Said, 1991; 2000). Foucault's focus on power and Gramsci's (1891 – 1937) concept of hegemony were influential on Said's argument that Orientalism operates by consent where 'ideas, values and beliefs are not imposed from above…but are negotiated through a whole series of encounters and collisions' (Sadar and Van Loom, 2001, 49). An awareness of Orientalist practices assist with uncovering how the knowledge of adopted Vietnamese about their non-European background as given by the West is inseparable from an asymmetrical power relationship by analysing particular discursive practices. The research is then able to broaden its focus beyond the autonomy of individuals to include the wider social structures that may have produced knowledge about Vietnam and constructed it into a subordinate 'Other'.

> Orientalism' can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institute for dealing with the Orient, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1991: 3).

Adopted Vietnamese have spoken in various media reports about first rejecting their cultural background while growing up but then changing their attitudes once they reached maturity (Minh, K., 2001; Tran, 2000). Studies of non-whites' investment in marginal identities offer some guidance into understanding this shift. Such studies posit that some individuals invest in their marginality because they are unable to be accepted as white. Worded differently, 'faced with a choice between solidarity and alienation, people usually choose solidarity' (Scheff, 1994: 287). Frankenberg states that such an investment, 'in part empowers different 'communities' towards collective struggles to reclaim or rearticulate a subordinated identity' (Frankenberg, 1999: 11)

Strategies of resistance that are conceptualised around racial or cultural dualisms may have the ability to empower or mobilise marginal struggles, however, they are still problematic because they fail to address the potential for the adopted Vietnamese to synthesise the cultural backgrounds of both of their adoptive parents and biological parents into their sense of identity. Vietnamese are not made up of a monolithic, unitary community and Vietnamese culture is not static (Thomas, M., 1999). It is also necessary to recognise that 'whiteness' is also socially constructed and white identities are heterogenous. There is a danger of 'defining Whites as essentially oppressive, homogenous, immutable and intrinsically racist' rather than acknowledging 'that all ethnic labels, including White, are historically sited' (Werbner, 2000: 11).

> There is a choice it seems, between assimilation of an alien modernity and reversion to the spurious authenticity of (ethnic or religious) origins. This is an intolerable condition. But it is also a prevalent condition, and its consequences have been both damaging and destructive…Cultural arrogance can become cultural violence (Robbins, 1996: 63, 66).

Papastergiadis, proposing that a post-structuralist approach to understanding identity liberates 'the subject from notions of fixity and purity in origin', reminds us of our 'multiple subjectivities' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 257). To support his argument he refers to the work of Hall whose 'representation of hybrid identities as always incomplete does not imply that they aspire to a sense of wholeness and invariably fall short of becoming a finished product, but rather, that their energy for being is directed by flows of an ongoing process' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 274, 275).

Hall argues that cultural identities are not about unity, security or the essential or authentic, but part of an ongoing process and always open to redefinition, of 'being' and 'becoming' (Hall, 1990: 223). He states, 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past'(Hall, 1997: 52).

> We have entered an anxious age of identity, in which the attempt to memorialise lost time, and to reclaim lost territories, creates a culture of disparate 'interest groups' or social movements. Here affiliation may be antagonistic or ambivalent; solidarity may only be situational and strategic: commonality is often negotiated through the 'contingency' of social interests and political claims (Bhabha, 1996: 59)

Grossberg agrees that, 'Identity itself is socially constructed, we organise political struggle within the category of identity, around particular socially constructed identities' and proposes that 'The alternative is to begin to construct a theory of otherness which is not essentialist, a theory of positivity based on notions of affectivity and belonging' (1996: 93, 97). Such re-conceptualisations of 'difference' and identity as more complex and malleable begin to open up possibilities for this research to develop new ways of understanding the ongoing process of identity by the adopted Vietnamese as they interact, as adults, with the Vietnamese community.

Ang draws attention to how the multiple ways 'difference' is being investigated stating, 'concepts such as hybridity – and related concepts such as diaspora and 'third space' – have become popular terms used to describe the experiences of mobile and migrant populations in plural societies' (Ang, 2000: xxi). Writings on hybridity moves an understanding of how the adopted Vietnamese experience identity beyond notions of them being not quite an identity or defined as permanently stuck between 'two worlds' or 'two-cultures' metaphors (Luke and Luke, 2000).

Many notable studies of hybridity destabilise essentialist beliefs that fix identities into binary oppositions by offering possible alternatives such as the 'Third Space' and the 'cosmopolitan' (Bhabha, 1994; Papastergiadis, 2000; Werbner, 2000; Young, R., 1995). However, Ang warns that 'hybridity, itself is a heavily contested term' (Ang, 2000: xix). For example, Lo criticises a 'pernicious form' of hybridity she terms 'happy hybridity' that she claims 'masks and perpetuates structural inequities' (Lo, 2000: 153). Parker (2003) is sceptical of sentiments celebrating the concept of the 'cosmopolitan' citizen arguing that 'The terms on which cultural differences are encountered, appropriated and absorbed have never been free from power, from being embedded in asymmetrical relationships and pressures of commerce, colonialism and military force' (Parker, 2003: 156).

While it is not possible to critique all aspects of the hybridity debates, a more promising idea Papastergiadis offers is that 'Despite its historical association, which bears the dubious traces of colonial and white supremacist ideologies, most of the contemporary discussion of hybridity are preoccupied by its potential for inclusivity' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 258). He explains that hybridity 'is not a catalogue of 'difference' where identity is conceptualised by the sum of its parts, but a process of opening what Bhabha has called a 'Third Space' within which 'other elements encounter and transform each other' (Papastergiadis, 2000: 258).

Bhabha proposes that, 'The intervention of the Third Space...challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force' and 'by exploring this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity' (Bhabha, 1995: 208, 209). Such a re-conceptualisation of identity relies on recognising the interactions and negotiations that occur between cultures. Adopted Vietnamese potentially occupy a 'Third Space' now that they have begun to interact with Vietnamese people and visit Vietnam.

In summary, this chapter has reviewed theoretical understandings of identity to guide the study of the adopted Vietnamese across three main stages (early childhood, late childhood to adolescence and adulthood) and life experiences (being the 'same', experiencing the disrespect of their 'difference' and an investment in their 'difference'). Symbolic interactionism and childhood psychology offer an entrée into understanding how the adoptees' childhood sense of self was shaped. The late childhood to adolescence of adopted Vietnamese, where they experience 'difference' as a more problematic part of their identity, can be explored through a range of approaches found in cultural studies. Debates on authenticity and hybridity offer a framework for understanding the period when the adopted Vietnamese reached adulthood and began to invest in 'difference' through building relationships with other Vietnamese people and exploring their own cultural background.

The next chapter will detail the methods used in the research including how symbolic interactionist perspectives are adapted to collect qualitative data and how cultural studies perspectives assist with its analysis and interpretation. These will be followed by a summary of the survey, the medium through which it was conducted and the ethics considered. The participants are then introduced and the implications of my 'in group' position with them are addressed.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1 Using A Qualitative Approach for Research

The mature perspectives of adopted Vietnamese and their identity process have been rarely explored in-depth in both trans-racial and more general literature on identity. The construction of identity in adopted Vietnamese individuals was qualitatively investigated, using personal data provided by thirteen participants. Full life histories of the adoptees were explored to gain insight into how the Vietnamese background and white upbringing of the adoptees shaped their identity across a broad range of influences and interactions.

The scope of this research allows new insights on significant life experiences of the adoptees, from their childhood to adulthood, to be revealed. The adopted Vietnamese are now able to speak about their upbringing that has, in past research, mostly been evaluated through the perspectives of their adoptive parents. Now adults, the participants can critically reflect upon the impact it had on their overall sense of identity both within and beyond the influence of their adoptive parents.

The validity of using life history interviews as a methodological tool is supported by many researchers from a range of disciplines including cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and history writing (Bilton and Jones, 1987; Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1970; Dick, 1999; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Greenhouse et al., 2002; Laming, 1995; Richardson, 1996; Spradley, 1979). The research does not aim to be representative in a statistical sense [18]. A non-quantitative approach is argued as valid where 'nomothetic generalisation is not the ultimate aim …adequacy is dependent not upon quantity but upon the richness of the data and the nature of the aspect of life being investigated' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001: 22, 23).

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[18] A comprehensive statistical study of the first generation of the adopted Vietnamese population is not easily achieved, particularly in terms of verification. This is because the incoming numbers of orphans are difficult to obtain and verify as records of Vietnamese War adoptions were often lost or misplaced during the war and its final days in April 1975. For example, the first C-5A Galaxy Air Force aircraft ordered on 4 April 1975 to evacuate children from Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport crashed just after take-off. Peck-Barnes reported that 'The records of over one thousand…orphaned children were being sent back on the flight and were destroyed in the crash' (Peck-Barnes, S, 2000: 237).

The potential for people's memories to have gaps or alterations in accuracy still requires some consideration. Fields (2002), who wrote about the validity of memory in African American subjects recalling racism before the civil rights movement, questioned the validity of her subjects asking: what can be taken as 'aspiration or fact?' Field claims that a 'tainted memory summoned in view of present political purposes' emerged in her study and had the 'function of legitimising and stabilizing a claim to some distinction' (Fields, 2002: 93).

The memories of the adopted Vietnamese narrated through their life histories are also open to reinterpretations guided by their own agendas or aspirations. While any agenda or aspiration might alter the retelling of situations or events, this does not necessarily negate the value of the data. Hall states of diasporic cultural identities that, "We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails' (Hall, 1990: 393).

Said defends accounts of memory under colonialism, arguing that any exaggerations or blurred recollections still have 'an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel' (Said, 1991: 56). Gergen dismisses the search for 'objective truth' by stating that 'Arguments about what is really real are futile…A postmodern empiricism would replace the 'truth game' with a search for culturally useful theories and findings with significant cultural meaning' (Gergen, 2001: 803).

The Chicago School style of symbolic interactionism methodology supports data and insight achieved through qualitative research and encourages a complete departure from positivist approaches in the study of social subjects. Blumer (1969) proposes researchers get close to the social world under investigation by using techniques such as in-depth interviews and accessing personal diaries and participant observation. These methods are supported by other disciplines such as history writing and anthropology as being the most effective way to focus on how actors perceive their own lives and circumstances (Dougherty, 1999; Higgs, 1997; Huen et al., 1998; Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

Ballis Lal (1995) makes the assessment that using symbolic interactionist methodology for studies of race and ethnic identity has the additional advantage of giving a 'voice' to the subjects under investigation.

> They assume that ethnic groups are responsive and creative rather than passive…The symbolic interactionist is required to employ methods that capture the actor's point of view and that enable him or her to speak for him- or herself. In this sense, symbolic interaction "empowers" those it seeks to describe and understand' (Ballis Lal, 1995: 421).

A disadvantage of symbolic interactionism is that its close attention to micro-level interactions has the potential to over-determine the autonomy actors have over the circumstances within which they seek 'empowerment'. Blumer (1969) downplays the role that culture and larger forces (such as class and gender) might have on disadvantaged groups.

> I would submit that, after we apply in the most exhaustive manner these schemes of cultural norms, social positions and social roles, we would miss what is most vital to our interaction, namely, the presentation of my ideas and your judgement and assessment of them…Cultural norms, status positions and role relationships are only frameworks inside of which that process goes on (Blumer, 1969: 115, 116).

Cultural studies perspectives alternatively support the view that culture and wider structures play a central role in how social actors define their lives. Hall argues more emphatically 'You can't get outside of a culture, because you can't understand what a human being would be like outside of a cultural frame' (in Osbourne and Segal, 1999: 397). Cultural studies offered this research a way to broaden the framework used to consider how larger forces interconnect with the participants' construction of identity. For example, the participants' shift from denying to reclaiming Vietnamese ethnicity is found to interconnect with the types of representations of Vietnamese people they are able access in cultural productions, i.e. Hollywood Vietnam War movies to Vietnamese made films.

4.2 Using the Internet for Participant Recruitment and Interviews

A report by Pew claims that, 'Asian Americans (are) the most experienced group of Internet users in the United States' and that 'Nearly two-thirds (sixty-three percent) of Asian-American Internet users are between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four'(Pew, 2001: 5). The recruitment of participants for this research took advantage of the Internet's popularity with this demographic and circulated notices on the various online e-groups and networks created and used by individuals adopted from Vietnam.

Announcements about the research project were distributed to the list serve systems of Adopted Vietnamese International http://groups.yahoo.com/group/adoptedvietnameseinternational/ and The Vietnamese Adoptee Network http://groups.yahoo.com/group/VAN-Online/ . Mam Non in the US, Origines Vietnam in France, plus the Intercountry Adoptee Support Network and the Post Adopted Resource Centre (the latter two are both based in Australia), also made offline networks available forwarding lists of suitable adoptees.

The announcements provided general information consisting of the working title of the thesis; target population; the general focus of the research project; and the approximate time it would take for participants to conduct the interview. More detailed information was given to individuals who expressed an interest in participating. This consisted of a general one-page introduction to the thesis topic; a historic overview of adoption from Vietnam; and a brief biography about myself, to reveal that an individual who was also adopted from Vietnam was conducting the research. My 'in-group' position and the implications this has for the research will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The research project was approved by The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) Human Research Ethics Committee before any interviews began. Participants were sent a voluntary consent form that provided the contact details of the UTS Research Ethics Officer who could answer any enquiries they had relating to the ethics of the project. The form stressed to participants that they were under no obligation to volunteer and could withdraw from the project at any time without explanation. The survey was conducted over the Internet using 'one – shot' email attachments consisting of 30 interview questions sent in a Word Document format. Most information, including the research questions, is made available in the appendix. However, individuals who volunteered were given a pseudonym to protect their privacy and confidential materials with their real names and contact details are not supplied.

The use of email to conduct the survey had three main advantages. Firstly, as war orphans from Vietnam are based in various international locations, the Internet web posts and emails could easily reach individuals across many borders at the fastest speed and with minimal cost. Secondly, questions were sent to each participant individually, thus avoiding group situations that could induce peer-influenced responses. Thirdly, the less invasive approach of using a 'screen to screen' or interactive mode of communication (Adler and Rodman, 1997) provided a certain intimacy between participants and the questions and removed the pressure to answer or 'perform' immediately for the interviewer (also a peer).

The collection of life history interviews for qualitative research is traditionally conducted in person. However, an increasing amount of academic writing devoted to explorations of culture and identity using cyberspace and on-screen communication supports the use of computer mediated communication (CMC) as a tool for research (Jones, 1998; Reymers, 1998; Turkle, 1995). It is argued that while 'The computer is an evocative object that causes old boundaries to be renegotiated…we have used our relationships with technology to reflect on the human' (Turkle, 1995: 22, 24). In other words, 'people can build personal relationships and social norms that are absolutely *real* and meaningful even in the absence of physical, *touchable* matter' (Paccagnella, 1997: 3).

Selwyn and Robson (1998) have highlighted that, 'there have been tentative moves toward using e-mail as a research tool, primarily in the form of quantitative instruments such as electronic questionnaires and also, to a lesser extent, qualitative methods such as electronic interviews and electronic 'focus' groups'. However, they also warn that, 'Careful consideration of these new methods is needed if they are to be used effectively in the social sciences' (Selwyn and Robson, 1998: 2, 4).

One of the main limitations of using email to conduct the survey is that transactional or face to face situations (Adler and Rodman, 1997) generally cancel the opportunity for instantaneous free flowing ideas and spontaneity to be recorded. Emotions shown through meaningful gestures are also unable to be recorded or observed. Another limitation faced in this research was that any uncertainties regarding the meaning of the question could not be immediately clarified.

Follow up emails were used where it was decided that some participants might be able to expand on questions or had misunderstood questions. Once the data were summarised participants were sent a copy and encouraged to check if their overall contributions were suitably representative of their experiences. This offered them an opportunity to add to, or amend, their narratives.

4.3 Selecting Interview Questions

To gain insight into the construction of identity in the adopted Vietnamese, three main stages in the adoptees life were chosen. The first stage was early childhood where interactions are mainly confined to the family. The second stage was late childhood to adolescence where interactions outside the family environment increase. The final stage was adulthood where participants are expected to have had increased interactions with Vietnamese people and culture in more multicultural environments.

This overall schema was developed to correspond with patterns found in the emerging literature on the adopted Vietnamese community; reviewed in Section 2.3. The time-defined categories indicated that significant shifts occurred in the adoptees sense of identity as they moved from culturally homogenous family and school environments through to more multicultural environments and return trips to Vietnam in adulthood. Open-ended interview questions were broken down into four sub-sections to explore these three stages in more depth. These are 1) Early Childhood/Interactions in the Family, 2) School and Adolescence, 3) Interactions In Society/General and 4) Vietnamese Culture, Overseas Community and Place.

Having been adopted from Vietnam myself, discussions with other adoptees and reading other adopted Vietnamese perspectives in recent media reports influenced the planning of my questionnaire which took into account sensitive issues which could touch on in the adoptees' lives, such as family relationships. This knowledge underpinned the awareness that some participants were likely to be concerned about being seen as unfairly judging their adoptive parents when reflecting on their parents' choices of upbringing. It was also expected that feelings of loss and shame could emerge in the participants. Thus, I was cautious to avoid causing negative emotions too early in the process that could result in the participants' avoidance of sensitive issues.

Opening questions were designed to be non-challenging. The survey began by asking for simple details such as a racial and cultural description of their adoptive parents, whether they had brothers and sisters, were they the only trans-racially adopted child in their family and what year and at what age they were adopted. These questions allowed participants to draw on easily recalled facts about their family environment and adoption background details while immediately beginning a dialogue on race and culture. The questions also set the memory of the participants to the period of early childhood.

The initial interview questions were piloted on two individuals. Even with my careful planning, a major problem still occurred when the survey focussed on racism. Questions designed to promote discussions about racism were answered with very little detail or a 'blank zone' in the pilot study. For example, one replied briefly that it was never an issue for her and the other stated she was unaware of it affecting her. However, towards the end of the survey, both participants' reports suggested that racism had an overall impact on their lives. Why were deeper discussions of racism first avoided?

What I had failed to adequately address in my first survey is the fact that many adoptees are sensitive and often uncomfortable addressing racism for fear that any critique they make about experiencing racism from white others may strain their own family relations because their adoptive parents are also white. Gobodo-Madikizela introduces an additional issue that adds to the difficulty adoptees may face when it comes to talking about racism. This is that many white people do not acknowledge racism in their society as it, 'would threaten their sense of humanity. So it is better denied as something of the past or dismissed as a figment of one's imagination' (Gobodo-Madikizela 1999). Further reading that connected feelings of personal shame, fear and silence to experiences with racism led to my decision to encourage the participants to speak about racism without feeling they were personally responsible for 'losing face' or were attacking specific individuals (Gobodo-Madikizela 1999; Young, R., 1987).

Fanon's focus on structural racism assisted the development of additional questions for this study. These questions asked participants to discuss racism in broader contexts such as in racially stratified neighbourhoods and the mass media. Fanon argued, 'The black man should no longer be confronted by the dilemma, turn white or disappear; but he should be able to take cognisance of a possibility of existence…once his motivations have been brought into consciousness, (it will place) him in a position to choose action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict – that is, towards the social structures' (Fanon, 1967: 100). The additional questions addressing issues of racism in broader contexts as well as in close interactions then resulted in much more awareness of racism being reported. The new questions were integrated into the final survey and the changes resulted in the eleven other participants also 'speaking', in detail, about various forms of racism in detail.

4.4 Overview of the Target Population

The target population for the research project were Vietnamese orphans who were adopted by white adoptive parents in the West during the Vietnam War. Although there is over a thousand younger Vietnamese adoptees, the first generation, now in their late twenties to early thirties, can reflect a broader range of interactions from childhood to early adulthood. My objective was to find a group size manageable within the available time and length of the intended final project; thirteen individuals responded and all were selected. The patterns emerging and repeating in the data provided sufficient insight into the adoptees construction of identity but are open to further exploration and testing in future studies on the adoptees ongoing process of identity.

The participants' general details are set out in Table 2 and are listed by country, pseudonym, gender and year of adoption. This table demonstrates that the target population is adequately reflected. All participants spoke English (one as her second language) and despite their diverse geographical locations, all grew up in Western societies where 'whiteness' is given the most privilege. Although gender is not the primary concern or focus for this project, the final selection of participants resulted in a close gender balance. A more in-depth overview of the participants' adoption details, environments and Vietnamese cultural exposure are presented in the next chapter.

Table 2: Overview of Participants

Current Location	**Name *pseudonym**	**Gender**	**Year of Adoption**
Australia	Joe	Male	1975
Australia	Sasha	Female	1972
Australia	Cindy	Female	1975
Australia	My-Dung	Female	1975
US	Luke	Male	1975
US	Sam	Male	1975
US (Raised in UK)	Simon	Male	1970
US	Nick	Male	1974
US	Ken	Male	1974
US	Benjamin	Male	1974
US (Raised in Middle East and UK)	Tuyet	Female	1975
France	Ann	Female	1969
France (Raised in UK)	Mina	Female	1973

Summary of target population that was interviewed: males: 7, females: 6, oldest age at adoption: 6 years and youngest age at adoption: 6 months. Participants with Vietnamese names were asked to choose a Vietnamese pseudonym.

4.5 Introspection and Data Management

> Qualitative research methods involve procedures that result in rich, descriptive, contextually situated data…Within this context, it is nowadays generally acknowledged that an understanding of the experiences not only of our participants but also of ourselves as researchers constitutes a fundamental part of the research process (Richardson, 1996: 175).

There are very few trans-racially adopted individuals who have the qualifications and training to conduct research on trans-racial adoption. Although this does not negate the existing work by non-trans-racially adopted, and mostly white scholars, some critics argue that there is a critical lack of alternative insights that trans-racially adopted people might bring to this type of research (Hübinette, 2003; Young, S., 2003). For example, from a Korean adoptee perspective critical comment include that 'In the past and even in today 'experts', professionals and adoptive parents are the ones who are often telling KADS (Korean adoptees) what 'the adoption experience' is actually like' (Johnsen, 2002).

Lam -Song (2002), the executive director of Mam Non, a Vietnamese adoption support group, suggests that the lack of representation in trans-racial adoption research by people of colour and trans-racial adoptees parallels with hook's critique of patterns in the research of 'difference' [19] where:

> The suggestion that such work (by white scholars) constitutes the only relevant discourse, evades the issue of potential inaccessible locations, spaces

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[19] hooks (1998: 4) argues, 'Committed cultural critics--whether white or black, scholars or artists--or both--can produce work that opposes structures of domination (and) that presents possibilities for a transformed future by willingly interrogating their own work on aesthetic and political grounds. This interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention, fundamentally fostering an attitude of vigilance rather than denial'.

> white theorists cannot occupy. Without inscribing an essentialist standpoint, it is crucial that we neither ignore nor deny that such locations exist (hooks, 1998: 4).

As someone who was adopted from Vietnam during the Vietnam War by white adoptive parents in the West, I share many commonalities with the participants providing the data for interpretation and analysis. The advantage of this 'position' is that it allows for a pre-existing personal sensitivity and interest towards the research topic and the various concerns of the target population. However, my 'in group' status still requires awareness as to what disadvantages may exist. The main issue that will be addressed is the probability of researcher bias shaping the results.

According to Weber 'we are all cultural beings, endowed with the capacity and the will to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and lend it significance' (Weber, 1949: 80). Boucher claims Weber believed that 'one chooses a research area because of its cultural value; a choice based on one's cultural experiences; but that having conducted the research, one presents the facts uncovered, not the values which infused the choice but which have become irrelevant' (Boucher, 1994: 3).

Blumer outlined how having a certain sympathetic introspection with groups under study enables researchers to 'acquire an intimate acquaintance with the kind of experience he is studying, in suggesting leads, in enabling insight, and in helping him to frame more fruitful questions' (Blumer, 1969: 125). Weber also believed a researcher's pre-existing experience prior to research has a positive value stating, 'the method of investigation, the guiding "point of view" is of great importance to the construction of the conceptual scheme which will be used in the investigation' (Weber, 1949: 84).

Some research perspectives argue that 'facts' and claims of objectivity can always be deconstructed by multiple ways of knowing and meaning (Kvale, 1996).

Claims of objectivity are widely dismissed in postmodernist, feminist and cultural studies where there is a growing volume of work that vigilantly argues that there are multiple ways of constructing and interpreting knowledge (Anzaldua and Keating, 2002; Crowley, 1999; Hernandez and Rehman, 2002; hooks, 1994; Mercer, 1990; Sandoval, 2000). However, it is acknowledged that researchers who investigate people who they share a 'group membership' with need to confront their own 'personal history' and 'cultural training' in order to address the implications it may have on the research (Frankenberg, 1999: 23).

A system that balanced questions of researcher strengths and possible bias was found in *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Wajnryb, 2001) where the researcher and the people she investigated shared a common background. Wajnryb's study offers a useful system for addressing my own 'insider' position with my research group. Wajnryb argues that her 'expert' status in sharing the background of her research topic assisted her to develop sensitive, effective questions and to access information through an easier rapport with her research participants. Her precautions to ensure the validity of the research data included her continuously checking that her understanding of the interviews reflected her participants' views.

Wajnryb argues that her crosschecking as well as 'bracketing' when interpreting results acted as a useful guide to keeping 'alert' of possible researcher bias throughout her study. She states her methodology assisted her counter 'potential accusations of a disabling subjectivity' and 'researcher bias' (Wajnryb, 2001: 330, 331). My interpretation of themes and patterns emerging from data in my research was checked against secondary data found in adopted Vietnamese reports from media stories and adoptee personal narratives on websites and in documentaries.

Overall, the advantage of my personal experience with the research problems and community issues counter-balanced the disadvantages. A degree of sympathetic introspection acted as a valuable source of guidance for selecting research questions and an awareness of subtle yet important aspects of the participants' life histories that shed light on their sense of identity. This includes understanding some of the contradictions or 'silences' surrounding the participants' feelings towards racism in the pilot studies. My personal experience also helped me avoid intruding into the participants' personal lives with insensitivity or clinical indifference. My familiarity with most participants outside of the research project also had the advantage of building an easier rapport with the participants when conducting the survey. Email communication balanced our familiar relationship by offering more space/distance and a stronger sense of occasion or formality to the interviewing process than 'face to face' meetings.

In summary my investigation into the life histories of the adopted Vietnamese employed a diverse range of methods and reviewing of secondary data in order to fully analyse and check my interpretations of the complexity of their personal descriptions of their experiences. Scientific attempts to measure racial and cultural identity were viewed as irrelevant and potentially destructive. Research perspectives that propose focussing on small group interactions and those that only focus on wider social forces to investigate identity, when isolated from each other, both failed to provide an adequate framework to investigate the trans-racial family upbringing and social marginality experienced by the adopted Vietnamese.

The combining of symbolic interactionism and cultural studies perspectives offered a more rigorous approach to uncovering interconnected social interactions and structures that shape their identity. The question of validity in my qualitative research approach is balanced by the richness of the data produced. Most participants answered each question with a minimum paragraph response although some gave particular questions full-page responses. The research findings are presented over the next three chapters. The first chapter reveals new insights into how the adopted Vietnamese viewed their heritage and built a sense of ethnicity in early childhood. The next two chapters presents reports on the way the adoptees negotiated and coped with 'difference' in their ongoing process of identity from school years to adulthood.

Chapter 5 – Encounters With 'Difference'

5.1 Introduction to the Research Findings and Profile of the Participants

The profiles of each of the adopted Vietnamese interviewed are presented in the first section of this chapter to provide a general introduction to the research findings. Key events in the participants' lives from childhood to adulthood are highlighted in these profiles and then the research findings that follow explore the adoptees experiences in more depth. Each profile begins by introducing each participant's age and year of their adoption, pseudonym and then a description of his or her adoptive family. Descriptions are given in their own words. This allows for the generalised category of 'white adoptive parents' to be further detailed and for their own cultural diversity, through the adoptees voices[20], to begin to be acknowledged. The profiles also reveal that five of the participants have other trans-racially adopted family members.

The participants' descriptions of adoptive parents set the context for the types of role models they are able to identify with in early childhood. The profiles also detail if Vietnamese people were introduced by to them by their adoptive parents. The participants' interactions in school and neighbourhood environments from late childhood through to adolescence are then introduced. At this stage, disrespect of 'difference' and racialised boundaries of inclusion and exclusion begin to become more pronounced. This is seen in reports ranging from those of racist taunts to being discriminated against in dating situations.

The profiles then introduce key aspects of their adulthood by looking at their changing social relationships, activities and self-descriptions. The adoptees recognition of their own 'difference' from 'whiteness' increases once they are exposed to more multicultural interactions. A significant change to occur is participants' self-descriptions shifting from closely identifying with their adoptive parents racial and cultural identity to acknowledging their Vietnamese heritage. However, new challenges occur for some of the adoptees once they interact with other Vietnamese people in adulthood.

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[20] As all the interviews were conducted over the Internet, where possible the integrity of each participant's direct text has been maintained. Therefore, throughout the introductory profiles and the research findings that follow, spelling and grammar reflect 'British' or 'American' English according to the participant's usage. Terms such as 'white' or 'White' also vary in accordance to the participant's choices.

Ann

Ann was adopted by “White French parents”, in 1969 at the age of nine months. She was raised in France and states she was “the only Asian in the neighbourhood” while growing up. She has no brothers or sisters in her adoptive family. Her adoptive parents did not introduce Vietnamese people, language or culture to her while she was growing up but she believes they would have if they had known how. She recalls seeing “Muslims, North Africans but no Asians” at school. Ann experienced racism by peers, such as being identified as a Chinese ‘coolie’ slave. This racist treatment became worse when she revealed she was a Vietnamese war orphan.

As an adult, Ann has not associated closely with the overseas Vietnamese living in France. She does not speak Vietnamese and feels this makes it even harder for her to meet with Vietnamese people. Ann did return to Vietnam as an adult but felt she had less in common with the local Vietnamese than with the other tourists with whom she travelled. However, she has spent the past two years forming closer ties with adopted Vietnamese and started up a community website for French adoptees. In summary she describes herself as “definitely not entirely French nor entirely Vietnamese”.

Ben

Ben was adopted by a “white Czech father and Irish mother”, in 1974 at the age of nine months. He has two brothers who are biologically related[21] to his adoptive parents and one sister (white, adopted). Ben was raised in a neighbourhood he describes as “predominantly white” in the Mid-West of the US. Ben was not introduced to Vietnamese people, language or culture while he growing up and believes that his parents did not have the resources. Ben can recall “only 1 or 2 other Asians” at his school and reports that he struggled to cope with racism from peers. He states he felt like “an outcast” because he looked different. This was intensified by alienating situations such as when the parents of a girl he dated rejected him because he was Asian.

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[21] ‘Biologically related’ in this thesis refers to the birth children of the participants’ adoptive parents.

Ben is now married to a Mexican American. He learnt to speak Spanish and is currently in the US Army. He lives in “a multicultural area, mainly Latino, no Vietnamese’. Ben joined Asian groups at college and tried to “mix” with the overseas Vietnamese in his local area but reports feeling alienated because he cannot speak Vietnamese and because of “cultural differences”. Ben has not returned to Vietnam but is planning to, stating, “When I think homeland, I think Vietnam”. As part of his journey of “self discovery” he socialises with other adopted Vietnamese, mainly through the Internet. His overall description of himself is, “I am Vietnamese. I am proud of being Vietnamese and being a part of a great culture that places value on the group and honors its ancestors. That is who I am”.

Cindy

In 1975, Cindy was adopted by a “White Australian mother and Dutch father”. She was adopted as a baby and is unable to give a definite age/birthdate. When Cindy’s adoptive father died, her mother remarried; Cindy’s step-father is a “White Australian”. Cindy has two brothers who are biologically related to her adoptive parents and three step-sisters. Cindy describes the neighbourhood she grew up in Western Australia as “a completely all white situation”. During her childhood, Cindy was introduced to Vietnamese people by her adoptive parents, but did not form any meaningful relationship with them. She recalls that in school “Everyone was as varied in their background as me” but states that at one stage, “I have felt pressure to conform to stereotypes of Asians”.

Cindy is an architect and is married to a white Australian. They have two children. They live near a city that she describes as “cosmopolitan”. She reports having several Vietnamese friends and seeing the overseas Vietnamese community regularly. She has many adopted Vietnamese friends and also acts as a Vietnamese adoptee community organiser in her state for individuals from Operation Babylift. She returned to Vietnam on a holiday and plans on returning again next year to search for her birth mother. A Vietnamese friend, who has offered to translate for her, will accompany her. When describing her Vietnamese past in relation to her identity she states, “My expression of who I am in regards to mannerisms, speech and train of thought are moulded on my adopted mother’s. I know that the more I learn about Vietnam the more you absorb and then naturally you then emanate that in some form. I haven't quite yet adopted the culture for myself yet”.

Joe

Joe was adopted in 1975, when he was five, by “White Australian parents”. Joe has an Aboriginal Australian brother and a Vietnamese brother who are also trans-racially adopted plus two other brothers who are biologically related to his adoptive parents. Joe grew up in South Australia and described his neighbourhood as “predominantly white.” As a child Joe could speak Vietnamese but “chose not to” once he settled in with his adoptive family. His adoptive parents introduced him to Vietnamese people but he rejected them. He recalls school being reasonably tolerant with borders “from all around the world”. Joe identifies his father as an African American and states “I do not look Vietnamese”. While growing up, his challenges included some cultural misunderstandings.

As an adult Joe works in the male fashion industry. He finds his neighbourhood “fairly multicultural” and is currently engaged to an Indian Australian. He returned to visit Vietnam to “search for answers” but was not satisfied. He plans to return to Vietnam again following his upcoming honeymoon visit to see his wife’s family in India. Joe has some regrets at not speaking Vietnamese but has not pursued friendships or involvement with the general overseas Vietnamese community. He has spent time socialising with other adopted Vietnamese over the Internet. He currently identifies himself as a "Global Citizen".

Ken

Ken was adopted by "White Irish-Americans", in 1974 as a baby (age hard to verify). Ken has a trans-racially adopted Vietnamese sister plus one sister who is biologically related to his adoptive parents. Ken was raised on the West Coast, USA and described his neighbourhood as "a predominantly white community" having only "one black family". As a child he was not introduced to Vietnamese people. He recalls junior school being "mainly white" and during this period he remembers experiencing racist taunts from peers. At high school he states that life was easier as he had "friends across the racial and social boards".

In adulthood Ken is married to a Thai American and spends his time in "multicultural places". He has not returned to Vietnam but is saving up for a future trip when he revisits his wife's relatives in Thailand. He is a poet with a few published works and has built a local profile performing in poetry festivals. He has some Vietnamese friends but cannot speak Vietnamese. He socialises with adoptee friends in person and over the Internet and now believes, "the boundaries between language, race, ethnicity and nationality are not always mutually exclusive and don't always have to be".

Luke

Luke was adopted by "White American" parents in 1975 when he was two years old. He has one brother and one sister who are biologically related to his adoptive parents. Luke grew up in the same city as Ken and also reports his area as an "all white community". Luke was introduced to Vietnamese people in childhood but recalls that he was not interested in forming any meaningful relationships with them. Luke's adoptive parents offered him Vietnamese language lessons but he declined. Luke can recall, with remarkable detail, that at school there was "4 Koreans, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Iranian, 3 Lebanon, and 1 Colombian". Luke remembers being called by a derogatory racist name in the schoolyard and being teased by white people who used parodies of martial artists to mock him.

Luke currently works as a project manager for a graphic arts and printing corporation and is married to a white American. Luke has not returned to Vietnam but is planning to do so. He reports seeing Vietnamese people regularly at work and socially but feels frustrated that he cannot speak Vietnamese. He is currently taking Vietnamese language lessons. Luke socialises with local adoptee friends and corresponds with others over the Internet. He volunteers for adopted Vietnamese community events and a non-profit adoptee group. In summary he describes his identity as, "I'm all Vietnamese, no doubt about that. It's not all in how I was raised. I was in a Caucasian society, but you still can't take the Vietnamese out of me".

Mina

Mina was adopted by "White British parents", in 1973 at the age of twenty-three months. She has two brothers and one sister who are all biologically related to her adoptive parents. She was raised in the UK in what she remembers as "a predominantly white community with Indian and Pakistani minorities". She was not introduced to Vietnamese people while growing up and described her first school environment as "very white". Mina was moved to a different school that included "a mix of races, although mostly Indian" after she complained to her adoptive parents that she was distressed by frequent racist comments.

Mina is currently studying osteopathy and lives in "a culturally diverse area" in France. She reports seeing Vietnamese people in her local area regularly and has several Vietnamese friends. Mina began taking Vietnamese lessons but discontinued them before gaining a competent level, saying that she is more comfortable speaking to overseas Vietnamese people in French (her second language after English). She returned to Vietnam and had a slight sense that she "felt at home". Mina recently began meeting other adoptees in person and over the Internet. Defining her adult identity, Mina states, "I realise it's not so important for me to feel as though I belong to a country – it's just an idea – I belong when I feel surrounded by people I love whatever their nationality or skin type".

My Dung

My Dung was adopted by "White Australian" parents, in 1975 at the age of fourteen months. She has two brothers who are biologically related to her adoptive parents. My Dung was raised in South Australia and describes the neighbourhood where she grew up in as "not very multicultural at all, only a few Italian families". She was not introduced to Vietnamese people by her adoptive parents and received very little information about her adoption as a child. Describing her school environment, she states that she "Does not recall any Asians or other non-whites." She reports experiencing racism from teachers as well as students. She also recalls a boyfriend's parents disapproving of her because she was Asian.

My Dung currently works as a team coordinator and provides a case management service to people with disabilities. She sees Vietnamese people in her local area but has not formed close ties with them. She expresses a feeling of jealousy or envy of Vietnamese people in her area because she cannot speak Vietnamese. When she returned to visit Vietnam she felt a similar jealousy or envy. She also expresses a sense of jealousy or envy of white people, "because they're in the majority". She has concentrated on making friends with other Vietnamese adoptees by attending community events and through correspondence over the Internet. In describing her overall sense of identity, My Dung says, "it's hard sometimes to feel that I belong in either community, Vietnamese or Australian".

Nick

Nick was adopted in 1974, when he was six years old, by a "White Irish American father and Italian American mother". He has a Vietnamese brother plus one other brother who is biologically related to his adoptive parents. Nick was raised in the US on the East Coast and describes the neighbourhood he grew up in as “predominantly white”. He was not introduced to Vietnamese people and was unable to retain his knowledge of Vietnamese beyond some basic phrases. His school was “predominantly white and growing up, most of my friends were Caucasian”. While growing up, the main challenges he had with dating were that some parents would not allow their daughters to go out with him because he was Asian. He states, “During my school days, I don’t ever remember anyone ever wanting to stand out. Everyone wants to conform and belong with the masses”.

In adulthood Nick still lives on the East Coast but has moved into a major American city recognised for its diversity. He has several friends from the overseas Vietnamese community, but he believes that he is not considered “fully Vietnamese” because he can no longer speak the language fluently. Alternatively, he states that he finds an immediate sense of belonging with other adopted Vietnamese. He has returned to Vietnam once and plans to return again soon to begin a search for his birth mother. Regarding his identity, he states, “I use my Vietnamese heritage when I see a need for it”.

Sam

Sam was adopted by a “White Polish mother and German father” who live on the East Coast in the US. He was adopted in 1975, at the age of nine months. Sam has a trans-racially adopted African American sister and a Korean brother. Sam remembers the neighbourhood where he grew up as being “all white”. He was not introduced to Vietnamese people. While growing up, he did not make friends who were from “different cultural backgrounds” (to white) and experienced racism and stereotyping, saying, “I hated them all”. With Asians he feels he is not “Asian enough” to be accepted, especially in dating situations.

In adulthood Sam is a graphic artist and a musician. He now sees Vietnamese people in his local area and has a “mix” of friends from many cultural backgrounds. He has many adopted Vietnamese friends including some whom he met on a group return trip back to Vietnam. Despite not feeling “Asian enough” for non-adoptee Asian females, Sam states that he would readily date another adopted Vietnamese. In summary he defines himself as "a citizen of the world".

Sasha

Sasha was adopted by "White Australian" parents, in 1973 at the age of six months. She has three sisters and one brother who are all biologically related to her adoptive parents. Sasha describes the town where she grew up, "as a small country town in Australia with only a few Aboriginals and no other Asian people". She was not introduced to Vietnamese people as a child and feels she would have been embarrassed by them. Her school environment was "a very racist place" and she felt inferior around her family and school peers because she was Asian. During this time she felt she "hated" Asians.

In adulthood Sasha moved to another state and headed towards its capital city. She completed a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology and has taken up various volunteer positions including working on a suicide 'help line' and leading an inter-country adoptee community group. She is also employed as a Team leader at a large multinational company. She expresses no deep desire to know the overseas Vietnamese community preferring to spend time with "Australians and Inter-country adoptees – they define who I am". However, she did return to visit Vietnam and felt it made her proud of the Vietnamese people. As a teenager and young adult she also stated that she "wasn't attracted to Asian men" but later became engaged to a Chinese Australian.

Simon

Simon was adopted by "White Irish mother/English father", in 1970, at the age of ten months. Simon joined a trans-racially adopted Vietnamese sister (who passed away four years ago) plus two sisters and one brother who are biologically related to his adoptive parents. Simon described his British neighbourhood as "predominantly white". As a child, his adoptive parents introduced him to other

Vietnamese adoptees. During his school years Simon recalls, "there were only a handful of other non-white students, e.g. Chinese, Indian and Afro-Caribbean/Black." Simon's main challenges include experiencing racism from his peers while growing up, for "being black (I was perceived by others as being black as opposed to Vietnamese or Asian)". Simon, like Joe, identifies his biological father as being African American.

In adulthood, Simon moved to the West Coast, USA and settled in a large multicultural city. He reports seeing "plenty of the overseas Vietnamese community" and has actively pursued friendships, cross-cultural experiences and language lessons. He visited Vietnam and found it, "reinforced the fact that I will always be Vietnamese-born, and therefore Vietnamese to a certain degree". He has also kept in contact, via the Internet, with adopted Vietnamese. Describing his adult identity, he states, "When I look in the mirror, I see this Asian-looking man. Up until a few years ago, I used to see an Afro-American-looking man… Because I have a slightly darker complexion to the average Vietnamese".

Tuyet

Tuyet was adopted in 1975, when she was six months old, by a "White German father and Greek mother". She does not have any brothers or sisters in her adoptive family. She was raised in the Middle East until her late childhood and then during adolescence attended a boarding school in the UK. When she was growing up Tuyet knew "mainly British and Dutch people" through the insulated expatriate environment her parents chose for her. Tuyet was not introduced to Vietnamese people while growing up and recalls seeing "very few Asians or other" non-white people at school. When questioned about challenges, Tuyet reports experiencing some stereotypes although she claims her main focus was negotiating her "Queer identity in overtly heterosexual environments".

In adulthood Tuyet lives in one of the largest East Coast cities in the USA. She works as a photographer and recently toured with her first exhibition across the country. Tuyet also spends time volunteering for non-profit overseas Vietnamese groups and socialises with Vietnamese adoptees in her local area and over the Internet. When she was first interviewed, she had not as yet returned to Vietnam. After visiting Vietnam, she provided several journal entries that express a deep sense of disappointment. During her trip there she reports some good experiences but these are outnumbered by situations where she felt rejected. In summary, after her trip she states, “For the first time I really feel American Vietnamese rather than Vietnamese American”.

5.2 Early Childhood Overview

> Irrespective of appearance of racial difference, the adopted child was very closely and comfortably identified with all members of the family, almost as if born into it – *Of the adopted Vietnamese 5 years after Operation Babylift* (Harvey, 1980: 351).

> Blindness to difference perpetuates cultural imperialism by allowing norms expressing the point of view and experience of privileged groups to appear neutral and universal…only oppressed groups come to be marked with particularity; they, and not the privileged groups, are marked, objectified as the Others (Young, I. M., 2001: 11).

This section explores in more depth the first stage of each participant’s identity that developed in early childhood. The suggestion that the adopted Vietnamese grew up feeling white is evident in some literature (Armstrong and Slayton, 2001; Harvey, 1980; Lieberthal, 2000; Thomas, L., 2001). This includes Harvey’s (1980) study of 109 families with adopted Vietnamese when the children were aged between six and nine years old. New insights are revealed in this research from investigating how some people who were adopted from Vietnam during the war now, as adults, recall their childhood.

The types of roles, objects and practices adoptive parents offered the thirteen participants in childhood are explored in the first section of this chapter. The findings reveal that the participants grew up in a culturally homogenous environment and describe themselves being the 'same' as their adoptive parents. The 'same' is a term commonly used by participants to describe 'whiteness' and given the value of 'normal'. Vietnamese people and culture did not have a strong presence and were not considered to be a normal part of any of the participants' upbringing, identity and social world.

An investigation into what type of knowledge about Vietnam was made available to the participants will follow. The findings reveal that adoptive parents, in adoption narratives, objectify Vietnamese people, particularly birth mothers, as inferior and less moral. The Western media that mostly informed adoptive parents and adoptees about Vietnam will be explored in a later chapter. Positive knowledge about Vietnamese people and culture is notably absent leaving little to balance the negativity surrounding the participants' heritage. This provides some understanding as to why several attempts made by adoptive parents to introduce the participants in early childhood to Vietnamese people may have been rejected. However, a contradiction emerges when participants speak about documents and mementos that represent their past. Although all the participants' desire to be 'normal' is set against identifying as Vietnamese/'different', they describe their documents and mementos from Vietnam as valuable to their sense of identity.

5.3 Raised As 'Normal'

A main pattern to emerge in this section is that many participants' narratives position their adoptive parents' racial and cultural identities as 'normal'. Many participants also describe the world of adoptive parents as being white. Descriptions of their childhood upbringing include statements that they were raised like a "normal Australian lad", "all American", "raised as normal", "indoctrinated in the dominant view", "like any other middle class white boy" and as “white… just like my family”. For others, racial ‘difference’ has less meaning at this stage.

Although Nick spent his first six years in Vietnam he recalls being able to identify with his adoptive parents and not feeling racially ‘different’.

> I never thought of myself as Asian because I grew up in a predominantly Caucasian neighbourhood. I never thought of my adoptive parents as Caucasian and I don’t believe they thought of me as Asian.

Joe spent his first five years in Vietnam. He describes his upbringing with his adoptive parents as ‘normal’ and ‘white’.

> I was raised as a normal Australian lad…(although) for years I felt that I did not belong to any group. I was raised like any other middle class white boy.

Luke closely identified with his adoptive parents’ racial and cultural identity. He separates his skin colour and heritage from his sense of being ‘All American’.

> It’s the same concept had I been adopted into a Black family. I would associate with the Black community…being adopted into a Caucasian family we associated with other Caucasians. It wasn’t an encouraged emphasis more than it was a given I was pretty much ‘all American’ except for my skin color and my heritage of being from Vietnam.

When Luke was asked if his accent was advantageous he claimed not to have one – positioning his American one as neutral. The question did not state a Vietnamese or American accent. His narrative demonstrates how ‘difference’ was viewed outside of what is 'normal' and, so as a consequence, becomes a source of ridicule.

> The cool thing is I don't have an accent, so to the average ear, I am just as "American" as the other person down the road. I think that's what really helped me get by in life. I didn't have an extra physical attribute that my peers could catch onto and tease me about, which I am very thankful for.

Sasha also struggled to secure a positive sense of her identity in childhood. National identity and race overlap in Sasha's report. Her narrative shows how she felt identifying strongly as a white Australian had a direct relation for her to the devaluing of 'difference'.

> I was white mentally – I thought and was educated the way Australian culture teaches one to think, I acted the way that was modelled to me by my family, I interpreted things based on the belief systems my family modelled…I was so white and identified so much with White Australians that I "hated" and couldn't identify with Asian people – to the degree where I had no sense of belonging to the Asian race that I biologically belonged to.

A series of relationships between social structures and adoptive parents[22], that in turn contribute to the adopted Vietnamese construction of identity are highlighted in the following reports. As we will see, social roles, relationships and memberships beyond the family home, grounded in categories such as religion, nationality and class, intersect with the adoptees identifications with adoptive parents. For example, Simon’s description of his childhood upbringing refers to religion as well as national identity and class.

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[22] Althusser's (in Mansfield, 2000: 53) theory that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects through state apparatuses 'like the church, family, school [and] the mass media' to reinforce and reproduce values, and Foucault's (in Mansfield, 2000: 55) argument that individuals 'are the material of power' assisted with identifying this relationship.

> I speak fluent English…I grew up in a British middle-class environment. My adoptive father is an ordained minister of the Anglican Church…so I had a Christian upbringing… I associated with British cultural values, simply because I did not know anything else. It wasn’t so much that they encouraged this; more that this was the way that they lived their lives; and in adopting me, I became a part of their lives.

Sam lists a series of religious practices to describe his early childhood upbringing.

> I don't have an accent, I speak English…(Growing up) I wore Hebrew and Christian t-shirts. Different holiday sweaters were always in fashion for me. I ate the Jewish food around Passover, and went carolling at Christmas. They (parents) joined the Unitarian Universalist church when we were adopted.

Ken offers a more in-depth look into how his adoptive parents’ identities are inseparable from larger structures. Ken was encouraged by his adoptive parents to celebrate events revolving around their nationality and religion. Ken’s narrative is a critical analysis of his adoptive parents and, more generally, Western power, seen in his choices of words and phrases such as “indoctrinated” and “in their minds”.

> On a purely nationalistic level, I had to observe national holidays and religious traditions, plus be indoctrinated in the dominant view of American history…My parents made sure that I was

> consistently exposed to mainstream American values, morals and cultural products. In their minds, this was "normal".

My Dung is the only participant who states one of her adoptive parents had an appreciation of Asia, explaining, "Mum's always said she wanted a little girl and always loved Asia, so it made sense to adopt". However, being "Australian" was the only source of knowledge from which My Dung felt she could draw a sense of identity. Her narrative also suggests she was expected to conform to certain stereotypes.

> All I can remember is that I was adopted into an Australian family so was treated Australian. Growing up I felt Australian because it was all I knew. I never fulfilled her dreams of becoming a feminine girl who played with dolls, wore dresses and went to ballet… My relationship with my mum has been severed for several years now.

5.4 Rescued From A World of 'Difference'

> Had she not come to Australia, she would most certainly have died…Let's forget the politics and think of the kids –*Adoptive parent five years after Operation Babylift* (Harvey, 1980: 345)

> I felt that my culture and racial identity was something to be ashamed of because I needed to be rescued – *Sasha, Vietnamese Adoptee*

Most participants claim they 'always knew they were adopted'. This suggests that at some level they had to negotiate a part of themselves outside the world of their adoptive parents leaving a lack, gap or absence in the participants' sense of belonging with them. What knowledge did participants have to construct their pre-adoption past? Adoptive parents are found to be the main 'gate keepers' of knowledge as to why the participants were adopted and how they came to be orphans in the first place. The participants' 'difference' or the 'Other' part of them - traced to Vietnam and its people - is observed to be, almost without exception, set into positions of inferiority in the narratives offered by adoptive parents. The adoption narratives broadly position the West (history, values, soldiers) as more civilised, rather than a joint actor of war and its social consequences; the West's own possible role in the orphaning of children is never mentioned.

A pattern of religious values inspiring Westerners to adopt from Vietnam is also evident in the general literature about adoption from Vietnam. For example, Noone, an Operation Babylift adoptive parent, in *Global Mom* states to other adoptive parents 'God brought your family together for a reason', and that it 'is a powerful spiritual journey' , although she concedes, 'Pray for guidance to whomever you perceive the Divine Creator to be' (Noone, 2003: 9). Religion plays a key role in the participants' adoption process. For example, Mina states, "The organisation I was adopted through was looking for loving Christian families to adopt Vietnamese babies". Joe's adoptive father became involved in adoption through his role as a Christian Minister. Sasha's adoptive parents also adopted her through Christian church connections.

A dynamic and dualism between West/'Other' and superior/inferior unfolds in most narratives where adoptive parents are positioned in the role of 'rescuer' - Vietnamese people ultimately abandon. Altruism, infertility or both were the main reasons offered to most of the participants' as to why their respective parents had adopted them. Explanations the participants use to describe their adoptive parents motives include that they were "wanting to help" and had "the financial and emotional resources". On the other hand, the following reports show that Vietnamese people and Vietnamese birth mothers in particular, enter adoption narratives as incapable, immoral or deceased. An example of this is evident in Sasha's report of how her adoptive parents described her Vietnamese mother.

> (My parents) said that my mother was probably a prostitute who wasn't able to keep me or had died in the war. They seemed to indicate whilst I grew up that they did it out of the goodness of their heart and that it was purely for my benefit – which is why I grew up feeling I had to be grateful.

Sasha felt uneasy with the concept of being 'rescued'.

> Being adopted constantly reminded me to be grateful…which I resented because I'd never had a choice as a baby. I felt that my culture and racial identity was something to be ashamed of because I "needed to be rescued". I guess it made me as an adoptee feel as though there was something wrong with me or my country…to have to have been helped from such a "privileged and wealthy" country. People also reinforced this whenever they asked about my adoptive status – always commenting that I was "so lucky".

During the Vietnam War, some adoptive parents claimed they decided to adopt after becoming concerned about the harm that some American soldiers had inflicted on Vietnamese women and children. For example, in one media report in 1974 an adoptive parent stated, "I almost hate to mention it…I saw some terrible photos of the My Lai massacre, and we just thought they were ordinary kids like ours that were lying there dead – surely it was up to ordinary people all over the world to help the children who hadn't died. So we started off" (BLTN, 1974: 16). However, in the adoption narrative Ben was offered by his adoptive parents, his Vietnamese mother was portrayed as not only incapable but also in danger from Vietnamese aggressors only.

> They told me that my mother loved me but the war was making it too difficult for her to raise me. She also said that the north was coming down and killing many orphans and my biological mother was trying to protect me.

Although not all adoption workers had failed to think deeply about their responsibilities and actions, during the Vietnam War, some Western 'rescuers' were critically evaluated as irresponsible. In the same 1974 media report, for example, a Vietnamese social worker is quoted as criticising one Western adoption worker, saying, "She is one of those people who will always have causes. Just now it's our babies. It could just as easily be de-sexing cats" (BLTN, 1974: 17).

A more critical focus on the actions of some adoptive parents is emerging now that adopted Vietnamese have begun to evaluate their lives in adulthood. For example, in the participants' reports, My Dung is critical of her adoptive parents' motives.

> I grew up being told I was bi-racial, with my father probably American and my mother Vietnamese…I honestly believe that my adoption was about fulfilling their (adoptive parents) own needs and didn't take into account the implications of adopting an overseas child.

Although Cindy believes that she was adopted because her parents were concerned about the welfare of the children in Vietnam, she questioned her adoptive parents about their motives and asked if they made sure that she was a legitimate orphan.

> They had the financial and emotional resources. They had also read the book "waifs" and were determined to assist. They would explain that I was considered an orphan at the time of the adoption to the best of everyone's knowledge. They would acknowledge if conversation went further that some children who were adopted are stolen but then would express how absurd it was to push for such clarification during the war and things are different now, less chaotic and more ordered.

5.5 Indifference to 'Difference'?

> As most parents have expressed their intention to provide as much factual and other background information as possible, it also seems any possible disadvantage from cultural loss will be minimised – *On adoptive parents five years after Operation Babylift* (Harvey, 1980: 348)

The participants' adoption narratives, presented in the last section of this chapter, were found to be unsettling for them. Overall, their Vietnamese past was symbolised through stories about the misfortune, immorality and savagery of its people. It is clear that with some participants, like Sasha, her past was translated as being an inferior part of her identity. This provides some background to the reactions of some of the participants who were then introduced to Vietnamese people that are explored in the first section of this chapter. As we will see, it is likely that the negativity surrounding Vietnam/Vietnamese in the adoption narratives affected the success of these interactions.

This section then explores what other kinds of information that all participants, many whom were not introduced to Vietnamese people, were offered to inform them about their Vietnamese past. Most of the participants were given their

Vietnamese birth certificates and other mementos from their past and overall, claim they held great importance to their lives. However, rather than minimising 'cultural loss' as Harvey's study predicted (1980), such 'artefacts' become a symbol of loss and are described by participants as "important" and "vital" as well as a 'link' or 'key' to discovering the past rather than completely illustrating that past.

Only four of the participants were introduced to Vietnamese people. Three participants rejected these introductions. A useful observation that can offer an understanding as to why the participants' rejected other Vietnamese people is found in Young's critique of how 'sameness' achieves a normative value at the expense of 'difference'.

> Denigration of groups that deviate from an allegedly neutral standard often produces an internalized devaluation by members of those groups themselves…ashamed of their accents or their parents…The aspiration to assimilate helps produce the self-loathing and double consciousness characteristic of oppression (Young, I. M., 2001: 208).

Joe rejected introductions to Vietnamese people. He felt that Vietnamese people distressed him due to negative experiences he remembered in Vietnam. Joe's memory of being discrimination against before he was adopted is consistent with past reports about the treatment of mixed-race status of orphans left in Vietnam (Ferguson, 2002; Johnson, 2002). Joe's past experiences highlight the complexity and dangers of presuming that Vietnamese people were without prejudice. However, balancing his encounters with Vietnamese who were racist are the Vietnamese people who made themselves available to meet him through his adoptive parents.

> Due to bad experiences in Vietnam…when I first came I was fairly traumatised. Part of why I am in Australia is because Vietnamese are fairly racist towards interbreeding; My folks tried to keep me in touch with other Vietnamese, but I did not want to have anything to do with them.

Joe did not receive ‘artefacts’ from his past in Vietnam until he was an adult. At this stage of his life he begins to show a strong interest in his ‘origins’.

> When I turned 21 my folks gave all the papers to me, passport, birth certificate so on. In my early 20’s not really knowing my origins started to consume me and I started to grow restless. Those papers were a beginning and all I had.

Cindy was also introduced to Vietnamese contacts in her childhood but did not form meaningful or regular relationships with them. Cindy believes these introductions were still important, even though she was not keen to interact with other Vietnamese people at an early age

> I found it difficult to engage in it in any constructive way…the important thing being was that it was "offered" to me…. I think that at such an early age it instilled in me an understanding that you can go back to your roots when you know you are ready to.

Cindy’s adoptive parents gave her the Vietnamese passport she arrived with and a lacquered box as mementos from her background. She is unsure of their significance to her and is unable to clarify what their exact impact is, but indicates that her lack of overall context for them might contribute to her ambivalence.

> I think that mementos from before my adoption or due to the fact that I was going to be adopted are somewhat strange in the meaning. My feeling about my pre adoption time is one likened to having amnesia. When people tell you things and show you objects or stories about "what if" they have meanings that can only be felt at a certain depth. Not because I don't care but because my store - library of reference material - about my birth culture is so limited.

Luke met a Vietnamese female in his childhood through his adoptive parents' introductions. Luke reports that he rejected her. He was also introduced to a family with an adopted Vietnamese child at church but the opportunity for building any relationship with them was also cut off early due to their moving away from his area.

> My parents brought in a Vietnamese lady to my house to see if she could teach me Vietnamese, hoping to grab on to the language before I lost it too much. According to my parents, I pretty much shunned her away and refused to learn.

Simon's adoptive parents introduced him to other adopted Vietnamese through the Christian church that oversaw all of their adoptions. He was also offered adoption documents.

> I have a Vietnamese passport, birth and adoption certificates, and several photographs of myself with some Catholic nuns at one of the orphanages in Danang. Such mementos that I have, before and after adoption, serve as a link to my place of birth. They don't necessarily tell me who I am, but at least

> they give me an idea of where I come from, i.e. some form of geographical identity … as I was growing up, I did keep in contact with, and met up with other Vietnamese adoptees.

Many participants believed they were unable to meet Vietnamese people during their childhood because their adoptive parents had extremely limited resources and contacts. Most adoptive parents did provide information that they did have access to, such as Vietnamese birth certificates and passports. For example, Ann was given a small amount of information about her adoption process. This information is reported to hold great importance to her sense of self.

> I only had 3 photos, one of which I'm not sure I'm on it, papers from the attorney but no birth certificate (I think that in 1969 they were not compulsory), and my passport. I would just cling to them as part of myself. Have you ever seen how archaeologists are excited when digging up new fossils? I feel the same.

Ben's adoptive parents gave him information from his adoption process. He is using this information to search for his birth parents.

> I received my medical records from the orphanage, a narrative and my birth certificate. Also I have my original passport and shot record… They are extremely important since I am actively searching for my birth parents. The paperwork provides my only link to names and locations for me to continue my investigation.

My Dung only recently gained access to a small amount of information from her pre-adoption background. She was not given these documents by her adoptive mother and had to acquire the documents independently as an adult. She explains that the documents are an important part of defining her identity.

> I had to go through Family and Youth Services, Adoption Service to gain a copy of these, as they were not forthcoming from my mother. It's like finding out about a secret past life, and putting pieces together of my life's jigsaw puzzle. It's so vital to assist in forming identity.

Sam was given documents from his adoption process but questions their legitimacy. However, he believes they still are important to his sense of identity.

> I have everything that came with me. Which was not much. I had nothing really. If anything it was fake. But they (still) hold my past and give strength for the future. They hold my key to identity.

In summary, 'sameness' and 'difference' re-occur as main themes throughout all the participants' reports. The participants' upbringing is a homogenous construction of Western and mostly Christian roles, objects and discourses offered by adoptive parents. The adoptive parents racial and cultural identity is given a normative value and during this stage, most participants aspired to 'sameness' to achieve a sense of inclusion. The participants' Vietnamese past is symbolised as 'different' and mostly positioned as inferior to Western people and culture. Vietnamese people in adoption narratives are depicted as less moral and capable than adoptive parents.

In early childhood, participants were not forced by others around them to identify as Vietnamese/'different' if they did not wish to do so. In other words, the participants could choose, and were mostly encouraged, to identify as white/'same' by others around them. The next chapter will explore how the adoptees negotiate binary constructions of 'sameness'/'difference' into their sense of self and identity once they enter environments outside the family home where others see them as ‘different’.

Chapter 6 Experiencing 'Difference'

6.1 Late Childhood to Adolescence Overview

> Because the normative, self-image of each and every individual human being – his or her 'me', as Mead puts it – is dependent on the possibility of being continually backed up by others, the experience of disrespect carries with it the danger of an injury that can bring the identity of the person as a whole to the point of collapse (Honneth, 2001: 40)

The participants' were initially introduced to their Vietnamese heritage through mostly unsettling narratives about their pre-adoption past where Vietnamese people and culture were positioned as inferior and immoral. Arguably, individuals could experience significant trauma and internalised shame when made to identify with a past that was only constructed as negative and without positive aspects. However, the findings revealed that participants were encouraged by adoptive parents to be and feel the 'same'. 'Sameness' in the family home became equated with 'whiteness' for the adoptees, and, it was a racial and cultural identity that was identified as 'normal' and surrounded by only positive aspects.

This chapter explores the participants' sense of identity once they began to interact with others outside the family home across their life-stages of late childhood to adolescence. The first section explores how racial awareness marks a new phase in their construction of identity. The reports demonstrate how the participants' identity development was challenged in culturally homogenous school environments due to who peers perceived them as racially and sometimes culturally 'different' to white.

The next two sections explore how, as racial 'Others', the participants find themselves socially marginalised. In their reports, disrespect towards their identity from white peers is not uncommon. Non-white physical and cultural differences are still positioned by others as inferior and outside of what is considered 'normal', but in contrast to their adoptive parents, in the school setting participants found themselves unable to be "backed up by others" in their efforts to be the 'same'. Many participants report experiencing feelings of confusion and in some cases, deep shame because they are seen as 'different'.

The final section of this chapter explores what resources adoptive parents made available to help their children cope with racism and cultural stereotypes. The findings reveal that most participants were unable to access non-white mentors who had first-hand experience with racism and who could offer assistance, understanding and personal strategies of defence. Many participants searching for alternative sources of affirmations of racial diversity and more positive knowledge about Vietnam discussed their attempts to find information in mass media. Only some participants report this alternative approach as useful while most discussed frustrations at finding a few or no non-white public figures.

6.2 Awareness of Racial 'Difference'

> It will be some years ahead before future research can be planned to measure racial awareness and self-identity formation at their appropriate developmental stage - *Of the adopted Vietnamese 5 years after Operation Babylift* (Harvey, 1980: 355).

The development of racial awareness in the participants varies but all report that before adolescence they experience a 'break' from feeling they fully shared the racial identity of their adoptive parents. Most described feeling surprised at being identified as racially 'different' to their adoptive parents. For example, the first time Luke questioned racial 'difference' was when he entered school. Luke had previously turned down meetings with a Vietnamese adult in early childhood and emphasised that he felt "all American", apart from skin colour. Luke began to discuss the concept of race as he grew older and needed to define his sense of self, based on the differences and similarities he shared with his peers at school.

> When a Korean girl came to school, I had to understand why her skin colour was different. I had always looked at myself as being "white", but it finally came into light that I wasn't "white" and that I was olive colour and different.

Many participants report that they struggled to come to terms with not being the 'same' as their white peers because it meant negotiating an identity that was viewed as inferior to the mainstream. Ann's narrative illustrates this painful realisation and struggle. She was initially comfortable with the idea of being "left in the oven longer", an explanation of her physical difference to white given to her by her adoptive parents. However, Ann's feelings about not being white become negative once she experienced being the target of racial and cultural stereotyping at school.

> The French education system doesn't stress on different cultural backgrounds, in fact it most of the time tries to forget them and forbid them… I was 11 and one evening there was a film [where] The Chinese pictured there were coolies. I can't describe the reactions of the other children afterwards. They just regarded me as their slave. I was so fed up that I told them I was not from China but from Vietnam and was born during the war. Then I was suddenly a freak.

Simon had been told at an early age that he had a Vietnamese and African American heritage but this did not challenge his sense of sharing his adoptive parents' racial and cultural identities.

> I can recall my parents telling me about my Vietnamese background, i.e. the Vietnam War, about my mother being Vietnamese and my father being Afro-American…it didn't have a huge impact on my sense of belonging, cultural and racial identity, probably because I was so young. At the time, it was just another natural part of me, just like having two arms and two legs i.e. I was adopted but I was still a full member of my family.

As he grew older, Simon's feelings towards sharing his adoptive parents identity began to change. He began to explore his sense of racial and cultural identity and interconnects this with the impact adoption has had on his life.

> From 11 years old, I began to question where I fitted into this racial and cultural identity, i.e. being British, and being black (I was perceived by others as being black as opposed to Vietnamese or Asian)…As time has gone on, the significance of my adoption, and its effect on my sense of belonging, cultural and racial identity has become more important…this awareness has led me to question who I am, to search for who I am. It has led me to explore what I can of my Vietnamese roots and my Afro-American roots.

Tuyet's process of racial identification is more complex. She speculates that she did not have a Vietnamese biological father stating, "I remember seeing an article in Time Magazine many years ago when I was a teenager and they paired up different races. I looked closest to the Asian/Black mix". She highlights how having a physical appearance that is hard to label racially leads to other people having trouble in trying to make sense of her identity.

> It would be nice to know my other half, but as I get older I think that what I want is more to make others understand me better, rather than it being important to me needing to know.

Tuyet can recall being identified racially by others as Asian but claims that she avoided acknowledging her Vietnamese heritage for most of her life.

> I remember though one time I made a comment that all Asians look alike…I remember my physics teacher making a comment about me not understanding English...I didn't come out or into my "Asianess" until a few years ago. And the definitions of what that means to me (forget what the rest of the world thinks) is fluid.

In summary, the past section shows how racial categories become increasingly meaningful to the participants' construction of identity as they grow older. The next section will further explore how the participants' sense of being the 'same' as their adoptive parents is further disrupted through racism. The physical 'lack' or 'gap' the participants have from 'whiteness' becomes a source of tension once their identity is challenged by school peers, teachers and other people in society.

6.3 Taunts and The Lack of Appreciation of Diversity

A recurring pattern in this section on the participants' reports is that many experienced discrimination because they did not look white and due to imaginary cultural differences. Their experiences with racist forms of exclusion are complicated due to most participants feeling they lacked effective strategies of defence. Many also felt unable to cope because positive knowledge about racial and cultural diversity remained largely absent or was insufficiently emphasised during their upbringing.

Sasha was not introduced to Vietnamese people, history or culture in her childhood or adolescent years and had not met any other Asian people.

> I was the only non-white child at all my primary schools. It (white identity) confused me more due to the teasings I got at school for having “slanty eyes” or a “flat nose”…I still felt mentally very white but I knew that my looks would always be the catalyst for people giving me a hard time. I was constantly reminded I wasn’t “white” like them…I was always being judged by my Asian looking appearance.

Sasha’s exposure to hostile experiences and lack of Asian peers had a deeply negative impact on her sense of identity and self-esteem. Without any positive racial or cultural references to build a strategy of defence and resilience, she was left to interpret that white people were superior.

> Certain stereotypes bothered me, like take the white female model. It was as if that was the only concept of “beauty” that existed. I felt I’d never be able to be “beautiful” because I wasn’t white. There were no non-white role models on TV or in magazines etc when I grew up.

Simon also grew up in a homogenous environment and attended a “predominantly white” school. He experienced racism from his peers and suggests that a multicultural environment would have helped him develop a better sense of identity.

> I did experience racism at school…what racism I did experience was based on being perceived as being black, rather than being Vietnamese, Asian or

> ‘Oriental’. I tended to fight back which helped to reduce what racism I did experience…If I had lived in a multicultural environment, there would have been associated perceptions of other cultural backgrounds, which I could either embrace, or challenge.

Joe had difficulties, based on cultural differences, when he tried to fit in with his peers. He established a better level of acceptance once he adjusted his cultural behaviour.

> My first 5 years in Australia it was anger management. I used to react before my mind could process the information, most of the times it was not anger but frustrations / misunderstanding of cultures.

Mina’s identity was also challenged by racism once she began school. She felt that cultural stereotypes led to others being confused about her having a Western last name but Asian appearance.

> On the inside I felt and always had felt British and even when I was with my brothers I didn’t feel any different. It was only when children remarked on my physical appearance being strange for my surname did I start to become conscious of this… I was called chinky eyes, slitty eyes, Hong Kong Phooey.

My Dung’s report illustrates how both she and her peers stereotyped nationality as equating with ‘whiteness’. She reports being distressed that her peers treated her as Asian which is stereotyped as ‘different’ from Australian.

> I felt I was white, but because I don't look like my parents or the majority of students at school I was treated like I was Asian, not Australian. Directly and indirectly, by students, teachers and people walking past who believed they had the right to have a go and judge me.

6.4 Dating and Discrimination

> As the child grows to a teenager, there may be discrimination; or difficulties concerning dating, marrying – *World Vision report on adopting Vietnamese babies abroad 1973* (WV, 1973: 17)

> It's all right now while she's a cute little girl, but when she grows up and some bloke won't marry her because she isn't white, what then? - *Of the adopted Vietnamese 5 years after Operation Babylift* – (Adoptive parent quoted in Harvey, 1980: 98)

Simon and Joe, the only male participants who identified as having Vietnamese and African American parents, reported that race was not a significant or challenging issue in dating situations. Simon states, "I didn't date a lot, but I don't think that race was ever a consideration". Joe alternatively felt his physical appearance was an advantage stating, "being quite different from the other guys was quite a bonus. At my 10-year reunion I was surprised by how many girls told me that they had a crush on me at school".

This section further explores the other participants' reports of dating more closely. They reveal a range of situations that show racial and cultural discrimination caused them to be excluded in dating situations. Several grew up feeling that white peers would not date them because of their race. For others like Nick, he recalls, "Racism is definitely a factor in dating. I had a couple of break-ups because of the girls parents did not approve of their daughter dating an Asian guy". Ben too found that, "Many parents would not allow their daughters to date me because of my race. I never considered race when I would date, but I was curious about dating another Asian."

The problem of racist responses from peers' parents was not restricted to the male participants. When My Dung was sixteen years old the white parents of a person she was dating disapproved of their son dating her because she was Asian.

> At my formal (end of year dance), I met his parents and the horror on their faces said it all. He didn't speak with me for the rest of the night and had to stay with his parents. I worry now, when I go out with someone and make sure they tell their parents about me being Asian before meeting them

Sasha grew up feeling white peers would not date her because she was Asian. She then interpreted her own rejection as a sign that Asian males were also unattractive (like My Dung and Luke, she uses nationality or "Aussie" as a term for whites).

> I was the only non-white and boys saw me as being too different to go out with…I didn't see Asian men as attractive because all I knew around me was that white, tall, blonde muscular Aussie blokes are what were considered "attractive". My mentality was so "white" that I saw Asianness as inferior, not as good, not as attractive, and I would have felt ashamed to be seen with an Asian male.

Luke also excluded Asians from his possible desirable dating partners. He did not report having trouble dating females from other backgrounds.

> I told myself I would NEVER date an Asian girl, of any race. I can't explain it, it was just something that I had established and that I was not going to move away from that. I didn't want to date a girl who looked like me. As I got older I slowly began to reconsider, but that took a long time.

Sam was enthusiastic about dating Asians until he found that cultural 'authenticity' rather than race was an issue for him in terms of dating Asian people. His experiences introduce some of the tensions towards 'difference' that would not emerge for other participants until they reached adulthood.

> In the beginning, I wasn't Asian enough for Asian Americans, and I wasn't white enough for the white girls. As time went on I dated white women and was still not Asian enough to be considered for Asian girls. That's a part of the Asian culture I hate.

6.5 Resources for Coping

The past sections discussed how 'different' parts of the participants' identities, from cultural background to racial appearance, were found to be sources of exclusion, embarrassment and inferiority for them while they were growing up. This section investigates tactics adoptive parents used to help their children cope and reveals that many adoptive parents are reported to have downplayed or dismissed the adoptees' concerns over racism. For example, Sasha explains that her adoptive parents not only failed to help her cope with racism but they also lacked any sympathy and sensitivity.

> Even my family teased me of having such a flat nose and my lips were called "loobra lips" because they supposedly stuck out more than theirs…I

> remember the first time I came home crying because kids at school were teasing me about my looks. My mum said to me, "don't show them that you're upset and laugh along with them. That way they'll see they can't get the response they want and they'll stop". And that was about all the support I had from my parents.

Tuyet also describes her adoptive parents' method of helping her to cope with her identity challenges as brief and unproductive.

> For all the times my mother would tell me "Don't let people do that to you", has never helped me to cope well in these situations. I would rather have had her talk things through so I could have built up the confidence to stand up for myself, by myself, as opposed to letting it happen, complain to her and have her say, "Don't let people do that to you!"

Ben felt his adoptive parents were unable and also possibly unwilling to help him cope with racism. He also believes his school should have done more to create a tolerant environment for him.

> My parents were unprepared for the racism that I would receive and choose to ignore it. At the time I think you need a strong support network of family and friends that helps the child to verbalize what he/she is experiencing. You also need a certain amount of understanding of the culture that he/she comes from in order to instil a sense of pride and community to belong to. Also, a school administration that does not tolerate racism in its halls.

Mina's report highlights a common problem throughout most of the participants' discussions about how their adoptive parents dealt with racism. The problem was that many were unaware how non-whites were treated in their society until their children brought it to their attention. Mina's adoptive parents moved her to a more multicultural school once they became aware that she experienced racism at a predominantly white school.

> My parents weren't aware of it before I told them children were teasing me – as a result I was then moved to a school where there was more of a mix of races, although mostly Indian…But knowing I was loved and cared for by my family – and also realising that those teasing me were just ignorant also helped.

My Dung did not receive any guidance from her adoptive parents to help her cope with racism. She explains how this oversight had a negative long-term impact on her sense of identity.

> They didn't and if I mentioned it, I was told to ignore it and forget about it… I needed to know that I was okay. To know how to react / respond to the racism. I needed to be supported by my family. Love is not enough. I think even now, I need to remember that even though I feel and "act" Australian and speak English with no accent that I am still Vietnamese. I need to remind myself that I am okay and feel proud of who I am, but that's really hard at times. I need to remember that people with racist views are ignorant.

Cindy was more fortunate than most participants. She believes her adoptive parents open attitude towards racial and cultural diversity helped her cope with racism.

> My adoptive parents always guided me in my resources of racial and cultural identity, never dictated, or had expected outcomes as to their views or input. They just gave and were always open…It was really their attitude and perspective on culture along with a positive feeling about my own heritage. I knew that when I was ready they would be there to supportive and encourage me. There was always the feeling that the journey would be all of us and that this unity was a good thing.

Most participants reported that their adoptive parents offered them other types of resources, such as general emotional support, to cope with racism. However, My Dung emphasised that when trying to cope with racism, “Love is not enough”. Sam discloses that although his adoptive parents gave him their love, he still lacked the confidence to be “unique and proud”. Ann states she needed, “a background and proof that I wasn’t from Mars”. Most participants generally expressed a sense of regret about not having enough positive knowledge about racial diversity and Vietnamese culture to challenge the cultural stereotypes and racism they experienced.

The next part of this section explores how participants responded when asked what types of role models they aspired to in the mass media while they were growing up. Of identity Ballis Lal writes, ‘The kind of object an actor makes of him- or herself is also affected by imagination insofar as the meanings he or she attaches to him- or herself might also be influenced by the imagery available in the mass media - for example, magazines, newspapers, movies, and television sitcoms’(Ballis Lal, 1995: 426). The main pattern to emerge in the participants’ narratives is a desire to find non-white individuals they could relate to and the public figures they listed were chosen “because they were Asian” or because “she was not pure Caucasian”.

The following reports show in more detail the types of role models with which the participants identified in the mass media. Joe’s earlier role models included famous African Americans. As he grew older he began to appreciate a more multicultural group of public figures.

> Muhammad Ali - He was witty, strong, handsome and stood up to the US government and still kept his humour and charm even though being stripped of his Title. Sidney Pointier - When I saw him in ‘To Sir With Love’ it was the first time that I saw a Black person in a lead role in a film and he was so dignified it made me proud…Now I get inspired by many people Male, Female, White, Black, Yellow, living or dead who promote others to be the best they can be, help others and to live in peace.

Simon also appreciated seeing African Americans on the screen.

> “Roots” was an eye-opener for me, giving me a view of the Afro-American experience and at the same time offering me some sense of identity. I tended to relate more to non-white figures in TV, movies, etc, because I could associate more with them than I could white figures.

Some participants found the mass media only provided more negative racial and cultural stereotypes and increased their sense of inferiority. For example, Ann found turning to films for any positive representations of Vietnamese racial or cultural background useless.

> I didn’t like films about VN war because the Vietnamese were always pictured as barbarians or total dummies... The stereotypes that bothered me were the Vietnamese woman trying to seduce the American soldier (has my mother done the same)? I’m still very touchy about this.

Various negative representations of Vietnamese females in Hollywood produced Vietnam War movies were a source of distress for all the female participants. Cindy was unsettled by Vietnamese women who were represented as rape victims.

> I certainly watched my fair share of Vietnam War movies though I soon tired of 80's version of things, always the American view. It wasn't until the 90's that some much better films came out from the Vietnamese perspective. I am very interested still and I am grateful for a wider choice of theme and perspective. The standard rape scene in the American movies was always a little distressing.

Mina also found it difficult to find alternative positive role models in the mass media while growing up.

> I was a teenager and all the US films came out (about the Vietnam War)…There were no female Asian Oriental icons whilst growing up – so I related to “Nicole” (Mia Peeples) in Fame, as she was not pure Caucasian – At the time of Bruce Lee all the kids thought I was a Kung Fu expert – which I suppose although annoying at the time in retrospect was not such a bad thing.

A few male participants felt that the Asian male martial arts stereotype, made famous by Bruce Lee, was a positive image with which to identify. For example, Luke lists several as being role models while he was growing up.

> Sad to say but Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and Sho Kosugi; only because they were Asian. But when I got older, I started to relate closer to male actors who were short. I hate being short and I still am short…all of 5’4”!

Nick also identified with Bruce Lee.

> I think every Asian boy looked up to the great Bruce Lee.

Ben did not feel the Hong Kong martial arts star was a good role model but stated:

> The only Asians when I was young in the media were the kid from Goonies, the kid from Indiana Jones, and Bruce Lee. I didn’t have much in common with any of them.

Ken felt that the Bruce Lee and martial arts stereotypes were not always a source of pride.

> I received no preparation against racism whatsoever. Looking back on it, they were hypocritical about battling prejudice. When I told them what other kids were calling me – “chink”, “Bruce Lee” – they told me to ignore those comments, that they didn’t apply to me. What I needed was sympathy, empathy and moral support.

Sam claims to be a fan of Bruce Lee but felt that Asian martial arts often became linked with a broad range of racial and cultural stereotypes.

> I hated all of them (Asian stereotypes). Karate, Chinese food, ping-pong, math, being smart, speaking Chinese, bowing, and all that crap…They make you strong if you think positively. They put you in fear if you think negatively. The choice is always up to you.

This chapter has explored the main patterns that occur throughout the participants' late childhood to adolescence. In this stage of their identity development they could no longer comfortably identify with their adoptive parents 'normal' 'whiteness' as they had in early childhood. The majority of the participants' felt they struggled to negotiate and cope with being identified as non-white in white, homogenous and mostly racist environments.

The participants were faced with an uncomfortable alternative if they could not locate themselves within 'whiteness'. To construct a non-white identity that was consistent with how peers viewed them, the adoptees needed to displace and disconnect themselves, in various degrees, from the groups and cultural boundaries most familiar to them. Peers who viewed them as non-white and as having a non-western cultural upbringing did not realise or accept that such racial associations and cultural traits were completely unfamiliar to the participants.

The reports demonstrated how the disrespect of 'difference' became a prevalent experience in most of the participants' interactions outside the family home. The marginal identities adoptees were given by others were both confusing and shameful to their sense of self, given that they had not been offered positive knowledge about anything else but 'whiteness'. Some participants like Sasha subscribed to the hegemony of 'whiteness' and its claims on superiority. She internalised racism, resulting in self-hate and then projected the dominant views around her by rejecting anything Asian. This is clearly seen through her reports on dating.

Many participants tried to legitimise their identity by searching for non-white role models that affirmed their worth as racial 'Others'. The participants' overall attempts to bring about new meanings to their Vietnamese background were further hindered by the racist representations they found in Vietnam War movies. The next chapter will explore what happens to the participants' sense of self and construction of identity once they are exposed to more multicultural interactions and more balanced representations of Vietnam.

Chapter 7 - Investing in 'Difference'

7.1 Adulthood Overview

> Whether the cognitive potential inherent in feeling hurt or ashamed becomes a moral-political conviction depends above all on how the affected subject's cultural-political environment is constructed; only if the means of articulation of a social movement are available can the experience of disrespect become a source of motivation for acts of political resistance (Honneth, 2001: 44).

This final part of the research findings explores the participants' experiences and their ongoing identity process in adulthood. All the participants gained independence from their school environments and the direct influence of their adoptive parents. The participants then found they had more control over whom they interacted with and where these interactions took place. All moved to more multicultural environments and began to interact with non-white people; this included interactions with Vietnamese people. The participants' identifications and investments in 'whiteness' began to decrease as these moves occurred.

Some of the disrespect and *mis*recognitions of identity that participants experienced when interacting with white others in their early years continued into their new environments and social networks. However, all participants began to develop resilience and resistance by changing how they defined and defended their identity. The main changes were the adoptees coming to terms with their own 'difference' to their adoptive parents and various others, identifying as Vietnamese, reversing stereotypes and educating people about adoption. These changes are explored throughout the first section of this chapter.

The next section looks at the types of investments participants' have begun to make to better integrate their cultural background into their sense of identity. The adoptees that had chosen to reject meetings with Vietnamese people now discuss their enthusiasm to meet other Vietnamese. Those unable to meet any Vietnamese people when children are also trying to develop closer relationships with other Vietnamese. However, tensions and complications are reported to emerge because the adoptees lack Vietnamese kinship, language and cultural knowledge.

The final part of this chapter explores other ways participants are trying to reconcile with their Vietnamese heritage and learn more about the Vietnamese culture. The most striking and successful investment participants discuss involves their building of close relationships and community networks with other adopted Vietnamese. The community building activities they describe range from networking with each other over the Internet to becoming involved with non-profit organizations focussed on adoption from Vietnam. Many participants report feeling a sense of relief by sharing their encounters with racism and feeling alienated from white and Vietnamese society.

7.2 Old Challenges, New Strategies

The participants' responses to the question, "where are you from" details how cultural stereotypes from general people in society continue to be a part of their adult lives. Each participant reported being perceived by others as being 'different' due to their physical appearance. However, many claim that they now feel more confident presenting an identity that integrates their Western upbringing and Vietnamese past. Their hybrid constructions illustrate some of the ways in which the adopted Vietnamese began to feel less intimidated by cultural stereotypes.

Ben explains that he now identifies as being born in Vietnam but then explains his cultural upbringing.

> I reply, "I was born in Vietnam and raised in Minnesota. I don't know much about Vietnamese

> culture, but I sure can tell you how to milk a cow at 5:00 a.m." Now it is a very easy question to answer, but when I was young and still searching for myself it was extremely difficult.

Sasha also once felt too embarrassed to identify with Asians and was ashamed by her Vietnamese heritage. She now finds it easier to discuss 'where she is from'.

> Yes – all the time. I always respond I was born in Vietnam but adopted into an Australian family. Over time it has been easy to answer. When I was young I hated the question. Now I use it as an opportunity to educate people on the issues of adoption.

Ann introduces a possible reason why she and many other participants became more comfortable with presenting an identity that included references to their Vietnamese past. Her response suggests that the expectation of racist remarks has become less common in adulthood. She also suggests that as her knowledge of Vietnam has increased, the possible negative remarks of others are less influential on her sense of identity.

> When I was a child, saying I was born in Vietnam was like confessing a defect (abuses made me feel like that). Whenever someone asked me the question, I thought: "this is a racist"…Now I feel much more proud of my background, I even insist on it. It's because I know more about Vietnam and because I went there in 1994.

My Dung was also once distressed by others commenting on her Vietnamese past. She now expresses a sense of frustration and anger at having to explain her past rather than feeling obligated or ashamed.

> I feel like a broken record! I’d be rich if I was given 5c for every time I’ve been asked where are you from! My standard answer is “I was adopted from Vietnam during the war” or “I’m a Vietnamese war baby”. It’s now easy to answer but as I’ve got older I’ve found it harder to respond because I don’t think people should assume the right to ask me. I don’t ask people because I know what it is like.

Ken’s attitude towards white people also changes from feeling inferior to challenging their prejudices.

> I don’t hold white people up as the social ideal anymore. I’m more aware of what kind of privileges society gives them and I do my best to call attention to that fact. Since I’m more involved with the Asian American community, I’m more aware of how white America treats its non-white citizens and what kind of expectations they have for Asian Americans.

Ben’s adult methods of coping with racism play upon racial and cultural stereotypes by reversing assumptions and applying them to ‘whiteness’.

> There were always stereotypes that bothered me…I’ve found that you can often point out that all white people look the same (i.e. German, French etc) and then ask how many European languages they know. This will usually get the point across. It took me awhile to make that analogy however and until then I struggled with trying to explain the differences.

7.3 New Interactions and Challenges

This section explores the benefits and challenges that participants report their recent exposure to Vietnamese people and culture has had on their identity. The participants all report that once they reached adulthood the overseas Vietnamese community began to be more visible to them. Ten participants have visited Vietnam. The reports of the three participants who have not yet returned to Vietnam are examined first to explore what impact they expect their visit to have on their sense of identity and belonging. Reports by participants' who have already returned to Vietnam are then examined to reconsider some of the myths and realities of the first group's expectations.

Luke rejected Vietnamese people when he was younger but as an adult he regularly interacts with them in his workplace and neighbourhood. He 'shunned' his Vietnamese teacher when he was a child but he is now going to Vietnamese language lessons. He explains why his attitudes towards Vietnamese people may have changed.

> While I was growing up, I didn't have a burning desire to want to learn the language. There was no one else around to speak to in Vietnamese, so what's the point? Now I interact somewhat with other Vietnamese people, I work with several Vietnamese people, and I so much want to speak with them in their own language.

Luke feels the Vietnamese people he meets assume that he can speak Vietnamese. This challenge is common in most of the other participants' reports of their interactions with other Vietnamese people.

> When I tell other Vietnamese people that I too am Vietnamese, they automatically think that I can or

> should know the Vietnamese language…and then they look at me with disappointment because I don't know the language.

Luke is planning to return to Vietnam but is nervous about the types of challenges he will face there. His caution is accompanied by a belief that it will still be beneficial to his overall sense of identity.

> Vietnam is my native heritage; it's every part of me. I'm now trying to catch up on the past 28 years of my life and trying to grasp the Vietnamese community. Just to walk the grounds that I was born on would be an emotional rush. I think my over perception about Vietnam would come closer to home if I actually visited the orphanage that I was brought to. This is a feeling I've wanted for a long time.

Ben sees Vietnamese people in a variety of social situations, however, he feels excluded due to not speaking Vietnamese and his lack of cultural knowledge.

> I joined the Asian Club in college but I couldn't relate to a lot of the other students, especially the Vietnamese, who seemed to have their own little world that I knew nothing about. I feel that I am expected to speak Vietnamese and know the customs of the homeland …we probably don't have a lot in common since we've led such different lifestyles. As it stands I am still learning and it will take time before I am comfortable in Vietnamese culture.

Although Ben is positive about visiting Vietnam, he fears being rejected by the people there and regrets that his adoptive parents did not help him acquire Vietnamese cultural knowledge when he was younger.

> I wish to this day that my parents had given me Vietnamese language lessons so that I could go back and visit the country anytime. As it stands I have to learn the language myself... I'm not sure whether they (Vietnamese people) will embrace us adoptees as their lost sheep, or reject us as turncoats…I am also just learning about Vietnamese food, so at this point I do not even feel comfortable ordering at a Vietnamese restaurant. I am confident that I will in the future, but it will take a certain amount of time yet.

Ken once felt that speaking Vietnamese would have drawn attention to the fact that he was not the 'same' as his adoptive parents and made him feel awkward. As an adult he now believes speaking Vietnamese would be advantageous.

> (Growing up) I didn't think much of speaking Vietnamese because I was too busy trying to fit in and live my life. The more I meet Vietnamese people, the more interested I am in speaking the language. Learning the language would help me better connect with the Vietnamese American community. I would be able to learn more about their history and social situations and they would be able to better know me.

Ken plans to return to Vietnam to explore his cultural background but he does not expect it will give him an immediate sense of belonging.

> I have no illusions that I don't have a long way to go before I know what Vietnam is and what it means to be of Vietnamese descent. But visiting Vietnam would bring me to a deeper understanding of Vietnam and its people; it would open a window onto their world.

Tuyet initially believed that visiting Vietnam "would fill the void that I seemed to have carried around with me all my life…that I would finally feel a sense of completeness. It would validate the pride of being Vietnamese." She also felt that there was an overall connection between all Vietnamese people

> Someone much younger than me who is Vietnamese once told me when I was doubting my identity, "You were born Vietnamese, you will die Vietnamese, therefore you will always be Vietnamese." Ever since then, that is how I define my "Vietnameseness."…I feel a great sense of belonging, which is quickly broken with the expectation of me speaking Vietnamese and being reminded that I cannot just yet.

When she visited Vietnam, Tuyet reports being unsettled by the awkward cultural situations and racism towards her "hapa"[23] appearance. An excerpt from her travel journal reveals that she felt unwelcome and that others could not accept that she had Vietnamese heritage:

> *(To the local people in Vietnam)* I have no want to learn Vietnamese. Why should I? Just so I can justify my wanting existence in a language you will understand, only to have you scoff at me and accuse

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[23] An American term used to describe people who have a 'mixed' Asian and/or Pacific Island and non-Asian or Pacific Island 'racial' backgrounds.

> me of either being a liar or not Vietnamese enough? Forget it! Being Vietnamese doesn't just mean learning your birthplace tongue. It means being able to recite your culture and be obligated in what that society demands of you.

Other participants report having a more mixed range of feelings about their return trips to Vietnam and the impact it had on their sense of identity. Simon first returned to Vietnam in 1996 and was put in contact with a woman believed to be his birth mother. He returned to the US for a DNA test which proved to be a negative match and in his words he described the whole event as "pretty traumatic and emotionally draining, on top of the fact this was the first time I had seen the land of my birth". Simon returned to Vietnam two years later and is planning a further trip in the future.

> Vietnam is the place of my birth, and where my biological roots are, and therefore, I do identify with Vietnam and being Vietnamese. Consequently, I went back to Vietnam in 1998…My visits to Vietnam have reinforced the fact that I will always be Vietnamese-born, and therefore Vietnamese to a certain degree. Nevertheless, having been adopted and raised in the U.K., with little exposure to Vietnamese language or culture, I feel that that part of being Vietnamese is shut off or even lost to me.

Simon also spends time with the overseas Vietnamese community in the US and is learning Vietnamese.

> I definitely think that the Vietnamese community overseas have something to offer adopted Vietnamese. On a general level, there is a kind of kinship, an immediate sense of belonging. On a

> cultural level, the overseas Vietnamese community offers a door to the culture that adopted Vietnamese were born to, but one to which they have often had little exposure to (as a result of being adopted). My personal experiences range from dining with Vietnamese friends, experiencing the food, learning about Vietnamese customs and culture to taking Vietnamese lessons, and attending Vietnamese festivals.

Sasha also decided to visit Vietnam once she reached adulthood. She explains her experiences there helped her overcome the shame she once felt about having a Vietnamese heritage.

> The first trip there enabled me to feel proud for the first time of being Vietnamese, that the Vietnamese people are not to be ashamed of – they were fighters – courageous and inventive. It is my birth country – the heritage that I came from [But]… My identity has been defined by being between two cultures/races… apart from my looks – I don't belong in Vietnam. I was only born there and have my heritage there but that's all.

Many of the participants felt that their meetings with Vietnamese people to discover more about their Vietnamese past had its constraints. Nick spends time with people from the overseas Vietnamese community in his local area. He is positive about them but feels he is still partly excluded due to his lack of Vietnamese cultural knowledge.

> The Vietnamese people that I know are mostly very financially successful because of their work ethics combined with intellect. I am very proud to know

> these people. They acknowledge my Vietnamese heritage but know I am not one of them anymore.

Nick believes that the adopted Vietnamese will never be fully accepted by other Vietnamese people unless they fulfil certain expectations.

> Adopted Vietnamese must accept who they are. I realize this is a very difficult task and sometimes one might feel isolated. From personal experience, I know the Vietnamese overseas will not willingly accept adopted Vietnamese unless they speak Vietnamese. Because the adoptees came from similar circumstances, it is very therapeutic for the adoptees to be in contact with one another.

7.4 Alternative Forms of Authentication

This section explores some of the alternative ways participants are reconciling with their Vietnamese heritage. The mass media that had originally been regarded as unhelpful or offensive by most participants during their adolescence is now reported to be more helpful. For example, Ann expresses feeling uncomfortable with non-adopted Vietnamese people, but appreciates Vietnamese made films and meeting other adopted Vietnamese.

> I'm a fan of Tran Anh Hung (The Scent of the Green Papaya, Cyclo, The Vertical Ray of the Sun) because it's there that I first heard Vietnamese and saw a film about Vietnam with almost no reference to the war period…I don't have any opportunity to see Vietnamese people…I'm too shy to talk to them. I don't feel I have much in common with them, probably because they can hardly speak French and are boat people for the most part of

> them and are still living in the Vietnamese fashion...as we are adoptees we are not considered as fully Vietnamese and as it is difficult for us to understand what they've been through, they too have difficulties in understanding our needs as adoptees.

Meetings between adopted Vietnamese people are reported to have the most positive impact on all the participants' sense of identity. Ann explains that she is most comfortable with her identity when she is amongst other adopted Vietnamese people. Since coming into contact with them she has developed a website dedicated to posting their photographs and stories, as well as planning a future event in France so adoptees can spend more time with each other in person.

> It was like finding members of my family. It's really great to see how each of us coped with living a multi cultural adoption and with living with his/her past. I think that all of us have thoughts that cannot be shared or understood with our adoptive family or friends but that can be shared with people who went through the same experience.

Tuyet has also looked for Vietnamese representations in media to learn more about her cultural background. She is now able to find some Asian female public figures that are represented as strong individuals.

> Films on Vietnam by Vietnamese portray a more beautiful existence of Vietnam today. The only media I have seen regarding the Vietnam War that I can really appreciate, is a current exhibit that is touring called "Another Vietnam" which is a collection of unpublished and unprinted photos by

> war photographers from the North and South. Now, I am also appreciative that there are women (even though they are not Vietnamese) like Joan Chen, Michelle Yeoh, Jenny Shimizu, etc to show off how strong Asian women can be.

Although Tuyet felt a deep sense of rejection in Vietnam, she has maintained regular contact in the US with Vietnamese people who are mainly second generation Vietnamese. After her trip she stated, “For the first time I really feel American Vietnamese rather than Vietnamese American”. Tuyet feels most at ease with the adopted Vietnamese community and is currently planning a photography exhibition of the photographs she has taken of adopted Vietnamese she has met at various events and some whom she met in Vietnam[24].

> Thanks to the Internet, I was able to find … and connect with other Vietnamese adoptees and share their experiences of growing up as different. They can offer similar or same experiences which may help us understand better the feelings of being lost, misplaced, and alone.

Simon also believes the adopted Vietnamese community provide him with a sense of belonging. He has recently moved to the US and joined an Internet forum for adopted Vietnamese there.

> Adopted Vietnamese offer each other a form of kinship, as a result of the common experience of being Vietnamese-born and having been adopted. For me personally, it’s always been a good opportunity to meet up with other people who had a

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[24] ‘Tuyet’ joined several other adopted Vietnamese people and myself in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) Vietnam in January 2003. This includes one male adoptee who initially travelled to Vietnam with me on a trip I arranged for seven adopted Vietnamese and two adoptive parents in January 2001. He has been living and working in Vietnam since that initial first trip and continues to reside there.

> similar background, to share experiences, and to know, ultimately, that I was not alone.

Ben also feels more confident about his identity when he is amongst other adopted Vietnamese. He recently joined an adopted Vietnamese community group and plans on attending one of their upcoming social events. Ben believes that adopted Vietnamese share in common issues about racism and trouble finding understanding and a sense of belonging in society.

> I feel most comfortable around other adoptees because they understand me better. Adoptees can provided support with fighting racism as well as creating an environment of understanding and belonging…I recently joined an adoptee e-group and have been making connections with several people whom have gone through the same experiences as myself.

Cindy also finds a strong sense of belonging with other adopted Vietnamese. She currently acts as a community spokesperson at general adoption events and also arranges social gatherings for over 20 adopted Vietnamese who live in her city.

> We offer each other a point of mutual understanding that no other group can. It is very different from even what your spouse can offer…It was quite a surprise to me to feel that oneness with strangers. We have talked about this since, and though it sounds all a little "sappy" I think there's a lot to said for that bond, especially when things get tough with searching for biological information, return trips to the homeland.

Joe did not initially think that Vietnamese culture would have been any use to him and he was not especially enthusiastic to learn the language stating "there's more to me than being Vietnamese". However, he recently found interacting with other adopted Vietnamese to be a new and useful source of support. Since being in contact with other adoptees, Joe is planning on a second trip back to Vietnam and has joined a support group for inter-country adoptees.

> Interacting with fellow adopted Vietnamese gives me a sense that the other person actually knows how you feel and has shared a similar life and we might be able to support each other. It's something that is hard to put into words, but there is an emptiness inside as well as feelings of being lost and incomplete. My adopted family have been great to me but could never fill the void of knowing your true roots.

The findings from this chapter show that access to more multicultural environments and a positive view of Vietnam coincides with the participants feeling more secure and confident with their sense of identity. All the participants are better able to defend themselves against racism from white people and all feel a sense of pride about Vietnamese people. The most striking changes are seen in participants such as Luke and Sasha who were racist towards other Asians while growing up but have reassessed these views in adulthood. Another significant change is that some participants such as Ken have begun to critically evaluate white hegemony and connect its impact to their feelings of being ashamed at being 'different'.

Having increased their interactions with other Vietnamese people, many participants report that such meetings, particularly in Vietnam, often feel awkward. Some participants carried expectations that meetings with Vietnamese people would naturally re-activate a Vietnamese 'essence' within them and that connections could be made with other Vietnamese without taking particular cultural differences into consideration. Vietnamese people are also reported to expect that adoptees will have some knowledge of Vietnamese culture. As a result, many participants began to develop alternative approaches to exploring their Vietnamese heritage.

The participants' attempts to mobilise a sense of solidarity and support with other adoptees is the most immediate form of empowerment for the participants. Other alternative strategies, used by participants such as Mina, Simon and Ben to make sense of their identity and understand their heritage, include the forming of closer ties with second generation Vietnamese. Ann and Tuyet decided to re-evaluate their heritage and try to better understand Vietnam through watching Vietnamese films. Others such as Nick and Joe have decided to return to Vietnam for a second time. Most report a desire to learn to speak Vietnamese.

Since adulthood, all the participants have focussed on creating a better sense of identity for themselves connected to a reconciliation process with their Vietnamese heritage. In a sense, the participants' Vietnamese heritage was never broken away from their identity once it was introduced to them in early childhood; it was moved to the margins, racialised, denigrated and denied. In adulthood, their more balanced knowledge about Vietnam that the adoptees develop allows for a more positive repositioning of their Vietnamese heritage, which continues to influence their sense of identity. The next chapter involves a more in-depth discussion of the research findings.

Chapter 8 –Discussion

8.1 Tracing the ‘Origins’ of ‘Difference’ and Status of ‘Whiteness’

The patterns and themes of the research findings are considered more closely in this chapter in order to make sense of the participants’ complex construction of identity. The participants’ claims on particular racial and cultural identities, revealed in the last chapter, went in some cases from sliding between dualisms of ‘all’ white to ‘all’ Vietnamese, while others became more malleable. More specifically, as the adoptees developed mature perspectives on their experiences and heritage, their self-identifications became not only flexible and shifted from white to ‘Other’ but they also began to be located in a space ‘in-between’. White, Vietnamese, Asian and African American identities all play an intricate role in how the adopted Vietnamese, who are a heterogenous community, construct a sense of self and belonging.

A deeper understanding of these transformations can be discussed using a framework that combines symbolic interactionism and cultural studies. The hegemony between ‘whiteness’ and its various ‘Others’ in the participants’ early childhood is examined in the first section of this chapter. The next two sections focus on investigating the intricate link between the adoptive parents’ privilege through ‘whiteness’ and the disrespect of ‘difference’ in the society where the participants lived. This highlights how the adopted Vietnamese, as they were growing up, struggled to identify comfortably inside and outside the racial and cultural identities of their adoptive families. The final section discusses the strategic benefits, potential limitations and possible hybridity of the participants’ identifications with Vietnamese ethnicity in the most recent stages of their identity process.

It is important to re-emphasise that race and cultural background, including ‘whiteness’, are not lurking biological ‘essences’. Adoptive parent and author Klatzkin (2002) suggests that the successful development of a trans-racially adopted child’s identity relies on their having knowledge of their cultural background explaining that, ‘If you don’t have roots, you can’t stand up straight’ (Klatzkin, 2002: 1). The ‘roots’ metaphor is striking, both central to the arborescence tree metaphors dominating Western thought that have been criticised by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 18) and ‘a word with almost unequalled charisma in the denotation of the source and meaning of anything’(Mansfield, 2000: 140). However, ‘roots’ echoes essentialist or metaphysical beliefs in culture as being something biological, given and static.

There is no evidence in the research findings of participants having any kind of innate Vietnamese cultural knowledge or behaviour, nor is it something a priori, lost and waiting to be re-awakened. The participants’ Vietnamese identity is first named and shaped by their adoptive parents and set unevenly alongside the adoptive parents’ racial and cultural identity. The participants’ overall identity development and sense of self is consistent with symbolic interactionist principles where, ‘The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity’(Mead, G. H., 1972: 6). Writings in cultural studies further assists with understanding the participants shifting identifications as/not Vietnamese as historically situated, constructed around binary oppositions and within relationships of power (Cousins and Hussain, 2000; Denzin, 1992; Hall, 1990; Mansfield, 2000; Minh-Ha, 1995).

An in-depth look into the participants’ overall identity process was guided by the premise that ‘Human beings are seen as living in a world of meaningful objects…To identify and understand the life of a group it is necessary to identify its world of objects; this identification has to be in terms of the meanings objects have for the members of the group’ (Blumer, 1969: 69). The qualitative data in this research first looks at what meaningful objects the participants were offered, in their early childhood, by their adoptive parents.

> Beginning in early childhood, (a) one engages in the imitation of significant others' behaviours, attitudes, and values or standards; (b) the developing child adjusts his/her behaviour to garner the approval of

> salient socializing agents; (and) one comes to adopt the opinions that significant others are perceived to hold toward the self, reflected appraisals that come to define one's sense of self as a person (Harter, 1999: 677).

In Chapter 5, the participants' reports of their very early childhood describe how they felt the 'same' and that this feeling was largely influenced by their adoptive parents. These reports follow typical patterns of models of childhood development found in studies from psychology to sociology (Erikson, 1950; Mead, G. H., 1972; Parsons, 1951). The participants' identifications with their adoptive parents' language, class, religion, food and national customs are also accompanied by a series of value judgements. The adoptive parents' roles and objects are all given the status of 'normal' by the participants.

Luke's childhood needs were fulfilled by his adoptive parents, however, they showed little awareness of the potential for racism in Luke's future. His upbringing is common with most of the other participants

> They tried to love me and accept me as one of their own kids. There really wasn't much they could do until a situation arose. My main needs as a child was to have interaction with other kids, that and having food. I was a typical child with the typical needs of a child. As I got older I became more aware of racism and discrimination.

A 'colour-blind' description of the construction of the participants' early childhood identity is too simplistic. The participants' identifications in childhood are traced to 'whiteness' rather than transcending racial and cultural self-classifications. The long-term impact of non-white 'race aversion' (Frankenberg, 1999) rather than 'colour-blindness' in the participants' upbringing can be seen in Ann's adult description of whom she sees in the mirror (*emphasis* added).

> Strangest of all is that *I* consider myself as all white. It's only when I looked at *myself* in the mirror (or when I am abused) that I realise I have Vietnamese features.

The connection between the negative emotions disrespect can cause, such as feelings of shame, and Vietnamese ethnicity is evident in most of the participants' lives, and it is a connection that can be traced as far back as their childhood. Adoption narratives are the first symbolic construction of a specific Vietnamese sense of self or ethnicity that participants gained – initiated from knowledge presented to them by others rather than an innate self-awareness.

Grossberg (1996) argues that, 'The act of power comes not in creating something from nothing, but in reducing something to nothing (to pure semantic & differential terms)' (Grossberg, 1996: 96). Vietnamese people are spoken for and objectified. They are portrayed as not only 'different' but also positioned without any positive attributes. The knowledge that the participants are offered about the 'Other' part of their identity is unsettling and only represents Vietnamese people as immoral and incapable. Returning to Ann's adoption narrative, she was told either "both my parents died in a bombing" or "my mother couldn't raise me correctly, so she preferred to abandon me for my own good". Similarly, Sasha was told by her adoptive parents, "my mother was probably a prostitute who wasn't able to keep me or had died in the war".

Theorists from critical race theory to post-colonial and cultural studies (Hall and du Gay, 1996; Hartigan Jr, 1999; Mercer, 1994; Said, 1991) agree that constructions of the 'Other' involve a power relationship or can be understood 'as a set of activities which is lived and developed within asymmetrical relations of power' (Giroux et al.). Bhabha speaks of 'the moment of colonial discourse' where 'forms of racial/cultural/historical otherness' are stereotyped as differences that serve 'racial and cultural hierarchization' (Bhabha, 2001: 389). Colonialist discourse is evident throughout the adoption narratives the participants were offered in order to explain their pre-adoption past and to support the role that was played by white Westerners.

The recent memoir of Peck-Barnes (2000) demonstrates that such power-relationships in narratives about adoption from Vietnam are not just a product of the past. Peck Barnes' account of Operation Babylift describes how Vietnamese orphans were 'abandoned in … trash heaps or pawned off to anyone who had a spark of compassion'. She speaks of Westerners who 'left the comfort of their homes and went to Southeast Asia to reclaim discarded babies' and of how 'Many a housewife skimped on her weekly grocery budget to fill a small shoebox of items that could keep a child alive' (Peck-Barnes, 2000: v).

The voices of the Vietnamese, particularly the birth mothers who relinquished their children, have so far not been given a substantial platform to reply and provide their perspectives on the overseas adoptions of Vietnamese children. There is an 'asymmetrical obliteration' of their voices in the subaltern sense (Spivak, 1998: 25) through the 'absence of a text that can answer back' (Parry, 1995: 41).

> Take up the White Man's burden--
> The savage wars of peace--
> Fill full the mouth of Famine,
> And bid the sickness cease (Kipling, 1899: 1).

> The Vietnamese know something which his Western allies are still a long way from understanding: Help without genuine empathy and mutual respect can be worse than no help at all. It can save the body but destroy the soul. – *Gerald Stone, Former Vietnam War correspondent* (1966: 139)

An understanding of the findings is guided by the view that identities build a centre from *what they are not* and are inseparable from relationships of power (Derrida, 2000). This view assists with developing an understanding into how the race and culture of white adoptive parents and the adoptees Vietnamese ancestry of the adoptees were set in binary oppositions and uneven power relationships where 'one is the norm and the other is the *other*' (Woodward, 1997: 36). Adoptive parents and the West continually entered adoption narratives as subjects who offered stability - their acts are associated with altruism and often connected with religious acts of compassion - all offering what Wu more ambiguously termed 'the good life'(2002: 6).

Janmohamed (2000) draws attention to colonialist practices in literature where Europeans transformed the 'Others' 'social and historical dissimilarities into universal, metaphysical differences' incapable of having equal intelligence or values, therefore supporting projects where 'the process of civilizing the natives can continue indefinititely' (Janmohamed, 2000: 22). While this research does not suggest that adoptive parents focused on 'civilizing' Vietnamese people, the adoption narratives many participants recalled being told make Vietnamese people appear to be uncivilised. Participants are left to aspire to the high morality accorded to 'whiteness' or the 'inherent' lesser morals of the Vietnamese.

Post-colonial writings, particularly from feminist authors, assist with identifying a more balanced interpretation of the circumstances leading up to the participants' adoption and the actors that shaped such circumstances. Post-colonial studies draw attention to the two-way process behind much of the 'Others' misfortunes set across a history of imperialism, colonialism and war (Ashcroft et al., 1995). Mohanty (1999) urges that while the West responds to 'Third World' poverty and instabilities, it 'cannot avoid the challenge of situating itself and examining its role in such (a) global economic and political framework' (Mohanty, 1999: 260). The West's own ideological projects, political actors and soldiers that also contributed to the aggression in Vietnam, where orphans were just one of many casualties, are mostly unaddressed in the participants' memories of how the war and their adoption was represented to them by non-Vietnamese others.

There is a comparative power and desirability for participants to identify themselves with the represented security, civility and morality surrounding their adoptive parents' racial and cultural identity. This was for many participants a long term and sole reality. Participants like Sasha grew up being pressured to feel "grateful" to the West and ashamed of her Vietnamese culture and racial identity because she "needed to be rescued" from it. When Sasha visited Vietnam as an adult she gained a different perspective; she found she began to, "feel proud for the first time of being Vietnamese, that the Vietnamese people are not to be ashamed of – they were fighters – courageous and inventive".

8.2 Access to Vietnamese Culture and the Appreciation of Racial Diversity

Positive accounts of Vietnamese culture and history, plus any points of commonality, are absent from the adoptees' upbringing. It has also been noted that for 'much of the world the very word Vietnam represents an event and an experience – the wars of 1946 to 1975 - rather than a country. Yet Vietnam is more than a symbol' (Mackerras et al., 1988: 1). A strong presence of colonial discourse was not unusual in non-Vietnamese constructions of Vietnam in the immediate years following the Vietnam War. Most of the information produced about Vietnam outside its national borders was filtered through the US where, 'policy makers saw Vietnam through a lens heavily shaded by European "orientalism" as well as by the home-grown racialism that pervaded much of American culture' (Giffith, 2000: 2).

Participants generally appreciated their adoptive parents' efforts to make them comfortable, such as Luke feeling, "They tried to love me and accept me as one of their own kids". Some adoptive parents are reported to have provided support in areas where they had expertise such as Simon's father who, "encouraged me to be active, taking me climbing and skiing, and also teaching me how to box (something he had done in his past). So this allowed me to develop my physical confidence". Most participants believed that information and resources about Vietnam were not readily available to their adoptive parents. For example, Ann believes her adoptive parents, “never met other Vietnamese people. But they would have if they had had the opportunity”. However, My Dung felt her adoptive parents did not make an effort to find support for her stating, “my adoption was about fulfilling their own needs and didn’t take into account the implications of adopting an overseas child”.

While the participants were growing up, post-adoption resources focussed specifically on assisting adoptive families with Vietnamese children were scant. The main wave of Vietnamese migration only started in the West after 1975 and adoption policies did not formally acknowledge racial or cultural issues for almost two decades after Operation Babylift. Most of the Vietnamese people migrating to the West were refugees who were alienated from mainstream society and visiting Vietnam was made extremely difficult in the two decades following the Vietnam War (Dorais, 2001; NSW, 1994b; Jakubowicz, 2003; Thomas, M., 1999). These historical factors provide understanding into the constraints many adoptive parents faced when trying to develop a healthy upbringing for the Vietnamese War orphans they adopted.

Future interviews with the adoptive parents might reveal that the participants were given more positive views about Vietnamese culture and people, and a more even historical account of the Vietnam War. However, the participants’ own memories, through the interviews, did not reveal that any such views were provided in a significant manner to counter-balance the negativity that they clearly recall surrounding their knowledge of their pre-adoption past. What was offered to participants in terms of affirmation of their racial and cultural background did not occur regularly enough to be considered ‘normal’ when placed alongside their Western family and community interactions.

In My Dung’s recollections, although her mother said she “loved Asia”, My Dung does not remember being offered a deeper understanding of her cultural background or exposure to Vietnamese people.

> I think the thing that I lacked and was the most important, was the opportunity to choose whether to be a part of the Vietnamese community or not and to what degree I wished to become a part...There was no opportunity to explore my Vietnamese background in any way, which I believe was vital and has affected my ability to develop a true sense of identity because I often wondered about why I was never exposed to my culture.

Only four of the thirteen participants (Joe, Simon, Luke and Cindy) could recall seeing Vietnamese people while they were growing. Cindy's exposure to people of 'different' racial backgrounds assisted her develop an appreciation of racial diversity. She believes this allowed her to understand, "different ethnic backgrounds…I can say confidently that it made me go beyond the superficial cultural masks of people at an early age".

For Joe, Simon and Luke it is what was *not* provided alongside these meetings that affected the potentially productive impact of such introductions. For example, Vietnamese people and positive representations of cultural background were not a regular part of Joe's upbringing. When he was introduced to total strangers from the overseas Vietnamese community he could only draw upon bad experiences from Vietnam and, "did not want to have anything to do with them". However, after he attended a multicultural school with students "from around the world" he felt he was able to "be broad-minded and tolerant to others, like people for who they are".

Simon, who also had a sister adopted from Vietnam, was offered contact with other adopted Vietnamese. He believes these meetings were positive but still felt that having Vietnamese culture offered to him while growing up "would have definitely helped me develop a better sense of who I am in terms of my cultural heritage". Without it he states, "I think it's made me more independent and self-reliant, but also at times insular or stand-offish, with the sense of not belonging, or at least not belonging to any one particular group, culture, etc… I will always be trying to find a place for myself in the world, somewhere that I feel that I truly belong".

Luke feels he lacked enthusiasm to learn Vietnamese because, "There was no one else around to speak to in Vietnamese, so what's the point?" Luke's lack of consistent contact with racial and cultural diversity contributed to his feeling uncomfortable with meeting non-white people. Reflecting on his past, Luke now feels that, "A multicultural neighbourhood would have been nice for me to play around ... It would have helped me get along with other kids of different races. But my immediate community was all white". When Luke did begin to interact with Vietnamese people he reported that one of the benefits was that, "It helps me become more proud of my heritage and not so ashamed of what happened some 25 years ago".

Other participants believed ways to appreciate racial and cultural diversity and cope with racism were notably absent within their adoptive family environments. Ann gives further insight into how many adoptive parents were ignorant of issues such as racism rather than intentionally trying to avoid it, stating, "They didn't think people would react that way. They nevertheless stopped seeing some old friends and made new ones because of racist reactions". The adoptive parents' lack in seeing the need to include an appreciation of racial diversity is comparable to the observation hooks makes about some white people who are surprised at finding out that being a non-racist requires more than just 'having a black friend' (hooks, 1993: 223).

Minority discourses, such as those emerging from cultural citizenship debates by Latinos, argue that 'Privilege tends to be invisible to itself' (O'Toole, 2000: 3). Goodman details how this invisibility contributes to a lack of awareness more broadly with her general observation that, 'white parents do not have to cope with the "what am I" questions. They do not have to face the complexities of…

extreme racial inferiority. They are not haunted by fears…or by personal painful memories of having taken it themselves[25]' (Goodman, 1964: 140).

The participants' desire for more exposure to Vietnamese culture and racial diversity is evident in their discussions of what role models and films they sought in the mass media. The representations of Vietnam that participants could access were found to be restricted to American made Vietnam War films. These only supported and continued the negativity surrounding Vietnam that participants had first encountered in their adoption narratives. Historically situated, such films were produced at a time when 'The Vietnam era witnessed the most sweeping and rapid social change in American history, and naturally the writings and films reflect the flashpoints of the culture. The only thing missing, it seems, is the Vietnamese'(O'Nan, 2000: 2).

The presence of the Vietnamese is not missing from Vietnam War movies but any subjectivity or connections to modernity, morality or civility and ingenuity of the Vietnamese are absent. The adopted Vietnamese were once again confronted with narrative devices and portrayals that are consistent with Said's observations of Orientalist practices where the 'Other' is 'lamentably under-humanized, anti-democratic, backward, barbaric and so forth' (Said, 1991: 150). Ann observed that Vietnamese male soldiers (female soldiers are mostly absent in American films) were reduced to "barbarians or total dummies", removing any possibility of heroism. Narratives about Vietnamese soldiers who are represented with more complexity and ability, such as those of in *The Sorrow of War*, did not become translated, published and available in the West until almost a decade after the American made Vietnam War movies (Ninh, 1991).

Most female participants felt even more distressed by the way Vietnamese females were represented in Vietnam War movies. Said argues that in Orientalist practice, using author Flaubert's work as his main example, there has been 'an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex' (Said, 1991: 188). Said argues that the sexuality portrayed in the East situates it as morally inferior but also symbolises submission. This connection can also be seen in how Vietnamese women are presented as sexual objects in Western made films watched by the participants where Cindy complained about, “the standard rape scene” or as Ann observed, “whores. That doesn’t help a feeling of pride.” The roles of Vietnamese women in such movies are also consistent with the ones given to Vietnamese women in the participants’ adoption narratives.

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[25] Goodman's oversight is 'the intersection of Jewishness and whiteness' which is given attention in Frankenberg's (1994: 214) study discussing the experiences of Jewish people and their persecution as racial others.

General observations, such as, ‘Vietnam is and always has been one of the most intensely literary civilizations on the planet’ (Woodside, 1976: ix) are absent in the participants’ knowledge about Vietnam. Stories of Vietnamese warrior heroines such as Lady Tri?u and the Trung sisters (Huynh, 2002; Marr, 1981) along with the long history of female soldiers, teachers, nurses and other non-sex related occupations, also go unreported. However, participants, such as Tuyet, are eventually able to list some “strong” Asian female role models in adulthood.

The non-Vietnamese public figures that male participants listed as a source of inspiration and pride were generally of African background, such as former World Champion boxer Muhammad Ali or Chinese and Japanese martial arts film stars. Some of these representations also became a source of cultural stereotypes for the participants; Luke found people, “thought I could fight like Bruce Lee” because he looked Asian rather than having the actual ability to fight. However, such figures also had attributes that were valued in the world of the participants. In Joe’s school environment he recalls, “being good at sport made everyone worship you”.

Morris argues that the appeal of stars such as Bruce Lee is strengthened by their ability to ‘connect diverse circuits of cult activity, sports fandom, gym, street and self defence culture, identity politics and self-improvement philosophy’ (Morris, 2001: 176). Jackie Chan was also listed as a role model. Marchetti suggests his appeal is based on how ‘He takes on various racial roles as masks…He can slip effortlessly between imitations of James Bond, Indiana Jones, and other white masters of the global order [and] mimic the white hero’ (Marchetti, 2000: 156).

Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan offered the participants access to non-white role models that exist in a modern, urban world rather than the jungles of Vietnam. While the Vietnam War movies could be charged with orientalist type practices, where Western narratives ‘tended to make more rigid the sense of difference between European and Asiatic parts of the world’(Said, 1991: 204), the martial arts movies might be seen as bringing them closer together.

8.3 Coping With Disrespect of ‘Difference’

> A racist society functions like a private club, in which membership conceives itself in a certain way and excludes those who do not fit in (Fredrickson, 1999: 335)

> The child’s value system can be in painful contrast with his knowledge of himself… the growing sense of color kinds is accompanied by a growing set of values (Goodman, 1964: 56, 57)

Fanon (1967) believed that ‘A normal Negro child, having grown up in a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world’ (Fanon, 1967: 143). Disrespect in the form of racism and/or cultural stereotypes intensified in most of the participants’ lives once they expanded their interactions with others beyond the family home. Harter (1999) posits that ‘the spheres of social influence widen, as the child moves out of his immediate domestic life into the world of school, including teachers and peers. As more spheres become salient, more alters appear on the social horizon, leading to greater complexities in the adoption of attributes that will come to define the self’(Harter, 1999).

The participants’ ability to negotiate both existing and new self- attributes goes awry and is made problematic by their visible difference from ‘whiteness’ and unfamiliarity with other forms of racial and cultural identities. The participants’ encounters with stereotyping and exclusion due to their perceived racial 'difference' is comparable to situations where, 'The fully and visibly stigmatised …suffer the special indignity of knowing that they wear their situation on their sleeve, that almost anyone will be able to see into the heart of their predicament… he is a normal human being, but that he is also 'different' in some degree, and that it would be foolish to deny this difference'(Goffman, 1963: 149, 152).

More general studies on the adolescence of non-adopted minorities argue that the placement of non-white individuals in intolerant homogenous environments has a negative impact on their self-esteem (Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Phillips Smith et al., 1999; Porter and Washington, 1993). The impact such situations have on the adopted Vietnamese is compounded by both complexity and strain from lack of understanding at home. For example, Ben felt, "racism was an everyday reality for me…my parents were unprepared for the racism that I would receive and choose to ignore it". He believes the adopted Vietnamese needed, "A strong support network of family and friends that helps the child to verbalize what he/she is experiencing" and "A certain amount of understanding of the culture that he/she comes from in order to instil a sense of pride and community to belong to".

Most of the participants felt similar internal struggles. For example, Sasha reports, "There were no Asians in my area/community/school that I could relate to in terms of physical appearance. I hated being short and stocky and I hated my looks and physical appearance". Luke also felt, "As a younger boy I always hated looking in the mirror, because I didn't like what I saw. I wanted to be like all the other kids. Tall, white, no flat nose, no slanted eyes, and no brown skin. I hated the way I looked". Sam felt, "As a child I was confused and angry to not fit into my own skin".

Cindy had been prepared for racism by her adoptive parents. While she was growing up, they exposed her to situations where racial diversity was seen as acceptable. She believes, "The usual 'stick and stones may break my bones' type chant I guess filtered down. They (adoptive parents) were very encouraging about me developing as a strong, confident and loved individual". She was the least intimidated, of the participants, by efforts of others to subordinate her ‘difference’ from ‘whiteness’. This included her responding to racism and cultural stereotypes confidently stating, “I usually walked off laughing at them and calling them ‘ignorant misfits’ later joking, “I guess *they* looked that up in the dictionary in primary school”.

8.4 Re-conceptualising ‘Difference’ In Adulthood

> Coming to grips with being adopted involves accepting oneself as Vietnamese- albeit without the name, the language, or having the culture readily available, but still Vietnamese and understanding that we are in a constant evolution of finding comfort in this identity – *Jay Alt Minh, adopted Vietnamese adult* (2003).

The reports in Chapter 7 detail how the participants’ became more comfortable with their Vietnamese heritage. The thirteen participants all began to see Vietnamese people and ten participants returned to visit Vietnam. The participants’ identifications with Vietnamese ethnicity increased as opportunities to meet with Vietnamese people and explore Vietnamese culture improved. For some participants their identifications with ‘whiteness’ began to decrease, such as Ken who does not, “hold white people up as the social ideal anymore”. A more extreme shift is Luke’s childhood self-description of being, “all American” changed to an adult declaration of “I’m all Vietnamese”.

Cast and Burke’s (2002) study of self-esteem and adult identity assists with understanding the participants’ new interest and investment in developing a better sense of Vietnamese identity. Cast and Burke posit that ‘when individuals are persistently unable to verify their identities, the decline of self-esteem is even greater…Therefore, when social relationships do not contribute to self-verification, individuals may leave such relationships and seek identity verification, and the resulting self-esteem, elsewhere. As such, a desire for self-esteem motivates individuals to seek both verifying and enhancing social relationships' (Cast and Burke, 2002: 1044). Scheff more specifically linked Cooley's 'the looking glass self', where feelings of 'pride or mortification' are shaped socially, to individuals who reclaim subordinated cultural identities through joining marginal group collectives (Cooley in Scheff, 1994: 285).

Bennett warns that there is a danger when individuals over- invest in their marginality (Bennett, 1993). He argues that such individuals 'may report feeling inauthentic all the time, as if any engagement in society is simply role-playing, and there is no way to ever feel 'at home'...This captive state can be called 'terminal uniqueness' for it seems irresolvable' (Bennett, 1993: 115). However, according to Cohen, 'A more recent strategy observed among ethnic and other disadvantaged groups has been to 'honour' the stigma, to render it as a positive value, and thereby, to de-stigmatise it' (Cohen, 1999: 60).

All thirteen participants have actively begun building social relationships with other adopted Vietnamese and some have taken their social networking further by engaging in more formal activities such as joining organizations that focus on issues related to adoption from Vietnam. These relationships and activities engender positive outcomes including Cindy feeling, "We offer each other a point of mutual understanding that no other group can". Tuyet feels they help replace her sense of "being lost, misplaced, and alone". Simon similarly stated that contact with other adopted Vietnamese helped him "to know, ultimately, that I was not alone". Ben felt that the new relationships being formed between adopted Vietnamese people have the potential to create "an environment of understanding and belonging".

> 'Ethnicity. Ethnicity Lite?...too European, and therefore not quite ethnic enough?'(Gilman, 1998: 1)
>
> As we are adoptees we are not considered as fully Vietnamese – *Ann, Adopted Vietnamese*

The main challenges emerging in the participants' attempts to 'reclaim or rearticulate a subordinated identity' (Frankenberg, 1999: 11) occurs in their interactions with the wider Vietnamese community. Sam introduced this problem in a more general way when he described that while growing up he "was not Asian enough" for Asians in dating situations. Some participants reported that their lack of cultural knowledge alienated or invalidated them when they interacted with Vietnamese people. Tuyet, for example, had strong feelings of being shunned in Vietnam because she was "not Vietnamese enough".

The participants' struggles with verifying their identity as Vietnamese are strongest when measured against, or reliant upon, essentialist ideas of ethnicity. Section 3.3 discussed how subordinated groups resisting Western hegemony are vulnerable to 'a prevalent condition' of engaging in a 'reversion to the spurious authenticity of (ethnic or religious) origins'(Robbins, 1996: 63) in their collective struggles to empower their identities. However Barth alternatively defines ethnic membership as being based on boundaries, not 'the cultural stuff' (Barth, 1969: 15).

Acknowledging Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities, Scheff argues that 'For such a differentiation to occur, the group itself, or its host group has to undergo a collective act of the imagination' (Scheff, 1994: 278). Hall also highlights that essential cultural identities are underpinned by imaginary bonds between 'one people' with 'a common origin' (Hall, 1997: 51). The participants' feelings of exclusion in Vietnam or amongst overseas Vietnamese communities can be traced to partial but real barriers. The main barrier reported is language. However, the greatest barrier creating tension in the participants' exploration of Vietnamese identity might be their viewing culture 'as a complex whole' based on ideas of 'homogeneity, coherence and continuity' (Wicker, 2000: 33). Wicker urges that culture should not be seen as 'something in itself' but as 'the ability to produce reciprocal symbolic relations and to form meaning through interaction' (Wicker, 2000: 39, 40).

The ‘potential for inclusivity’ (Papastergiadis, 2000: 258) for participants exploring Vietnamese identity is strengthened under a re-conceptualisation of cultural identity that goes beyond the sum of its parts to ‘strategies of hybridisation’ (Bhabha, 1996: 58). Post-structuralist and post-modern emphasis on multiple subjectivities can also deconstruct grand narratives of particular cultures by highlighting their members heterogeneity (Mansfield, 2000; Sarup, 1996). Meredith focuses on a deeper investment in Bhabha’s concept of a ‘third space’ (Bhabha and Rutherford, 1990) to overcome ‘us/them’ cultural ‘differences’ to ‘both/and’ positions to enable a new ‘ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion’ (Meredith, P., 1998: 3).

The possibilities of cultural inclusiveness and transformation between adopted Vietnamese and the wider Vietnamese communities can increase when the pursuit of having ‘enough’ Asian or Vietnamese parts to create a unitary whole sense of cultural identity decreases and membership refocuses on recognising the diversity throughout the Vietnamese community worldwide. Meredith argues that strategies of hybridity and exploration of the third space ‘develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multifaceted, not dualistic, patterns of cultural exchange and maturation’ (Meredith, P., 1998: 5).

As the participants have only just begun to interact with the Vietnamese community, re-conceptualisations of what Vietnamese identity means and strategies of inclusion are only beginning to become possible. However some early signs can be observed in Cindy’s attitudes.

> I think it will always be interesting to see the parallels that are in the lives of other Vietnamese. I think that as long as you are not in the frame of mind of "judging ' them as better or worse … then I think all facets of the Vietnamese community is relevant in some way…I think that sometimes walls are put up unnecessarily because of this and

> we cut ourselves off from being able to sympathise and empathise with others, and even more so with those who share a common plight. i.e. Other Vietnamese.

The combination of the adopted Vietnamese feeling inclusion within ‘whiteness’ in early childhood, confused marginality in late childhood to adolescence, and reconciliation through largely unguided attempts to identify with Vietnamese ethnicity in adulthood is a pattern evident in all the participants’ lives. The struggles they experienced indicates that trans-racial adoption from Vietnam to the West has far more complex and problematic implications for the lives of such orphans than was predicted in earlier research literature from the 1970s – 1980s (Calder, 1978; Harvey, 1980). The results of this study suggest it is crucial to re-emphasise issues raised and recommendations made in some of the adoption reports from the 1990s onwards (ALII, 2000; Altman, 1995; Armstrong and Slayton, 2001; Lieberthal, 2000; NSW, 1994b). The next chapter presents the conclusion to this study, the overall implications of the findings and directions for future research.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

9.1 Summary

This thesis set out to achieve two main goals. The first goal was to add new insights on the experiences of the first generation of adopted Vietnamese who grew up in white families, now that they have reached adulthood. This thesis has provided the adopted Vietnamese with an opportunity to speak about their experiences, where in the past adoptive parents, policy makers, adoption agency workers and Operation Babylift volunteers had for the most part spoken for and about them. The perspectives of the adult adopted Vietnamese presented in this thesis also contribute to providing more knowledge on the topic of adoption from Vietnam that in more general publications 'to date has had minimal exposure…only a paragraph here, a slight mention elsewhere, and only a sentence in the history books…more often, not at all' (Peck-Barnes, 2000: 310). This chapter will later explore what directions might be taken for future research.

The second goal of this research was to open up further debate on the value of recognition and respect of 'difference' in trans-racial adoption. The exploration of what role the authentication of cultural background has on the development of an integrated identity by adopted Vietnamese War orphans revealed that issues of 'sameness' and 'difference' interconnect and inter-play throughout the participants' construction of identity. The subordination and disrespect of their 'difference' was traced back to their early childhood where 'sameness' amounted to 'whiteness', which was then unevenly positioned as superior to various 'Others'. The implications and significance this research has for trans-racial adoption is discussed in the closing part of this chapter.

In this section I will summarise how the overall research process proved to be a satisfactory method to explore issues of identity for orphans adopted from Vietnam. The background information to adoption from Vietnam that was presented in Chapter 2 assisted with gaining an awareness of some of the key issues that have emerged in the adoption community and of the gap that exists in the research of such issues. Some of the adult adopted Vietnamese voices that are emerging in recent media reports and films introduce various struggles they have had with their identity. The most common pattern in these reports is that the adopted Vietnamese felt that their cultural background was too 'different' and unfamiliar to them while they were growing up but that they were making efforts to explore their Vietnamese heritage in adulthood (Bancroft, 2000; Meredith, S. T., 2000; Minh, K., 2001; Tran, 2000).

In such reports some adopted Vietnamese described their cultural background as a source of ridicule and exclusion and so it became a negative part of their identity. Returning to one media report, an adopted Vietnamese adult stated, 'I rejected being Asian… the last thing you want to be is different' suggesting he had strong identifications with the 'whiteness' of his adoptive parents. However, in adulthood he felt the need to connect with his cultural background stating, 'nothing would help until I came here and saw Vietnam for myself' (Tran, 2000). Overall, other adopted Vietnamese identifications with racial and cultural identities explored in Chapter 2 also appear to be shifting to, from and possibly in-between 'whiteness' and 'Other', such as Vietnamese and Black identities.

The closing part of Chapters 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3 highlighted the gap in the literature of more in-depth studies on the identity process of adopted Vietnamese. Chapter 3 reviewed more general literature on selfhood, racism and cultural identities to find work that could assist with understanding how the adopted Vietnamese identities might be challenged, subordinated and possibly reclaimed or re-conceptualised. Writings in symbolic interactionism offered the theory that all identities are socially constructed and therefore malleable (Blumer, 1969; Ballis Lal, 1995; Denzin, 1992; Goffman, 1963; Mead, G. H., 1972).

Literature from cultural studies and other contemporary social theory offered understanding into how concepts of 'sameness' and 'difference' associated with racial and cultural identities are constructed around binary oppositions and shaped by relationships of power (Boyne, 1990; Cousins and Hussain, 2000; Hall and du Gay, 1996; Mansfield, 2000; Said, 1991; Scheff, 1994; Stam and Shohat, 1994).

Proposed models of resistance to subordination and ways to re-conceptualise identities through hybridity provided alternative understandings to constraining dualistic and essentialist views on identities (Bhabha and Rutherford, 1990; Meredith, P., 1998; Papastergiadis, 2000).

Chapter 4 outlined the research methodology. The interviews with thirteen adopted Vietnamese participants, due to the close attention each participant gave to the questions asked and their thoughtful and substantial responses, resulted in rich qualitative data. Each individual participant volunteered a valuable amount of time and made a great effort to share their experiences. The benefits of using email to conduct the survey outweighed the disadvantages. The main benefit was that the probability of my 'insider' status leading the participant to respond in various ways was reduced due to the 'invisibility' email offers. This chapter also detailed how symbolic interactionism and cultural studies both offered useful ways to interpret the data.

Chapters 5 to 7 reported the research findings outlining the main patterns and themes. For the adopted Vietnamese in this research, their identity can be viewed as first emerging from a series of identifications and affirmations of 'sameness' through sharing their adoptive parents racial and cultural identity. Throughout childhood to adolescence, the participants' 'different' Vietnamese heritage was demonised and devalued. Most participants were taunted by racism and negative cultural stereotypes by white peers at school who did not see them as being the 'same'.

The participants' who were most distressed by such challenges to their identity lacked affirmations of racial diversity from their adoptive parents. For example, Sasha and Luke both reported that they hated their appearance and felt ashamed about their cultural background. Cindy, Mina and Joe were able to cope better having been exposed to racial diversity by their adoptive parents' social networks or by attending more multicultural schools.

It is not until the participants reached adulthood that all became exposed to more multicultural environments and found opportunities to explore their Vietnamese heritage. The participants demonstrate, in various degrees, a sense of reconciliation with their Vietnamese heritage and, in most cases, feelings of pride replace former feelings of shame. The table below provides an overview of the key interactions, events and circumstances that contributed to this development in their construction of identity. The first column lists negative interactions, events and circumstances and the second column lists ones that assisted their identity to become more integrated. After this table, the next section discusses the gaps that exist in this research and what research directions might be taken up in future.

Table 3: Summary of the Participants' Identity Development

More Tensions:	Less Tensions
Where Vietnamese culture and people were portrayed negatively in adoption narratives.	Where documents such as birth certificates, Vietnamese passports, orphanage photographs and mementos were provided.
When there were negative representations of Vietnamese people and culture in the mass media.	Where positive images of Vietnamese people and culture were found, such as in Vietnamese-made films and exhibitions.
When their sense of self and inclusion within their adoptive parents' ethnicity went awry due to encounters with racism and cultural discrimination.	Where they were able to see an appreciation of racial and cultural diversity, such as in multicultural neighbourhoods, visiting Vietnam and find more positive images of non-white people in the mass media.
When their identity and sense of belonging was questioned or challenged by others.	Where they were able to meet other adopted Vietnamese individuals. When they were able to question the status of 'whiteness' and be confident in referring to adoption/Vietnam in adulthood.
When a secure sense of self relied on essentialist Vietnamese attributes and	Where they felt there was a possibility of being welcomed into the Vietnamese community and

having Vietnamese language skills.	where commonalities were identified. Where they were accepted by Vietnamese people.

9.2 Future Directions

The personal insights of Vietnamese orphans adopted by white adoptive parents during the Vietnam War are only just beginning to emerge in general literature. Further research into the older 'first generation' of adopted Vietnamese, once they have spent more time investing in 'difference', can bring about a deeper understanding of the long-term benefits of engaging with Vietnamese people and culture. However, there have been thousands of other Vietnamese orphans placed with white adoptive parents following the first migration (NAATA, 2000; NAIC, 2002; USDOS, 2001). Future research with more recently adopted younger Vietnamese individuals and their adoptive parents might reveal that Vietnamese culture and an appreciation of racial diversity is included in their upbringing. Research with these families may confirm or challenge benefits with such choices in upbringing.

In the broader context of understanding adoption from Vietnam, an important voice is yet to be recovered. The voices of non-adopted Vietnamese people, particularly the voices of birth mothers, is absent from this research and most other English language literature on adoption from Vietnam. The main barrier that existed in this project to accessing the perspectives of Vietnamese women who relinquished their children during the Vietnam War was my lack of fluency in Vietnamese. Another problem was my choice of using email to conduct the research. The digital divide between the West and Vietnamese people is only beginning to be bridged, and mainly by foreign corporations and a small, mainly metropolitan population of Vietnamese middle-class (Lam - Song and Williams, 2002; Tipton, 2001).

Vietnamese biological parents have only recently begun to appear in the Western media. One example is that of adopted Vietnamese Bubb's birth mother featured in the documentary *Daughter from Danang* (Franco, 2002). Other reunions between adopted Vietnamese war orphans and their birth mothers or fathers are rarely reported. However a recent report by Turner, an adopted Vietnamese Australian who was reunited with her birth mother in April 2003, adds a different angle to narratives about abandoning mothers:

> I arrived safely in Australia [in 1975 as part of Operation Babyift], into the arms of my wonderful new family - complete with three older sisters. My Vietnamese mother knew none of this. Four months after she had left me at the babies' home [urged by the father], she returned with my grandmother to collect me. When she arrived, the place was deserted. I had disappeared without a trace. My mother told me she fainted on the footpath that day (Turner, 2003: 4).

Present-day adoption from Vietnam is set in a different stage of history where war no longer adds an extra element of uncertainty to children becoming ‘orphaned’. In the US some adoption agencies are beginning to facilitate ‘open adoptions’ where adoptive parents are offered ‘Post placement mediation between adoptive family and birth parents’ and birth parents an ‘Opportunity to have ongoing contact with adoptive family/child via face-to-face contact or pictures and letters’ (IAMA, 2003: 1, 2).

Mediation services such as those in open adoptions can provide adopted Vietnamese with new opportunities to have better access to their personal history and for the presence of Vietnamese people, particularly birth mothers to be more prominent in their lives. How such engagements might further complicate the construction of identity for individuals that are trans-racially adopted from Vietnam by white families in the West can only be more deeply understood through future research.

9.3 Current Implications

The significance of this research is that the experiences of the thirteen adult adopted Vietnamese in this study revealed that a more complex identity process resulted from their adoption into white families than was predicted in some of the earlier research investigating adoption from Vietnam (Calder, 1978; Harvey, 1980). The practical applications of this research are that it highlights important issues that adoption professionals working with recent and potential families adopting from Vietnam and the adoptive parents themselves may still need to address or revisit. This research outlines particular struggles that, although not inherent to all, exist in the lives of individuals who are adopted from Vietnam and who contributed their voices for this research.

Whereas previous research observed 'the adopted child was very closely and comfortably identified with all members of the family' (Harvey, 1980: 351), this research has shown that questions of racial and cultural identity emerge socially and persist throughout the life histories of the adopted Vietnamese. Such questions shape their construction of self and identity as well as social belonging and status amongst family and peers. The findings demonstrate that, if the cultural background of trans-racially adopted children is only negatively constructed by adoptive parents and others, it can have a long-term effect on the adoptees self-esteem and even result in feelings of self-hate. Studies of disrespect, stigma and colonialism (Honneth, 2001; Fanon, 1967; Goffman, 1963; Said, 1991) leads to an understanding of how the disrespect of 'difference' can become a source of inferiority.

The research also demonstrates how a lack of regular access to positive representations of racial and cultural 'difference' contributed to the adoptive parents 'whiteness' being seen as superior and 'normal' at the expense of 'difference'. The possibility of the participants having a 'colour-blind' upbringing did not hold in this research and highlights the importance of adoptive parents being aware of how 'whiteness' is as much a socially constructed identity and cultural practice as any other ethnicity, and that it is currently located in a position of privilege (Frankenberg, 1999; Hall, 1995; Nakayama and Martin, 1999; Omi and Winant, 2001).

Hartigan Jr (1999) argues that 'white (people) benefit from being white whether or not, as individuals, they hold supremacist notions, harbour racist sentiments, or are made anxious by the physical presence of people of colour' (Hartigan Jr, 1999: 184). What this study has shown is, that in contrast, adopted Vietnamese, as people of colour, are not immune from racism and that their identifications with their white adoptive parents are experienced from a vantage point of exclusion once they enter society.

The participants' attempts in adulthood to invest in 'difference' once it becomes more salient suggest the importance of giving racial and cultural diversity recognition and validation. The importance of authenticating cultural background is evident in the reports of the thirteen adopted Vietnamese who gave their perspectives for this research. In summary, even with scant remnants of their Vietnamese past, Sam felt they "hold my key to identity" and Ann described, "I would just cling to them as part of myself" while Sasha felt visiting Vietnam, "enabled me to feel proud for the first time of being Vietnamese".

The identifications of the adopted Vietnamese with their cultural background are vulnerable, being constrained by essentialist attitudes defining Vietnamese culture, held by some adoptees and Vietnamese people. Returning to Tuyet's feelings after visiting Vietnam, she was surprised and distressed at being rejected because she 'was not Vietnamese enough'. Nick also felt, that after some awkward meetings with other Vietnamese people, "I know the Vietnamese overseas will not willingly accept adopted Vietnamese unless they speak Vietnamese".

The voice of Ken perhaps best summarises how being not quite or just the 'same' or 'different' to others around them can be re-conceptualised in a more positive way. His more inclusive views promote the idea that the various identities the adopted Vietnamese and others around them construct and identify with are malleable and open to an ongoing process of transformation.

> People can learn from adoptees - that the boundaries between language, race, ethnicity and nationality are not always mutually exclusive and don't always have to be. Adoptees can teach others that modern humanity cannot survive without adapting to differences in society and in our communities.

In a broader context, this research can contribute to supporting the view that no cultural identities have fixed meanings or members. There is no evidence of any innate cultural 'essence', that be can drawn upon to secure particular abilities or behaviours in particular groups. Any claims that specific identities have cultural attributes that are biological must be challenged and dismissed.

This research reveals that, in early childhood, the adopted Vietnamese developed socially to be culturally consistent with their adoptive parents. The participants, who did not have Vietnamese culture included in the crucial developmental stages of their upbringing, could not summon knowledge of it from within. When they did encounter Vietnamese culture it was unfamiliar to them.

Such findings destabilise a whole series of cultural stereotypes. This study shows the potential for the adopted Vietnamese to be competent in any number of cultural identities if given recognition and inclusion. This highlights how vigilant we need to be in interrogating the ways we socially construct all cultural identities and define the boundaries between them.

Abbreviations

AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ALII	Australasian Legal Information Institute
BLTN	The Bulletin (Australia)
HCCH	Hague Convention on Protection of Children an Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption
HLS.	Holocaust Learning Centre
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
IAMA	International Adoptions - Michigan Adoptions
IITC	International Indian Treaty Council
INS	Immigration and Naturalisation Service
NAATA	National Asian American Telecommunications Association
NAIC	National Adoption Information Clearinghouse
NSW	New South Wales
QLDGOV	Queensland Government
UK	United Kingdom
UKDOH	United Kingdom Government Department of Health
US	United States of America
USDOS	United States of America Department of State
WTOP	WTOP Radio Online
WV	The World Vision Non-Government Organisation

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Appendix
Interview Questions

Early Childhood/Interactions in the Family

1. Can you describe the racial and cultural identity of your adoptive parents? Do you have any brothers, sisters? Are they biologically linked to your parents or adopted? What age did you arrive and what year? What city are you based in?

2. As a very young child, can you explain what ways you may have associated yourself with the racial and cultural identity of your adoptive parents? What ways did your parents encourage this?

3. At what age do you think you realised you were adopted? What led to you realising that you were adopted? Why do you think they wanted to adopt you and describe how this impacts on your life then or now?

4. How did this relate to your sense of belonging, cultural and racial identity when you had this realization? Were your parents ever forced to explain to you your 'different' appearance and if so, how did they do this?

5. How did your parents explain the circumstances of your availability for adoption? Can you describe how there might be a sense of loss that comes with being adopted? Were you given anything from your adoption such as Vietnamese mementos, birth certificate papers and so on? Can you describe how Vietnamese mementos and information about your background prior to adoption would have any meaning for you?

School and Adolescence

6. Did you still feel closely associated with the racial and cultural identity of your adoptive parents when you were at school?

7. Did you experience racism? In what ways did your parents help prepare you to cope with any encounters with racism? What were your main needs as a child, do you think in facing racist challenges? What about now?

8. What about dating – was race ever a problem or consideration? How?

9. Did you have many friends at school from different cultural backgrounds than that of your parents? What about in the neighbourhood? How do you think multicultural neighbourhoods and environments might be positive or negative to your experience as an adopted Vietnamese? How do you think homogenous white neighbourhoods and environments might be positive or negative to your experience as an adopted Vietnamese?

10. Would Vietnamese culture have been of any use to you when you were in primary school/high school?

Interactions in Society/General

11. Can you describe the person you see when you look at your image in the mirror or a photo of yourself? In what ways may this have changed from past to present?

12. Where do you see non-Vietnamese people (such as white people) and what type of things do you feel when you see them? What type of things do you feel white people may have unfairly expected from you? Has this changed over time?

13. Are you ever asked ‘where are you from’ at work, bars etc? What is your response? Is it a hard or easy question to answer? Has this changed over time?

14. Who could you relate to on TV, in movies or magazines etc when you were growing up? What about now?”

15. Did you ever see any stereotypes that bothered you or offended you? Has this changed over time?

16. Did images of the Vietnam War or boat refugees, if at all, play any role in your life? What about Vietnam War films? What about any stories of Vietnamese today, in the media or Vietnamese films for example?

17. Do you think or were you ever aware of any racism that may have existed for other Vietnamese people?

18. Can you discuss how the Internet might have any significance for you in terms of exploring identity? If possible give at least one example where it has personally (if at all) helped you.

Vietnamese Culture, Overseas Community and Place

19. In what ways has Vietnamese language been a part of your life?

20. In what ways do you think Vietnamese language would enhance your sense of belonging or exclude it when you meet people? Did you ever wish your parents gave you Vietnamese language lessons and if so why?

21. In what ways do you think your accent enhances your sense of belonging or excludes it when you meet people?

22. In what ways has Vietnamese food been a part of your life? To what extent would knowledge of how to prepare it, pronounce it and eat it have any meaning to identity? Do you feel comfortable when dining and ordering at Vietnamese restaurants?

23. To what extent or how do you think of yourself as Vietnamese when you think of your sense of identity?

24. Would Vietnamese culture enhance your sense of belonging or validate your sense of identity when interacting with others? If so, in what ways?

25. Where do you see Vietnamese people and what type of things do you feel when you see them? What type of things do you feel are expected of you when Vietnamese people are around you? Were your parents able to provide you with any interaction with the Vietnamese community? How does this make you feel?

26. Do you feel the Vietnamese people overseas, like the refugee community or second generation have anything to offer you or other adopted Vietnamese? Can you describe any personal examples?

27. What about adopted Vietnamese, what kind of things could they offer each other and others? Can you describe any personal examples?

28. Can you describe how you think Vietnam, the country, relates to you?

29. What might change in you if you were to visit there? (or) What changes did you feel happened to you when you visited there?

30. In retrospect, how did your sense of racial and cultural knowledge as guided by your parents affect your development? This can be good, bad or in-between – and the way it affected you can be only a stage or consistent, changing or fixed…

Information for Voluntary Participants

Background information

Adoption from Vietnam began during the Vietnam War as early as the 1950s but the largest migration, known as Operation Babylift, took place in 1975. On April 3rd, 1975 President Gerald Ford approved the airlift of thousands of orphans from Vietnam. Reports vary but it appears that at least 3000 children were flown to the United States and over 1000 were flown to Canada, Europe and Australia. Our backgrounds are diverse with many in the community having mixed parentage and multicultural families. It is hoped to reflect this diversity for there is no 'single' adopted Vietnamese identity – but there are some common experiences.

Significance of research

The significance of this research is that now that the first generation of adopted Vietnamese has reached maturity we are able to reflect upon and talk about our own experiences (many other studies have been articulated through the voices of adoptive parents and written by non-adopted Vietnamese authors). As new trans-racial adoption policies and families are made - what can we offer? It is hoped that by sharing our insights we can provide a deeper understanding of adoption while also providing resources that may be useful for future generations of adopted Vietnamese and their families. Since then figures from incoming adoptions from Vietnam vary in different countries but adoption from Vietnam has shown steady popularity in some countries like the US. For example, in the year 2001 the US Department of State, Office of Visa Processing issued 737 visas for incoming adopted orphans from Vietnam. In total Australia had around 232 trans-racial adoptions in the year 2000-2001. The US, which takes up to 75% of all foreign adoptions, had over 16,000 trans-racial adoptions in the year 2000-2001.

About the project

Thank you for volunteering for this research project. These interviews are being conducted for a research project as part of Indigo Williams' MA by Thesis degree at the

University of Technology, Sydney. Indigo was adopted from Vietnam in 1972 to an Australian family. This project is concerned with adoption from Vietnam and how you feel your sense of self and identity has been maintained, shifted or expanded as you have interacted with others from your early post-adoption years to the present. The final project will be in the form of a written thesis and possibly a website.

In cases where the interview is taped you will be provided with a transcript of your interview to review and can make changes to any contributions you might like to amend or clarify. You are also free to withdraw your participation from this research project at any time and without giving a reason (see optional consent form at end of questions). Also, please feel free to clarify any questions you might not understand or might not wish to answer during the interview. For any follow up information Indigo can be contacted at: Indigo.A.Williams@uts.edu.au - You can also send correspondence to Po Box 337, Mona Vale NSW 2103, Australia

In cases where you would like to follow up on any further professional services on adoption you can contact The Post Adoption Resources Centre. You can also check out www.adoptedvietnamese.org to find links to various web resources on adoption from Vietnam.

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UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY
CONSENT FORM - STUDENT RESEARCH

I ______________________________ agree to participate in the research project *Constructions of Identity in Adopted Vietnamese War Orphans* being conducted by Indigo Anne Williams, Email Indigo.A.Williams@uts.edu.au (Supervisor's phone number: Ph: 029514 2298), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, of the University of Technology, Sydney, for the purpose of her MA by Thesis Degree (which includes the production of a website). I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore the formation of identity in adopted Vietnamese War orphans and have been provided with an information sheet about the research. I understand that my participation in this research will involve my volunteering to be interviewed for approximately one hour and that this information will be recorded in a taped interview (or in some cases as an emailed response). I am aware that I can contact Indigo Williams or her supervisor Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, Email: A.Jakubowicz@uts.edu.au if I have any concerns about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish and without giving a reason. I agree that Indigo Williams has answered any questions I may have had about my participation in this project fully and clearly. I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published and archived in a form that does not identify me in any way and that a pseudonym will be used.

____ ____/____/____

Signed by

____ ____/____/____

Witnessed by

NOTE:

The University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee, has approved this study. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research, which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer, Ms Susanna Davis (ph: 02 - 9514 1279, Susanna.Davis@uts.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.