

Prep for interview

Today is May 26, 2023. This is Kevin Phung, interviewing for my ethnic studies class. Today I have Julie Phung, my cousin. This interview is going to be about culture, racism, and oppression.

First question, how do you identify ethnically?

I identify as an Asian-American, more specifically as Vietnamese. Both of my parents were born in Vietnam, then moved to the US in the 1990s. I was then born and raised in Oklahoma.

If you were born in Oklahoma, what connection do you have with Tacoma?

My dad's side of the family lives here in Tacoma, so I am always visiting Tacoma every year.

Alright, what does culture mean to you?

Culture to me includes the way I live, the values I go by, and the traditions I grew up with. My culture plays a big part in the lessons I was taught growing up and the relationship I hold with my family and with others.

So, what role does culture play in your life?

Culture plays a big part in my identity. My culture causes me to hold my family and my close friends very closely. Growing up in a more collectivist culture, I've always found it more comfortable being a part of a group. I've carried that with me into college, where I am a part of Vietnamese, the Vietnamese Student Association at Purdue. I love the Asian community at Purdue. Everyone knows one another and it feels very connected. Going to college so far from home, it's nice and comforting to have a group that I belong to and that shares a similar culture to me.

What are some historical events from your lifetime that have had a big impact on your life?

While not in my lifetime, a big historical event that has had a big impact on my life would be the Vietnam War. My parents always tell me about how they escaped the Vietnam War and traveled to the US for a better future. Without them traveling to the US, I wouldn't have the education and the opportunities that I do have now.

Which aspects of your culture, ethnicity, or heritage bring you the most pride or satisfaction?

I think that I have the most pride in the fact that we are peaceful people. Growing up with Buddhist parents, I was taught to say only what was necessary and what was kind. Buddhists like to avoid controversy and they like to keep a calm and peaceful state of mind.

Do you see or heard from students who experience racism or other forms of oppression?

Have you ever experienced discrimination or oppression in school, work, or the community?

I think that when I was younger, kids, kids would question certain things I did or place me into a stereotype. I feel that people would place me within the "model minority myth", believing that I was good at things simply because I was Asian, and that that wasn't due to any hard work or efforts. Growing up, I feel that I was lucky, as my high school was quite diverse. However, I felt that often the student director would push too hard to prove that my school, school celebrated diversity. On many occasions, she would go out of her way to invite me and my friends to events simply because we were Asian and was more inclined to give us awards to prove that our school was diverse.

Did you ever notice what the school director was trying to do at that time and if yes how did it make you feel?

Yes, I did notice what the student director was doing. It became quite obvious when looking at who she would invite to events and who she would give awards to. At the time, although I appreciated her efforts in trying to make us minorities be more recognized, I still felt that me and my friends weren't being seen as equals. It felt that we were still being singled out, whether or not it was in a positive light. I think it would've been better if she had invited students based on their merits and not on their race.

Describe a tradition or practice that you learned from your family.

One tradition I've learned, and one of the most popular holidays in Vietnam is Lunar New Year. During Lunar New Year, the entire family will gather. We will pay respects to our ancestors through offerings and leaving food at the altar. Red envelopes will be given to one another, and in receiving a red envelope we will wish something upon the person for the upcoming year. These wishes often include luck, good health, happiness, and wealth.

Has a family member or anyone from your culture or nationality ever shamed you or put you down for not being authentic or true to your roots?

Certainly. I think it makes it more difficult considering I grew up in the US when my parents and ancestors grew up in Vietnam. The US with Western culture promotes individualism while Vietnam is more of a collectivist society. Many of, many of my family members didn't understand why I would want to go to college out-of-state and far away from home as all, all they've really known and what they prioritize is being close to family.

So, what did you tell your family members to help them better understand you?

I sort of reminded them that education is also a big priority. And that, just because I was moving far away, doesn't mean that I no longer prioritize my family. Even in college, I still keep in contact with them and call them every night, just to make sure that I still hold family very close.

What has been your relationship with your ancestral language?

Vietnamese is how I communicate with my family members, especially with my older relatives that don't know English as well. Vietnamese was actually my first language, yet those skills have certainly declined over time. My dad actually used to teach Vietnamese classes that I, I would attend at our local temple yet those ended when I was about 10 or 12 years old. Now I only use Vietnamese at home with family, and therefore my Vietnamese has become very informal and quite conversational.

You mentioned growing up Buddhist earlier, and just mentioned that going to the temple. Do you believe that religion also played a big part in your culture?

Growing up Buddhist definitely played a big part into my life and my culture. So yes, religion did, does play a big part into my culture. Growing up, my family would go to the temple every Sunday and also

during big holidays. In times of difficulty, my parents would teach me Buddhist prayings and teachings to guide us through those hard times.

Thank for being here and answering these questions today.

You're welcome Kevin, thank you for asking these questions.