

THE MAINTENANCE OF ETHNIC CULTURE AND MANIFESTATIONS OF  
ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE LIFE STORIES OF FINNISH IMMIGRANTS

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined whether Finnish immigrants show evidence of assimilation or if they have maintained their ethnic culture in the United States. More specifically, the purpose was to examine how the ethnic culture has been maintained and the ways that ethnic identity manifests itself in their life stories. Ten qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Finnish immigrants and children of Finnish immigrants, and emerging themes were identified in the data. The results indicate a strong ethnic identity among Finnish immigrants, yet it appears to be a very much taken for granted experience for them. The immigrants' lives were influenced by their ethnicity in that they lived in predominantly Finnish areas, preferred Finnish as their daily language, participated in Finnish activities, especially the Lutheran church, followed customs, and kept regular contact with friends and family in Finland. One of the major differences between the immigrants and children of immigrants was their language use. The norms and policies have been that ethnic groups will assimilate; yet this cohort of Finnish immigrants demonstrates a high level of maintenance of their ancestral culture, thus providing support for Cultural Pluralism. Future studies should address the specific organizations, mainly the Lutheran church, and its influence on the maintenance of Finnish culture, and future studies should address the meaning of language in more detail.

This paper is dedicated to those who have experienced or examined immigration.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history.

Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (1973:3)

Immigration is an enormous social and political issue in the United States. American society is undoubtedly one of the most diverse countries in the world. It has been estimated that during recent years, and currently, immigrants are contributing approximately forty percent of the population growth in the United States (Glazer, 1995). Today's immigrants are largely from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, while historically principal immigrant groups-those of European origin-are declining (Glazer, 1995). Currently, the five states that take in the preponderance of immigrants are California, New York, Texas, Florida, and New Jersey (Glazer, 1995; Massey, 1995).

Due to the massive immigration to the country, researchers began examining the phenomenon and its effects on American society. Today, there is an abundance of literature available on topics related to immigrants, acculturation, ethnicity, and so forth. The following literature review will reveal that while much has been accomplished by various researchers, many topics related to ethnicity remain unclear, and future research on immigration and ethnicity is warranted.

There is a body of literature available regarding the broad topics of immigration and ethnicity. This literature review focuses on the history of Finnish immigration to the United States, the well-known theories of assimilation, and the most influential theoretical frameworks of ethnicity and ethnic identity. The first goal of this study is to examine how Finnish immigrants

fit into this debate of assimilation; whether they show evidence of assimilation, or if they have maintained their ancestral culture in the United States. Furthermore, the second goal is to gain more understanding about how Finnish immigrants attempt to maintain their ethnic culture in the United States. More specially, the purpose is to examine the effect of language, participation in Finnish activities, and how visits to Finland and contacts affect their maintenance of ethnicity and ethnic identity. The third major goal of this study is to study the manifestations of ethnic identity in the life stories of Finnish immigrants. How do the respondents orientate themselves toward their ancestral homeland? The following factors are included; how Finland and Finns are being described, what feelings are associated with being Finnish and Finnishness<sup>1</sup>, and would the immigrants ever consider moving back to Finland. The final result of this project leads to an understanding of how immigrants have maintained their ethnicity, or whether they demonstrate evidence of assimilation, and how they subjectively orientate themselves toward their ancestral homeland.

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<sup>1</sup> Suomalaisuus. Refers to Finnish culture or spirit.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The History of Finnish Immigration to the United States**

The first Finns to arrive to the United States took part in the Swedish expeditions in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1638 the colony of New Sweden was established along the Delaware River, which is currently the state of Delaware, and this became the home of the first 500-600 Finns that arrived to the United States (The Genealogical Society of Finland, 2005a). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Finns began emigrating in large numbers to North America, and during the so-called “American Fever”, a total of about 360,000 Finns settled in the United States (Nickels et al., 1973). The greatest period of immigration to the United States was during 1899-1913. However, when authorities began regulating immigration in 1923, the immigration rates began decreasing. Nevertheless, an astounding number of immigrants came to America, and it has been stated that approximately 40 million people immigrated from Europe to North America. On the one hand, compared to millions immigrants from countries such as Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Austria-Hungary, the impact of about 350,000 Finns immigrating to the United States may appear rather insignificant (The Genealogical Society of Finland, 2005a). On the other hand, the Finnish emigration has taken its toll on Finland’s population. It has been estimated that without any emigration, Finland’s population would be approximately 6-7 million compared to about five million inhabitants today (The Genealogical Society of Finland, 2005b). Thus, the overall immigration has had a significant impact, at least on the Finnish population.

During the first part of the twentieth century, the majority of the Finnish immigrants settled in a narrow area south of the Canadian border. The four states that most Finns settled in were the northeastern states of New York and Massachusetts, and the Midwestern states of

Michigan and Minnesota. The U.S. Census records from 1930 show that there were 17,444 first generation Finns in the state of New York, 13,077 in Massachusetts, 27,022 in Michigan and 24,360 in Minnesota (The Genealogical Society of Finland, 2005). Very few of the Finnish immigrants settled in the south. In fact, in 1930 there were only 333 Finns in Florida (The Genealogical Society of Finland, 2005a).

The immigrants frequently settled in areas according to the occupation they had in Finland. There was a great demand of labor in many occupations in the United States and that gave immigrants opportunities to choose from a variety of occupations in the new country. For example, tailors and craftsmen often settled in New York and Boston (Massachusetts), Cleveland (Ohio), and Chicago (Illinois), while seamen frequently became construction workers in harbor towns, lumberjacks settled in the northern states, and industrial workers found work commonly in Fitchburg (Massachusetts), Detroit (Michigan), and Chicago (Illinois). One of the largest employers was the mining industry and since many cities in Michigan, including Calumet, Hancock, Marquette, Ishpeming, Negaunee, and Ironwood, had copper mines, many Finns settled there. Women, on the other hand, were popular as maids in affluent families on the east coast, and additionally many of the immigrant women were employed by the textile industry. During the immigration years a consistent pattern emerged: people from the large immigration areas in Finland frequently attempted to settle together in the same areas in the United States (Heikkilä & Uschanov, 2004; The Genealogical Society of Finland, 2005a). Thus, the first immigrants began establishing immigrant enclaves.

## Reasons for Immigration

Historically, the primary reasons for immigration were purely economic (Heikkilä & Uschanov, 2004; Korkiasaari, 1989). It has been suggested that at times men immigrated when their marriage fell apart rather than get a divorce. Subsequently, children began immigrating when new stepmothers or stepfathers joined the families. Some young men immigrated in order to avoid parental responsibilities, while others simply had a powerful desire for adventure (Niemi, 2003). According to Leinonen (2003) the reasons why people immigrate to North America today are personal in nature, for example falling in love, getting married, or self-development. Thus, the economic reasons that were typical for the earlier immigrants have vanished because there are no longer substantial differences in the living conditions between Finland and North America. One of the research questions that remain unexplored today is whether or not it is possible that immigrant's feelings toward their ancestral homeland and culture have undergone a shift along with the change in their reasons for immigration.

## The Number of Finns in North America Today

In the U.S. Census 2000, 624,000 people claimed Finnish ancestry. Of them 20,000 were born in Finland and about 8,000 had arrived after 1990. It has been estimated that about 80,000 are second-generation immigrants, meaning that they are first born in America. Consequently, over half a million of third, fourth, fifth, and even sixth generation Finnish-Americans claim their Finnish roots as either their first or second ethnicity at the census polls (Westenberg, 2004). Additionally, the Census asks: "What language other than English is spoken at home?" In the 2000 Census, 40,000 people stated "Finnish." This constitutes more than six percent of those claiming Finnish ancestry (Westenberg, 2004). The U.S. states with the most Finns in 2000 were:

Michigan (101,351), Minnesota (99,388), California (56,528), Washington (40,290), Wisconsin (36,047), Massachusetts (27,703), Florida (25,723), Oregon (21,359), Illinois (19,108), Ohio (18,817), and New York (16,833) (Korkiasaari, 2003).

Today approximately 500 people a year from Finland are given permanent residence status in the United States, primarily due to being married to a U.S. citizen (Westenberg, 2004). In addition, 10,000 non-immigrant visitors are admitted each year. In 1994, for example, 3,500 were admitted on employment visas, 4,000 for education purposes, and 1,500 for government related purposes (Westenberg, 2004). According to Leinonen (2003), today the typical emigrant from Finland is often a well-educated woman between the ages of 26 and 30. While much is known about the numbers of immigrants, and their locations, less is known about the experiences of immigrants that arrived after the immigration became restricted, and more specifically, how do the immigrants themselves interpret their experiences and how they value their ties to their ancestral culture.

### The Finnish Enclave in Florida

Historically Finns settled in the Northern states, but after 1945 Florida began attracting Finnish retirees who established a thriving ethnic community in the Lake Worth-Lantana area, an area between Palm Beach and Boca Raton (Kivisto, 1989). This enclave is unique in many ways, yet very little research exists on it. According to Kivisto (1989) this migration to Florida was encouraged to some extent by the financial stability provided by Social Security and by union pension plans. Despite the fact that the number of Finnish immigrants in Florida is small, as stated previously, Kivisto (1989:81) claims that “there is a sufficient concentration of Finns in a relatively small setting to have an impact.” Kivisto discusses further how different churches,

social halls, and local businesses seek to serve this clientele in the area. Thus, there are organizations and businesses that have been established to further support this particular ethnic community. Furthermore, interviews with a small number of residents indicated that many of the residents had experienced a resurgence of interest in their ethnic heritage, and they particularly indicated an interest to rejuvenate their somewhat weak command of the Finnish language. The future of this community, as Kivisto points out, depends on whether or not retirees from subsequent generations choose to settle in such ethnic communities.

The reason why this Florida retirement enclave is important to study further is because they have gone to great extent to preserve their cultural background. For example, they have built clubhouses and church services are given in Finnish in the area, and so forth. Therefore, it appears that their ethnicity is more concrete than symbolic. However, it is less clear whether or not the immigrants have experienced a resurgence of interest in their ethnic background overall, as indicated by some of the respondents interviewed by Kivisto, or whether they have always wanted primarily to maintain their ancestral culture and have expressed modest interest in assimilating into the main American culture.

### Theories of Assimilation

One of the big questions regarding immigrants is whether they are assimilated into the dominant culture, and more specifically, how fast they will adopt the new culture. This question has generated many debates among ethnicity researchers over the years. Over the past century, a number of different philosophies of assimilation have been generated. Park and Burgess (1921:735) offered an influential definition of “assimilation” nearly a century ago. According to them “Assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups



acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” This theory suggests that minority groups will adopt the main culture. In subsequent definitions, Park (1930:281) argued that an immigrant could be considered assimilated in the United States “as soon as he has acquired the language and the social ritual of the native community and can participate, without encountering prejudice, in the common life, economic and political.” In other words, as soon as the immigrants learn the language so that they can manage in everyday situations without others thinking that he or she is different.

Archdeacon (1985) points out in his review of problems and possibilities in the study of American immigration and ethnic history that the modern study of immigration and history began after the 1920’s when immigration became restricted, and that during that period the occurrence of immigration was considered finished and ethnicity was expected to be transient. The major concern thus developed into how fast the foreign minorities could be absorbed into the population, and the suggested span became two generations. However, there were critics of this assimilation perspective, and during the 1960’s many scholars continued to criticize the assimilationist perspective, and emphasis was placed on the cultural pluralism, which might be more representative of American values (Archdeacon, 1985). According to Alba and Chamlin (1983), the debate over ethnicity has been dominated by two antithetical positions: by the theory of the melting pot that predicts that over time assimilation is inevitable, and by the cultural pluralist position that envisage ethnic differentiation as a fundamental feature of American life. In his classic work on assimilation, Gordon (1964) reviews the three essential assimilation theories: Anglo-conformity, the Melting Pot, and Cultural Pluralism. These theories will be

discussed next to get a better understanding of the differences between them and to demonstrate how differently the concept of assimilation is thought to occur.

### *Anglo-Conformity*

At the core of the Anglo-Conformity perspective is the demand of “complete renunciation of the immigrant’s ancestral culture in favor of the behavior and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group” (Gordon, 1964:85). While Gordon (1964) points out that Anglo-conformity is not one theory, but refers to a number of perspectives on assimilation and immigration, they all share the postulation that English institutions, language, and English-oriented culture will be a dominant part of the American life. This view on assimilation was most dominant during World War I and it was being referred to as the so-called Americanization movement. The goal was “to strip the immigrant of his native culture and attachments and make him over into an American along Anglo-Saxon lines—all this to be accomplished with a great rapidity... it was an attempt at ‘pressure-cooking assimilation’” (Gordon, 1964:99). The other goal of this movement was to decrease the total number of immigrants, specifically from Southern and Eastern Europe. Immigrants from Northern and Western Europe were favored because it was assumed that they would be more easily assimilated into the American culture compared to the other unfavored groups (Gordon, 1964). Therefore, according to this view, the Anglo Saxon way is the standard in the society and there is no room for different ethnicities to exist.

### *The Melting Pot*

The Melting Pot view takes a rather different stance on assimilation compared to the Anglo-Saxon view. Rather than examining American society as a custom-made England, this perspective views the American society evolving as a uniquely new type, composed of the different ancestries of people and melted together by the American influence and interaction (Gordon, 1964). Therefore, American would be something of a new type, formed from all the races of Europe, a race that is not a representation of Anglo-Saxon traits only, but rather composed of various ethnicities.

### *Cultural Pluralism*

The third central perspective on assimilation is that of cultural pluralism, which characterizes the contemporary view on assimilation (Gordon, 1964). Both the Anglo-conformity and the melting pot theories view the absorption of the immigrant groups into the existing American social structure, and the abandonment of their ancestral heritage. However, Gordon (1964) points out that all the immigrants themselves do not unanimously share this view. According to Gordon (1964), the classic statement of the cultural pluralist position was made by Horace Kallen in 1915 in a series of two articles published in *The Nation*. According to Kallen rejected both Anglo-conformity and the melting pot theories in his writings, and articulated how different ethnic groups tend to settle in particular areas and preserve their language, religion, communal institutions, and ancestral culture. Therefore, this view recognizes that ethnic minorities try to maintain their ethnic culture. Nagel (1994) points out that research has shown support for the cultural pluralism view since regardless of many indications of weakening ethnic boundaries among white American population, i.e. support for the assimilationist view, a number

of studies have demonstrated maintenance, or increase in ethnic identification among whites. For Nagel, this is evidence of an ethnic paradox in the United States. Unquestionably, the debate over assimilation will continue for centuries to come.

## The Concept of Ethnicity

When we are talking about assimilation of ethnic groups into the main culture, the debate is more over the role of ethnicity. There is no one definition of “ethnicity”; rather there are various definitions. For example, Giddens et al. (2005:316) state that:

ethnicity refers to cultural practices and outlooks of a given community that have emerged historically and tend to set people apart... Different characteristics may serve to distinguish ethnic groups from another; but the most common are some combination of language, history, religious faith, and ancestry-real or imagined-and styles of dress or adornment.

Similarly, Nagel (1994:152) states in her constructivist view of ethnicity that “Identity and culture are two of the basic building blocks of ethnicity. Through the construction of identity and culture, individuals and groups attempt to address the problematics of ethnic boundaries and meaning.” Moreover, ethnicity then, is neither constant nor unaffected from external factors, such as social, economic, and political processes.

Ethnicity can have important implications for an individual, as the definitions above imply. Additionally, ethnicity is an important factor in societies affecting even social organization. Alba (1990) discusses the ethnic hierarchy that formed during the mass immigration: at the top were the Protestant groups from the British Isles, groups from northern and western Europe were in the middle, and groups from eastern and southern Europe were at the bottom. However, this hierarchy is only approximate, as Alba (1990) further points out that there are some groups, such as eastern European Jews, that will not fit exactly in their designated

compartments. More importantly, it has been acknowledged that ethnicity has become progressively more voluntary for whites (Alba, 1990). Therefore, ethnicity has important implications for societies, but at times blurred group boundaries will make categorization of ethnic groups problematic, especially since it has been suggested that ethnicity can be voluntary.

## Ethnic Identity

To further study this concept of ethnicity, it is appropriate to examine a more precise concept of ethnicity, that of ethnic identity. Alba (1990:25) offers a broad definition of ethnic identity: he states that it refers to “a person’s subjective orientation toward his or her ethnic origins.” Alba’s definition implies choice. Similarly, Alba and Chamlin (1983:240) state that ethnic identification refers to ethnic labels by which individuals describe themselves to others, more specifically “the individual’s self-placement in terms of ethnic categories.” Congruent with this conception, Lyman and Douglas (1973) argue that studies that address the contemporary role of ethnicity necessitate the conception of identity that acknowledges the potential fluidity of ethnicity. In addition, they argue that identity will be chosen based on what is most advantageous for the individual. Additionally, consistent with Alba (1990), they argue that it is necessary for a conception like identity to originate from recognition that ethnic identity may be a subtle matter for many whites, and that it can be rather variable in its form. Korkiasaari (2004:4) differentiates between ethnicity and ethnic identity in the following way:

Ethnicity refers to a person’s affiliation with a particular ethnic group, or to their sharing qualities, characteristics or customs of that ethnic group. Ethnic identity is quite personal and individual, and it has many facets. It can be based on geography, nationality, ancestry, family, culture and sub-culture, religion, language, race-or any combination of these.

Thus, to generally state the difference between ethnicity and ethnic identity, it can be argued that ethnicity is where an individual comes from and ethnic identity is the degree to which an individual chooses to describe themselves in those cultural terms. As stated previously, especially European Americans enjoy many choices regarding their ethnicity. In other words, they have the choice whether or not to identify and how salient an ethnic label is, and lastly, they can choose how they express their ethnicity (Stoller, 1996). It must be noted as well that ethnicity is only one constituent of identity, and the importance is connected to the individual's situation and it is not a fixed or stagnant element (Nazroo & Karlsen, 2003). The question of how we should examine ethnicity and ethnic identity has generated many theories over the years that will be examined in the following section.

### Theories of Ethnicity/Ethnic Identity

According to Alba (1990) in order to assess the current state of ethnicity among European-Americans, examining ethnic identity is a crucial part of that assessment. In his book *Ethnic Identity*, Alba (1990) outlined four well-known theoretical frameworks of ethnicity, and specifically how they relate to ethnic identity.

#### *Ethnicity as a Working and Lower Level Style*

According to this view, ethnicity is a class-linked phenomenon and it implies that ethnic cultural markers are most prominent among members of the working and lower classes. Similarly, according to this view, ethnic identities are also more common and more salient in lower socioeconomic groups than among members of higher socioeconomic groups (Alba,

1990). Therefore, ethnic identity may be related to factors such as socioeconomic status, the lower the socioeconomic status, the more importance ethnic identity will have for that individual.

### *The Politicization of Ethnicity*

This view postulates that ethnicity will correspond to differences in American conditions, for example, residential and occupational situations. Ethnicity will be especially important in the political field, as ethnic groups become interest groups, standing for the interests of many people in similar situations. Consequently, ethnic identity will be connected to political attitudes, participation, and behavior (Alba, 1990). Those with more salient ethnic and group identities are more likely to participate in the political sphere.

### *The Revival of Ethnicity*

The third model of ethnicity is based on Marcus Hansen's well-known thesis from 1938 that focused on the role of the third generation immigrants (Alba, 1990). It should be noted that Hansen did not present his argument to scholars, but to members of Augustana Historical Society who were actually a group of Swedish-Americans concerned about maintenance of their ethnic heritage. Hansen's thesis reached larger audience when Glazer had it republished in *Commentary* in 1952 (Kivisto, 1989). The main premise of Hansen's thesis is that the second generation is frequently preoccupied with the problems encountered while trying to adapt to American society and therefore, they often reject their ethnic heritage. On the other hand, the third generation is able to retrieve their ethnic heritage due to them being more established in the new society. Hansen (1952:495) argued that "The theory is derived from almost the universal phenomenon that what the son wishes to forget the grandson wishes to remember." Therefore, according to

Hansen, ethnicity is not destined to disappear among subsequent generations; rather it will manifest itself in subsequent generations.

Opposing Hansen's views, Nahirny and Fishman (1965) suggested that generations experience their ethnicity differently. For the first generation it is a very much a lived experience, very concrete, and unreflective, while for subsequent generations it becomes more abstract and idealized, reflective, and ultimately optional. This view is further expanded on in the idea of symbolic ethnicity.

### *The Emergence of "Symbolic Ethnicity"*

The fourth model of ethnicity can be attributed to the work of Herbert Gans (1979) who first conceptualized the idea of symbolic ethnicity (Alba, 1990). According to Gans (1979:9) "Symbolic ethnicity can be expressed in a myriad of ways, but above all, I suspect, it is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior." Ethnicity thus becomes more voluntary for later generations, and it is not necessarily a part of everyday life for them. Gans did not believe in revival of ethnicity, rather he saw ethnic groups experiencing a steady process of straight-line assimilation (Kivisto, 1989). Gans additionally (1979:12) argued: "symbolic ethnicity does not need a practiced culture, even if the symbols are borrowed from it." Consequently, symbolic ethnicity is more about feeling ethnic than practicing aspects of ethnicity, such as cultural traditions. Alba (1990) further discusses this concept and notes that because of social mobility and intermarriages, ethnicity is becoming less important for many Americans of recent ethnic origins. Alba (1990) also argues that if symbolic ethnicity is the proper concept to be applied to contemporary ethnicity among



whites, we can expect to find that ethnic identity does not correspond to commitment to many cultural activities. Rather, expressing ethnicity becomes occasional, for example, serving of ethnic foods at holiday gatherings.

### *Why Study Ethnic Identity?*

There are numerous reasons as to why it is important to study ethnic identity. First, ethnicity as identity is an important aspect of people's lives (Nazroo & Karlsen, 2003). More specifically, ethnic identity can have an effect on the psychological well being of members of minority ethnic groups (Phinney, 1990). Second, as Phinney (1990) points out in her review of 70 studies conducted on ethnic identity since 1972, the results of many studies are not congruent and overall, there is much perplexity about the topic. One indication of this is that there is no widely agreed upon definition of ethnic identity, consistent with the discussion presented previously in this paper. Therefore, more research is needed to solve inconsistencies. Third, ethnic identity is important for people because it enables define themselves as unique (Kellogg, 1990). It can be argued that what is unique about America is that it is the meeting place of various cultures and ethnicities. Rather than seeing it as a hindering factor, it can be viewed as a positive factor for the whole society.

### **Studies on Ethnic Identity and Identification**

There are various studies on ethnic identity among various groups. The studies range from examination of ethnic identity among Europeans (e.g. Alba, 1990), Norwegian-Americans (Thaler, 1997), Swedish-Americans (Blanck, 1989), Finns (Kelly and Karner, 1994), and

Finnish-Americans (Kivisto, 1989; Korkiasaari 2004; Stoller, 1996) to Zulu-speaking workers in Natal (Campbell & Mare, 1995) and Jews (Buckser, 1999) just to name a few of the endeavors.

### *Finnish Ethnic Identity*

To understand Finnish ethnic identity better, it must be reviewed in historical context. Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden for more than 600 years and during this time Finns had the same rights and obligations as Swedes. In 1809 Finland was annexed to Russia, but many aspects of the Swedish culture remained dominant in Finland. Nevertheless, the annexation to Russia marked the emergence of the Finnish ethnic movement (Kelly and Karner, 1994). Kelly and Karner (1994) note that the symbolic identity formation of Finland came most strongly from language reclamation, folklore, and mythology. More specifically, the Finns focused their efforts on the book of folk poems, the *Kalevala*, Finland's national epic. Therefore, Finns have a very distinct ethnic identity that has been shaped by factors such as historical events, language, and mythology.

### *Ethnic Identity Among Finnish Americans*

There are few studies that have examined ethnic identity among Finnish Americans. Kivisto argues that as Finnish-Americans become more distant from the political and cultural life of Finland, they maintain the attachment to the homeland by familiarizing themselves with the *Kalevala*, Sibelius's music, Saarinen's architecture, handicrafts and folklore. "In short, the display of ethnicity increasingly occurs not in lived experience but in museum-like compartments" (1989:86). Therefore, ethnicity becomes less and less concrete for subsequent generations.

Similarly, Stoller (1996) researched ethnic identity among second- and third-generation Finnish Americans. Interviews among a sample of thirty-four respondents revealed that ethnicity was an important component in constructions of self to them. Stoller (1996:168) argues that the “Orientation to Finland incorporated both nostalgia toward the immigrant experience and attachment to the homeland... They [the respondents] expressed pride in Finnish history and Finnish culture.” The majority of the respondents also indicated that they have strong sentiments toward their Finnish heritage, but these feelings infrequently translate to actual actions. In conclusion, Stoller notes that the results of her study are congruent with Gans’ (1979) notion of symbolic ethnicity, and Nagel’s (1994) emphasis on ethnicity as a social construction. The results did not provide, according to her, evidence of either of a rediscovery of ethnicity nor the disappearance of ethnic identity.

Korkiasaari (2004) has additionally recently studied Finnish North Americans. The results indicate that, as expected, the connection to Finnishness fades generation by generation. Nevertheless, there are several factors, such as childhood experiences and living environment that can have a significant impact on learning and maintaining Finnishness. They also found that many respondents regretted that their parents and grandparents never talked about their Finnish background. This implies that the immigrants themselves were preoccupied with ensuring that their children would learn English and become Americans, and that it was seen as more important than maintaining Finnishness.

### *Language Maintenance*

Maintaining a good command of the mother tongue in the new country can become very important for immigrants. The mother tongue is an important facet of the homeland, and it can be

viewed as a positive symbol of cultural pride (Tannenbaum, 2003). In a review of 70 ethnic studies, Phinney (1990) notes that language is the most widely examined cultural practice of ethnic identity, but a majority of studies do not examine that, in fact, fewer than half of the studies reviewed by Phinney had included measures of language. According to Phinney (1990) some consider language as the single most important component of ethnic identity.

There are many studies that have demonstrated support for the important part that language has on the maintenance of ethnic identity. For example, Seymor-Jorn's (2004) study of Arab-American students in Wisconsin. The results indicate that the students used Arabic language as a way to maintain cultural identity, and the respondents often indicated studying Arabic as a method of exploring their cultural identity. Therefore, mother tongue and ethnic identity are connected entities.

It is plausible that Finnish language declines slower in the American society than the languages of many other groups as Kivisto (1989) points out. This might be due to the fact that many Finnish emigrants had difficulties in learning English because Finnish is not an Indo-European language. Kivisto (1989) also notes that many first generation immigrants maintained a good command of Finnish and often were unable to acquire enough English to feel comfortable with it as a second tongue. The subsequent generations, however, became proficient in English, mainly due to their public school experiences. Therefore, it is plausible that Finnish emigrants prefer Finnish due to the difficulties they may encounter in learning English.

Kolehmainen (1937) examined the fate of Finnish in America and concluded that Finnish immigrants prefer communicating in their native tongue, Finnish, and only speak in English when necessary. Kolehmainen concluded that even among the second-generation immigrants, English takes prominence over Finnish. According to Kolehmainen it is inevitable that English

will replace Finnish, and there will be “the slow and orderly retreat of Finnish before the dominant language” (Kolehmainen, 1937: 889). Stoller’s (1996) examination of language use among second-and third generation immigrants indicated that Finnish language was not a part of everyday life for a majority of the respondents. Moreover, the majority of second-generation immigrants were not fluent in Finnish. The results are congruent with Kolehmainen’s notion of retreating Finnish.

However, the native language in the new country is important for the immigrants. In a study of Canadian Finns, Sintonen (1993) examined the development of English proficiency and the immigrant’s motivations to use it. The results indicate that in the beginning, the immigrants had little motivation to use English and that their ability to use English developed only to a moderate level. The respondents felt that writing was especially demanding, but that overall they were able to manage in everyday situations. The respondents also indicated regret for their poor proficiency in English and felt they should have learned it in the beginning when they immigrated decades earlier. However, learning the language in the new country can have important implications for the adaptations in the new country. For example, Taiwanese emigrants felt that language was an important skill for communication, social interaction, daily transactions, and learning in the United States (Tsai, 2003). Therefore, it is plausible that while the immigrants feel that it is important to learn the language of the new country, they might encounter obstacles in learning the new language. Therefore, they rely on their mother tongue heavily even in the new country, despite the fact that their language is very uncommon and they have trouble communicating with people. It can be argued that language maintenance is an important aspect of maintaining ethnic identity and ethnicity studies should address that topic as well.

## The Present Study

Questions regarding ethnicity have generated a wealth of research, including numerous theoretical frameworks. Mainly, there are various theories regarding assimilation, more specifically, theories about how long it will take for the minority group to abandon their ancestral culture in favor of the dominant culture. The three essential theories are Anglo-Conformity, the Melting Pot, and Cultural Pluralism, which can be argued to be the most dominant of the three today. Along with theories on assimilation, theoretical frameworks on ethnicity and ethnic identity have been developed. The four well-known theories are ethnicity as a working and lower level style, the politicization of ethnicity, the revival of ethnicity, and symbolic ethnicity. It appears that the notion of symbolic ethnicity is most popular among researchers. However, it remains unclear which one of the theories is most applicable to immigrants who immigrated after immigration became restricted. Research on ethnic identity among Finnish Americans has revealed that ethnicity and ancestral culture is important for them, but it is not necessarily a part of their everyday life. Additionally, the few studies that have examined Finnish-Americans, Stoller 's (1996) examination of ethnic identity among Finnish-Americans and Korkiasaari's (2004) research on Finnish North Americans, have mainly focused on second-and third generation Finns. While Korkiasaari's study, for example, is based on a sample of more than 2,600 Finnish-Americans and Finnish-Canadians and he examined many of the similar aspects that are of interest here, for example, how do Finnish Americans identity themselves and how do they perceive the future of Finnishness in North America, immigrants constitute only 9.3% of the sample. Therefore, the focus is on subsequent generations. Research has also indicated that English will replace Finnish language among subsequent generations. It is important to research these small ethnic groups to understand more about the dynamics that take place in the

maintenance of ethnic culture. On the one hand, it is plausible that small ethnic groups go to greater extent to maintain their ethnic culture simply because it is so uncommon. On the other hand, it is possible that it is the small ethnic groups that will be assimilated fastest into the dominant culture.

In conclusion, based upon the literature presented in this review, there are many unresolved issues regarding ethnicity and ethnic identity. While studies have been conducted on subsequent generations, the immigrant generation needs to be studied in more detail. If we have more understanding regarding how they identify themselves, what their life experiences have been like, and how they perceive the future of Finnish culture in the United States, proper actions can be taken to preserve the culture among subsequent generations.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on these topics by first examining which theory of assimilation: Cultural Pluralism, the Melting Pot or the Anglo- Conformity, can be best applied in explaining the life experiences of Finnish immigrants. To determine whether the immigrants have assimilated and how they have maintained their ethnic culture, the following factors will be examined: language maintenance, participation in Finnish activities, possession of Finnish items or objects, visits and contacts to Finland. Also, how immigrants perceive the future of Finnish culture in the United States will be examined. The third major goal of this study is to examine manifestations of ethnic identity in immigrants' life stories. Since ethnic identity refers to the subjective orientations toward ancestral homeland, the following facets will be examined: how would the respondents describe Finland and Finns, what feelings they associate with being Finnish and Finnishness, and whether they ever seriously thought about moving back to Finland.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

The first goal of this study was to gain more understanding whether assimilation or Cultural Pluralism can best explain Finnish immigrants' life experiences. Furthermore, the second goal was to evaluate how they have maintained their ethnic culture in the United States, or whether they show evidence of assimilation and consequently demonstrate that they have not maintained their culture. More specifically, the purpose is to examine whether language has an effect on ethnicity maintenance when it comes to this cohort of immigrants. Does this cohort know English and what kind of impact did language have on their everyday life experiences? Second, how actively did this group participate in Finnish activities and did they follow Finnish traditions? It can be argued that a more active participation is a way to preserve one's ancestral culture. Third, was the connection to ethnic origins maintained by visits to Finland and keeping contacts? The second major goal of this study is to study the manifestations of ethnic identity in the stories of Finnish immigrants. In other words, how do the respondents orientate themselves toward their ancestral homeland? The following factors are included; how Finland and Finns are being described by the respondents, what feelings are associated with being Finnish and Finnishness, and would the respondents ever consider moving back to Finland. Finally, which theory of assimilation: Anglo-Conformity, the Melting Pot, or Cultural Pluralism, do the results provide support for? To gain more knowledge about these topics, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Finnish immigrants, or children of immigrants. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed for respondents to give meaning to their own experiences.



## A Look at the Qualitative Methods

The strength of qualitative methods lies in its goals. The aim of qualitative methods is to seek “depth rather than breadth” (Amber et al., 1995:880). The purpose of qualitative methods is not to generalize from a large, representative sample, to the population, but to obtain in-depth knowledge from a smaller group of people. More specifically, “to learn about how and why people behave, think, and make meaning as they do, rather than focusing on what people do or believe on a larger scale” (Amber et al., 1995:880). It has also been noted that qualitative methods often are more focused on discovery rather than verification, but that is not to mean that qualitative research would not be concerned with contributions of previous research (Amber et al., 1995). It can be argued that the goal of quantitative methods is to understand meaning compared to quantitative methods that are geared toward obtaining data that is generalizable. It can also be argued that qualitative studies could add on to the ethnicity research because the data derived is more in-depth.

Qualitative methods can be beneficial in aiding our understanding about the subjective meanings that immigrants associate with their life experiences and about the role that ethnic culture and ethnic identity plays in their lives. Additionally, qualitative methods allow probing, which would not be possible if quantitative methods, such as questionnaires are utilized. Consequently, data derived using qualitative methods is much more in-depth versus data derived using quantitative methods. Additionally, because the sample in this study will be derived from an older cohort, it is reasonable to believe that they would be reluctant to fill out questionnaires. For these reasons qualitative approach will be employed in this study.

## Procedure

The study took place at an assisted living facility located in south Florida that was established due to the demand for a facility where Finns could receive quality care and at the same time maintain their cultural values and heritage (Finnish-American Resthome, 2005). The facility is not an Alzheimer's facility, rather it is a retirement community and none of the participants was cognitively impaired. At the time of the study, there were 82 residents in the facility. Ten people (eight women and two men) volunteered to participate in the study. Seven of the interviewees were Finns and had immigrated to the United States themselves, and three of the interviewees were children of Finnish immigrants. The data collection was completed during September 2005. All interviews were conducted at the facility, on weekdays between 9am and 5pm. Each interviewee was asked to choose the location for the interview. Nine of the interviews were completed in the participant's apartment and one at the facility's library. The men and women's privacy during the interviews was protected in that all interviews were conducted in settings where there were no other people around. Additionally, the respondents' apartments were visually documented to examine what Finnish items or objects they had.

The participants were recruited with the help of the facility manager. The manager informed residents about the study, and introduced me, the interviewer, at a residents' morning meeting. All interested residents were asked to give their names to the facility manager, or talk to me. Frequently, many of the residents spent time in the commons areas; they sat on the couches and rocking chairs and talked with each other. I became more familiar with some of the residents in this setting and approached some of them directly and asked if they were interested in volunteering for an interview. While many were hesitant to participate in the beginning, often saying things such as "you would not be interested in my story", I could sense that many were

curious to know more because they would sit and talk with me and occasionally ask me to tell more about my study. At times after getting to know the person a little better, they enthusiastically agreed to participate.

Entering the setting was unproblematic in the sense that I had the facility manager's endorsement toward the project and that the residents and I, we shared "sameness" in the sense that we were all Finns or of Finnish heritage. Despite the fact that I was considerably younger than the residents, I was 26 years old at the time of the interviews; I was accepted into the setting, perhaps because I am also a Finn. There were no language barriers or cultural differences that could have hindered the residents' willingness to participate in the study. Even though we all shared a degree of "sameness", the two differences between the interviewees and me was that I have never lived in ethnic enclaves and that I am a more recent immigrant. While I was able to understand the interviewees' culture and communicate with them effectively in Finnish, it was apparent that our immigrant experiences were different. In that respect I was an outsider looking in.

At the time of the interview, the procedure was explained for the interviewees, including that their participation in this study is completely voluntary, and that all their responses would be confidential. They were asked for their permission to be audiotaped and the procedure of keeping the tapes in a locked filing cabinet for three years was explained to them, as well as that the tapes will be reviewed only if necessary during write-ups and that besides me, only my supervisors will have access to the tapes, all of whom are bound not to disclose the respondents identity. Prior to beginning an interview, the participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent form acknowledging that their participation is voluntary. These procedures were approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at the University of Central Florida (Appendix B). All the

interviews were conducted face-to-face in either English or Finnish, depending on the respondent's language preference by the author who is fluent in Finnish and familiar with Finnish culture. Eight of the respondents chose to do the interview in Finnish, and two first generation Finns in English. The times for the interviews ranged from about 45 minutes to three hours, with an average time of about an hour. Before the interviews, I always talked with the interviewees. Often times they would talk about their families and some were curious to know where I came from and more about me. We established rapport in which both of us felt comfortable in completing the interview. In some cases, after the interviews, the interviewee would show me more pictures of their families, or talk about their grandchildren, for example. Time flew by while completing the interviews and because the interviewees shared so much of their lives, I felt that it was advantageous not to complete more than two interviews a day. By completing one or two interviews a day, I was not rushed to go and do another interview, rather I was able to focus on the interviewee who had, after all, invited me into their home and shared much of their life experiences with me.

### Key Concepts

To examine if and how Finnish immigrants have maintained their ethnicity and the ways in which ethnic identity manifests itself in their lives, qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted. This methodology allows for personally relevant immigrant experiences to be explored that structured, quantitative questionnaires would not capture. The interviews were semi-structured. The design of this interview was semi-structured so that the respondents could address the issues they felt were most important to them personally, but guiding questions were asked if needed to gain information regarding the themes that will be discussed next.

While it is invaluable to be able to let the respondent's freely talk about their life as they have experienced it as an immigrant, there were themes that were used as a guide during the interviews (Appendix A). Besides demographic questions: the place and year of birth, the year of immigration and the initial state of residence, relocations in the United States, educational and occupational background, the following themes were addressed in order to examine how ethnicity has been maintained: language use, participation in Finnish activities, ethnicity as a part of everyday life, possession of Finnish items and objects, and feelings about how future generations could maintain Finnishness in the United States. To study the respondents' ethnic identity, the respondents' feelings towards Finland and Finns were addressed.

Language maintenance is especially important to examine for several reasons. As discussed previously, Tannenbaum (2003) has suggested that mother tongue can be viewed as a positive symbol of cultural pride, and Phinney (1990) has argued that some researchers consider language as the main component of ethnic identity. Additionally, language maintenance provides clues as to whether a specific ethnic group is assimilating into the dominant culture because as recognized in the literature review, Park (1930:281) argued that an immigrant could be considered assimilated in the United States "as soon as he has acquired the language and the social ritual of the native community and can participate, without encountering prejudice, in the common life, economic and political." Therefore, if language acquisition is an indicator of assimilation, it is imperative to include measures of language in this study. Therefore, the following questions regarding language use were included: "Were you able to speak English when you first arrived in the United States?" "How did you learn English?" "How well would you say that you can speak English?" "How important was it for you to learn English?" and

“Today, what is your language preference in your daily life?” These specific questions were chosen as indicators of language maintenance.

To further examine if Finnish immigrants have maintained their ethnic culture and if so, questions regarding participation in Finnish activities after immigration were included. The following questions were chosen because the goal is to find out if Finnish immigrants have maintained their ethnic culture and if so, how. Also, answers to these questions can be used to evidence assimilation. The following questions provide information about participation in activities, which in turn could indicate a high level of ethnic culture maintenance, and the following questions were chosen as indicators of various facets of culture maintenance. One of the main objectives was to examine whether the respondents followed customs and traditions. Therefore, the following questions were included: “Do you observe Finnish customs? If *YES*, which ones?” “Do you subscribe/read any Finnish or Finnish-American newspapers or magazines?” “Do you or did you participate in any Finnish-American organizations and/or social events?” “Do you go to church?” “Do you follow current events in Finland?” “Do you have family and friends in Finland?” “Do they ever visit you here?” “Do you have regular contact with people in Finland?” “How often would you say you call, email or write to them and they to you?” and “When is the last time you visited Finland?” The following question: “How do you feel that future generations could maintain Finnish culture in the United States? Or is it more important that they become completely Americanized?” was included in order to examine how the respondents feel about how the Finnish culture can be maintained in the future.

In order to gain more understanding about ethnicity as a part of everyday life and how it is being maintained, the following questions were included as prompt questions. “In general, what kind of neighbors have you had in your life? In other words, have you always lived in

predominantly Finnish areas?” “Were there other Finns at your first place of employment? Any place of employment?” “If you think of your daily activities, what role do you think that being a Finn plays in your life?” “How do you feel that your ethnicity and cultural background affected your life in the United States?” “Are there specific struggles in your life that you contribute to being a Finnish immigrant?” “Did you teach your children/grandchildren Finnish/customs/history, etc?” The above mentioned questions were chosen because they will provide us with clues whether the respondents show evidence of assimilating into the dominant culture or have their everyday lives, including locations and work, been very much affected by their ancestral culture. Also, whether the respondents have taught their children and grandchildren Finnish customs is evidence of culture maintenance in that the respondents are passing it along.

It has been argued that ethnicity is more symbolic than part of everyday life. It is plausible that a person’s ethnicity manifests itself through symbols. To study the role of symbols, the following questions regarding items and objects were included: “What Finnish objects or items do you have?” “What is your most treasured object and why?” and “Are there items/objects/people that you associate with Finland?” The respondents’ apartments were also visually documented to look at what items and objects they have, and the items were written down in the field notes during the interviews. The author is familiar with Finnish culture and looked for items or objects made by Finnish companies, flags, handicrafts that are typical of Finnish culture, or any other items that could be from Finland. Many of the items are rather easy to recognize because they are very popular in Finland, for example, glassware such as candleholders made by a specific Finnish company. The visual documentation of items and objects was done for two reasons. First, visually documenting the apartments permits the overall

examination of what particular Finnish items this population of immigrants has, if any. Additionally, the respondents might not mention some items that they actually have. Second, visually documenting the apartments allows for comparison between their responses and what they actually had.

The second main objective of this study was to examine Finnish immigrants' ethnic identity; their subjective orientation toward their ethnic origins. To gain more understanding about the respondents' identity and how they perceive themselves, all interviews began with the question "Who Am I?" This question was included to gain more understanding about how the respondent views herself or himself in ethnic terms. In other words, if the respondent would state that "I am a Finn", that would be an indicator of strong ethnic identity. The respondents were asked to tell ten things about themselves, more specifically, elaborate on how they would describe themselves.

In addition, questions regarding attitudes toward ethnic origins were included as measures of subjective orientations toward Finland. Guiding questions such as "How would you describe Finland today?" "What kind of people are the Finns?" "Do you or did you in the past seriously thought about moving back to Finland?" "What feelings do you associate with being Finnish or Finnishness?" were asked in order to prompt the respondent to talk about their feelings toward their ancestral homeland and to guide our further understanding about the respondents' ethnic identities, their subjective orientations toward their ancestral homeland.



## Data Analysis

Before the write-up, all interview tapes were transcribed. When necessary, I translated interviews completed in Finnish into English, for quotes, for example. Emerging themes were identified in the data by examining all the interviewees' responses for a particular question. Identifying the themes was possible because there were specific themes used as a guide during the interviews, and therefore, all respondents addressed all the same questions during the interviews. Notes were taken during the interviews regarding the objects and items that the respondents had in their apartments to examine whether the visual documentation of the Finnish objects they had in their apartments were consistent with their responses. During the interviews, I looked for typical and well-known Finnish items. These field notes were compared to the individual's responses regarding the questions about the items and objects.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to gain more knowledge about if and how Finnish immigrants have maintained their ethnicity in the United States, and manifestations of ethnic identity in their life stories. To gain more knowledge about this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Finnish immigrants, or children of immigrants.

### Demographic Characteristics

Of the ten interviewees, seven were immigrants (six females, one male) called Emma, Ester, Hilda, Lyidia, Raakel, Viola, and Otto, and three were children of immigrants<sup>2</sup> (two females, one male) called Anna, Vilma, and Elias. All of the interviewees' names have been changed to protect their identity. While I was interested in examining immigrant experiences, I also included children of immigrants as respondents because that gave me the chance to examine assimilation and maintenance of culture in more detail. The ages ranged from 81 to 94 years. One of the immigrants had arrived in the United States in the late 1920's and the remaining respondents between 1950 and 1961. The respondents' educational attainment ranged from some high school to some college. The immigrants had attended "kansakoulu"<sup>3</sup> in Finland. Only one of the immigrants had received more education in the United States; she had attended a beauty school and became a hairdresser. All respondents had worked in the paid labor force. Three of the immigrant women had worked in professions such as housekeeping, cook, and/or maid; one had worked in factories, and one as a bookkeeper. The professions of the two women born in the United States were a nurse and an office worker. The male respondents' professions were a

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<sup>2</sup> In the following discussion, the children of immigrants will be interchangeably referred to as first generation Finns.

<sup>3</sup> The "common school" which consisted of six years of schooling.

professional musician and an entrepreneur. Six of the respondents had children. All of the respondents had been married, and nine were widows/widowers at the time of the study. All respondents were married to Finns, or to first generation Finns. Table 1 provides some information about each of the respondents.

Table 1  
Respondent Demographics

Interviewee	Year of Immigration	State of Immigration	Current Age	Education	Interview Language
Emma	1950	Massachusetts	80s*	Kansakoulu	Finnish
Ester	1959	Canada	81	Kansakoulu	Finnish
Hilda	1951	Massachusetts	80s*	Kansakoulu	Finnish
Lyydia	1961	New Jersey	87	Some college	Finnish
Otto	1961	Minnesota	83	Kansakoulu	Finnish
Anna	n/a	Ohio	80s*	High School	English
Vilma	n/a	Massachusetts	88	High School, Nurse	English
Elias	n/a	New York	90s*	High School, Conservatorium	Finnish
Raakel	1953	New Hampshire	92	n/a	Finnish
Viola	1928	Canada	94	Kansakoulu/ Jatkokoulu/ Beauty School	Finnish

Note: All of the interviewees' names have been changed to protect their identity.

Kansakoulu consisted of six years of schooling. Jatkokoulu is an extension of kansakoulu and it consists of two more years of school.

If the year of immigration n/a, it refers to children of immigrants. Accordingly, state of immigration refers to their state of birth.

\*Currentt age at the time of the interview is an approximation.

## *Reasons for Immigration*

To better understand the life experiences of the respondents, it is important to examine the historical contexts and the reasons for immigration. Overall, the decision to immigrate was influenced by desire to obtain a better life here. The results demonstrate how the majority of the respondents left Finland after World War II, in the 1950's. Times were tough in Finland, as evident from the stories of the immigrants. One immigrant was particularly concerned that Russia still presents a threat to Finland, even today. Many described how there was an immense need for housing, and the fear of future war was also in people's minds. As stated previously, this group left in hopes of a better life. The immigration was easier for many of the respondents because they already knew people who had immigrated. Many of the respondents described how they had relatives or friends of the family to visit them from America and how the visitors begin talking them into immigrating. Lyidia left initially only for a year to come to school. During her initial stay in the United States, she met her future husband and came back to stay after briefly returning to Finland. Ester immigrated, in hopes of a better job, but also for the fear of future war with Russia. She immigrated after the wartime in Finland and explained how Finns were still afraid of being attacked by Russia. Viola was reluctant to immigrate, but explains how there were eight children in her family, and how her aunt, who was already in the United States, said she would send her a ticket so there would be "one mouth less to feed." Viola was unwilling to let her aunt purchase a ticket for her, but when her grandmother volunteered to purchase the ticket, she agreed to immigrate. She was only seventeen. Similarly, the first generation Finns indicated that their parents immigrated for a better way of life and to see something better; in one case it meant getting more education here as well.

The states of immigration were as follows: Massachusetts (two of the respondents), New Jersey, New Hampshire, Minnesota, and two of the respondents first immigrated to Toronto, Canada. The birth states of the three respondents were Massachusetts, Ohio, and New York. All of the respondents immigrated to areas that had a lot of Finns already. All the respondents mentioned relocations in the United States after immigration, the respondents mentioned states such as New York, Michigan, Illinois, and eventually all respondents relocated to Florida. The majority of the respondents came to Florida in the 1960's and 1970's. As discussed in the literature review, this particular ethnic community has been established after 1945 and though it has been very thriving, very little research exists on it.

### Maintenance of Ethnicity

One of the main objectives of this study was to determine if these immigrants have maintained their ancestral culture and if so how and whether immigrants show evidence of assimilation. To achieve this, the participants were encouraged to talk about their lives in the United States, but also asked to address the following factors during the interviews: language use, participation in Finnish activities, visits and contacts to Finland, and how the respondents felt that the future generations could maintain Finnish culture in the United States.

### *Language Use*

The results show that for this cohort and group of immigrants, language barriers restricted their lives in the United States. Of the seven immigrants, only two stated that they knew a little bit of English before immigration. Two immigrants mentioned having bought dictionaries before immigrating. The remaining five did not know any English at all. When the respondents were

asked if they learned English, the majority stated that they had learned enough to get by in everyday situations. In addition, it was during the everyday situations that the respondents learned English. Some respondents said they learned English from television and newspapers. Two mentioned going to night school to learn English when it came time to apply for the citizenship papers. When asked if it was important to learn the language, Raakel felt that no, but admitted that it makes life harder at times if you do not know the language. Similarly, Otto felt that it was only important “in a way” but that you can manage without it. The remaining respondents indicated that it was important to learn English, but many admitted not knowing English very well, just enough to manage in everyday situations. Some of the immigrants admitted that not knowing English made their lives harder in some respects; as Raakel put it: “because you don’t know, don’t understand.” When the immigrants were asked whether they preferred Finnish or English in their everyday language, four of the seven stated that they prefer Finnish. Two of the immigrants admitted forgetting English altogether. Three of the interviewees stated that they could speak either one of the languages, depending on the situation. Ester explained: “Well, you can only manage with Finnish among Finns and compared to others, the groups of Finns is so small... And it is a tough thing for Finns”, thereby reflecting on how restricted the immigrants’ lives might have been to some extent due to language barriers.

There was a clear difference between the immigrants and the first generation Finns and their language usage. All three first generation Finns stated that Finnish was their home language when they were growing up. Vilma and Elias learned English when they went to first grade and Anna learned English when her older sister went to school. Today all three respondents prefer English as their daily language, even though one of them told that her language preference also depends on the people. “Some can’t speak English, so I speak Finnish with them. Most of them

can speak a little bit but they are afraid of making mistake. So I use both languages. But the language in this home is English.” It was evident from the responses that the majority of the immigrants never reached a high level of English language proficiency; they only knew enough to be able to manage in everyday situations.

While the immigrants felt that learning English was not necessarily a main concern in their lives, the first generation Finns felt that it was extremely important to learn English. When the question “How important was it for you to learn English?” was presented, Elias commented, “Very important. You can’t manage here in the America unless you learn English. No, not at all.” Elias also told how hard it was in the beginning at school because he did not know English. For example, he stated: “I had hard time asking the teacher if I could use the restroom. I did not know what to say to the teacher.” But it was the school environment where the first generation Finns learned English, which evidently took prominence over Finnish even though it had been the home language when the respondents were growing up. Anna stated that she spoke English with her husband, who was also a first generation Finn, “except when we were with our parents, then we spoke Finn[ish].” Therefore, comparable to the respondents in this study, the parents of the first generation Finns were unable to master English as well. The results suggest that even though all respondents spoke Finnish when growing up, it was the social institutions, like schools, that most likely had a major effect on language use and preference. In addition, the respondents stated that it was easier to learn the English language when they were younger.

### *Future Generations and Language*

All the immigrants in this study maintained their mother tongue throughout their lives, and they also hold, as grandparents, an important role in helping to transmit the language to

future generations. All five immigrants affirmed that their children knew Finnish. One respondent admitted that all of her three children can speak Finnish, but only her daughter knows how to write it, too. When inquired about their grandchildren's language use, the role of grandparents as language teachers emerged. Otto stated "No, they don't [know Finnish]. They don't know anything about Finnish language, because they are already adults and have their own lives. We are not in contact with them so much that I could have taught them because they have lived so far away." Vilma also stated how her son was able to speak it very well and he even went to summer school to learn the culture but "when they went to school...and when my parents died, he lost a lot of it. But he can get along." Viola, an immigrant, talked about how she was unable to find old-fashioned Finnish ABC-books. She wanted to get a copy for her grandchildren so that they would have learned the Finnish alphabet and how to pronounce the letters. Consequently she said that her grandchildren are unable to speak Finnish today. The results indicate how fast English takes prominence over Finnish and how grandparents hold an important role in transmitting the ancestral language. Due to geographic distances and when grandparents pass away, the ability to maintain the ethnic language also diminishes.

### *Finnish Communities and Participation in Activities*

As stated previously, all immigrants lived in predominantly Finnish areas. This was also the case for the first generation Finns when they were growing up. When the first generation Finns were asked the question "When you were younger, did you live in areas that had a lot of Finns?" Anna exclaimed: "Oh, yes, our church was completely Finns. Our high school was all Finnish people. Our basketball team was completely Finnish and when they had basketball games, the boys would call their signals in Finnish so the other teams could not...did not know



what there were talking about.” The immigrants settled in predominantly Finnish areas throughout their lives in the United States. Not only where there other Finnish families in the areas, all immigrants worked in places that had other Finns as well, therefore learning the language was not a necessity. The entrepreneur explained how they knew an awful lot of Finnish people and how that population became his major clientele as well. Therefore, in order to run a business, it was not even necessary to speak perfect English. In addition, the types of jobs that the respondents held did not require mastery of English. One of the immigrants explained her experiences as a maid and how her boss said she did not have to know English because she did her job one hundred percent.

The picture that emerged from the interviewees’ stories was that the Finnish communities were very close knit. Viola talked about a visit to see a friend in Michigan. When she arrived in Michigan, she asked for the street name. The person replied to her that the streets have no names here. The respondent wanted to know how she can find the people she is looking for if the streets have no names? What she found out is that in the area she was visiting, everyone went to church, knew each other and spoke Finnish. The results indicate that churches, especially the Lutheran church, were significant organization in the respondents’ lives. All participants were active churchgoers throughout their lives and many go to church service even today. Church as an institution emerged as one of the places where language was maintained as well. One of the respondents stated how children are being taught Finnish in the church early on.

In addition to being active churchgoers, the respondents participated actively in various activities, and ethnicity was maintained by participation in clubs and organizations throughout their lives. Otto described how he used to participate in too many activities because “at one time

I didn't have a single night off. There was the tourist club, aseveljet, kalevalaiset, pohjalaiset... At the time they had a lot of clubs here. We had vapaamuurarit<sup>4</sup>, we had it all." The respondents mentioned clubs and organizations such as the Finnish coffee club, Finlandia University, and Finlandia Foundation. Many mentioned being active in the activities at the "Suomitalo"<sup>5</sup> where different dances and other activities were regularly held. Additionally, many of the respondents and their spouses have been active over the years in establishing and volunteering at the facility where they are currently living.

### *Following Traditions*

The interviews with the men and women show that the number one tradition followed was cooking Finnish meals, which all respondents agreed doing. One first generation Finn explained how her family followed traditional Finnish cooking at Christmas, too: they made lanttuloota<sup>6</sup>, rosolli<sup>7</sup>, and rice pudding with an almond hidden in it. The old tradition holds that the one who gets the almond will have a good upcoming year. Vilma, a first generation Finn, stated with a laugh: "I have all Finnish cookbooks. They use a lot of cream and butter!" In addition to cooking Finnish foods, the respondents described Finns as heavy coffee drinkers.

The other significant tradition maintained was the Finnish sauna-culture, even while living in Florida. All interviewees had maintained this tradition, and for some it was extremely important. When Otto and his family relocated, he said that the first thing they did was to build a sauna in the basement of their new home. When the family relocated to Florida, he built another

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<sup>4</sup> Freemasons.

<sup>5</sup> A Finnish social hall.

<sup>6</sup> Rutabaga casserole.

<sup>7</sup> Beet, carrot, and potato casserole.

one in the garage. When talking about sauna, Hilda declared: “Yeah, we always had sauna. That is how Finnish we were!”

Overall, the interviewees observed many of the Finnish customs and traditions throughout their lives. They talked about celebrating Vappu<sup>8</sup>, Juhannus<sup>9</sup> and Finland’s Independence Day.<sup>10</sup> One first generation Finn explained how her family followed the New Year’s tradition of melting a piece of tin and then predicting the upcoming year from the piece of tin.

Connection to Finland was also maintained by reading and subscribing to many Finnish or Finnish-Americans newspapers. All of the respondents read Finnish and/or Finnish American newspapers, and nine of the respondents had subscribed to newspapers such as *Finlandia Weekly*, *Raivaajat*, and *Amerikan Uutiset* during their lifetime. Anna, a first generation Finn had never subscribed to any Finnish-American newspapers and said “No, I don’t. My mother used to get Finnish papers but...I can read and write Finnish, but it takes me so long to read, but if there’s something like, the Finnish church board, I read that and stuff, but I don’t read periodicals or anything like that.” Overall, the respondents followed current events in Finland, partly influenced by the facility because they read about the current events during residents’ meetings. Otto stated that through the Internet, he listens to the Finnish news on a daily basis, at least once a day so that he can keep up with what is going on over there.

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<sup>8</sup> Vappu takes place on the first of May. It is a celebration of Spring, but Vappu celebrations are also influenced by the worker’s movement, and students celebrating graduation. Vappu celebrations consist of parades, brass bands, singing, drinking and dancing (Liffing-Zug Bourret, et al., 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Midsummer Day. Juhannus, the festival of St. John the Baptist, is observed on June 24<sup>th</sup> when the sun is at its highest point in the northern hemisphere and the sun remains above the horizon all night (Liffing-Zug Bourret, et al., 2002). Traditional celebrations include the lighting of bonfires.

<sup>10</sup> At times referred to as the most important holiday since it is the celebration of gaining independence from Russia on December 6, 1917. Festivities consist of parades and speeches and a ball held at the presidential palace. Traditionally, most of the households lit up two blue-and-white candles at the windowsill (Liffing-Zug Bourret, et al., 2002).

### *Visits to Finland and Contacts*

An important facet of maintaining ethnic culture was visits to Finland and staying in contact with friends and relatives in Finland. All of the immigrants had visited Finland since their immigration. The frequency varied from some respondents visiting Finland twice a year or yearly, to one respondent visiting Finland twice since she immigrated 26 years ago. Some of the first generation Finns stayed there for extended period of times, for example Vilma stayed there for three months on her honeymoon. The results indicate that how many times the interviewees visited Finland was dependent on work commitments and monetary issues during the earlier years, and affected by health problems now in the later life. However, many of the interviewees had visited Finland during the recent years and some expressed a desire to go again, but regretted that it was unlikely due to health problems.

Most interviewees preferred keeping in contact via telephone, rather than writing. It was stated that this was due to health problems such as bad eyesight that make it harder to read or write letters. Nine of the respondents kept frequent and regular contacts with friends and family in Finland. Only one of the immigrants has had very little contact with family in Finland. She stated money as the reason why she does not call them frequently (because international calls are expensive), but her sisters had visited her here. Most interviewees named siblings, nephews and nieces, or cousins as their frequent contacts. Many stated that they used to stay in regular contact with their brothers and sisters, but now many of them have passed away.

### *Finnish Objects and Items*

It is plausible that ethnicity is more symbolic than part of everyday life. It is probable that a person's ethnicity manifests itself through symbols. To study the role of symbolic ethnicity,

questions regarding items and objects were included in this study. Additionally, having a lot of Finnish items might represent one facet of ethnicity maintenance. To examine whether the respondents have Finnish items or objects, the question “What Finnish objects or items do you have?” was included. If the respondents stated *yes*, there were asked the question “What is your most treasured object and why?” to examine whether the respondents would describe the item as being important because it was from Finland, thus providing support for symbolic ethnicity. Additionally, the respondents were asked the question “Are there items/objects/people that you associate with Finland?” to study whether there are specific items that the respondents associate with Finland, thus providing further support for symbolic ethnicity. Nine of the ten interviews were completed at the respondents’ apartments and they were also visually documented by the author who is familiar with Finnish culture to look at what items and objects the interviewees have for two reasons. First, visually documenting the apartments permits the examination of what particular Finnish items this population of immigrants has, if any. Additionally, the respondents might not mention some items that they actually have. Second, visually documenting the apartments allows for comparison between their responses and what they actually had.

When the interviewees were asked the above questions about Finnish items and objects, one dominant theme emerged: many of them have already passed along much of their Finnish items, either to children or to nieces and nephews. As Anna explains:

I gave it all of it, everything away, I gave them to the kids. I don’t have any children, but my nieces and nephews. I gave everything away. I had gobs of glassware and linens and all that stuff. I can’t use it here, so I gave them all to the kids, so... So they have everything that I have, but I had lots of it! ... I got some of those tall, really nice candleholders, those glass ones, I have a bunch of those and oh, I have tea sets... and those little spoons and forks. They are really cute. I have a lot of stuff. And I have goblets and plates, those pretty plates, but the kids got them all.

Similarly, Vilma explains:

Yes, they are all packed in boxes now. 'Cause I just moved. So, I had all kinds of things, those wooden carvings, and I had all kinds of linens...silverware... When we went on our honeymoon, everybody gave us [Finnish items]... I had copper Finnish coffee pots. They was on a row on top of my refrigerator. I think there were eight of them, different sizes.

Likewise, Emma, Hilda, Otto, and Viola stated that they have tried to arrange it so that their children will have their items and objects, such as dishes and glassware.

Overall, the interviewees stated that they have treasured objects, but many referred back to having passed them along in the family already. For example, Hilda said that she has given her most treasured items to her children already. When inquired for examples, she talked about 'many little things, small churn and that sort of things.' Otto mentioned 150-year-old candleholders and mother's picture as his most treasured objects. Viola stated that she had many treasured objects, such as Finish glass and Finnish dishes, but since she moved she could not keep them all, therefore she told her daughter to take what she wanted. However, like Otto, Viola felt that the candleholders she had on the windowsill were her most treasured objects. Lydia's most treasured object was the weaving she had on the wall.

The results show that the majority of the interviewees associated glassware and wooden things with Finland. As Anna responds to the question: "Yeah, the glassware, and the wooden things. I like the wooden things, my great niece, the one I gave a lot of stuff to, she has her Christmas tree all wooden decorations and most of them are Finland. My tree is, I made it myself, but I have all Finland decorations on there, wood." Others, for example, Viola and Vilma, mentioned Finnish glassware as being very Finnish.

The visual documentation of the apartments demonstrates that all nine interviewees had some Finnish items or objects. The most frequently observed item was different kinds of handicrafts, such as weavings. Seven female respondents had different kinds of Finnish items in their apartments, for example, tapestry such as ryijy<sup>11</sup> or kuultokudos<sup>12</sup>. The other frequently seen items were wooden items such as handmade clocks, flowers, birds and other wooden items. Four of the respondents had Finnish flags. The other frequently seen item was candleholders from a well-known Finnish company. However, what was observed was that the interviewees had many more Finnish items than what they reported when asked if they had Finnish items or objects. The results show that the respondents mentioned having Finnish objects, which were visually also documented, and the things that they had were also the sort of things that they associated with Finland, for example, glassware and wooden things. However, many of the objects in the apartments were not mentioned by the respondents.

### *How Future Generations Could Maintain Finnishness*

Another important objective of this study was to see how the immigrants feel that the future generations could maintain Finnishness and Finnish culture in the United States, or if they felt that it was more important that they become Americanized. Overall, the immigrants felt that teaching children Finnish is consequential in passing along the culture. However, a few of the respondents shared a view that the younger generations are becoming more and more Americanized. As Viola explained “The younger generation is becoming more Americanized; they don’t want to learn Finnish” and another one believed that both aspects, passing along the

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<sup>11</sup> Ryijy: rya tapestry. The Finnish ryijy is similar to Iranian rug, but represents its own category. The most frequently used patterns are abstract, but at times ryijys depict landscapes, buildings, animal and human figures (Berg, 2005). For history and examples of ryijys see <http://www.kaiku.com/ryijy.html>

<sup>12</sup> Kuultokudos is a weaving made of linen and it has a transparent look to it.

Finnish culture and learning about the American culture, are important. Two of the interviewees talked about the importance of various clubs and organizations in helping to maintain the culture, however, Otto felt that is harder and harder to get the younger generations to participate. Furthermore, he talked about how “in Finland, people become familiar with English [in schools] and they learned it for the most part, so that has disseminated that dense life together.”

Similarly, all three first generation Finns held that teaching Finnish language for the younger generations is extremely important. Anna was optimistic about maintaining the Finnish culture and language:

I think it is very important, you know. In my hometown, they are just making a new Finnish center. Yeah, they are building a new building and it is going to be a Finnish center. And of course, here, that’s all we have is Finnish, so it just keeps on and on, you know, the younger people. We have, at church, we have Finn school, they teach the little kids Finn, so they don’t forget it. Because as they grow older, they are gonna be taught in English language, but they still don’t want them to forget the Finnish language, so we have Finn school at the church. And it is a big group of young people.

In regards to maintaining the culture, the respondents felt strongly that it can be maintained through organizations, including church, and teaching Finnish. One immigrant pointed to her heart and said “It is here, that Finnishness.”

## Ethnic Identity

One of the main objectives of this study was to evaluate the salience of ethnic identity among Finnish immigrants. To examine the manifestations of ethnic identity among the interviewees, two approaches were employed. First, to evaluate whether the respondent thought of themselves in ethnic terms, the question “Who Am I?” was presented to the interviewees in the beginning of the interviews and they were asked to state ten things about themselves.



However, majority of the respondents were reluctant to describe themselves. When the immigrants were asked the “Who Am I?” question, the majority of the respondents would state something such as the following: “who wants to talk about themselves?” “I don’t know”, or “there is nothing to say about me.” Only Otto referred to ethnic markers, by stating that now he is a resident of the Finnish-American Resthome. Those who would answer the question mainly talked about their work, or described themselves in terms of work. For example, one immigrant stated that he had worked independently until retirement, and two others described themselves in terms of work titles. Many also talked about being a mother and/or grandmother.

Compared to the immigrant respondents, the children of immigrants were more likely to describe themselves in ethnic terms also. For example, the first descriptive that Anna provided was “I’m American-Finn” and continued “I have always enjoyed the language, which I learned as a child.” It is evident that the first generation Finns are aware of their ethnic background, but for the immigrants it is taken for granted, which emerged when the respondents were prompted with the question: “I see you did not mention being a Finn. What does that mean to you?” Many of the respondents stated, in a presumptuous manner that is what they are. Ester said that when others (i.e. Americans) ask her who she is, she would say that she is a Finn. Hilda stated after being prompted that “It is a wonderful thing that I am a Finn. I respect Finnishness.” Therefore, it was evident that ethnic background was very important for the respondents, but that ethnic identity was a taken for granted experience for them.

### *Feelings Associated With Finland, Finns, and Finnishness*

To further gain more understanding about the interviewees’ ethnic identity, a number of questions was presented to them. Even though the respondents did not describe themselves as

“Finns” during the “Who Am I?” questions, when asked directly later on, they were very quick to elaborate about the meaning of Finland, Finnishness, and Finns. The results show that the respondents are proud of being Finnish and Finland.

The seven immigrants described Finland in various ways ranging from describing it as a beautiful country to describing it as “home country” or “A good country” to viewing it as a country that “is not the same old Finland anymore.” Lyidia claimed “Finland is awesome” and talked about the beautiful building styles, about the social changes, and how Finland takes good care of its war veterans. However, many of the respondents saw changes. They felt that especially the language usage has changed and that the different [Finnish] dialects are diminishing; this was particularly being expressed by Otto and Lyidia.

The three children of immigrants described Finland in the following ways: “Beautiful. I would not mind living there, but the darkness and winter time.” Another stated: “Finland is a beautiful country. The area where my mother came from has fifty-two lakes. And I love the birch trees, they are beautiful.” The third respondent described Finland as more and more modern.

Finns were also characterized in various ways. However, the most frequently mentioned characteristic was that Finns are honest people. As Lyidia explained what happened recently during a visit to a local supermarket. She explained how she had gotten some fruits and they rang up a different price at the cash registers. She then told the cashier that the fruit had a different price at the produce section. A manager went to check on the price and returned with a refund. Lyidia then told the store people: “I can’t believe you are doubting a Finn! We are Finns” (and she pointed to the group that was with her). She stated that she is very proud of Finnishness, and referred to Finns as honest people, which was echoed by others. One female modestly described

Finns: “As far as I am concerned, they are all nice. I don’t have much to say.” Otto exclaimed with a laugh: “They have changed as well. They are somehow conservative, they do not accept this modern time.” Ester described Finns as people who hold on to their Finnishness. Likewise, the first generation Finns also described Finns as honest by nature. Other descriptions provided were: “drink too much”; “very quiet, bullheaded, very clean, meticulous with all their work and their cleaning”; and “very clean people, smart and now most of them are well-educated.”

The results also suggest that being Finnish has had an impact on the interviewees’ lives. Otto explained how the fact that Finns have a good reputation has affected his life, whether he went to the store, or bank, or any institution, Finns had a clean reputation. When asked why Finns have a good reputation, Otto stated that “it is hard to say, but for example, these millionaires, when they wanted a maid, they took a Finn if they were able to.” Furthermore, when asked if the importance of Finnishness has changed over the years, according to Otto it has been more important to him that he has been a Finn. When Lyidia was asked the question “What has it meant to you over the years that you are a Finn?” she exclaimed: “Well, I don’t know how to describe it, but I’ll never be American!” On the other hand Viola reflected on her life and she talked about how she is somehow distant from her own family. For example, when she visits them, she feels like she is being treated as a guest. Raakel felt that Finnishness affected her life in that she has many friends both here and in Finland and she also attributed her making it in life to being a Finn. Hilda felt that it is a wonderful thing that she is a Finn and that she respects it. When asked about the role Finnishness has played in her life, she did not know quite how to describe it, but stated that it has been constant and she has enjoyed the Finnish lifestyle.

The first generation Finns unanimously felt that Finnishness has enriched their lives. When Vilma was asked the question “How do you feel that your ethnicity and cultural background has affected your life?” She stated: “Well, I think it’s been good. At the time I was entering school, there were a lot of ethnic groups, Italians and Spanish, and nobody could speak English, you know. But we all learned it very easily. I think it’s been nice to be in a Ethnic group and...they all have activities together. Finnish people always stand out [with their costumes and foods].” Anna answered: “Well, I think that I am a better person for knowing two languages and I don’t know... All in all, I just feel proud that I know two languages and... all in all it’s worked out fine.”

Overall, many of the interviewees stated that there were very proud of being Finns. Anna explained: “Personally, I’m very proud that I’ve been born a Finn. I was born in America, so naturally I’m American-Finn, but I would never want to loose my relationship with Finns! I’m very proud of it.” Similarly, Viola felt that it has been important to be a Finn. She explained: “I was born a Finn, my husband was a Finn. Both husbands were Finns. And my family and friends were Finnish. Everybody from Finland came to visit us. So, all the contacts have been with Finnish people. And I went to a Finnish church and we had Finnish halls, they had dances and what else is there.”

It was also evident that the interviewees have been very aware of their ethnicity, particularly the first generation Finns. Anna explains: “Oh yeah, we were always Finns. If some of the people, kids that moved into our school. They were Italians, but we were Finns and they were Italians.” The results show that overall, the main feeling attributed to being Finnish is being proud of it.

### *How About Moving Back to Finland?*

Since one of the main objectives of this study was to gain more understanding about immigrants' subjective orientations toward their homeland, the question "Do you or did you ever seriously think about moving back to Finland?" was presented to the interviewees. There was some variation in the answers. Two of the immigrants, Raakel and Lyydia, had kept their houses in Finland because they believed they would go back there later on in life. Raakel sold her house in 2000 and Lyydia in recent years as well. Viola had recently called her nephews in Finland and asked them to find out about an assisted-living facility there where she could have her own room, but somebody would check on her regularly. The plans fell through because of monetary issues. Two of the immigrants stated that they had never thought about it seriously, Emma felt that she is been so pleased with her life in the United States and Hilda stated that she would not move back to Finland, because her children live in the United States.

Compared to the immigrants, besides Raakel and Lyydia, who had kept their houses there until recently, the thought of moving to Finland was less realistic for the first generation Finns. As Elias explained "No, this is my country, this America since I speak English perfectly." Similarly, Anna stated: "I guess I'm more American than I am Finn since I've been born here." The thought of moving to Finland had crossed Vilma's mind when she married a Finn. She explained: "I would've gone there when we got married, but he said no. He didn't want to go. I thought he would have wanted to go because all his family was still there. But he wanted to stay here." Even though some of the respondents had pondered about moving back, and many of the respondents thought highly of their homeland and visited Finland regularly, moving there was unrealistic for many, and evidently none of the respondents ever moved back.

In summary, this group of Finnish immigrants has maintained their ethnic culture throughout their lives, evidence of this is that all the immigrants always lived in predominantly Finnish areas and worked in places where other Finns worked as well. The immigrants demonstrated high levels of ethnic identity, yet ethnicity appeared to be a very much taken for granted experience for the immigrants. The ways how the immigrants maintained their ethnic culture included maintaining Finnish language and preferring it as their daily language. The children of immigrants demonstrated preference for English as their daily language. Teaching younger children Finnish was seen as an important way to maintain Finnish culture in the United States. Ethnic culture was additionally maintained by actively participating in Finnish activities, such as going to Lutheran church or attending activities at the social hall. The immigrants also followed Finnish traditions, such as cooking and sauna-culture. Ethnic culture was also maintained by observing Finnish holidays such as the Finnish Independence Day. All immigrants have visited Finland since their immigration and many maintained regular and frequent contacts with friends and family. By visiting and keeping contacts, ethnic culture was further maintained. The immigrants and first generation Finns had many Finnish items or objects, but many stated that they had passed along many of the items in the family already. Passing along items and objects can be seen as a way to maintain the culture. It was evident that the immigrants maintained Finnish culture by following many of the customs and traditions, and consequently, demonstrated very little assimilation into the dominant culture. Table 2 provides a summary of the themes that emerged in this study.

Table 2  
Summary of the Themes

Theme	Description	Examples
A. Maintenance of ethnicity	How the immigrants attempted to maintain their ethnic culture?	Immigrants demonstrated very little assimilation Maintained ethnic culture in various ways; see examples below.
1. Language Use	Was mother tongue maintained? Did the immigrants learn English?	All immigrants maintained a good command of Finnish; learned only enough English to manage in everyday situations. Teaching Finnish is important in transmitting ethnic culture.
2. Everyday Life	How did ethnicity affect everyday life in the United States?	Immigrants lived in predominantly Finnish areas, often worked with other Finns, cooked Finnish meals.
3. Following Traditions	Did the participants continue following Finnish traditions in the United States?	Immigrants cooked Finnish meals, built saunas. The interviewees observed Finnish holidays (e.g. Midsummer Day).
4. Participation in activities	Did the participants maintain their ethnicity by participating in Finnish activities?	Active participants in various Finnish activities. For example, (Lutheran) churches, clubs and activities at the Finnish social hall.
5. Visits to Finland/Keeping contacts	Was ethnicity maintained by visiting Finland and by keeping contacts there?	All immigrants have visited Finland since their immigration. Kept frequent contacts with friends and family.
6. Finnish objects and items	Do the descriptions provide support for symbolic ethnicity?	Important to pass along Finnish items in the family: to children or for nieces and nephews.
B. Ethnic Identity	How do the immigrants subjectively orientate themselves toward their ancestral homeland?	Demonstrated high levels of ethnic identity. Finnish culture evidently very important for the immigrants.
1. Feelings associated with Finland, Finns	How do the immigrants feel about other Finns and Finland?	Very proud of their Finnish heritage. Described Finland in nostalgic terms, and Finns as honest people.
2. Moving back to Finland	Have the immigrants ever considered moving back to Finland?	Two women had kept their houses in Finland until the recent years. A less realistic thought for the children of immigrants.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

The three goals of this study were as follow: first, the purpose was to examine whether the Finnish immigrants have assimilated or if their life stories provide evidence for the Cultural Pluralism argument. The second goal was to gain more understanding about how Finnish immigrants have maintained their ethnic culture in the United States. More specifically, the purpose is to examine the effects of language, participation in Finnish activities, and how visits to Finland and contacts affect the maintenance of ethnicity and ethnic identity. The third major goal of this study was to study the manifestations of ethnic identity in the stories of Finnish immigrants. How do the respondents orientate themselves toward their ancestral homeland? The following factors were included; how Finland and Finns are being described, what feelings are associated with being Finnish and Finnishness, and would the respondents ever consider moving back to Finland. The final result of this project leads to an understanding of how Finnish immigrants fit into the debate of assimilation versus Cultural Pluralism, how Finns have maintained their ethnicity, and how they subjectively orientate themselves toward their ancestral homeland. The result also aids our understanding about the future of Finnish culture in the United States, especially how it relates to Florida Finns.

The respondents in this study indicated that they immigrated for a better way of life. The results are consistent with prior research on historical reasons for immigration, which were purely economic. Even though one of the respondents stated that while she was studying in the United States she met her future husband and returned to the United States after briefly returning to Finland, it can be concluded that none of the respondents immigrated for reasons that have been found to be dominant today: personal in nature, such as getting married. All immigrants



immigrated because they felt they could have a better life in the United States, which is consistent with historical reasons for immigration.

The four states that most Finns settled in historically were New York, Massachusetts, Michigan and Minnesota. Somewhat consistent with the historical settlement patterns, of the seven immigrants, two of the respondents settled in Massachusetts, and one in Minnesota. Somewhat inconsistently one respondent settled in New Jersey and one in New Hampshire, and two immigrants settled in Canada. How many Finns immigrated to Canada historically was not examined in this paper. It is possible that many Finns immigrated to Canada, especially to Toronto, where the two respondents also settled. Both immigrants stated that they immigrated to predominantly Finnish areas. Of the three children of immigrants, two were born in states that most Finns settled in; one in Massachusetts and one in New York. The birth state of one of the respondents, Ohio, is somewhat inconsistent with the historical settlement patterns. However, all respondents indicated living in areas that were largely populated by Finns, which is consistent with historical settlement patterns in that Finns attempted to settle in the same areas in the United States.

As discussed earlier in the literature review, the Finnish enclave in Florida is important to study for a number of reasons. First, very little research exists on it, perhaps because historically Florida has not been a significant state of immigration. It was not until after 1945 when Finnish retirees, partly encouraged by the financial stability provided by Social Security and by union pension plans, established the ethnic enclave in Florida (Kivisto, 1989). Inconsistent with the establishers, none of the respondents indicated financial reasons as the reason why they relocated to Florida. Many indicated that they knew Finnish people in Florida, which perhaps made the

relocation easier. Also, it is possible that many of the respondents in this study were most likely younger than the Finns who established the Florida enclave, and thus they were in the paid labor force when they relocated to Florida. Second, this enclave is unique in that they have attempted to maintain their ethnic culture by establishing Finnish churches and clubs. The results of this study demonstrate that the respondents of this study were also active participants in churches and clubs, but whether the participation was a social activity or a firm attempt to maintain ethnic culture remains unclear. If it is, in fact, that this Finnish enclave has been thriving due to the social activities, it is possible that as this generation of immigrants passes away, there will never again be such a thriving Finnish ethnic enclave in Florida. One of the interviewees went to great extent to talk about the differences in participation in various activities between his generation and the younger generations. He stated that there is hardly anybody left from the group that once were active participants in all of the social gatherings. He also said that it is impossible to get the younger people to participate in any of the social activities. Future studies should focus on this younger generation of Finns so that conclusion could be drawn whether participation in activities was a way to maintain ethnic culture, or whether it was just a social activity.

Kivisto (1989) concluded that many Florida Finns indicated an interest to rejuvenate their somewhat weak command of the Finnish language. The results of this study are inconsistent with Kivisto's findings because the immigrant respondents in this study indicated having always maintained their Finnish, and most preferred it as their daily language. It must be noted, however, that it is unclear whether the respondents in Kivisto's study were immigrants, or children of immigrants. If the respondents were children of immigrants, the findings of this study would be consistent with his research because even though all three children of immigrants in this study were able to speak Finnish, they preferred English as their daily language.

One of the main goals of this study was to determine whether this group of Finnish immigrants has assimilated into the dominant culture. More specifically, the objective was to determine which theory of assimilation: Cultural Pluralism, the Melting Pot, or the Anglo Conformity can be best applied to explain the life experiences of Finnish immigrants. The results provide support for Cultural Pluralism, which postulates that ethnic minorities try to maintain their ethnic (Gordon, 1964). Consistent with the cultural pluralism argument, the immigrants in this study settled in similar areas, and attempted to preserve their language, religion, communal institutions, and ancestral culture. The results demonstrate that the immigrants in this study always lived in predominantly Finnish areas, they maintained a good command of their mother tongue and attempted to preserve Finnish by teaching their children and grandchildren it. It was significant that all the immigrants chose to do the interview in Finnish rather than in English. The interviewees were also active participants in the Lutheran church and in various other Finnish activities. The results do not provide support for the Melting Pot view because all the respondents were married to other Finns, the immigrants mainly worked in places where other Finns were employed, and the respondents interacted mostly with Finns. Neither is there evidence to argue that Finnish culture has changed or had influence on the American culture. The results of this study do not provide support for the Anglo-Conformity view on assimilation either, which demands a complete abandonment of ancestral culture in favor of the Anglo-Saxon values. As one of the respondents put it when asked what it has meant for her that she is a Finn: “Well, I don’t know how to describe it, but I’ll never be American!” It was evident from the responses that the respondents were proud of their Finnishness and indicated no desire to become Americanized. The respondents did not speak perfect English, neither did they expressed following American cultural traditions. The only exception was that some of the respondents

indicated that they were proud of their children because they knew English. In conclusion, the results provide most support for Cultural Pluralist view on assimilation. This group of Finnish immigrants shows a high level of ethnic culture maintenance and very little assimilation into the dominant culture. Future studies should examine the specific factors regarding why this group of immigrants have not assimilated. However, the immigrants' stories provide support for the assimilation of future generations, for example, the respondents indicated that their grandchildren hardly knew how to speak Finnish.

The second main goal of this study was to determine how ethnic culture is being maintained. The results demonstrate that language is one of the main facets of ethnic culture. The results regarding language are consistent with Tannenbaum (2003) who argue that language can be seen as a positive symbol of cultural pride. It can be argued that in the case of Finns, language holds a significant role in ethnic culture maintenance. All seven immigrants have maintained a good command of their mother tongue and they preferred Finnish as their everyday language. Some of the respondents indicated that their lives were harder in some respects because they did not have a good command of English, they only knew enough to manage in everyday situations. The results of this study, that the respondent's ability to use English developed only to a moderate level, are consistent with Sintonen's (1993) examination of English language use among Canadian Finns. The results are also consistent with Kolehmainen's (1937) research in that immigrants only speak in English when necessary. One of the first generation Finns pointed out that even though many Finns know English, they are reluctant to speak it because they are afraid of making a mistake; therefore, they only speak English when necessary. Since, the immigrants lived in areas that had ethnic enclaves, thus it is possible that learning English was not necessary. It is also possible that living in predominantly Finnish areas hindered their

opportunities to learn English. It would be beneficial to locate Finns that do not live in predominantly Finnish areas and examine whether these immigrants have managed to maintain a good command of Finnish. Moreover, many of the immigrants worked in occupations, such as housekeepers and maids, and learning English was not necessarily mandatory. For the immigrants, Finnish was a part of their everyday lives.

Consistent with prior research (Kolehmainen, 1937; Stoller, 1996) the three first generation Finns in this study demonstrate how fast English takes prominence over Finnish. Even though Finnish was the language spoken at home when they were growing up, all three stated that they speak better English than Finnish, and they prefer it as their daily language. Consistent with Stoller's (1996) examination of language use among second and third generation Finns, Finnish language was not a part of everyday life for the respondents in this study. An indication of this was that while the immigrants stated that they mainly worked in places that had other Finns, this was not the case for the first generation Finns. They had also worked in settings where there were no other Finns. The results regarding language are typical and consistent of most immigrant groups in that they learned English when they started school. Kivisto (1989) has pointed out that subsequent generations are able to become proficient in English due to their school experiences. Therefore, when it comes to maintaining ethnic cultures, specifically, when it comes to language maintenance, social institutions such as schools appear to have a significant effect. It would be beneficial to examine if the results are the same for immigrant children who are being home schooled.

Many of the respondents indicated that it is very important for future generations to learn English, and they expressed a desire to ensure the continuation of language. One respondent

talked about her efforts to get an old-fashioned ABC-book for her grandchildren so that they could learn Finnish. However, she was unable to locate such a book and regrettably said that her grandchildren are unable to speak Finnish. Others felt that it was important, but challenging at the same time because of geographical distances. Some respondents specifically talked about teaching language for children when they were asked how the future generations could maintain the Finnish culture in the future. One respondent foresees that since Finns learn English in schools [in Finland], there will never be the tight ethnic enclaves that there once was because people are not dependent on other people. The results indicate that Finnish immigrants are less optimistic about the future of Finnish language than are the first generation Finns. It could be that even though many immigrants expressed contentment in that their children knew English very well, at the same time they are witnessing the vanishing prominence of Finnish as they watch their children and moreover, their grandchildren growing up speaking English fluently and hardly knowing any Finnish.

The results show that this group of immigrants was active participants in Finnish activities and clubs, therefore, one way how ethnicity was maintained was by active participation in various activities. By participating in these activities, the immigrants maintained social ties to other Finns, maintained their language, and they were able to follow many traditions, such as celebrating Finnish Independence Day or Vappu celebrations. However, it remains unclear whether the respondents were active participants in various activities and clubs because they wanted to maintain their ethnic culture, or was it because it was the only culture they knew and that they wanted to hold on because they were familiar with it. It is also possible that the respondents participated in various activities just because it was a social activity and that it had nothing at all to do with the culture but was rather the result of convenience. It is plausible that

there were factors, such as not knowing English, which prevented this group of respondents into venturing to more American activities. In other words, it is unclear whether ethnic culture is maintained because of high levels of ethnic identity or whether it is the only culture they know, or want to know. But it emerges from the results that active participation was one way to maintain ethnic culture because the respondents participated in activities that are exclusively Finnish, such as Vappu and Midsummer's Night celebrations.

The second main goal of this study was to examine manifestations of ethnic identity in the life stories of Finnish immigrants. The results indicate that ethnicity and ethnic identity is very much a taken for granted experience for the immigrants. Many stated that they are proud of Finland, Finns, and Finnishness, but at the same time they expressed that it was hard for them to describe their feelings towards those aspects. However, their actions throughout their lives show a high level of ethnic culture maintenance, but the fact that it is hard for them to verbalize it, shows that ethnic culture is very much part of their everyday lived experience, their identities consist of the ethnic culture so strongly that it do not need to be verbalized. Additionally, the fact that the respondents demonstrated difficulty in telling about themselves might be a reflection of Finnish personality and behavioral traits, and not a sign of weak ethnic identity. The second and third generation Finns that participated in Stoller's (1996) study on ethnic identity among Finnish Americans described Finns as people who do not emphasize their own accomplishments. Therefore, the reserve characteristics that the respondents employed in this study might indicate cultural personality characteristics. Additionally, ethnic culture might be so much a taken for granted experience that that is why the respondents did not describe themselves in ethnic terms.

The fact that these respondents demonstrated a high level of ethnic identity could be explained by the theory that views ethnicity as a working and lower level style. As discussed previously, according to this view ethnic identities are more common and more salient in lower socioeconomic groups (Alba, 1990). None of the respondents were highly educated in this study and it could be an indicator of lower socioeconomic status, however measures of income were not a part of this study. Only one of the respondents made statements that are inconsistent with this view on ethnicity. The respondents stated a number of times during the interview that it is very expensive to travel and call to Finland and therefore, her contacts have been rather minimal throughout the years. Therefore, this immigrant demonstrated how having money is needed to maintain ethnicity as well, at least when it comes to visiting homeland and keeping contacts.

Besides one circumstance, the results provide no evidence for the politicization of ethnicity view. Elias, a first generation Finn, who grew up in Queens, New York, talked about how Finns once were active participants in political activities. He talked about how Finns were fighting for government pension plans because those did not exist at the time. This was the only occasion in any of the interviews that active participation in political activities was tied to ethnicity in any way. Since the group of interviewees were immigrants and first generation Finns, it is not possible to apply the revival of ethnicity model to the results. The revival of ethnicity model argues that there will be a revival of ethnicity among third generation immigrants. In order to examine whether the revival of ethnicity model is applicable to Finns, a group of third generation Finns should be located and studied. It would be ideal to interview children and grandchildren of the men and women who participated in this study.



The results are somewhat unclear when it comes to the question whether ethnicity is concrete or whether it is symbolic for the respondents because there is evidence to support both. In many ways ethnicity was very much part of everyday life for these respondents, thus disputing the symbolic ethnicity argument. Finnish culture is the only culture of which they have ever really been part. On the one hand they cooked Finnish foods, spoke fluent Finnish, subscribed to Finnish newspapers and magazines, associated with other Finns, just to name a few. On the other hand the respondents' sentiments toward their homeland were very symbolic; they described Finland as being "a beautiful country" and that they are proud to be Finnish, but the statements could be understood as evidence of symbolic ethnicity. This especially emerges when the respondents were asked whether they have ever seriously thought about moving back to Finland, and only three indicated that they had. Therefore, in some ways the results provide support for symbolic ethnicity, which "is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country" (Gans, 1979:9). However, the respondents indicated that they practiced aspects of ethnicity, including cooking Finnish meals, built saunas at their homes, and visited Finland, so they did much more than just felt ethnic; they practiced their ethnicity in everyday life, thus refuting the argument that these immigrants' ethnicity is symbolic.

By employing qualitative methods, I was able to get the immigrants speak freely about their experiences, yet at the same time by having a planned-out interview schedule, I had questions that guided the interviews. By having a semi-structured design and by using qualitative approach, I was able to probe the respondents and ask for clarification or elaboration, thus the data collected was more in-depth than what would have been possible to obtain by using quantitative methods. While the sample of ten respondents in this study is inarguably small, it

can be argued that the sample is representative of Finnish immigrants because they immigrated for a better way of life and many settled in states that most Finns historically settled in, which was consistent with prior research. Therefore, even though the sample is small, they appear to be a representative sample because they can be thought to represent the larger group of Finnish immigrants that immigrated after World War II. It must be noted, nevertheless, that there might be a group of immigrants that would rather forget their ancestral homeland. In that respect this sample is limited because it is unlikely that anyone who views their ancestral homeland negatively would move into the type of facility where the respondents are currently living. Additionally, validity of this study could be improved by conducting subsequent interviews with the respondents, or by interviewing their children and grandchildren so that more knowledge about the assimilation process could be accumulated.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

In the case of Finnish immigrants who arrived to the United States after immigration become restricted, the results show support for cultural pluralism position, which postulates that ethnic groups attempt to maintain their ethnic culture. The interviewees' demonstrated high levels of ethnic identity; their subjective orientations toward their homeland were positive and they kept frequent contacts there. However, the immigrants especially had hard time putting their feelings into words, thus indicating that ethnicity is a very much taken for granted experience for them. The immigrants in this study maintained their ethnicity in various ways ranging from language maintenance to visiting Finland regularly. However, the stories told by the interviewees indicate that the future generations might not be as active in participating in various activities as this generation of Finnish immigrants was. This is especially significant considering that the Finnish enclave in Florida is only about fifty years old. Could it be that after this generation passes away, the thriving ethnic community in Florida will diminish? When the respondents were asked about the future of Finnish culture in the United States, many mentioned preserving language. However, some had recognized that subsequent generations show little interest in learning Finnish. Furthermore, one immigrant pointed out that the difference between his generation of immigrants and today's immigrants is that most know English when they immigrate today. Language appeared to affect the immigrants' life experiences significantly, mainly because they never learned to speak it fluently, only enough to get by. If the future immigrants will not face language barriers, their life experiences might be significantly different from those who do not reach a high level of language proficiency. Future studies should focus more on language. Additionally, many respondents mentioned how the Lutheran church has a

language school where small children can learn Finnish. Since the Lutheran church appears to hold many functions, including serving as an institution where language is preserved, future studies should examine organizations such as the Lutheran church, and its effect on maintaining Finnish culture in the United States.

In conclusion, this group of immigrants has gone to great extent to preserve their culture in the United States. Throughout their lives this group has lived in predominantly Finnish areas and relocated within ethnic enclaves, eventually settling in Florida. The respondents are a part of immigrant cohort that has been active in maintaining their culture. The respondents ethnic identities were salient, yet ethnicity appeared to be very much taken for granted experience for them. The results provide most support for the cultural pluralism view on ethnicity. While the respondents showed very little evidence of assimilation, their responses echoed the inevitability of assimilation in the part of their children and grandchildren.

## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

## Interview Schedule

1. All interviews will begin with the question: “Who Am I?” The respondents are asked to tell ten things about themselves.

If mention “Finn” → The question “What does it mean to be Finnish?” will be asked.

If no mention of being Finnish → The question “I notice that you did not mention being Finnish. Why not?” will be asked, followed by “What does it mean to be Finnish?”

2. After a transition from what does it mean to be Finnish, the conversation will be directed towards the time of immigration.

- a. What year did you immigrate to the United States?
- b. How old were you at the time of the immigration?
- c. What was/were the reason(s) for immigration?
- d. What was the state of immigration?
- e. Have you moved since (within the United States)?

3. After discussing the reasons for emigration, awareness and attitudes toward ancestral homeland will be discussed.

- a. How would you describe Finland today?
- b. What kind of people are the Finns?
- c. Do you or did you in the past seriously think about moving back to Finland?
- d. What feelings do you associate with being Finnish or Finnishness?

4. After discussing attitudes, questions regarding participation in Finnish activities will be asked.

- a. Do you observe Finnish customs? If YES, which customs?
- b. Do you subscribe/read any Finnish or Finnish-American newspapers or magazines?
- c. How often do you follow current events in Finland?
- d. Do you participate in any Finnish-American organizations and/or social events?
- e. Did you go to church?
- f. Do you have regular contact with people in Finland?
- g. How often do you visit Finland?
- h. When is the last time you visited Finland?
- i. Do you have family and friends in Finland? Do they ever visit you here? How often would you say you call, email or write to them and they to you?

5. Questions regarding symbolic ethnicity.

- a. What Finnish items or objects do you have? If they have some, it will be asked what is your most treasured object and why?
- b. Are there items/objects/people that you associate with Finland?

6. Questions regarding ethnicity as a part of everyday life and maintenance of Finnishness.

- a. Were you able to speak English when you first arrived in the United States?
- b. How did you learn English?
- c. How important was it for you to learn English?
- d. Today, what is your language preference in your daily life?
- e. What was your education in Finland? In the United States?
- f. Your occupation in Finland? And in the United States?
- g. Were there other Finns at your first place of employment? Any place of employment?
- h. In general, what kind of neighbors have you had in your life? In other words, have you always lived in predominantly Finnish areas?
- i. If you think of your daily activities, what role do you think that being Finn plays in your life. (Examples: do you cook Finnish foods, do you prefer listening to Finnish music, do you go to sauna regularly, etc.)
- j. How do you feel that your ethnicity and cultural background affected your life in the United States?
- k. Are there specific struggles in your life that you contribute to being a Finnish immigrant?
- l. Do you feel that how the importance of being Finn/ Finnishness has changed over the years? If yes, when was it strongest/lowest?
- m. Did you teach your children/grandchildren Finnish/customs/history, etc?

7. In conclusion, the respondents are asked the question: “How do you feel that future generations could maintain Finnish culture in the United States? (Through churches, organizations, older generations passing it along, etc.) Or is it more important that they become completely Americanized?”

**APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL**





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