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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE BOAT EXPERIENCE
ON VIETNAMESE REFUGEES

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL
PSYCHOLOGY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements iv
Abstract vii
Introduction 1
Background of Problem 1
Statement of Problem 3
Significance of the Study 5
Purpose of the Study 6
Literature Review 8
Vietnamese Boat People 8
Asian Americans and Migration/Resettlement 13
Emotional and Psychological Impact on Vietnamese Survivors 16
Strength and Resilience of Vietnamese Survivors 19
Other Survivors: Holocaust 24
Asian Americans and Clinical Considerations 30
Historical Trauma and Posttraumatic stress —Defined 39
Methods 40
Phenomenological Approach to Qualitative Research 40
Research Design 41
Participants 44
Materials 46
Data Collection (Interviews) 48
Data Analysis 51
Validation Procedures 53
Findings 54
Experiences on the Boat 54
Long-term Psychological and Emotional Effects 59
Integration of Vietnamese and American Cultures 64

Boat Experiences Transmuted 69
Discussion 73
Clinical Implications 73
Limitations 78
Future Research 79
References 80
Appendix A Rating Scales 95
Appendix B Participant Demographics 96
Appendix C Recruitment Letter 101
Appendix D Interview Questions 102
Appendix E Member Check Letter 103
Appendix F List of Emergent Themes 105

ABSTRACT

There is a growing need to study Asians and mental health. One such Asian subgroup that is important to study more thoroughly is Vietnamese people, more specifically, Vietnamese Boat People and the impact that their boat experiences had on their lives. The study sought to understand the boat experiences and its relation to their emotional and psychological well-being, the impact of immigrating to America after leaving Vietnam as well as how well they adapted to the American culture. Additionally, the study explored the strengths of the Vietnamese Boat People and what role these strengths have played as they coped with the stress after the boat experience. The investigator used a phenomenologically-grounded, qualitative research design. A purposeful sample of 16 Vietnamese Boat People from the Midwest and Pacific Southwest were interviewed using qualitative techniques (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Five hundred thirty-five statements were extracted and grouped together, resulting in 16 emergent themes. Participants described symptoms consistent with posttraumatic stress, denial, avoidance and depression. They also discussed struggles in balancing the American culture with their Vietnamese heritage immediately after arriving to the United States. Furthermore, the participants expressed resilience, optimism, and faithful devotion to God in moving past the ordeal and moving forward with their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Background of Problem

The 2010 U.S Census Bureau reported approximately 13.5 million Asian Americans in the United States, which comprised 4.47% of the population and is considered one of the most rapidly growing ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). It includes people from the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. Over the past few decades, there has been a dramatic increase of Asians in the United States. Additionally, some of the major reasons for the influx of Asians to the United States are for increased economic opportunities, chances for developing wealth, easier attainment of higher education, and more freedom to express their political opinions (Sandhu, Kaur & Tewari, 1999). Because of immigration, over two-thirds of Asians are born from overseas, with 79 percent speaking a language other than English at home, and about 40 percent speaking English less than "very well" (Sue & Sue, 2007). As a matter of fact, with the exception of Japanese Americans and Pacific Islanders, Asian American populations are mainly composed of internationally born individuals (Sue & Sue, 2007).

The Vietnamese people represent one of the major key groups from the Indo-Chinese immigrants (Sandhu, Kaur & Tewari, 1999). Vietnamese refugees represent the second largest group of people granted refugee status by the United States (Haines, 1996). Roughly 250,000 Vietnamese refugees that immigrated to the United States were males from middle class backgrounds. This immigration is not the first time the Vietnamese people were involuntarily removed from their homes. Nearly one-third of

Vietnamese people had been refugees from North and South Vietnam or were internal refugees from South Vietnam (Sandhu, Kaur & Tewari, 1999; Dunning, 1989). Although the number of refugees migrating from Southeast Asian countries has diminished, there are still hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asians whose family members are waiting to immigrate to the United States (Negy, 2004). Today, there are 1.73 million Vietnamese people residing in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

As such, migration experiences are a major issue to consider when studying Asian Americans (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001). Refugees, regardless of their ethnicity or cultural background, suffer major challenges during the immigration process (Leva & Wickes, 1997). The immigration of Vietnamese people to the United States was due to reasons such as escaping the Vietnam War, breaking away from "political oppression," and searching for a better life. These major changes in the lives of the Vietnamese people have had a significant impact on their physical and emotional health and have led to the increased propensity to experience psychosomatic risks (Leva & Wickes, 1997). Due to the impactful war history of the Vietnam country, over 700,000 Vietnam born people have fled the country and now live in the United States as refugees. The influx of people that came during the 1970s to mid 1980s was considered Boat People because they were evading oppressive tyranny in small boats. Those that were caught were jailed in refugee camps with sub-human conditions (Frye, 1995). The impact of war and suffering and a lack of cultural stability may have resulted in emotional turmoil (Frye, 1995). Many Vietnamese people who have fled their country, especially those that had experienced torture, murder and other emotional and physical abuse, have been susceptible to posttraumatic Stress, increased anxiety and severe depression. Hence, the Vietnamese

people's traumatic experiences resulting from war, oppression and other physical and emotional trauma may necessitate a need for mental health services.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a growing amount but not an abundance of literature on Asians and mental health. Moreover, in the past, Asians were generally researched as a single, monolithic group with little recognition that there are a multitude of subgroups that exist within the Asian culture. One such group is the Vietnamese people. There has been an underrepresentation of Vietnamese people in Asian American psychological research (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005). However, the research that does exist suggests that Vietnamese Americans underutilize mental health services despite the reality of psychological problems within the Vietnamese American community (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005). Furthermore, underutilization is not due to a lack of need but attributed to cultural factors (Flaskkeurd & Hu, 1992; Hauff & Vaglum, 1994; Hinton, Chen, Du, Tran, Lu & Miranda, 1993; Kuo, 1984; Okazaki, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1974; Zhang, Snowden & Sue, 1998). A few of the reasons for the underutilization of mental health services by Vietnamese Americans have been attributed to the stigma and shame (Chiu & Lee, 2004) associated with mental illnesses and their approaches to solving problems (Lee, 1988). These factors play a major role as to why there is resistance of Vietnamese people in seeking help outside the immediate family. Perhaps, acculturation barriers may also contribute to Vietnamese Americans from seeking mental health, more specifically, in the United States. Some of these barriers include a lack of English competence, feelings of alienation, and lowered Acculturation Motivation, which make it difficult to adapt to the host culture (Kim, 1989). According to Kim (1989), Acculturation

Motivation refers to the level of "eagerness" people have to associate, matriculate, and accustom themselves self to the "American sociocultural system."

As mentioned earlier, growing but limited research in multicultural counseling continually attempts to understand the psychological needs of Asian Americans as a single, large group. However, there is a need for current research to start looking more specifically at the various ethnic subgroups (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001) in order to provide better mental health care by implementing culturally specific therapeutic interventions. Moreover, it is important to understand the many cultural differences of groups when providing therapy to culturally diverse populations. In general, Asian Americans have less access to mental health services than Whites, and the care they receive is more likely to be of substandard quality (Negy, 2004). Additionally, Asian American termination rates are much higher compared to Whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). It has been suggested that one of the many reasons for these termination rates is due to the shortage of culturally competent psychotherapists for the Asian American people as well as ones that understand the unique within group differences among the many Asian cultures (Negy, 2004). Hence, it is not only important to study cultures from a general group perspective but also from a specific, subgroup one as well.

Researchers have actually found that there are cultural differences within each of the various Asian subgroups (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001; Negy, 2004). In terms of Asian American subgroups and clinical research, Sue (1991) suggested that there should be a push to research focusing on "within-group differences" among Asian Americans in order to further understand the diverse psychological needs of this

population. More specifically, it is important for mental health providers working with Asian American clients to be aware of sub-cultural differences within a particular Asian country (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001) as a means to better inform their clinical work. This understanding can help clinicians and Asian Americans both gain insight into the perceptions and reactions to psychological stress (Negy, 2004). Furthermore, understanding the differences present among Asian groups may assist mental health providers with the necessary knowledge to appropriately customize interventions to meet the needs of each specific subgroup (Negy, 2004).

Significance of the Study

This study is important because there is a widely accepted belief that Asian Americans do not suffer from mental, emotional, or psychological issues and most achieve success financially and educationally, thus do not require any type of services to address these needs. However, research has shown that this thinking is a myth and that a significant number of Asian Americans do have challenges with these issues and have a dire need for services. Hence, this study can assist mental health clinicians in treating Asian Americans, more specifically Vietnamese Americans, by identifying the culturally specific challenges (i.e., stigma towards mental health, acculturation factors, and views of problem-solving) that impede their lives. Also, the study hopes to highlight the strength and resilience of Vietnamese people so that this knowledge can be used when addressing their mental health issues. Last, the study is a resource in better understanding the Boat experience and what life was like for the Vietnamese people to flee their country under adverse conditions and live as a refugee in the United States. The qualitative data will

allow for an enriched experience by learning from the intimate stories of the Vietnamese Boat people.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to better understand the Vietnamese Boat People's experience and use the information to assist mental health professionals in working with Vietnamese clients. The information may also be used mindfully as a general template in helping Asians clients that may be facing challenges with issues regarding trauma, acculturation, and adaptation. Moreover, the researcher aims to develop a loose working model of how Vietnamese people work through emotional and psychological problems. In order to access the phenomenological and lived experiences of the Vietnamese Boat People, the researcher qualitatively explored the following four main questions with sub questions subsumed under each:

1. What was your experience on the boat (i.e., physical conditions, emotional experiences, mental experiences, etc.)?
2. How has the Boat Experience affected your life?
    a) What has the experience been like for you emotionally and mentally?
3. What has been your acculturation experience since coming to America after the boat?
    a) How you have adapted to the American culture?

b) What it was like for you integrating the Vietnamese culture with the American culture?

4. How has the boat experience strengthened your life?

a) What are the positive qualities about yourself or that you developed through the boat experience that helped you get through the experience?

b) What was the negative impact that the boat experience may have had on your life?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is organized in the following way. First, descriptions of Vietnamese Boat People as well as other terms associated with Vietnamese people and the Vietnam War (i.e., Vietnamese refugees, reeducation camps, migration and resettlement, emotional and psychological impact of refugees, resilience of Vietnamese refugees, etc.) are provided. Second, the next portion of the literature review discusses people that have endured similar experiences as the Vietnamese Boat People. These topics include the Holocaust, concentration camps, the emotional and psychological impact of the Holocaust on Jewish prisoners, and the resilience of the Jewish survivors. Third, a discussion of Asian Americans and clinical considerations is provided. Topics in this section include the Model Minority Myth, acculturation, problem-solving, and gender differences. Last, two psychological terms (i.e., Posttraumatic stress and historical trauma) are defined and which are closely associated with Vietnamese Boat People and Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Terms Associated with Vietnamese Boat People

Vietnamese Boat People and Conditions at Sea

Vietnamese Boat People refers to those in Southern Vietnam who wanted to escape North Vietnam's communist authority and its political oppression as well as the social, political, and economic reforms that were being imposed on the Vietnamese people (Do, 1999). Many of the people that escaped apprehension, imprisonment, or death fled the country to safety. These people became known as Vietnamese Boat People, because they eluded capture and persecution using homemade, shabby built boats and

other water vessels as their source of transportation in the Vietnam waterways (Do, 1999). However, gaining a spot on a boat was not the end of their voyage nor their doorway to freedom. For many, it was only the beginning of a journey filled with unrelenting turmoil and trauma.

Thousands of people of all ages, socioeconomic classes, education levels, etc. were shipped out of South Vietnam in run down boats through the region's rivers, creeks, and beaches into the South China Sea. However, the fear continued for those passengers on their way to their new destinations. During these perilous travels in the sea, the passengers were subjected to starvation as well as sexual assault, physical beatings, and death in the hands of pirates (Chan, 2006). They also had to battle Mother Nature on the long boat trips, which accounted for much of the ill fate of those on the boats (Chan, 2006).

Additionally, the lack of quality construction of the water vessels, which could not endure the rough weather of the seas, coupled with the inadequate maritime skills of those operating the boats as well as the presence of Thai pirates patrolling the waters, created immense odds for the boat people in having a successful outcome. The death rate and toll of the Vietnamese boat people were rampant. Some verbal accounts by survivors of refugee camps estimated the death rate to be as high as fifty percent (Do, 1999). Moreover, Grant (1979) and Wain (1981) estimated the death rate to be 10 to 15 percent, respectively. The following are accounts taken from Boat People survivors:

> *On the eight day my three-year-old daughter died, on the ninth my four-year old son died, and on the tenth my wife's smallest niece died. We were on the sea without food or water for about 13 days. Then I wrote a letter, put it in a bottle, and threw it*

> *overboard, hoping someone would find it and let my family know that I had died at sea.* (Hung Lang—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), p. 23).
>
> *On the 17th day at sea, the woman who sat next to me began passing out from lack of food and water. The next morning she was dead. When I saw her dead body, I began to worry that in a few days I would become just like her. From that point on, I began believing that my life was in the hands of God. During the next two days, two more people died from hunger. From then on, every morning one or two people died. Most of the people who died were men ages 18-25. We men were weakened because we gave our rations to the women and children…..Even though we saw many ships, none of them paid attention to us. When I saw this, I became extremely discouraged, began to hate other countries, and began to lose hope for life (*Hien Trong Nguyen—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), p.154).

North Vietnam Government and Re-education camps

On April 10, 1975, North Vietnam's Hanoi government overcame the Southern region of the country and "pulled down the bamboo curtain" (Cargill & Huynh, 2000). As the South Vietnamese government was nearing its fall, the United States prepared to evacuate Americans and their dependents as well as Vietnamese people that were vulnerable to capture (Chan, 2006). At this time, few people escaped from Vietnam. Within a few days of capturing Saigon, the new persons assuming power announced on the radio that certain groups of people—elected officials from the national assembly down to the village level, civil servants, members of non-Communist political parties, military officers, policeman, employees of various counterinsurgency programs, religious leaders, professors, teachers, writers, and artists—should gather at specified locations to attend re-education sessions (Chan, 2006). These Vietnamese people were told that they had to attend courses that would last anywhere from three to thirty days. Even those whose ranks required them to attend for more than a few days were told to bring only a

week's ration of food and water. This misled people into thinking that the sessions would not last long. Since the individuals singled out for re-education thought it was in their best interest to abide by the demands, most of them reported to the stations as told. To their frightening surprise, soldiers packed them into covered vehicles, from which they could not see where they were going and were re-located to camps where they were subjected to intense labor, minimal food and water, and political brainwashing (Chan, 2006). These oppressive behaviors occurred frequently in the concentration camps, and these prisons became more commonly known as re-education camps (Cargill & Huynh, 2000). The majority of prisoners were kept for years; however, when inmates became so ill that it looked as though they may die soon, the camp wardens released them to avoid a high death toll. As a result, the new government enforced a policy against Southerners that was without mercy and one that imposed fear (Chan, 2006).

Outside the prison walls, this new policy for the Southerners created excessive physical and emotional distress for the people. Life changes were abrupt and pervasive including the immediate break-up of families, the sudden loss of home and property, and multitude of executions devoid of trials. Day-to-day living became more of a struggle and life threatening. Moreover, religious persecution, political dominance, and brainwashing were continual themes characteristic of this time period (Cargill & Huynh, 2000). The heinous acts and punishment were targeted especially towards "intellectuals" and those people that had ties to the former Southern government. The following is an account taken from Boat People survivors:

> *The people who guarded the temporary camp were horrible. The guards were sometimes rapists. If they saw a young girl and they wanted to make her sleep with them, they might beat her if she*

> *resisted. My mother was worried for my cousin, who was about 16 or 17 then, and Mom would tell my male cousins to watch out for her. Mom was also careful about our sleeping arrangements, always putting my female cousin in the middle* (Lan Nguyen—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), pp.40-41).
>
> *Some prisoners died because they could not take it anymore. The guards often whipped the prisoners with bamboo canes until the prisoners confessed to whatever the guards wanted to hear. They also starved the prisoners by not giving them any food or water for days. At other times, the Communists put the prisoners in a metal box called a connex and took off all of their clothes. At noon, when the sun was directly overhead, it was so hot inside the connex that it felt as though their bodies were on fire. At night, the temperature dropped rapidly, the prisoners suffered from the cold. Many got sick and died. Anyone punished by the Communists was more likely to die than to survive* (Nameless survivor from Chan (2006), p. 177).

Vietnamese Refugees/Survivors

Refugees continued to leave Vietnam after the American evacuation and resettlement efforts. The first of the boat people escaped from Vietnam and found their way mainly to Malaysia (Chan, 2006). A number of people, but not as abundant, landed in Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines. Until October 1975, which was the U.S. deadline for placing refugees into American processing centers, the United States admitted all the refugees from Vietnam who escaped by the sea. This is the primary reason why there were almost no remaining refuge-seekers in Southeast Asia by 1975 (Chan, 2006). By November 1980, forty nations had "resettled" 300,000 out of the 370,000 boat people in Southeast Asian and Hong Kong camps. However, in 1987 and 1988, the number of boat people increased again, partly because the Thai government, with U.S. assistance, had managed to reduce the number and thwarted pirate attacks against the boat people in the Gulf of Thailand during the preceding years. Then in

January 1988, Thailand announced that it would no longer offer "first asylum" to any future arrivals and started preventing boats from docking at their shores, with its coast guard pushing an estimated 3,200 boat people back to sea in 1988 (Chan, 2006). Many of these people found their way to Malaysia after being pushed away from Thailand and, subsequently, the United States. The following are two excerpts from boat people survivors entering the United States as refugees:

> *When I found out that I was actually going to the United States, I thought: "Oh, wow. I'm going to America." Oh, America—no dirt on the streets. I imagined some perfect place where everything is clean and our house is nice. I was very glad to leave the camp because people said that America was wonderful. I almost imagined a Utopia* (Lan Nguyen—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), p.45).

> *When I arrived in the United States, I had a hard time adjusting to the new environment, especially the language. I like living in Vietnam better than America. There I always had my family support and a close relationship with my brothers, sisters, and other relatives. Life in America is too stressful and isolated. I wish I could return to live in Vietnam when I get old. I want to live near my family back home* (Nhan T. Le—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), p.142).

Asian Americans and Migration and Resettlement

There were significant issues that emerged as a result of the massive influx of Vietnamese refugees entering the United States. First, there was both racial and ethnic dissension when the Vietnamese first arrived (Do, 1999). Initial resistance to the mass entry of the refugees occurred in certain cities in Texas, Colorado, and California. Daniels and Kitano (1970) described the prejudice against the Vietnamese refugees as an "in-group and out-group phenomena." In other words, they believed that in order for prejudice to take

place, there must be at least two separate groups of people with disproportionate power. What results is the superior group designating the other group as the one that is inferior and one to be exploited (Daniels & Kitano, 1970). For instance, in Seadrift, Texas, tension between the white fishermen in that city with the newly arrived Vietnamese fisherman heightened with a physical confrontation in 1981 (Do, 1999). A white fisherman was killed in what was determined as self-defense. As a result of this incident, the Vietnamese were harassed and their boats and houses were bombed with incendiary devices (Duc, 1999). It is also of important note that the Klu Klux Klan began organizing a training course for 52 white fishermen training them in self-defense and survival. This group was pitting the killing of the white man against the Vietnamese immigrants in order to gain sympathy from other white people towards their cause.

There were also threats to other minority groups with the arrival of the Vietnamese refugees (Daniel & Kitano, 1970). Other minority groups felt threatened for their jobs and were forced to work laboriously in order to not lose their jobs to the Vietnamese people. A "racial hierarchy" or "preferential treatment" resulted in which Vietnamese workers advanced in their positions through hard work or from special treatment. This tactic of fighting to get to the top became known as "divide and conquer" (Daniel & Kitano, 1970). One incident occurred in Charlotte, North Carolina when African Americans felt the Vietnamese refugees were receiving special treatment in a lower-income housing neighborhood. Vietnamese were allowed to move in to the housing

project ahead of African Americans who had been on a wait list for a long time. The African Americans resented that the Vietnamese people did not fight in the World Wars, yet still received preferential treatment over American citizens who were injured or had loved ones that perished in the war (Oster, 2009).

Another issue that became problematic for Vietnamese refugees involved their struggle to speak or understand English, which impacted their chances of securing jobs that required fluency in English. Language became a barrier not only between the Vietnamese and with other minority groups but with Americans as well (Duc, 1999). So, many Vietnamese immigrants were left working in jobs that did not require interaction with English speaking people (e.g., customers) or require much need for speaking or understanding English. Consequently, many of these jobs involved custodial work. This job limitation was problematic within the Vietnamese family home because that led to the need for Vietnamese women to abandon their traditional roles of home maker and become co-bread winners. This new role conflict created tension between husbands and wives in the household, because the males no longer were considered the sole providers—a source of pride and identity for men in traditional Vietnamese culture (Duc, 1999).

Additionally, housing became an issue for the Vietnamese immigrants (Do, 1999). Traditional Vietnamese families tend to be larger. It is not uncommon to find parents, children, grandparents, and other relatives residing in the same house. The size of the Vietnamese household continued to increase

whenever other family members would immigrate to the United States. Also, finding affordable housing became a problem. So, it was not unusual to find many Vietnamese households overly crammed with multiple family members.

Emotional and Psychological Impact on Vietnamese Survivors

The immigration of Vietnamese people due to reasons such as escaping the Vietnam war, alluding political oppression, or finding a better life, have had significant impact on their physical and emotional health and have led to increased "psychosomatic" risks (Leva & Wickes, 1997). The number of Boat People that came to the United States during the 1970s to mid 1980s suffered tremendous emotional and psychological trauma while trying to escape (Frye, 1995.) Many Vietnamese people who have fled their country, especially those that had experienced torture, murder and other emotional and physical abuse, have been susceptible to posttraumatic stress, increased anxiety and severe depression.

Additionally, two somewhat unique problems faced by Vietnamese refugees as a result of the escape from Vietnam are Survivor Guilt Syndrome and the Vietnam Syndrome (Duc, 1999). The Survivor Guilt Syndrome occurs when a refugee, especially one who has experienced a tremendous amount of trauma while trying to escape Vietnam and has lost family members, managed to survive and then later asks why he or she survived and not others. This created a tremendous amount of psychological distress for the person, because he or she felt guilty and unworthy of having survived. He or she can imagine

hundreds of reasons why other people were more deserving to live and many reasons why he or she should have died. In addition, the Vietnam Syndrome is a negative attitude in people toward "social participation" but who are culturally and professionally capable of interaction. This is especially true for those people who were in the middle of the fighting, who did not know who were involved in the fighting, and who did not know that they had to cease fighting during the last month of the war. This syndrome is also generally experienced by some high ranking officials who felt guilty about the military performance during the critical hours of the war and by those who left Vietnam after spending years as prisoners in the communists' labor camps (Duc, 1999).

Furthermore, the second category of mental health issues and problems are those observed after the "resettlement" period (Duc, 1999). Vietnamese refugees spent a relatively short period of time in refugee camps in the United States. The United States government had implemented a Dispersion Policy that was to quickly relocate refugees from refugee camps into the American mainstream culture to prevent possible negative reactions from the American public as well as to prevent the formation of an "ethnic ghetto" (Duc, 1999). The primary problems Vietnamese people faced after the initial resettlement period were and continue to be depression, anxiety, marriage problems, and loss of social respect, followed by conflicts between Vietnamese generations and problems for the children to adapt to the educational system (Duc, 1999). These topics are discussed further in the sections below regarding migration and acculturation.

Further, there have been numerous studies on Vietnamese Americans that were most at risk and predisposed to increased mental health issues. First, the refugees that came to America who were most at risk were those individuals aged between 19 and 35 years. As a result of the Dispersion Policy and the focus of sponsorship on nuclear families, many single people found themselves excluded from the structure that was created specifically for families as well as extended family networks (Duc, 1999). Without the support of family, they started to become insecure. They felt isolated, abandoned, and missed their homeland. Many became transients from one community to the next. They also became depressed and were reported to have thought disorders, inflicted violence on themselves or others, became alcoholics, and felt a sense of desperation and dejection (Duc, 1999). These symptoms and behaviors were attributed to the lack of support from family, friends, and community.

The second most frequently reported at-risk group included those between 36 and 55 years (Duc, 1999). Depression and family conflicts were recorded as two of the most severe problems. Family problems occurred because of the new roles that women had to adopt. Since most Vietnamese people needed to quickly find jobs upon arrival, the lack of English proficiency or appropriate skill level led most people to find low paying, demeaning jobs. This led to the need for women to also find jobs. This need for women to work caused tension in the family, since the man was no longer the primary breadwinner. Last, those over 55 years old, depression, isolation, loneliness, loss of family and missing their homeland, and a feeling of helplessness were

described as the most prevalent problems (Duc, 1999). In traditional family culture, the older one gets, the more respect and higher status one attains. These cultural values did not usually carry over for the Vietnamese people when they came to the United States. Consequently, the elder were no longer viewed as useful in terms of work and financial gain once arriving to the United States (Duc, 1999).

> *Of all the refugee-seekers who fled Vietnam, several common themes can be discerned: the immense suffering, deprivation, loss, and violent uprooting that every family who fled Vietnam experienced* (Epilogue, Chan, 2006).

Strength and Resilience of Vietnamese Survivors

The strengths referenced in Asian American literature are usually not specific to Asian American subgroups (e.g., Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, etc.). In fact, some researchers have found that many strength factors can sometimes be generalized across Asian American subgroups (Leong, Lee, and Chang, 2008). As mentioned earlier, it would be remiss not to mention that many researchers do believe that there are between-group differences within the Asian American population, especially in regard to language, religion and values (Sandhu, 1997). But, in terms of the strength factors, there are some common themes shared among the Asian subgroups. With that said, there is limited literature speaking specifically to the strengths of Vietnamese Boat People; therefore, many of the following strengths to be discussed refer to Asian Americans in general, though some strengths specific to Vietnamese people will also be discussed. First, the role that family plays in Asian

American culture is considered to be an important aspect of their lives (Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner and Trimble, 2008). Many Asian American families emphasize "connectedness" with family members (Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner and Trimble, 2008). Within the Asian American culture, family stability, tranquility, obligation to family, and the appearance of harmonious relations are important factors in the family (Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner and Trimble, 2008). The emphasis is on "family harmony" and adapting to the needs of others (Rothbaum, Morelli, Pott, & Liu-Constant, 2000).

This strong bond between family members may have been a significant factor contributing to the Boat People's ability to endure the emotional, psychological and physical pain during those times of oppression in Vietnam and during their exodus out of the country. There are countless accounts of self-sacrifice that took place during these times that appear to have contributed to the survival of the Boat People and refugees. The following excerpts are taken from three Boat People survivors:

> *Behind every Asian American there is a story……What makes Asians strong are the hardships we have experienced and the close family ties that keep us together, give us support, and help us to survive* (Chan, 2006, p.152)
>
> *She had one small boy, and the child's father was in labor camp. She had to take care of her child, her parents, and a brother. She had to put meals on the table with xoi treats that she sold. Along, with the yoke, she carried many responsibilities and made many sacrifices. I didn't know if I could do it myself. My heart went out to her*....(Nhan T. Le—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), p.137)
>
> *The children slept in the available beds and the adults slept on the floor. Although sleeping on the floor was not very comfortable, a*

> *feeling of warmth, love, and unity filled the air. Adults talked about their lives and offered to help those who needed it. Everybody took care of everyone else* (Nameless survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000) p. 208)

The Asian American worldview can also serve as a source of strength for the Asian American people. In addition to family relations, Asian Americans view peace with others as essential to daily living also known as "interpersonal harmony" (Chien & Banerjee, 2002). Interpersonal harmony refers to maintaining peaceful relations with family, friends and people in general. This type of relationship strives to minimize conflict and tension between people in order to maintain a sense of tranquility and harmony. In terms of strengths specific to the Vietnamese people, Do (1999), discussed how "respect," "harmony," and "cardinal virtues" play a significant role in the lives of the Vietnamese. First, respect as a cultural value is rooted in all social relations and interactions as well as in all the activities of daily life (Do, 1999). This high regard for others is especially important with those who are older in age and more deserving of the most respect in the family. Children and younger adults are expected to defer to the elders, since they possess wisdom and life experience. This deference to adults may have saved countless numbers of children and adolescents during the dangerous boat voyages in that they entrusted the elders to make the tough life and death decisions. Second, peacefulness and harmonious interactions are highly valued, while conflict is discouraged. As a result, Vietnamese people have the tendency to seek out peaceful resolutions (Do, 1999). This willingness to resist fighting and look for solutions may have also been one of the reasons that some Boat People may

have survived, especially during those times in which pirates attacked and beat them when they boarded their vessels during the boat voyage. Third, in the Vietnamese culture, people are thought to be incomplete until they successfully implement "five cardinal virtues" in to their lives (Do, 1999). These five virtues are *nhan* (compassion); *nghia* (righteousness); *le* (propriety); *tri* (learning); and *tin* (truthfulness) (Do, 1999). Nhan refers to human relationships between different people, with each person treating another with respect, compassion, and love. Nghia refers to "duty," "justice" and "obligation." Le requires a person to be polite and civil to others. A person must act respectfully and have understanding of other people. Tri refers to one's ability to use knowledge and insight in daily life in order to create happiness. Furthermore, Tin refers to one being truthful to others, especially family members, friends, and colleagues. The word of a person has to be kept sacred and serves as a means to build trust with other people regardless of their social status in society.

Religion and spirituality also appear to be integrated into the lives of many Vietnamese. It can serve as a source of strength for them in their everyday lives. Four main philosophies and religions have impacted the spirituality of Vietnamese people: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Catholicism (Do, 1999). First, Confucius views society as shaping people. Reciprocally, he also believed that people have the ability to shape society. Since people live in a society, there needs to be a "code of ethics" to govern social interactions. This code of ethics outlines a person's commitment to

family, society, and the state. Second, it is believed that Buddhism in Vietnam was derived from India (Do, 1999). There are Four Noble Truths taught by Buddha: Life is suffering, suffering is caused by desire, suffering can be eliminated by desire, and to eliminate desire, one must follow the Eightfold Path of righteousness: Understanding, purpose, speech conduct, vocation, effort, thinking, and meditation." (Do, 1999, p. 7). Also, the Law of Karma is a major focus in Buddhism. This refers to an accounting of a person's total good and bad actions in lives. At the end of one's life, if all the good deeds outweigh the bad ones, then the future life will be better than the current one. If not, the next life will be less fortunate. The goal of Buddhists is to reach unity with the universe so that the reincarnation cycle stops and suffering is no longer experienced, which is known as Nirvana (Do, 1999).

Third, Taoism is similar to Confucianism and Buddhism. This philosophy focuses on a person's "oneness with the universe" (Do, 1999). Taoism encourages people to accept their life and be satisfied and make the most out of their lives. Ironically, this thinking may have been how some survivors may have endured the pain and suffering during the boat experience. It may have been a source of inner strength and resilience. Last, Catholicism initially was not supported by the Vietnamese government when it first arrived to the country in the 16th century (Do, 1999). It was viewed as defiant to the organized structure in place in Vietnam, since there were no "historical" or "cultural roots" linked to the religion (Do, 1999). But, Catholicism slowly became more accepted as years passed. Although there are many Vietnamese

Catholics in the country, most are from North Vietnam. This number includes many of those who became refugees when Vietnam was divided into North and South. The following two excerpts are from Boat People survivors:

> *After a few days out, my kids were hungry and thirsty. My wife held them in the back of the boat and prayed. Then I sat down and she and I prayed. Then God let us have a real hard rain. This let the children live a few more days (Hung Lang—survivor,* Cargill & Huynh (2000), p.23).
>
> *Then my mom and dad wanted to try something else. My parents raised up a 12-inch cross that looked like gold. My mom also held up a picture of the Virgin Mary, with the idea that the power of God would save us* (Hung Nguyen—survivor, Cargill & Huynh (2000), p.121).

Another Example of Trauma Survivors: Jewish Holocaust

A brief discussion of another group of people that have endured immense suffering, psychological pain, and tragedy is important in understanding the impact that war, oppression, racism, and political upheaval have had on others. One group of people that have endured such pain and suffering is the European Jews during the Holocaust years.

The Holocaust is the term used generally to describe the mass killing of approximately 6,000,000 European Jews during World War II (Niewyk, 2000). This genocide was part of a "deliberate extermination" carried out by the National Socialist Regime in Germany led by Adolf Hitler (Niewyk, 2000). In Greek, the term Holocaust meant a "sacrificial offering to a god." Germany, during this time, is normally referred to as Nazi Germany, while the Nazis referred to the genocide of the Jews as the Final Solution of the Jewish Question (Niewyk, 2000).

Efforts to remove the Jewish people from society were taking place years before the start of World War II (Berenbaum, 2006). Concentration camps were established and inmates were used for hard labor until they died of exhaustion or disease. While the Third Reich conquered territory in Easter Europe, specialized units called Einsatzgruppen murdered Jewish people and political opponents (Berenbaum, 2006). Jewish people were relocated into neighborhoods with deplorable conditions before being transported hundreds of miles by freight train to extermination camps where, if they survived the journey, the majority of them were killed in gas chambers. Every faction of Germany's authority was involved in the planning and execution of the mass killings, which in turn, changed the country in to what many called "a genocidal state" (Berenbaum, 2006). The following were some of the ways certain organizations were involved in the process: Parish churches and the Interior Ministry supplied birth records showing who was Jewish; the post office delivered the deportation and denaturalization orders; the Finance Ministry confiscated Jewish property; German firms fired Jewish workers; German pharmaceuticals tested drugs on camp prisoners; and companies competed for contracts to build the ovens where the Jewish people were to be cremated (Berenbaum, 2006).

Emotional and Psychological Impact on Jewish Survivors

The survival of anyone over 35 years or under 15 years was unlikely and concentration camp survivors were mainly youths and young adults (Krell & Sherman, 1988). However, the consequences for those that survived as well

as those hiding with unrelenting fear had its emotional and psychological impacts on the Jewish people (Krell & Sherman, 1988). Similar to what Vietnamese Boat People endured, there seems to be an agreement among most researchers of the Holocaust that there were long lasting effects of hunger, sickness, emotional, mental, and physical torture as well as severe trauma (Eitinger & Krell, 1985).

Furthermore, Kleber and Brom (1992) classified the experiences of the Holocaust survivors into four broad categories:

1) Death Imprint (Kleber & Brom, 1992): This is an individual who has been exposed to a lot of death so that the "images are permanently burned" into their memory. These memories are consistently pervading the mind of the victim and lead the victim to an "intense realization" of his or her own vulnerability to death (Kleber & Brom, 1992).

2) Survivors' Guilt (Kleber & Brom, 1992): This is an individual who struggles with finding reason to why he/she lived while others perished. Survivors' guilt is associated with a strong sense of hopelessness and lack of power over one's life while in the concentration camp and times in his/her life, thereafter (Kleber & Brom, 1992).

3) Numbness (Kleber & Brom, 1992): This describes the failure to experience emotions. It is considered a defense mechanism to avoid traumatic memories, thoughts and emotions and in doing so creates a disconnection between the victim and with "human contact" (Kleber & Brom, 1992).

4) The Search for Meaning (Kleber & Brom, 1992). Since survivors confronted death and other traumas during the camp experience, the survivor tries to understand why these events happened to him or her, and the reasons why these events took place (Kleber & Brom, 1992).

Last, Hassan (1994) looked at Holocaust survivors with posttraumatic stress and found these themes to have remained in their minds for 40 or 50 years after the event last took place. Hassan (1994) also indicated that the themes also contributed to the low number of survivors seeking help. Additionally, Hassan (1994) found that those who were the most impacted in the camps or in hiding were the least likely to seek help in order to avoid being viewed as weak and fragile (Hassan, 1994). These similar residual themes seem to still be engrained in the minds of the Boat People that endured trauma with few ever seeking any type of mental health as to avoid appearing vulnerable as will be discussed in later sections below.

Strength and Resilience of Jewish Survivors

As mentioned earlier, the Vietnamese Boat People displayed resilience and strength while enduring the emotional, physical, and mental trauma during the ordeal. Similarly, a number of researchers have also discussed the various strengths that Holocaust survivors used to help them through the Holocaust experience. One particular researcher examined the strengths and coping mechanisms that these survivors adopted in order to endure the emotional and psychological pain. Lee (1988) discussed the strengths that Holocaust

survivors possessed that helped them withstand the pain and suffering. For one, Lee (1988) found that survivors were supported during their incarceration by "inner resources" that they fostered during their childhood while growing up in their family environment. Such resources included the ability to connect to others and the willingness to trust those that they feel can be trusted. Lee (1988) also found that those who survived the Holocaust had the capacity to view the world as positive, despite the suffering they had gone through. Finally, Lee (1988) indicated that the survivors had a significant transformation of their identity by using a repository of "inner psychic strength." Several techniques that the survivors used included fictional thinking, reflecting on experiences of love and affection, and identifying one's self with a group. Survivors also used "illusion" to steer their minds away from the abhorrent situation of the camp. Lee (1988) also found that survivors recalled moments when they would reach out to one another for comfort. Amazingly, Lee (1988) discovered that survivors had the willingness to extract kindness from their persecutors. The following three excerpts are from Holocaust survivors:

> *I refused to accept that cruel reality and preferred to tap into my reservoir instilled in me by my parents. So strong were my projections that I would turn the German beast into a caring human being, like one tames a lion* (Nameless survivor, Lee (1988), p. 84)
>
> *For survivors, for all of us who've suffered pain and trauma, part of moving beyond the past-- to the extent that we can--is to engage our experiences rather than avoid them, and to somehow make peace with them* (Ervin Staub—Jewish survivor, Adler (2000), p.45) .

Holocaust and Historical Trauma (Intergenerational Trauma)

Most conceptualizations of historical trauma are based on reports of pervasive trauma among Holocaust survivors and their families following World War II (Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt & Chen, 2004). Whitbeck et al (2004) reported that links can be made between the sufferings of Holocaust survivors up to three or four generations. Typically, later generations still utilize many of the same coping strategies used by the persons who underwent the actual Holocaust as mentioned earlier. They also reported the presence of depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress symptoms. It is still not clear how these symptoms are passed along, only that the similarities are striking. Similarly, in regard to Vietnamese survivors, generations of family continue to also experience the pain and suffering from those that experienced the events firsthand. Although there is limited research on historical trauma experienced by Boat People, the individual accounts of their traumatic experiences suggest the presence of historical trauma. The following is an excerpt from the son of a boat survivor:

> *As I learned about my father's life, I realize what a lot of pain he has gone through. Deep in his eyes, I can see his past suffering. It hurts me everytime I think about all the things that have happened to him. One time, I asked him if he blamed the Communist government for his sufferings; he looked me straight in the eyes and said, "It's nobody's fault, son. It is fate."* (Son of Vietnamese boat survivor, Chan 2006, p.179)

American Indian researchers have also explored the possibility of generational trauma in which the experiences and reactions of one individual

are transmitted to his or her children, with the potential for emotional and behavioral consequences taking place in "subsequent generations" (Waldram, 2004). As indicated previously, precisely how historic trauma is transmitted from generation to generation has not been made clear. Further, research has too often failed to consider differing histories of American Indian tribes and families. Nonetheless, some of the research has offered more focused studies. Lonely (1995) has described the effects of relocation on Indian families. Braveheart (1998) has researched and argued that generations of unresolved grief cannot be openly acknowledged.

Asian Americans and Clinical Considerations

Model Minority Myth

The Model Minority Myth stereotype is relevant to consider for this study. Asian Americans have been given this stereotype as a result of their success in the realms of education and careers paving the path for others to believe that this is the way to behave in American society. Additionally, the underlying message that comes with this stereotype is that Asian Americans are "well-adjusted" and are associated with contributing to fewer problems in society (Chiu & Lee, 2004). Moreover, it is assumed that when Asian Americans do experience stress, they are able to deal with it individually or within the family instead of calling on the assistance from outside, professional help (Chiu & Lee, 2004). However, there has been research indicating that Asian Americans do suffer from mental illnesses and that the Model Minority stereotype is a myth (Chan & Hune, 1995).

The consequences that accompany the Model Minority stereotype are that Asian Americans are excluded from a number of entitlement programs including affirmative action (Lee, 1996). Furthermore, having such a desirable stereotype has led many Asian Americans to seek refuge into an "invisible" community, resulting in their problems and needs being disregarded or overseen by professional helpers (Chiu, 2008). Also, the stereotype fails to recognize the diverse experiences of the various Asian subgroups. This failure of recognition has the tendency to impact their psychological well-being by limiting access to help, thus hampering their ability to achieve success in American society. Lee (1996) found that some Asian American students felt that having a Model Minority status created a predicament where they had to deal with higher imposed expectations, thus creating increased levels of stress and anxiety. Hence, social services for Asian Americans are lacking and do not meet their needs appropriately (Chiu & Lee, 2004).

Asian Americans and View of Mental Illness

Asian Americans maintain stigmatized ideas regarding mental disorders (Corrigan, 2004); hence, seeking psychological help from mental health professionals is discouraged. A study conducted in Los Angeles reported that only 4% of Asian Americans indicated that they would seek help from a mental health professional compared to 26% of Whites (Zhang, Snowden & Sue, 1998). Instead, they would rather seek mental health care from their primary care physician, since it is less stigmatized to seek help from a medical doctor.

In Asian cultures, stigma is attached strongly to mental illness and is considered one of the top reasons for a person to avoid seeking mental health services (Chiu & Lee, 2004). Corrigan (2004) defined stigma, as it pertains to the mental health arena, as a collection of negative attitudes and beliefs that influence the general population to cast out, avoid, fear, and segregate people with psychological illnesses. According to Chiu and Lee (2004), when an individual is suffering from psychological illness, this may indicate that the person possesses inner weakness and flawed character. Ryujin, Ford, and Breaux (2001) found that Asian American students were more likely to feel that their families would not approve or be embarrassed that their children would be seeking counseling. The "face" of the family is of high value and importance in Asian culture (Chiu & Lee, 2004). If individuals were to disclose family problems to people outside of the family (e.g., mental health professionals), this would be considered unacceptable and bring shame to the family. Admitting mental health problems can bring intense disgrace and feelings of "losing face" (Chiu & Lee, 2004). As a result, to deny psychological symptoms is deemed necessary in order to preserve the reputation of the family.

Asian Americans and Migration Experiences

In addition to the actual boat voyage, two other situations appear to contribute to the mental health well-being for those in the Vietnamese American Community (Duc, 1999). As mentioned earlier, the first situation has to do with the adjustment that the Vietnamese people had to endure while in

the refugee camps. The second situation involved the experiences that were encountered after the refugee camp such as their resettlement into the American, mainstream society. The latter situation encompasses the migration and acculturation experiences of the Vietnamese Boat People, which will be discussed below. Although each situation is distinguished from the other, it is important to note that the mental health problems resulting from these experiences continued long after arriving to America and resettling.

First, migration experiences are a major issue to consider in clinical work with Asian Americans (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001), and the effects of these migration experiences may impact their attitudes toward psychological counseling. Refugees, regardless of their ethnicity or cultural background, inevitably suffer difficult challenges during the immigration process (Leva & Wickes, 1997). The immigration of Vietnamese people to the United States due to reasons such as escaping the Vietnam war, avoiding political oppression or escaping an impoverished life, have had significant impact on their physical and emotional health and have led to the increased propensity to experience psychological risks (Leva & Wickes, 1997). As a result, the impact of war and suffering may have caused emotional trauma in which refugees are no longer able to have stability in their culture (Frye, 1995). Many Vietnamese people who have fled their country have been susceptible to posttraumatic stress, increased anxiety and severe depression. Furthermore, the Vietnamese people that had negative experiences with the American military during the war may have trouble trusting Americans or anyone outside their

social network. Hence, the Vietnamese people's traumatic experiences of war, oppression and other physical and emotional trauma may impact their willingness to seek help from mental health providers. Additionally, the Vietnamese people's lack of trust for Americans may hinder their willingness to trust anyone outside of their family or social networks, hence limit their willingness to seek mental health services for their emotional problems while living in America.

Asian Americans and Acculturation

Acculturation refers to the process of integrating a different, dominant culture into one's present culture and how much he/she has accepted and incorporated the parts of the culture into his/her life (Sandhu, 1997). According to Kurasaki, Okazaki and Sue (2002), acculturation taken from a group perspective involves an adaptation of an ethnic minority group and how it integrates the values, traditions, rules, and behaviors of a dominant group (Kurasaki et al, 2002). However, according to Kim (2001), sometimes people of a cultural group can "resist change" and hold steadfast on their own, traditional ways, while others may strive try to "go native" and risk experiencing rejection, distress, and discouragement if success is not achieved when crossing cultures (Kim, 2001). Either way, this acculturation process can increase stress levels by risking one's sense of belonging to a particular cultural group. It may also cause one to question their own cultural loyalties and cast uncertainty about one's social support systems (Sandhu, 1997).

This adjustment to a new social system of people can induce distress and is referred to as *culture shock* (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001). Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as the anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse (p.177). Moreover, culture shock may induce acculturative stress, which is a type of stress that is directly related to acculturation and is differentiated from normal, everyday life stress (Sodowsky & Carey, 1988; Kwan & Sodowsky, 1994). The stress is brought about by life events introduced into a person's life that are usually new and drastic (Kurasaki et al, 2002). According to Portes and Rumbaut (1996), adapting to new social norms, values and behaviors of a dominant cultural group inevitably leads to unavoidable psychological stresses and difficulties for acculturating group members. Portes and Rumbaut (1996) further found that negative consequences of acculturation involve "threats to cultural identity, powerlessness, feelings of marginality, a sense of inferiority, loneliness, hostility, and perceived alienation and discrimination" (Sandhu, 1999, p. 5). Moreover, Tran (1993) found that people who experience increased acculturation stress have lower self-efficacy, which may contribute to depression.

However, Kim (2001) indicated that the majority of people have the ability to identify similarities and differences within their new environment and within their own "home cultures," thus allowing them to become increasingly adept in maneuvering in environments successfully when faced with novel situations. This adaptation of an individual to the dominant cultural

group is achieved largely in part to extensive "communicative interaction" also known as "intercultural communication" between an individual and the host culture. Once individuals are able to integrate "cultural patterns" into their innermost self, then cultural identity has emerged, while a person that is able to be a part of more than one cultural group, an "intercultural identity" has developed (Kim, 2001). In terms of immigrants being able to develop an intercultural identity in America, some researchers have found some immigrants to be more Americanized than others, hence making it difficult for others to notice the differences of their lifestyles from the dominant culture (Sandhu et al, 1999). These researchers also found that those with increased levels of acculturation tend to have higher self-esteem and stronger ties with their families contributing to higher levels of psychological well-being.

Additionally, Tran (1993) indicated that social support from one's cultural community, including ones that are spiritually and financially related, resulted in more positive effects on one's psychological well-being. Suinn, Ahuna and Khoo (1992) found that higher acculturation was related to the number of years in U.S. schools, younger age when arriving to the U.S., preference for language and the cultural/ethnicity background of their friends. This information suggest that higher acculturation to the U.S culture may lead to more positive attitudes towards mental health services, since mental illness and psychological services are more accepted in the United States compared to Asian countries. On the other hand, people who were less acculturated had higher levels of psychological stress and may have needed more mental health

services. It was also suggested that people who were less acculturated received less mental health services due to language barriers, cultural obstacles, and lack of knowledge of how or where to attain such assistance (Sandhu et al, 1999). This information suggests that people who are less acculturated to the U.S culture may lead to less positive attitudes toward counseling, since Asian countries are less accepting of mental illnesses and mental health services compared to the United States. Hence, the level of acculturation a Vietnamese person attains for the American culture may have an influence on his/her attitude towards mental illness and psychological services.

Asian Americans and Views of Problem Solving

The approach that an Asian American family utilizes regarding problem solving may impact attitudes toward mental health services. Sharpe and Heppner (1991) suggested that Asian Americans differ from the American culture in that Asian Americans value humbleness. Additionally, Asians tend to shy away from "over-inflating themselves" thus minimizing attention towards them (Lucas & Barrett, 1995). Yamamoto et al (1993) described Asians as having respect for authority which implies that there is a responsibility shared by parents and children to maintain peace and harmonious relations within the household. Additionally, Gold (1992) suggested that Vietnamese Americans are generally reticent to disclose personal information to strangers due to cultural beliefs and suspicion of Americans stemming from the refugee experience. Also, Yeh and Wang (2000) found that Asian Americans preferred to deal with their psychological

problems on their own, or seek help from within their own social network, rather than seeing an outside professional. Seeking outside help is thought to bring attention to the family and risk exposure to others of their inner, family turmoil. As a result, professional services for psychological problems are rarely sought and are considered as a last option (Nguyen & Anderson, 2005). These findings suggest that Asian American families may tend to keep problem-solving issues within the household or within close social circles and not seek psychological help outside of this domain. Moreover, the general family structure for Asian Americans indicates that the elder males are the authority figures, therefore they are the primary source for solving family problems. As mentioned earlier, research suggests that Asian Americans attach stigma with seeking professional help, especially when it involves mental illnesses. This stigma may explain the reason why problems are more likely to be resolved within the confines of the family.

Asian Americans and Gender Differences Regarding Mental Health

Gender attitudes may have an impact on Asian beliefs regarding mental health. Traditional Asian cultural norms have very strict guidelines about the proper behavior of men and women (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001). Although most Asians Americans have been exposed to mainstream American values and are increasingly less bound to their traditional mores, some may still tend to be more reserved in unfamiliar settings, such as a mental health clinic (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001). Several studies have reported that women tend to have more positive attitudes toward mental health services

than men (Gim et al, 1990; Tata & Leong, 1994; Yeh & Wang, 2000). Moreover, a female client may feel uneasy disclosing intimate personal matters to clinicians in general, while a male may feel uncomfortable disclosing to a female counselor compared to a male one (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001). This discomfort of a male disclosing to a female may be attributable to Asian males subscribing to the notion that males are to be strong and emotionally stable as well as not show weakness to females. It is important to note that this reluctance to disclose personal information to the opposite sex is also found in mainstream America. However, this behavior is more pronounced in Asian Americans who adhere to traditional Asian cultural norms. Clinical issues may further be complicated by age and how it pertains to the family hierarchy (Hong & Domokos-Cheng Ham, 2001), for the older people are, the more they are expected to be stronger both mentally and emotionally and be more stable in their lives, overall.

Psychological Terms

Historical Trauma (Intergenerational Trauma)

Historical trauma can be described as "psychological baggage" passed from parents to children, including posttraumatic stress and depressive symptoms (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) define historical trauma as "the idea is that the residue of unresolved, historic, traumatic experiences and generational or unresolved grief is not only being passed from generation to generation, it is continuously being acted out and recreated in contemporary culture.

Unresolved historic trauma will continue to impact individuals, families and communities until the trauma has been addressed mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually" (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004, p. 155).

Posttraumatic Stress

According to the American Psychiatric Association (2000), Posttraumatic Stress refers to the "characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate" (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, p.463).

METHODS

Phenomenological Approach to Qualitative Research

A phenomenologically-grounded, qualitative research design was used for the study. According to Fischer (1984), this type of research design offers a framework for studying human lives and allows the opportunity to closely examine meanings that are extrapolated from these experiences. This type of experience implies that the individual is an active participant in the behavior or experience. Furthermore, one of the main goals of phenomenologically-grounded, qualitative research is to minimize multiple-construed lived experiences with a phenomenon (i.e., Boat Experience) in order that the

phenomenon can be described and understood from a collective essence or a core framework (Creswell, 2007).

The primary researcher aimed to understand and describe the experiences reported by the participants interviewed. Through careful description, the researcher then attempted to offer answers to the proposed research questions and provide a deeper understanding of the Vietnamese Boat people's experiences.

Research Design

A semi-structured interview method was used for the data collection. The researchers used Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method of qualitative research to gather detailed descriptions of the participants' experiences. According to Creswell (2007), this approach is also known as empirical, transcendental phenomenology in which the researcher is more focused on highlighting the meaningfulness from each participant's experiences rather than on the researcher's own empirical interpretations. This particular approach also employs bracketing, which is a qualitative procedure that involves the researchers withholding their individual conceptualizations and understandings of the phenomenon (i.e., Vietnamese Boat people) as best as possible in order to allow for an unbiased perspective of the study's focus.

Role of the Researchers

The primary researcher and sole interviewer in this study was a 35 year-old, Asian (Filipino) American male who is a 4th year doctoral student

from the University of Oklahoma's Counseling Psychology program. He has worked on various projects and has presented several posters that employed qualitative methodology in the research. The primary researcher has also taken classes and seminars focused on multicultural issues. The secondary researcher for this study is an associate professor from the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Oklahoma. He received his Ph.D. degree in Counseling Psychology from this same university and currently teaches several classes in the Educational Psychology Department as well as supervises a number of doctoral students on their clinical and dissertation work. He has extensive involvement serving on numerous dissertation committees. Also, this secondary researcher has considerable experience conducting research and authoring articles/book chapters on qualitative research. Additionally, he has taught a multitude of multiculturally-focused classes, workshops, and seminars. A third researcher was chosen to assist during data analysis, more specifically the triangulation process. He is a 28-year old, European American male and a graduate student/doctoral intern in clinical psychology. He is from the University of Indianapolis and has experience working with multicultural issues and qualitative research. This person currently is attending the same clinical internship as the primary researcher at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

There have been debates among qualitative researchers regarding the selection of insider versus outsider status of a researcher and interviewer (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mattis, 2007). In contrast to an outsider, an

insider is a researcher that is also from the same population or community as the study's participants. The aforementioned researchers have noted that some authors favor having complete outsiders in order to maintain researcher-participant distance and to maintain objectivity. But, people naturally embody multiple identities, which make it challenging for researchers to completely separate what exactly constitutes an insider and an outsider. Nonetheless, attempting to be as fair to participants as possible and to achieve the highest standard as possible, the researchers chose to address both outside of objectivity and inside subjective content.

Although the primary researcher is identified as Asian American, he is new to studying this population and is relatively unfamiliar with the intricacies of the Vietnamese culture as well as the boat experiences that they endured. Additionally, it is worth noting, the researcher refrained from selecting participants that he knew personally in order to preserve objectivity. Equally important, the primary and secondary researcher maintained an open mind and flexibility regarding unplanned events that may have arisen during the study (e.g., participant attrition). For example, while not planned initially, the researchers requested for two separate interviews in order to obtain as complete and comprehensive information as possible as well as to fully address the research questions. The participants demonstrated their flexibility by agreeing to meet for the second interview. The researcher allowed for the reformulation of the first interview's questions by examining the emerging

data from the initial interview. This process later guided the context of the questions to be asked in the second interview.

Two Vietnamese people served as external consultants for the study. The first person was a 45 year-old Vietnamese male from Westminster, CA. He is a leader of the Vietnamese community there and works in the service industry. He provided a number of contacts of Vietnamese Boat people from the Southern California area. Information on this person's academic achievement was not attained. The second person was a 25 year-old female who is a psychology and pre-law major at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and who has experience with qualitative research. She is heavily involved in the Vietnamese Community in Kansas City, MO and is a leader at a Christian church, which caters specifically to the Vietnamese community. This church serves a large population of Vietnamese Boat people and many who immigrated to the United States during the Vietnam War era. She also provided a number of contacts for Vietnamese Boat people from the Kansas City area. Additionally, she also served as an auditor by reviewing the transcripts and offering feedback or clarification of the information as well as verified the accuracy of the themes identified by the researchers.

Participants

Sixteen Vietnamese Boat people participated in the study. These participants were selected from two geographical regions of the United States, with 10 participants from Midwestern and six participants from Pacific

Southwestern metropolitan cities. These geographical differences allowed for more heterogeneity among the participants. The primary researcher discontinued interviews after 16 participants as a result of data saturation. Each participant spoke English fluently. They varied across a number of characteristics including gender (10 males, 6 females), current age range (26-64 years-old), age range while on the boat (3-45 years-old), and range in years in the United States from Vietnam (4-32 years). The mean age of the participants was 46, while the mean number of years while on the boat was 19. Lastly, the mean number of years residing in the United States since coming from Vietnam is 25. Refer to Appendix B for participant demographics.

In order to further attain diversity among the participants, the external consultants rated each prospective participant using an investigator-constructed 10-point Likert scale to measure their level of trauma from the boat experience (1-Very Little Trauma to 10-Extreme Trauma) and level of psychological adjustment from the boat experience (1-Poorly Adjusted to 10-Very Well Adjusted). The consultants recruited participants that they were familiar with on a personal level through community involvement, social activities, or participation in the church. They were asked to discuss with the participants about their level of trauma and psychological adjustment if more information was needed and a way to better inform their ratings. This acquaintance of each of the participants provided an established rapport and trust with the consultants as well as made it possible for a more accurate rating on the two scales. The range for level of trauma was two to 10, while the range for level

of psychological adjustment was four and nine. Refer to Appendix A for the rating scales.

Materials

A tape recorder, pen, question sheet, consent, and stamped envelopes were the materials needed for the data collection process. The demographic form included general background questions that included items regarding age, gender, occupation, age on the boat, year of arrival to the United States, and the number of years residing in the United States. The interviewer had a sheet of paper consisting of the questions to be asked during the interviews. The questions were derived from the existing literature on Vietnamese refugees, Boat People, and Asian Americans. Questions were aimed at gathering detailed information that emerged from the literature review regarding the impact of the refugee and boat experiences on the emotional and psychological health of the Vietnamese people, the strengths that helped the Boat People cope with the emotional and psychological trauma, their acculturation experiences and how well they adapted to the American culture, and how the Boat experience positively and negatively impacted their lives. The researcher, along with a psychologist and a graduate student, collaborated on the list of questions. These judges are from the Educational Psychology Department, Division of Counseling Psychology. They are all familiar with the multicultural literature in counseling, as well as counseling research on Asian Americans.

Recruitment

The selection of participants for the study followed guidelines recommended for qualitative studies. In qualitative research, traditional random sampling methodology is typically avoided and purposeful sampling is the preferred approach in order to attain participants that can "inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (Creswell, 2007, p.125). The researcher developed a recruitment letter (Appendix C) explaining the purpose of the study, the benefits, and the requirements to qualify to be a participant. Also, an informed consent was also developed. The primary researcher obtained contact information for two Vietnamese community leaders (external consultants) by searching on the Vietnamese website for Kansas City, MO and Westminster, CA. Both cities contain a large population of Vietnamese residents, with Westminster, CA ranking as the most populated city of Vietnamese people in the United States.

The primary researcher called each of the community leaders and briefed them on the purpose of the study and the assistance that is being asked of them in attaining participants. Each person stated their willingness to help find participants for the study. The primary researcher reviewed with each external consultant the purpose of the study and the qualifications that each participant must have to be considered for the study (i.e., speak and understand the English language). The primary researcher also requested a range of participants based on gender, current age, age on boat, and number of years in the United States. Additionally, a request was made to the external consultants

to search for participants that varied on their level of trauma and psychological adjustment from the boat experience. The primary researcher then mailed out copies of the recruitment letter and informed consent to them so that they could disseminate them to potential participants. A follow-up call was made each week to the community leaders and names and contact information were provided to the primary researcher.

Once a list of potential candidates was received, a call was made to each of the participants and the purpose of the study, confidentiality, along with other pertinent information was communicated to each prospective participant. The primary researcher answered any questions that the potential participants had. Once a determination was made that a participant met the study requirements, a day and time was scheduled to meet for an interview. Additional participants were obtained from the first eight participants using a snowball method. Those participants that completed the interviews were asked if they knew anyone else that would be potentially interested in taking part in the study (Creswell, 2007). A total of eight additional participants were obtaining employing this snowball methodology.

Interviews

Each interview was individually conducted and used a face-to-face format. Each interview took place at each of the participant's residence in a quiet room with just the primary researcher and interviewee present. The primary researcher obtained a signed consent and answered questions that the

participants had prior to starting the interviews. According to Haverkamp and Young (2007), researchers using qualitative methodology must decide on the comprehensiveness and level of detail of their respective studies. For instance, limited interview time can impact the extent of understanding each participant's experiences. The participants were told that two interviews were going to take place on two separate occasions, with the first one aimed at gaining general information of their experiences and the second one geared at more specific questions based on the information attained from the first interview. Since many of the participants were working full-time and/or had family obligations, the interviewer decided to ask for only one to one and a half hour of their time collectively for both interviews. Before the interviews began, the participants were informed by the primary investigator that participation was completely voluntary. They were informed that they would be involved in one of two separate interviews, with the first one involving three broad questions and the second one potentially involving anywhere between two to five specific questions based on the information taken from the first interview. Please refer to Appendix D for a list of the general questions and samples of the more specific, follow-up questions.

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions, the investigator informed the participants that they had the right to refuse to answer any question that they felt was too sensitive in nature or that they felt uncomfortable answering. The participants were informed to say "next question" if they did not want to answer a question. The participants were also

informed that the interview would be audio taped for the purpose of transcribing their responses for data analysis. They were told that their participation was confidential and the link to the collected data would be through a numeric code. In addition, the participants were told that the audiotapes would be destroyed immediately after the transcription process, which was to be no longer than one year to when the data was collected. Moreover, they were also told that all other materials (i.e., consent forms) were to be destroyed after five years of data collection. Lastly, the participants were informed that all data collection materials would be stored and locked in a room at all times.

The interviews were semi-structured, standardized, and exploratory. The investigator employed non-directional probing questions when more information or clarification was needed. Some examples of these clarifying questions were, “Can you please tell me more about that?,” “What exactly do you mean by what you said?,” “Can you please give me specific examples of that?,” and so on. Once all of the questions were asked and the participants are satisfied with their answers, the investigator stopped the audio tape. After the first interview was completed, a scheduled appointment was arranged for the second interview. After the second interview, the investigator debriefed the participants on the purpose of the study and answered any questions that they had. The participants were also informed that they would be sent a copy of their transcribed responses in which they would have the opportunity to

correct, delete or add any information to their original responses. Lastly, the investigator thanked the participants for their participation.

Once each interview was transcribed, the transcriptions were sent to each of the participants for member checking. Revisions, additions, and amendments were made to the transcriptions as needed. All 16 sixteen transcriptions were then sent to one of the external consultants for validation of the information as well as to validate the emergent themes that the researchers found after triangulating the data.

Data Analysis

The interview data was transcribed using a Word Processor. All of the data was saved on a flash drive and CD Rom with password protection. These, along with all other study materials, were secured in a locked room.

Analysis of the data followed traditional methods of data reduction and analysis using qualitative methodologies (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Creswell, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The analyses began by having the primary researcher, the graduate student/doctoral intern, and the secondary researcher, who are all familiar with psychology literature and qualitative research methodologies, triangulate the data. These judges independently reviewed the transcripts through multiple readings using a micro analytic perspective. Using methodologies suggested by Creswell, Hanson, Clark and Morales (2007), the judges identified statements, sentences, or quotes that contributed to the understanding of the experiences of the refugees.

This information assisted in identifying concepts and to create general categories to represent the participants' responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1998). Furthermore, notes were recorded on the margins of each page of the transcripts to identify emerging themes along with other meaningful descriptions. Next, a process of data horizontalization was conducted in which key words, significant phrases, and meaningful sentences were selected and documented on a separate list. Repetitive or overlapping statements were aggregated. In order to handle the vast amount of information, the primary researcher organized the information into a Microsoft Word spreadsheet and created tables. Several meetings with the primary researcher and graduate student/doctoral intern were held in which "open coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to identify initial themes. This level of coding assisted in anchoring phrases or sentences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), while frequency counts (Huberman & Miles, 1994) assisted in identifying recurring themes and concepts. The primary researcher and the graduate student/doctoral intern then grouped similar statements into meaningful units or themes, which essentially are larger units of information taken from the original statements that were identified as significant. The judges then independently returned to the transcripts and coded the responses to each question. During this phase, the judges documented new or alternative construction of themes and concepts as well as extrapolate quotes to support the identified themes. Another subsequent meeting was held to apply principles consistent with "multiple investigator corroboration" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as the "value of employing

multiple perspectives" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this process, the three judges conducted member checking by reviewing and comparing analyses with each of the other judges simultaneously and combined interpretations in order to reach a consensus of how each participant's responses were coded for each of the questions.

Validation Procedures

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed validation procedures for enhancing the validity and reliability of qualitative studies. The terms that are most closely associated with reliability and validity in qualitative research are authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness. First, as mentioned earlier, the primary researcher invited a second researcher (graduate student/doctoral intern) to examine the transcribed data and extrapolate key words, significant sentences, meaningful descriptions, and emerging themes from the transcriptions. This process was conducted independent of the primary researcher but later both persons met to discuss and corroborate findings. This procedure is relatively similar to the process used in Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) in which the researchers independently review the data and subsequently meet to identify themes (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). But, for the present study, the researchers reviewed the data and devised themes independently and subsequently debated each of their findings over the course of several meetings.

As mentioned earlier, member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was conducted by mailing the transcriptions to each of the participants. A page at the beginning of the transcriptions was included describing the task that was asked of the participants regarding member checking (Appendix E). The researcher asked the participants to add any additional information under each question that was asked of them in the interviews. They were also asked to make any revisions or amendments to any of the information that they provided that needed clarification or more detail.

Last, the primary researcher had one of the external consultants/auditor, review the transcriptions and the preliminary findings to help verify the accuracy of the identified themes. As recommended in CQR's methodology (Hill et al., 1997), the researchers reconvened and examined the thematic constructions and groupings of statements that they have developed based on the feedback, challenges, and suggestions offered by the external consultant.

FINDINGS

The researchers agreed upon four, broad main themes as well as three subthemes under each main theme. Refer to Appendix F for the complete list of emergent themes. The following information below lists both the main and sub themes, provides quotes for each main theme along with the researcher's analysis of each subtheme.

Theme 1: Experiences on the Boat

Quotes:

1) *We were just running for life, so scared, you know that we could get caught by the police. But, we made it to the water, my mom was rushing through, like she*

dropped me into the water, and almost drowned, but my uncle caught me. I mean there were 100 people boarding a boat that is only meant for like 20 to 30, it's just packed like sardines and everyone was just looking out for themselves and just running for their lives and hoping to make it out before the communist police officer would come. If you were caught, they would basically kill you.

2) *In the middle of the night I woke up, and I didn't see my mom. Somehow one of the pirates, cause my mom is down to, they only pick the pretty ones, so even though we put oil on our faces, when we saw the pirates we said you know get oil, make yourself look ugly, right. Well the sixteen year old girl did not put oil on her face, so she was recognized, I mean as being pretty, so they pick her up by her waist and stick her to the captain. He stayed upstairs, and my mom you know somehow in the middle of the night they noticed her. They took my mom up to the captain. I was, all of the sudden there was this big commotion. It was screaming, running around. I was scared, and I didn't see my mom. I realized that our boat got um blown to pieces by the waves. With that commotion, they let go of my mom……So in the morning, I was a little girl, and smart, I went up to the captain to look for my mom cause in the morning he called her up again. I didn't know English, but I was doing fine in English, and I saw my mom! And they saw me and we ran with them. And you know it's my mom, I'm looking for my mom. I don't know what I did, but I just pulled my mom down you know, so I saved my mom.*

3) *That boat was scary, our boat which was real scary there was some kind of band of pirates, it was scary. We didn't know if they going to kill us or detain us. Yeah,*

they just fire and jump around, you know singing their own tradition songs, but it's all men you know. And then yeah it was another experience with, the first night they divided man in one cabin women in one cabin, cause we don't see the men, our father and brothers you know..... We feel so numb on boat we have no feeling we just want to live and survive……. It was suffocating. I had to sit on a boat with a lot of people. We couldn't move. I just sat there and cried. I was hungry I couldn't eat. I wanted to pee and I couldn't go anywhere.

4) *Every three hours they would give us a cup of water to drink, and sometimes my mother would have to sacrifice that cup of water for me to drink……. All I remember was my little sister crying for our mom. We didn't eat much and we were hungry. I slept most of them time and the only time I really woke up was because I was starving and then I figured out I had no food so I go back to sleep to kill time……. So we traveled for about 7 days you know, we ran out of food and ran out of water. What we needed the most was the water because you can't live without water. We had to get more water from the sea and boiled it and mixed it with something so that we could drink it.*

5) *We don't feel nothing on the boat we sit so tight and we so dirty we wear the same cloths and it smell bad and my two kids sit on me the whole time and they don't know nothing because they little baby. We no drink and Cindy (wife) and Hung (baby) I have them drink each other pee, because I know they thirsty and they don't know anything so I tear Cindy shirt off and let Hung pee on it and let Cindy suck on it then let Hung suck on it because they so thirty and we cannot drink the*

ocean water because it too salty and too salty they can't drink, we cannot even touch it.

6) *And then just being in the typhoon, my mom would describe the waves being like 30 ft high… we were like a leaf in the water. And people would just pray, like the fishermen would pray to the whales……. I know after 7 days, the typhoon pushed us to Malaysia-even though our destination had been Japan, we ended up in Malaysia. And the one memory I can remember my mom telling us from that night was that there was another boat that, because of the typhoon being so strong, the boat actually swung onto the rocks and everyone died. It was very traumatic, but we fortunately hit land and that was a blessing.*

Subtheme 1: Witnessing an Event That Involved Death or Learning about Unexpected Violent Death

The above quotations describe some of the horrific conditions many of the Vietnamese Boat people experienced during their voyages. Many described the fear and apprehension they felt as they narrowly escaped soldiers and policeman who threatened to kill or jail them. Participants also described the uncertainty that they had concerning their own fate along with the fate of their loved ones. Complicating their emotional experiences, their rescuers who they depended on for safety and who were taking them to refugee camps, were sometimes the same people that induced trauma experiences. The uncertainty of their predicament added to the nightmarish horror they experienced. Participants also expressed the unique helplessness that some of them felt as children and who were totally dependent on their older relatives and family members for protection. However, some participants also expressed that even as young children, they had to take

on grown-up challenges to protect their older relatives that could not fend for themselves. Some even stated risking their own lives to protect their parents or older relatives.

Subtheme 2: Threat to Physical Integrity

Some of the participants compared their living space on the boats to those of jailed prisoners. Others described the sadistic torture administered to the men, women, and children on the boats. Some described being raped, witnessing rapes, or being verbally and physically assaulted by pirates or predatory people who were supposed to be escorting them to refugee camps. When a participant was describing the possible rape of her mother, she literally had difficulty in verbalizing the event as though the emotional and psychological impact of remembering the event emotionally overwhelmed her, hence impacting her ability to verbally express her thoughts. Participants described having to, along with all the other women, deface themselves with oil in order to appear less attractive to the male pirates. The participants had to transform who they were in order to simply survive a viscous attack, rape, or even death. Men also described how they had to adopt a timid and fearful posture in order to appear meek to the threatening pirates. Those who decided to present themselves with resistance were either thrown off the ship or killed on the spot. For some men, this emasculation was quite difficult because their culture dictates that males are to be protectors of their families, strong in the face of danger and fear. However, they had to accept this reality and present a meek face in order to thwart harm to themselves and their loved ones. In summary, not only did the boat people experience humiliating physical treatment, they had violence assault the integrity of their identities.

Subtheme 3: Deprivation of Basic Needs

The participants described a severe deprivation of their basic needs such as water, food, air, space, hygiene, and sleep. A struggle to meet these basic needs created high levels of stress and anxiety for the participants. They described experiencing insurmountable fear about whether they would perish from not getting their basic needs met. This fear was also expressed by participants who had young children. They struggled to find food and, at times, made personal sacrifices to get water for their offspring. Desperation set in as participants took extreme measures to keep themselves and their loved ones alive. Participants also described adopting a mental, emotional, and physical resignation to counteract the hunger, thirst, and deplorable living conditions. These participants also risked capture and their own lives as well as the lives of their loved ones in order to escape the tyranny that they were facing in their homeland. They described frantic activity as they were preoccupied with shadows in the dark who might be murderous police. They also described inner experiences of anxious anticipation for the worst case scenario as their lives hung in a suspenseful balance.

Theme 2: Long-term Psychological and Emotional Effects

Quotes:

1) *That's scary cause I'm scared of water, I'm scared of dark water is my fear. I'm scared to go to the beach……. It was a scary experience in the dark water splashing and the boat keeps moving up and down. It was scary. You don't know what's going on…… And I was traumatized going to dark water because… Um,*

my experience is, well on the boat we were shivering, scared, and my mom was holding us.

2) *We on the ship and we got robbed by the Thai fisherman or pirate or whatever you call them and they take all. The first one threw the guys off the boat so that the guy cannot come back and attack them without them knowing so they can steal everything from us and protect themselves from our guys- they throw the men off the boat and let them swim while they rob us and some of the men too- and our men that fight too hard to protect us on the boat the pirate just kill them in front of us and throw off boat into the water……. pirates try to rob us and they get so mad that they beat up a lot of us and then stole our engine to our little boat. We so sad, we thought we die.*
3) *No emotions or mental that messed with me. It is just a really, really bad memory but it did not really affect me too much anymore because it's been so long* (response by male participant).
4) *It hasn't affected me* (response by two male participants).
5) *It make me sad. I don't like to think about it. I don't like to talk too much about it with my friends either. My friends all feel the same. Some people mention it here and there but I don't say anything because we all experience different and it was sad for everyone.*
6) *My mom was always crying and she was lonely and it made me even more sad because I couldn't help her or do anything to lessen that feeling. It tore me up inside to see my mom sad and me sad was one thing, but I was young and strong*

but my mom was older and weak and just gentle lady. I was hungry but more worried than hungry

7) *It was so scary. I was starving hungry. I've never experienced anything like it, it was terrible. I don't even want to think about it anymore because it's so scary to think about. I haven't thought about it in so long that I have to think more to tell you more because it's been so long that I forget from trying to avoid the memories.*
8) *Well….I don't like water. I hate going around too much water I feel like I relive Vietnam. I don't want to go back to Vietnam at all anymore all my family want me to go but no I feel like I die in Vietnam if I go . I feel like if I go swimming and I can't feel the floor then I will sink and die like in Vietnam on the boat. People fell off boat and I see people die and I make me sad. My heart is weak when I think about it.*
9) *Sometimes I get bad dreams and I haven't had one in a really long time but I would wake up in the middle of the night crying or scared to death that something was happening to my mom. Other dreams were of me and my mom getting separated.*

Subtheme 1: Symptoms Consistent with Posttraumatic Stress

The participants may seem to have developed symptoms consistent with posttraumatic stress as a result of directly experiencing actual or threatened death, sustaining serious harm, or witnessing the threat of death or injury to family members or others by the perpetrators (Diagnostic Statistical Manual, 2000). The participants expressed enduring intense fear, helplessness, and horror during times when they felt that

serious injury or death was imminent. This was evident when pirates boarded their boats and threatened the passengers with physical harm, rape, or death if they did not abide by their orders. Some of them described intense psychological distress when they came face to face with internal or external cues that resembled an aspect of the traumatic event. For instance, a few participants expressed that they currently feel anxiousness and fearfulness whenever they see or come close to large bodies of water (e.g., lakes, rivers, or oceans). They also stated triggers, such as, beaches, boats, and the dark, bring back horrific memories of the events that transpired on the boats. A few participants also stated that rain storms also serve as a trigger and arouse intense fear in them and remind them of the boat journey. Many of them expressed a level of hopelessness when certain triggers remind them of the boat experience. Another way that participants responded to the stressful events was to repress the life-threatening events. This repression was essential, for many of them had neither the emotional nor the mental resources to withstand the overwhelming impact of the distress. They compartmentalized their emotions, possibly, in order to stay strong for their loved ones and maintain morale.

Subtheme 2: Symptoms Consistent with Avoidance, Denial, and Depression

The participants describe their efforts to avoid thoughts, memories, feelings, or conversations associated with the traumatic boat experience. This was apparent in many participants that stated that they do not talk about it with friends or family. Interestingly, the majority of the male participants outwardly expressed that the events did not affect them at all and that it was too long ago for the event to impact them today. It appeared as if denial was a pervasive defense mechanism for most of the participants and particularly more for the males. There were also intentions to avoid activities or places that can

perpetuate reliving their experiences. Some of the participants noted avoiding the beach or other areas that have large bodies of water, while a number of them expressed discomfort and unwillingness to ever board another boat. One respondent noted not ever wanting to return to Vietnam. Additionally, their avoidance in talking about the boat experience made it difficult for some participants to recall certain memories of the traumatic journey. It was as if the avoidance locked away the memories to a place that was irretrievable. There was a sense of detachment and estrangement from their own thoughts and feelings as if an emotional numbness was a consequence of their effort to forget the events and move forward. Some participants in the study isolated themselves, turning their sadness and anger inwardly. They may have been chosen to carry their depression with them away from their children, not worrying them with the horror they experienced, possibly to their death.

Subtheme 3: Symptoms Consistent with Specific Phobia

Some of the participants describe persistent fear or phobia of certain situations (e.g., storms) or objects (e.g., boats). The mere exposure to the phobic stimulus induces a significant level of anxiety. Very often, the phobic stimulus is avoided and is sometimes endured with trepidation. Participants expressed experiencing a persistent and extreme amount of fear when anticipating an object or situation involving the phobic stimulus. The most obvious phobias that the participants appeared to suffer from were of the natural environment and situational types. Many participants discussed a fear of elements from the natural environment such as storms, hurricanes, thunder, and heavy rainfall. They talked about how the storms encountered during the boat trip were representative of the uncertainty surrounding life or death. Some even observed other boats founder in the

storms and witnessed the drowning of many people. In many respects, storms may have symbolized the coming of death. Additionally, several of the participants reported having fears of specific situations such as transportation by boat, being close to open water, or going to beaches. Several participants expressed how they consciously avoid boats, for this object signified harm and death. Both the tragic encounters that the boat people had with pirates and storms while at sea contributed to their general fear of both these natural environment and situational types of fears. Some of the participants have forsaken sentimental and precious joys such as Vietnam and swimming to avoid the terrible memories from resurrecting.

Theme 3: Integration of Vietnamese and American Cultures—An Acculturation Experience

Quotes:

1) *They brainwash me (parents).They just don't, they're afraid I'll end up marrying white. That's their fear. They just want me to stay in the race. That's why they always tried to not let me hang out with white people. Maybe cause my dad was traumatized way back in Vietnam when GI Joe's came over and prostitutes got pregnant or unwanted pregnancies. The thing is if you marry a white guy, you look like a prostitute. At some point that was that. He's traumatized himself, so he doesn't want to see his daughter marrying to a white guy cause oh my god anyone who marries a white guy is a prostitute. You know it's sad stuff like that. He's messed up, and he's, and it worked for some reason. It worked. And when I see a white dude, I don't feel anything. I don't see an attraction.*

2) *……..so I just remember having to balance [languages] because we weren't allowed to speak English at home – my parents wanted us to retain the language and always reminded us where we came from, you know, finish your food, always having to like go back and be reminded that we came here by boat and that we didn't have much.*

3) *They just made fun of the way our eyes looked, or the language, because we spoke another language. And then, also just being poor too, you know, the way we dressed because we didn't have much at the time, and just shopping at second-hand stores, or you know, wearing imitation clothing or shoes. That was kind of hard. I know as a child, I mean I think in Vietnam I could care less, but I think just here, just trying real hard to fit in and knowing that your parents could only afford so much. I think that was also hard too. The pressure to fit into to something... I think it's normal though for a child to feel that peer pressure, but I guess it's just that we're so different that maybe that caused a little more of the tension between other kids too.*

4) *(Integrating the Vietnamese culture with the American culture).It was hard, but we accepted it, at first it was really, really hard but after being at sea and seeing all these families spread apart and lose each other I was glad to have some of my family and not be alone. It was hard to integrate but it was easier, because I have a big family so we stayed the Vietnamese style in our homes and slowly adapted to the American culture but even still today most of the stuff we do and say are Asian style and only at work am I really Americanized or around white people I am proper but I am myself around Vietnamese people.*

Subtheme 1: Importance in Maintaining Vietnamese Heritage

Some participants described the pressure to strictly adhere to their Vietnamese heritage when they first arrived in the United States. Most of this pressure came from their parents and relatives. Some participants described a fear instilled in them by their parents who forbade them from getting romantically involved with white people. One participant said that her father's negative experiences with white soldiers in Vietnam were the source of this mistrust. Some spoke of being "brainwashed" by parents with the tenet that white people were not to be trusted. As a result, many people described staying close to the Vietnamese community as a way of maintaining solidarity among their people. Keeping close to their Vietnamese roots was a vehicle to maintain their heritage and build unity amongst the Vietnamese community. Language also appeared to play a key role in keeping the cultural ties intact. Some participants talked about how they were only to speak the Vietnamese language at home in order for the children to not forget their Vietnamese roots. Keeping the Vietnamese language and dating/marrying within the Vietnamese culture were two impactful ways of retaining the Vietnamese heritage.

Of particular poignancy is the above struggle between daughter and father about dating "white guys." The father has a heightened awareness of the oppression and persecution Vietnamese people have suffered due to "white guys." The daughter desperately wishes to transcend her father's vindictiveness and scorn but, on a deep level, she too suspects "white guys" innocence. She wants to believe in their humanity but has yet to have experiences that can cause her to truly believe in the possibility of a true mutual understanding that can counteract her father's views.

Subtheme 2: Struggle for Acceptance in America

Some participants described the suffering that they endured when first arriving in the United States. Though many felt that their entry in to the States represented freedom and the opportunity to start over again, many of the participants that arrived as children and/or adolescents experienced prejudice and racism from their peers at school. The most salient obstacles that made it hard for the Vietnamese people to readily integrate into the American culture were: their physical attributes, limited financial resources, and difficulty grasping the English language. For instance, some expressed their hurt when classmates would tease them about their eyes and other Asian physical features. One participant expressed her sadness when some neighborhood children made fun of her and her siblings' eyes and told them to go back home where they came from. Others talked about how their limited financial resources made it difficult for them to fit in with their American peers. For instance, several persons talked about how their family had little to no money when they arrived in the States, hence they were not able to buy new clothes and had to buy second hand or donated clothes. This inability to wear proper fitting, clean, and modern clothing brought attention and ridicule to the Vietnamese students. Lastly, many of the participants discussed how not being able to speak the English language made it difficult to assimilate into the American way of life. Several participants spoke about how language presented immense barriers in school and in the community when they could not express their needs or concerns. Thus, it appears that the struggle to blend in with the American culture seemed to be especially impactful for Vietnamese children and/or adolescents who had to attend school with their American

peers. Physical appearance, limited finances, and sparse English speaking skills were the main obstacles in assimilating into "America."

Participants in this study frequently discussed their struggles for simple justice for the assertion and sanctity of their humanity. The above descriptions depict the bitter truths of what it was like for the Vietnamese Boat people to be recognized for who they really were behind appearances that differed from convention. One cannot but feel the irony of these Vietnamese people who had learned the deep wisdom of the precariousness life and its value and meaning having to convince white people of their equality. The anecdotes demonstrate absurdness and self-delusions that Euro-Americans sometimes partake in.

Subtheme 3: Strong Family Bond that Eased the Assimilation Process

There seemed to be themes that evolved around family. The participants talked about a strong bond with family members and a devoted commitment to the extended family. This close attachment to the family appeared to facilitate the difficult transition from the Vietnamese to the "mainstream" American way of life. Several respondents talked about how the home and family were places of safety and comfort in expressing their Asian heritage. They talked about sharing customs, rituals, and language as a means to remind them of their roots and the struggles that they endured prior to coming to America. Home symbolized a place of genuineness and transparency—two qualities that they had forfeited when trying to assimilate to the larger American culture. One participant talked about being "proper" when in public but reverting back to Asian ways and customs when at home. There seemed to be a sense of protection and respite when at

home, which shielded the family members from the stress and oppression that they sometimes felt when trying to assume the American lifestyle. Family was a way of avoiding loneliness and vulnerability. Overall, family served as a powerful force in the Vietnamese Boat People's unavoidable acculturation process and the maintenance of their own cultural uniqueness as well as the root of their strength and resolve.

Theme 4: Boat Experiences Transmuted

Quotes:

1) *I always look back when I've overcome adversity in my life. I could've died in the ocean somewhere back there, but now I've learned I have to make the best out of it. You know I see what my parents went through. Sometimes they give me problems, or they want me to do things they want. I feel obligated to them to make them happy cause what they've gone through, so much to give us the freedom that we have now because we're so better off here than in Vietnam. It turns out real bad but with all that I've really become a stronger person, even as a kid. I see my strength. I see, yeah, something different about me, but I carry it in myself all the time. I mean I don't ever tell anybody or show it but if adversity comes, I'm able to handle things well, and I don't break down easy, to myself you know. There's something in me that's a little bit spicy, go on with my life. I value my life and value America.*
2) *……..it has changed my destination in life for forever. I think just looking back and hearing stories about how people didn't make it or people dying or just people still living in refugee camps to this day, the door closed on them. I think*

for me that my parents gave it everything in the country… they didn't want us to live in the minefields and work for a government that suppresses people and refuses people, for me it sounds like an appreciation for life. Just a hard work ethic, not to give up, and to maintain offenses, just, I don't know how to describe it. Just determination and to endure... that's the word!

3) *The sense of just appreciation, like I seriously just appreciate life and everything this country has to offer. Like now my heart is, I almost have a missionary heart, I shared this with Michelle, she knows that I have a missionary heart, like people are living and being oppressed, especially like living in Vietnam and all, there is so much oppression there, like with the government just takes all the money and the people are poor and are not given much. I think that compassion is to really go back, or not even just Vietnam, but other places in the world, where, to help people live a better life or to have hope, you know? Yeah, and just those who need it. Just loving people more and just having compassion for people and for life more.*

4) *I have to treasure my life and you don't know what's going on with you for the next day and the next minute, so I always try to do my best. I think because I've been too old, I think it's been very hard for me to survive in the boat. I would have probably died if no one and seen us, and then got in the Lincoln. I think mainly, positively all the time I always say things could be harder. I treasure my life, it's harder, and I make everything the best that I can. I can reach my goals. That's why I've made myself become a hard worker. I always think that I need to work harder because I think if I can work harder, I can reach my goals. That's why I*

always think positively, and then work harder than you can be someone that you want to be.

5) *I am not scared of anything because the worst part of my life, I already experience it. I always know that God will be next to me so I will always believe that I will make it and that is why I go to church and am chairman or the church to thank god for everything I have. The feeling that I have I follow because I know god is around me. All my money comes from God- God gave it all to me and if god want to take it away I don't care because I will start it over because my life will never end- I will always have god on my side.*

Subtheme 1: Reframing of Belief Systems

The participants described changing the way they view their lives. While escaping the country and during their boat journey, they spoke of constant hopelessness and despair. They talked about how they were already deciding their fate and some even expressed having died on the boat, as if they had already checked out of this life and were preparing for the next life. However, those that survived and made it to America expressed a renewed sense of hope, promise, optimism, and love for life. Several participants mentioned that they have a greater appreciation for life. They view daily adversities as easy compared to what they had to endure in Vietnam and on the boat. There appears to be a characterization of current, everyday struggles as temporary nuisances rather than life halting problems. Several talked about how a deficiency of basic needs such as a lack of sleep, shortage of food or money, or less than perfect shelter are no longer reasons to be stressed but a reminder of how lucky they are today. They alluded to having not only a lack of fear but rather a firm resilience in taking on life's

challenges and impediments. A number of respondents also talked about an enduring faith in God that emerged, feeling that he/she had developed through their trials. Consequently, many are committed to God and express their gratitude for having escaped the evil they faced in Vietnam and on the boat. Many participants defer to God when making decisions about their life, keeping God at the center of their lives. The participants in this study expressed a desire to live life fully and to be positive about their lives as if they have been given a second chance. For many, spirituality and a love for God was identified as having helped them to have positive attitudes.

Subtheme 2: Transmutation of Behavior

Many of the participants discussed how their behaviors have positively changed from the boat experience. Many talked about how they work hard in whatever they do and diligently work towards meeting their goals. These goals are associated with education, work, career, family, and relationships. Some said they want to give back to others through missionary work or through other services in the church. While some were motivated to altruistic acts as a way to express their thanks to God for having survived the tragic ordeal, others expressed having altruistic empathy for others who suffer. Either way, they wanted the good graces granted to them while escaping Vietnam and surviving the boat trip to be forwarded to others, especially those that need it most. Some respondents also expressed their gratitude for the sacrifices that their parents made in getting them to the shores of safety and freedom. Several participants stated how they feel that it is their duty and responsibility to take care of their parents as they have taken care of them. Several allude to literally owing their lives to their parents who were willing to give up their lives to protect them. Many participants reported that this

appreciation has been channeled into a work ethic characterized by fortitude, strength, and relentless effort. Respondents repeatedly spoke of their faithful devotion to God and their loyalty to their family, most notably their parents.

Subtheme 3: Letting Go of the Past

Many of the participants express a desire to "move forward" from the boat experience. They talk about establishing a future for themselves and their families. Many of the participants did not speak to long-term negative experiences resulting from the boat ordeal but rather talked about what they have learned from the whole tragic event. Several pieces of enlightening knowledge that they garnered from the experience are a value for life, an appreciation for goodwill, and a motivation to live life with passion and zeal. Many also do not allow themselves to forget the loss of life as well as the innocence taken from them and others, but realize that they must learn from this experience and transform the ordeal into one that can guide them in pursuing a productive life—one that is filled with optimism, hope, and trust.

DISCUSSION

If there has ever been a discussion that necessitated beginning with participant strength and heeding participant lessons on life, it is this one. Let us begin by considering the lesson that many participants shared about how our lives might be viewed as an educative experience leading to either unity with god or enlightenment. Several suggested that we can attach ourselves to our traumas and continue to suffer and hate others, or we can let go of them and see life from a more soulful perspective, which allows for viewing trauma as a vehicle for transformation. Some of the Christians spoke of the grace and

love of God and the people who helped them through their difficulties, facilitating their transformation from living in fear and hatred to living lives characterized by forgiveness love, and openness. Some of the Buddhists spoke of non-resistance, allowing the traumatic world of experiences to wash over them without clinging to them and not complaining or blaming others. They attempt to transcend the ego that is weakened daily by ruminating on misdeeds of others.

On the other hand, there were several participants who disclosed that they still suffer daily from the violations they endured and others who may have chosen coping styles that may become not only inadequate but also may inhibit personal growth and restrict interactions with others. The defenses, in general, such as repression and blocking emotions can create a diseased body. They can cause normal emotions to build into intense emotions. If psychology has anything to offer to the perspectives of Eastern spirituality, it may be the contribution of viewing emotions as fluid expressions and as a necessary component in connecting us with our own aliveness and sensitivity.

Psychologists would do well to consider the Eastern meditative wisdom that counsels mindful, non-judgmental observation of emotions which allows for true fluidity. In other words, persons can become absorbed in their emotions and repeat them endlessly, remaining trapped in chaos, or they can experience them without struggling with them, and let them go. The Buddhist perspective called maître, or unconditional friendliness to oneself, involves respecting emotions and allowing their expression, neither suppressing them nor indulging in them. A psychologist working with a Vietnamese client, whether that client be Christian, Buddhist or whatever religion, but

who has suffered from the Boat People experience, might consider the cultural conditioning of their client.

Psychologists need to also be mindful and sensitive to the acculturative stress that Vietnamese Americans have endured. These people include those immediately arriving to the United States after the boat experience and those of subsequent generations that witnessed the challenges their parents and other elders went through trying to adapt to the American culture. Kim (2001) indicated, once people can identify the similarities and differences between their culture and the new one as well as learn to assimilate through "intercultural communication," an "intercultural identity" begins to emerge. Many of the participants alluded to reaching their own intercultural identity and described their successes in blending the Vietnamese and American cultures in a harmonious way but also described the hardships they endured prior to achieving this identity. There appeared to be tension between the desire to maintain one's Vietnamese heritage and the aspiration to assimilate to American culture. Some participants talked about a forced acceptance in assimilating to the American way of life as their way of surviving the harsh realities of being a minority in a large, brand new culture. A review of the results revealed that age was not a factor in the participants' level of motivation to blend the Vietnamese and American cultures. No matter the age of the participants, they spoke of the existing tensions that were present between them and their own culture and family as well as with the American culture. Some participants even described a disconnection from their own identity during this acculturation process. These tensions persisted throughout most of the process. These strains occurred more during the initial period of time when they first arrived to the U.S. but then lessened as time elapsed and they were establishing a more

secure cultural identity. With that said, psychologists should maintain cultural sensitivity and avoid making a blind assumption that just because a client appears to be culturally integrated does not necessarily mean that he/she still does not struggle with acculturative stress. Several participants described how family members, especially those of earlier generations, still struggle in assimilating to the American culture.

However, what was apparent among the majority of participants was their persistent motivation to sustain their Vietnamese heritage despite being a minority in a large, predominant new culture. Many of the participants discussed how their adherence to a collectivistic culture, their strong ties within the Vietnamese community, and dedication to their spiritual roots were essential not only to their survival when first arriving to the United States, but also a way of maintaining strength and providing a home base of safety and solitude from the outer world. Hence, when working with clients, psychologists must remember how important a client's heritage may be in defining who they are as a person. Often times, clients' cultural heritage are sources of strength for them that clinicians can draw from, especially for those clients that have gone through stressful experiences that forced them to integrate their own culture with a larger, less forgiving host culture.

If there was a predominantly salient theme that emerged from the findings, it was how crucial the role of family was in bolstering the participants' ability to survive through their traumatic experiences. Within the Vietnamese culture, family is a predominant source of strength and the core to their resilience (Pedersen et al, 2008). While on the boats, the majority of participants described how family members sacrificed their own lives in order to protect their loved ones from harm. Moreover, after coming to

America, the majority of participants spoke to how vital their family was in helping them work through the distress of assimilating into American culture. Therefore, psychologists should be mindful in systematically exploring the importance of family as it applies to a client's health as well as examining how significant a role it plays in their client's support structure. Often times, family is a source of strength for Vietnamese people, hence the reason why they remain loyal, respectful, and committed to family ideals.

To reiterate the points in the above paragraph and to place them in a transformative therapy context, psychologists might: 1) take into account the client's readiness to work on any emotional blockages they might have resulting from the traumatic events; 2) create a meditative and mindful space to recall unpleasant events; 3) train them to "observe" images and emotions associated with the traumas they experienced and being with their emotions without being totally absorbed by them; 4) help clients to "let go" of the emotions and to transform them into wisdom, which will promote individual and relational growth; 5) establish space to allow the clients to talk about the effects of acculturation in their lives as well as in the lives of their loved ones; and 6) be mindful of the importance of family in clients' lives.

The above extractions may be important considerations when working with Asian clients, at least, in terms of helping to make current work more culturally relevant, but they certainly are yet to be appropriately integrated into a comprehensive model for work with Asians suffering from posttraumatic stress and have not been researched to determine their effectiveness. Moreover, based on the information attained from the study, a model should look at how Asians function in a system taking into account family, friends, community, spiritual network, etc. as well as focus on the positive impact

these areas contribute to their psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Additionally, living in a collectivistic culture, Vietnamese people tend to take care of one another with a deep sense of family-like compassion for people in their communities. There appeared to be an altruistic attitude among the Vietnamese people to look after one another in good times and during ones permeated with strife. Success in life seemed to evolve around assisting others in achieving happiness and life fulfillment. Hence, it would also be encouraged for clinicians to recommend their Vietnamese clients, who are struggling with cultural identity, loneliness, depression, etc. to seek comfort and support from social networks such as churches, community activities, church groups, festivals, and so on. This enmeshment within a social system can not only provide a resource for support but also an environment rich in cultural devotion.

Limitations

There are several limitations inherent in this study which should be taken into account when reviewing the results. First, a limitation of this study relates to the nature of qualitative research. For instance, the generalizability of the results to the overall population of Vietnamese Boat People is difficult to do considering the small sample size. However, it is important to note that qualitative research aims for applicability rather than generalizability (Heppner, Kivlinghan, & Wampold, 1999). Furthermore, the authors argue that qualitative research holds important implications for the participants, since the results are a meaningful product of their ideas and perspectives.

Second, the nature of qualitative and phenomenological methodology does not allow for causal inferences. The data analysis is limited to subjective descriptions and

understanding of participants' experiences. These experiences are then closely examined for similarities, unique differences, and variability within the data. Third, the participants were recruited from only two states (i.e., California and Missouri). The opportunity to have interviewed Vietnamese Boat People from various parts of the country could have provided rich information and examine the similarities and differences of participants across regions of the country. Last, the requirement of participants to speak English limits the breadth of understanding for other Vietnamese Boat People's perspectives. For instance, interviewing people who only speak Vietnamese may have implications about their level of acculturative stress and potential difficulty with assimilating into American society.

Future Research

This study offers opportunities for future studies. As noted in the limitations, interviewing Vietnamese Boat People from across the country can provide a more enriched perspective of the experiences. For instance, research can examine if there are differences in how well people acculturated to American culture based on the region of the United States that they immigrated to and the culture of that region (e.g., conservative, liberal, level of discrimination, etc.). Future studies may also consider interviewing more people to allow for a broader perspective. Last, research may also look more closely at the healthy coping mechanisms that the Vietnamese Boat People utilized as a way for psychologists to then integrate this knowledge in their work with clients that suffered from traumatic experiences.

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APPENDIX A

Scale to screen participants

Directions: Please rate the potential participants on the following criteria using the 10-point Likert Scales.

1) Level of Trauma

What is the level of trauma that the participant experienced as a result of the boat experience?

Very Little Trauma				Moderate Trauma					Extreme Trauma
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2) Level of Psychological Adjustment

How psychologically adjusted is the participant since the boat experience?

Poorly Adjusted				Adjusted					Very-well adjusted
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

APPENDIX B

Participants Demographics

*Please note that only the first initial of each participant name was used.

1) T
   a) Gender: M
   b) Age: 42
   c) Occupation: Service repairman, air-conditioning
   d) Age on boat: 12
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1980
   f) How many years in U.S.: 30
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 6
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 4

2) D
   a) Gender: M
   b) Age: 54
   c) Occupation: Physician
   d) Age on boat: 25
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1981
   f) How many years in U.S.: 29
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 2
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 9

3) A
   a) Gender: F
   b) Age: 39
   c) Occupation: Pharmacist
   d) Age on boat: 9
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1980
   f) How many years in U.S.: 30
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 7
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 4

4) X
   a) Gender: F
   b) Age: 35

c) Occupation: Public Health, masters
d) Age on boat: 3
e) Year came to U.S.: 1978
f) How many years in U.S.: 32
g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 3
h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 9

5) H
   a) Gender: M
   b) Age: 64
   c) Occupation: Retired; owned furniture store
   d) Age on boat: 32
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1978
   f) How many years in U.S.: 32
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 9
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 8

6) L
   a) Gender: M
   b) Age: 41
   c) Occupation: Import industry
   d) Age on boat: 11
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1978
   f) How many years in U.S.: 32
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 6
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 8

7) H
   a) Gender: F
   b) Age: 57
   c) Occupation: Hair dresser
   d) Age on boat: 28
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1981
   f) How many years in U.S.: 29
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 10
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 7

8) D
   a) Gender: M
   b) Age: 26
   c) Occupation: Law assistant, student in accounting Masters
   d) Age on boat: 5
   e) Year came to U.S.: 2006 (refugee in Philippines for 17 years, since 1989)
   f) How many years in U.S.: 4 (came from Philippines in 2006)
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 7
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 8

9) B
   a) Gender: F
   b) Age: 45
   c) Occupation: Secretary
   d) Age on boat: 17
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1982
   f) How many years in U.S.: 28
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 10
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 4

10) D
   a) Gender: M
   b) Age: 38
   c) Occupation: Nails; student studying to be a nurse
   d) Age on boat: 17
   e) Year came to U.S.: 2006 (from Philippine refugee camp, was there for 17 years)
   f) How many years in U.S.: 4 years
   g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 6
   h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 7

11) D
   a) Gender: F
   b) Age: 45
   c) Occupation: Hairdresser
   d) Age on boat: 15
   e) Year came to U.S.: 1980

f) How many years in U.S.: 30 years
g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 7
h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 7

12) K
a) Gender: F
b) Age: 46
c) Occupation: Nail Tech
d) Age on boat: 20
e) Year came to U.S.: 1984
f) How many years in U.S.: 26 years
g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 8
h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 6

13) N
a) Gender: M
b) Age: 41
c) Occupation: Sheet metal factory worker
d) Age on boat: 21
e) Year came to U.S.: 1990
f) How many years in U.S.: 20 years
g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 6
h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 9

14) N
a) Gender: M
b) Age: 42
c) Occupation: Factory worker
d) Age on boat: 21
e) Year came to U.S.: 1990
f) How many years in U.S.: 20 years
g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 8
h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 8

15) S
    a) Gender: M
    b) Age: 64
    c) Occupation: Retired
    d) Age on boat: 45
    e) Year came to U.S.: 1981
    f) How many years in U.S.: 29 years
    g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 9
    h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 7

16) B
    a) Gender: M
    b) Age: 55
    c) Occupation: Investor
    d) Age on boat: 27
    e) Year came to U.S.: 1982
    f) How many years in U.S.: 28 years
    g) Level of trauma (1—very little trauma……..10—extreme trauma): 9
    h) Level of psychological adjustment (1—poorly adjusted…..10—very well adjusted): 6

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Letter

Hello Name,

My name is Brian Licuanan, and I am a Ph.D. student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Oklahoma. I am contacting you in hopes that you may assist me in recruiting participants for my dissertation project.

I am looking for **Vietnamese Boat People** to conduct an **interview** with. The interview will last anywhere between **30 minutes to 1 hour**. All of the information is **confidential**. The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes, but the tapes will be destroyed immediately after the responses are typed. No one's names or other identifying information will be linked to the information, whatsoever. The only person that will have access to the information will be myself, my dissertation advisor, and a person helping out with the typing of the responses. Since I do not speak the Vietnamese language, I prefer people that can readily speak and understand English.

The main topic of questions that I will be asking involves the impact of the Vietnam Boat experience on their lives. I am hoping to complete the interview process by **May 1, 2010**. If you could kindly contact me once you have potential participants, I would appreciate it.

Thank you again. I am fascinated by this topic and feel that this information is invaluable in understanding this experience and the strength of the Vietnamese people.

Feel free to contact me at 714-469-1418 or email me at blicuanan@ou.edu if you have any questions.

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions (General and Sub- Questions)

1. What was your experience on the boat (i.e., physical conditions, emotional experiences, mental experiences, etc.)?
2. How has the Boat Experience affected your life?
    a) What has the experience been like for you emotionally and mentally?
3. What has been your acculturation experience since coming to America after the boat?
    a) How you have adapted to the American culture?
    b) What it was like for you integrating the Vietnamese culture with the American culture?
4. How has the boat experience strengthened your life?
    a) What are the positive qualities about yourself or that you developed through the boat experience that helped you get through the experience?
    b) What was the negative impact that the boat experience may have had on your life?

APPENDIX E

Member Check Letter

Hello, I wanted to thank you again for your help with my dissertation. I have completed my preliminary analysis of the data and am now engaged in the validation/reliability process, also known as, "member checking" in qualitative analysis. What this entails is for participants to voluntarily read over the study results and then to give any feedback or comments as they see fit. Since this research study represents you and the field of clinical/Counseling psychology, it is important that the study's results represent you and are both valid and reliable. This is purely voluntary so please do not feel any pressure to engage in this process.

I am enclosing the results along with this letter so that you may participate in the member check process if you wish and then provide any feedback or comments. Your original transcribed interviews (*with my own chosen pseudonym for you*) are also included. If possible, you might skim over your transcribed interview first, followed by the study results. This will help you recall how the interview went, what you discussed, and if you think your responses are represented within the final study results. Please let me know if you feel I misquoted you or did not get the gist of what you were saying during the original interview. Also, if I did not use a quote from you that you feel is important, let me know about that as well and I will do my best to include it in the final dissertation results.

Also included is a self-addressed return envelope in which you can mail back the detachable slip below and written comments or notes you have made. Otherwise, I do not need the results/interviews back. To ensure confidentiality, you may wish to remove your address label from the return envelop, or even email me instead of sending anything back via snail mail. Again, I really appreciate your patience and involvement in this research project and hope it will benefit the field of clinical/Counseling psychology.

Brian Licuanan

Please detach and mail this slip back to me, as well as any pages from the interview/study results if you made any written notes or comments, which could be helpful to the study or me. You can also email me (blicuanan@ou.edu) with any comments or notes you may have made. Feel free to contact me for any reason!

____ As a participant in this study, I have read over my original transcribed interview and the preliminary results and *did not* make any suggestions or comments.

____ As a participant in this study, I have read over my original transcribed interview and the preliminary results and *did* make suggestions or comments.

Brian Licuanan, M.S., Principal Investigator

APPENDIX F

List of Emergent Themes

Theme 1: Experiences on the Boat

- Subtheme 1: Witnessing an Event That Involved Death or Learning about Unexpected Violent Death
- Subtheme 2: Threat to Physical Integrity
- Subtheme 3: Deprivation of Basic Needs

Theme 2: Long-term Psychological and Emotional Effects

- Subtheme 1: Symptoms Consistent with Posttraumatic Stress
- Subtheme 2: Symptoms Consistent with Avoidance, Denial, and Depression
- Subtheme 3: Symptoms Consistent with Specific Phobia

Theme 3: Integration of Vietnamese and American Cultures—An Acculturation Experience

- Subtheme 1: Importance in Maintaining Vietnamese Heritage
- Subtheme 2: Struggle for Acceptance in America
- Subtheme 3: Strong Family Bond that Eased the Assimilation Process

Theme 4: Boat Experiences Transmuted

- Subtheme 1: Reframing of Belief Systems
- Subtheme 2: Transmutation of Behavior
- Subtheme 3: Letting Go of the Past