

Who were the people who completed a survey?

For the 88 of you who filled out a survey, you were predominately female (60%) and currently residing in the United States (97%). You ranged in age from 25 to 33 years. The mean age was 27. Sixty-six percent of you had never been married, 28% were married, and 6% were divorced. More than half (55%) indicated that you had a spouse or significant other. Of this group, 75% of the respondents had a spouse or significant other who was Caucasian. Smaller percentages of you who had a spouse or significant other who was Asian, African-American or Latino. Only one spouse or significant other was adopted. Twenty-four percent of you have children.

<b>Demographic Profile</b>	
60%	Female
40%	Male
97%	Residing in U.S.A.
3%	Residing in Canada
27 Years Mean Age	
66%	Never Married
28%	Married
6%	Divorced
24%	Had Children
76%	Had No Children
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	
10%	High School Diploma
31%	Some College
45%	College Degree
6%	Some Graduate Work
8%	Graduate Degree

What was your educational background?

You are a highly educated group: at the time of the survey, 30% of you had some college education; 45% were college graduates; and 8% held graduate degrees. Occupationally, you reflected a range of work interests, including human services and technology/science.

<b>Age at Time of Adoption</b>			
Age	# of Respondents	Age	# of Respondents
0	25	5	2
1	30	6	2
2	16	7	1
3	4	8	2
4	4	8	2

Before you left Vietnam

Those of you who completed the survey were adopted during the time period 1969-1985. Your ages at time of adoption ranged from less than a year to 15 years of age. 81% of you were 2 years of age or younger at the time of your adoption. As a group, 65% of you lived in an orphanage at the time of adoption; almost a quarter of you lived with foster families; and a small percentage (2%) of you lived with your birth families.

Adoptive Families' Profile

Consistent with your current residences, most of you were adopted by American families. The majority of you were raised by Caucasian mothers and fathers. Most participants (66%) grew up in Caucasian neighborhoods, although some lived in neighborhoods that included Vietnamese and/or other Asians (16%) or individuals of other (non-Asian) ethnic backgrounds (13%). The majority of you had at least one sibling who was also adopted (63%). A little over one third of you had only siblings who were biological to your adoptive parents. While growing up, the majority of you had only Caucasian friends, but a number of you reported having friends who were Vietnamese or Asian (35%) or of other (non-Asian) ethnic backgrounds (15%).

<b>Siblings</b>	
6%	Respondent Was the Only Child
31%	Biological Children of Adoptive Parents
16%	Other Adopted Korean Sibling(s)
26%	Domestically Adopted Sibling(s)
21%	Internationally Adopted Sibling(s) (Not Korean)
6%	Respondent Was the Only Child

Ethnic Identity

One area of the survey explored how Vietnamese adoptees viewed themselves ethnically when they were growing up. Just over a quarter of you viewed yourselves as Asian or Vietnamese, 31% of you considered yourself American; 21% of you considered yourselves Vietnamese-American; and 23% of you considered yourself Caucasian. As adults, you were far more likely to consider yourselves Vietnamese-American (51%) and less likely to describe yourselves as Caucasian (2%) than when growing up.

<b>VIEWS OF OWN ETHNICITY</b>		
Ethnic View of Self	While growing up	As Adults
Asian/Vietnamese	26%	26%
American/ Canadian	31%	21%
Vietnamese-American/ Canadian	21%	51%
Caucasian	23%	2%

Quotations

Often times, many of you took the time to respond in words that captured succinctly how you thought of yourself ethnically as you were growing up. Some of you expressed difficulty in having a clear sense of ethnicity, for example: "I suppose I never thought of myself ethnically at all. That is, my race was virtually a non-issue for me unless it was brought to my attention by someone else;" "I wasn't really sure of myself." Other adoptees struggled with being Vietnamese or Asian versus being "white," by stating that you were a "white person in a Vietnamese body;" or "I felt Caucasian, yet I was always surprised to see an Asian person looking back at me in the mirror." Others of you identified yourselves as "African-American;" or "wanting blonde hair and blue eyes." Some of you identified with your adoptive family's heritage or culture, "Vietnamese French Black;" or "Norwegian Vietnamese American."

Some adoptees discussed identity in terms of feeling different: "Among society, I felt lost and out of place;" "I did not feel like I belonged to the Vietnamese culture nor completely in the Caucasian culture;" "I thought of myself as different than the rest of my peers." In marked

contrast, other adoptees responded with comments that indicated no sense of being different or having no real focus on the issue of ethnicity: "I was brought up in an environment where regardless of your ethnic background, you were considered equal so I never dwelled on my ethnicity;" "I never gave much thought much (to my ethnicity);" "I was simply me."

How did you explore your Vietnamese Heritage?

Over half of you indicated that you had opportunities to explore your Vietnamese heritage while growing up. A larger number of you reported exploring your Vietnamese heritage as adults. The opportunities used to explore Vietnamese culture were: involvement with Vietnamese organizations (57%); studying or reading about Vietnamese history and culture (52%); active involvement with Vietnamese friends or the Vietnamese community (59%); eating Vietnamese food (89%); traveling to Vietnam (28%); and studying the Vietnamese language (28%).

What were your thoughts of Vietnam?

Fifteen percent of you have visited Vietnam and an additional 75% expressed an interest in doing so at some point in the future. For those respondents who provided descriptions of their experiences when they visited Vietnam, the responses were varied: "I have realized how different I am from Vietnamese people;" "It was like riding a roller coaster at times...;" "It opened the door to my understanding of my heritage and helped me discover a part of myself I didn't know existed;" "it really put things in perspective and makes me appreciate everything I have."

What experiences, if any, did you have relating to discrimination?

The majority of you who completed the survey reported that you had experienced some form of discrimination while you were growing up. Race (57%) was cited more often as the basis for discrimination than was adoption (20%). A number of you provided comments in response to the question about facing discrimination as you were growing up. The comments reflected a range of experiences and highlighted certain factors as most central to the discrimination you felt ...with regard to....

**Adoption:** "Strangers were always surprised when my adoptive mother would introduce me as her daughter."

**Race:** "I was called 'chink,' 'gook,' 'slant eye,' and 'chopney'...I was even told to go back to my country;" "I am half African American and half Vietnamese, but to almost anyone that sees me, they would think I am just African American...in school, I was discouraged from taking certain classes because of my race."

**Stereotyping:** "In college, a young man next to me celebrated after...realizing he had scored a few points higher than me on our chemistry exam...he thought ALL Asians did well academically."

**Physical appearance:** "I was teased...(because) of my skin color and children would make slanted eyes at me and laugh...I think it hurt me more than it should have because I was already struggling...growing up in a 99% white society."

### Views of Discrimination

Though so many of us experienced discrimination, the impact was varied - I think comments that many of you wrote best describes the essence of this subject matter.

"Throughout my school years, there were various times peers were mean to me because I was different. I learned to deal with it after realizing that I was special and not different in a bad way." "I was in a hospital helping a veteran, and he wouldn't stop raving about my wonderful English skills. I thanked him even though the smile across my face was actually for the self-knowledge that I'd never spoken any other language."

"Our family learned early about the KKK, derogatory terms and how to handle these situations as best we could. It was hard though -- not all the time, but a lot of the time."

"...Some of the most blatant and insensitive biases were directed (at me) by Vietnamese living in America. I have been called a 'twinkie' and told that I 'lost my roots.'"

Similarly, with regard to dating, your comments reflected variations in your experiences with discrimination. Some adoptees felt less attractive as a result of being Vietnamese: "In high school...there wasn't much diversity and the American dream of being blonde haired and blue-eyed reigned supreme." Adoptees who were mixed-race, described greater discrimination because of the color of their skin - "it wasn't so much because I was Vietnamese...it had more to do with my African-American background." To the extent that discrimination did occur, most of you shared that the issue was not so much with the person you were dating, but with their parents or grandparents: "the father of one of my boyfriends had a difficult time in accepting me...because he had fought in the Vietnam War," "grandparents and parents of women I dated didn't approve..."

#### Search and Reunion

There were also questions about search and reunion. Your responses were somewhat divided in your experiences with and interest in searching for your birth families. Slightly less than a fifth of you had undertaken a search or were in the process of searching. More than half of you were interested in searching but had not yet taken any steps in that direction. The smallest group - 4% - were found by your birth families and a quarter of you stated that you had no interest in searching.

<u>Search for Birth Family</u>
8% Have already completed a search
11% Currently searching
52% Interested, but have not begun searching
4% Have already been found by birth families

#### Reasons for searching and not searching

The major reasons given for a desire to search were: to obtain medical histories (4%); curiosity (11%); to meet others whom we physically resemble (6%); to learn whether we have relatives, particularly siblings (6%); to fill a void or gain a sense of closure (4%); to teach your children about your history and culture (6%); and to relay a message to our birth parents (9%). In those cases in which you stated that you wished to give a message to your birth parents, the messages were that you were well and happy or grateful to your birth parents for the decision they made. One person shared, "I would like to thank my biological mother for not only giving birth to me, but also giving me life by giving me up for adoption;" another said, "thank you, I have had a great life;" and yet another said, "I am alive and okay...I admire (my birth mother) and love her for her strength and wisdom in the choices she made for me."

Nine adoptees explained why they had no interest in searching: one said, "My adoptive parents ARE my parents. The love and support they offered is immeasurable. What more would I have to search for?" a second stated, "I believe my parents in Vietnam are dead;" a third shared, "if whatever higher power out there wanted me to be with my natural mother...I never would have been given up for adoption...what's the point of searching? I have my family."

Nine respondents stated they had obtained information about their birth families and eight respondents reported that they had had contact with various members of their birth families. The outcomes of the reunions have been on the whole, positive. In some cases, contact had been through letters and phone calls. In other cases, several of the adoptees reported close relationships with their biological siblings as the language barrier was easier to overcome. Two adoptees reported that it was hard to sustain a relationship with their birth parents because of language barriers.

In closing this presentation, I would like to share some more of the thoughts shared by you. Some reveal the positive aspects of living as a Vietnamese adoptee, while others indicate the negative. All, however different, are reflective of the complex nature of the international adoption experience.

"The first four months of my life are unaccounted for. I suppose I will always wonder what it is like to look at someone genetically related to me. Though there was a lot of sadness in leaving Vietnam, the happy ending is that I got to come to the U.S. and live with such loving people."

"I think my life has been run by my adoption. I think I was doomed from the get go. I think I did not get the care I needed in the first few months of my life. I think this affected me in every way of my life....On the other hand, I have had many experiences that have stemmed from all that bad stuff...I have had an opportunity to life because I was adopted (and) I am just realizing that I don't have to be afraid of life and that life has some kind of meaning for everyone."

"[Being adopted] is a blessing and a burden."

"Difficult."

"I won the lottery."

"I feel robbed of my heritage and culture in a way - but I know [that] my parents love me and I am grateful for that fact." Finally, I would like to share one quote by an adoptee that may sum up the complexity of international adoption and the ultimate positive outcome that we hope for - for those whose lives are touched by international adoption.

"I've been very blessed, with a loving, courageous birth mother and the best adoptive family! It's hard...coping with some identity issues (because my family will never know what it's like to be Asian), but with a loving environment, the adoption experience is a wonderful one."

The survey of the First Generation of Adult Vietnamese Adoptees revealed that the experiences of Vietnamese adoptees were rich and varied. I would like to thank all of you who chose to complete a survey for being so candid and willing to share your experiences. I hope you heard your voices among these words. Thank you.