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Basque Assimilation Across Four Generations: Experiences in a Rural Community

Megan L. Olson DeMontigny

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BASQUE ASSIMILATION ACROSS FOUR GENERATIONS:
EXPERIENCES IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Rocky Mountain College, 1999

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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This thesis, submitted by Megan L. Olson DeMontigny in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and hereby approved.

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and the format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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Dean of the Graduate School

May 2, 2008
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Date May 29, 2002

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ABSTRACT

The first "Basko" came to the American West in the early 20th century with hopes of securing a future through sheep ranching. Most planned to return home with the money they had made to start their families. However, some stayed after finding a good way to make a living and starting a family.

This research investigates what assimilation was like for those who chose to stay. How far have they come and how did they assimilate? The research spans four generations and includes fourteen interviews with Basques living in Johnson County, Wyoming. In studying the assimilation process of these families we can gain an understanding of what it was like for immigrants coming to work in rural America and how they have changed over time.

This study found that assimilation began in the second generation and was nearly complete by the third generation. Interestingly, after four generations, what it means to be Basque can change dramatically.

To Olivia and Benjamin

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When the first "Basco" moved to Johnson County Wyoming in the early 20th century he was greeted with many challenges. With values of determination and hard work he came to the American West with hopes of securing a future through sheep ranching. Most planned to return to the Great Pyrenees of northeastern Spain with the money they had made to buy a farm and start their families. However, some stayed in Johnson County after having found a good way to make a living and starting their families.

The way of life they found here consisted of hard work and loneliness. Most came not knowing how to speak English and were immediately given jobs herding sheep up in the mountains away from civilization. It was only a few weeks out of the year when they would come into town and socialize with the community. In the early years there was a bit of tension between the Basques and the townspeople until the Basques learned English. By the second generation the Basques were respected for their values and work ethic.

It is my goal to present in this study what assimilation was like for those who chose to stay. How far have they come and how much do they wish to assimilate? To what degree has each generation assimilated into the host society?

This research spans four generations and includes interviews and the study of documents such as letters back home, pictures, and newspaper articles. In studying the assimilation process of these families we can gain an understanding in what it is like for immigrants coming to work in America and how difficult or pervasive assimilation may be. Immigration has been on the rise from before our nationhood for quite sometime and different groups have been assimilating at different rates. Studies of this magnitude take lifetimes to complete. Therefore, this small piece of the puzzle will hopefully give one specific glimpse into what one group of immigrants in rural communities in America have gone through and what might be expected after four generations of life in a rural area.

Theories and Definitions

Assimilation

How do we define assimilation? No such study could begin without reference to the classic book, Assimilation

in America by Milton Gordon (1964). Gordon cites Robert E. Park's definition of assimilation as

. . . the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence. . . In the United States an immigrant is ordinarily considered assimilated 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. The common sense view of the matter is that an immigrant is assimilated as soon as he has shown that he can 'get on in the country.' This implies among other things that in all the ordinary affairs of life he is able to find a place in the community on the basis of his individual merits without invidious or qualifying reference to his racial origin or to his cultural inheritance." (Milton Gordon, 1964:63)

In other words, a Basque person living in Johnson County would be considered assimilated when he/she can speak English, has adopted American customs and no longer experiences any prejudice.

The focus of this thesis is the process by which Basques have been absorbed into the white, rural community in a western state. According to Gordon (1964), as seen on page four, that there are seven assimilation variables that should be included when looking at the assimilation process in a group, noting that assimilation is a process and each stage takes place in varying degrees.

Subprocess or Condition	Type or Stage of Assimilation
Change of cultural patterns to those of host society	Cultural or Behavioral assimilation
Large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs, and institutions of host society, on primary group level	Structural assimilation
Large-scale intermarriage	Marital assimilation
Development of sense of people-hood based exclusively on host society	Identificational assimilation
Absence of prejudice	Attitude receptional assimilation
Absence of discrimination	Behavioral receptional assimilation
Absence of value and power conflict	Civic assimilation

In a study based on factor analysis it has been suggested that ethnic cultural identity could be described in terms of six dimensions: religion, endogamy, language use, ethnic organizations, parochial education, and ingroup friends (Driedger, 1975: 139). In other words, by looking at these six dimensions, Driedger was able to quantitatively analyze cultural identity. Therefore, using these various dimensions as a base, in-depth interviewing can add qualitative data to further understanding of the processes involved. For example, in this study, assimilation will be measured by assessing the level of the generations' intermarriage, use of the mother-tongue,

participation in ethnic festivals, cooking, etc., devotion to religion, and association with other members of the ethnic group.

Today, sociologists use terms such as, assimilation, acculturation, and adaptation somewhat interchangeably. However, acculturation has been more recently defined as a sub-process of assimilation in books by both Joseph Hraba (1979) and Richard Alba (1990). "Acculturation, the second component of assimilation, refers to the fusion of groups into a common culture." (Hraba 1979: 29)

Generation

Borrowing the definition from a study completed by Richard D. Alba (1990:5) 'generation' can be defined as "the distance in decent from the point of immigration into the U.S." He found that there is a correlation between a person's marriage with someone from the same group and their level of assimilation. It is more likely for someone to speak the mother tongue, and engage in ethnic activities if that person is married to someone from the same ethnic group, increasing the level of assimilation. There is also a connection between marriage and generation; we would predict that the closer the generation is to immigration the more likely they are to marry within their group. However, if people from that particular ethnic group are no

longer immigrating into the host society from the native land then the chances of marrying someone from the same group decreases. Therefore the level of assimilation of those who marry someone from the host society increases.

Mother-Tongue

Use of the mother tongue is an important key in determining level of assimilation. There is much support that there is a dramatic effect of language on culture and vice versa. This is so strong that, "In measuring the degree of acculturation or adaptation for a given group, it has been shown that a good indicator is always which language is spoken as the 'home' language. (Bruner in McCall, 1968:27) It is also argued that, "Culture is embedded in language, thus knowledge of large portions of an ethnic culture is lost to those who do not know the mother-tongue." (Alba, 1990:10) It is also argued that the retention of ethnic identity is not necessarily based on generation but that the strength of ethnic identity retention is through the relationship of the mother tongue. In other words, it doesn't matter if you are the children or grandchildren of immigrants, what matters more is how well you can speak and understand the native language.

Knowledge of the mother-tongue would also depend on how much exposure the children have had to it growing up as

"mother-tongue speech is often confined to family settings" (Alba, 1990:98). Alba also found that the size of the group matters to the survival of the mother-tongue.

Specifically, larger groups give more opportunity for conversations in the native language compared to smaller groups (Alba, 1900). Alba's work also revealed that there is a steep decline in reference to mother tongue between the second and later generations.

There are different explanations for this language phenomenon. For example, other research has shown that the first generation encourages the second generation to assimilate as much as possible into the American culture in order to get along better with others and advance themselves further economically. A general survey of American ethnic groups revealed the tendency that, "it is the children who teach the new culture to their parents" and this appears to be prevalent among most groups (McCall, 1968:27). Therefore, it would be in our best interest to understand the amount and intensity of the Basque individuals knowledge of their native tongue across generations in order to have a better understanding of their levels of assimilation.

It is also important to note that many of the Basques in Johnson County immigrated during the time when

Americanization was at its peak. "While 'Americanization' in its various stages had more than one emphasis, essentially it was a consciously articulated movement 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 great rapidity..." (Gordon, 1964:100). For example, in an anthology written about the Basque people in Johnson County Iberlin and Romvedt noted that,

. . . stimulating acculturation, however, the Johnson county school system, which was dedicated to making Americans of its pupils, including the first generation of Basques born in Buffalo. American-born Basques who entered school unable to speak English, were often ridiculed by their peers. These young Basque-Americans quickly became familiar with American ways and with the English language so that, when they grew up and married, the language of the home became English except in cases when the Basque-American's spouse was born in *Euskadi*

Iberlin and Romvedt, 1995:25

Gordon has argued that this line of thinking widened the gap between the immigrant and his children. "The heartache, bewilderment, and tension of assimilation for the immigrant and his family could have been considerably decreased if American public opinion had been inclined and wise enough to build onto the newcomer's heritage rather than treating it with disdain (Gordon, 1964:107). It was

difficult for the parents to deal with the alleged ethnic self-hatred that the children suffered from as a result of being Americanized. How much were the Basques exposed to this and how did it affect their lifestyles and families?

Symbolic Ethnicity

Participation in ethnic festivals, cooking, etc. brings us to another important aspect of assimilation, symbolic ethnicity. Symbolic ethnicity is an idea developed by Herbert Gans. He notes that a person's ethnic identity can be observed through their expressions of behavior. "Expressive behavior can take many forms, but it often involves the use of symbols and symbols-as-signs rather than as myths" (Gans, 1979:204). As generations assimilate, their involvement in and the ethnic identity they feel toward their native culture changes. Ethnicity is less encompassing in daily life and individuals are able to choose what parts of their culture they will adhere to. For them ethnicity involves more choices and freedom than their immigrant parents/grandparents. "...given the degree to which the third generation has acculturated and assimilated, most people look for easy and intermittent ways of expressing their identity, for ways that do not conflict with other ways of life. As a result, they refrain from ethnic behavior that requires an arduous or

time-consuming commitment." (Gans, 1979:203). Therefore, we would see later generations displaying their ethnic behaviors through such things as participation in festivals that only occur on an annual basis. This kind of symbolic ethnicity may also entail an individual choosing to display a flag or emblem of their native land. Gans suggests that through symbolic ethnicity we may also see more things such as flags and native emblems in the homes of ethnic group members.

Gans also argues that the following generations share the pride in their culture but that the way they express it will take on new forms. Often these forms involve religion, cooking, and politics. Interestingly, he sees the generations that are removed from the old country as having more interest in the old country's problems and history. More often he sees the third generation sending money back to their homelands in order to preserve part of their history; for many this may be the part of history their grandparents tried to escape. He uses, for example, the Holocaust. Jewish people now are more interested in remembering and honoring those who were affected by this period in their history than their parents and grandparents were at the time when they were closely affected by it.

It is important to understand that Gans's position on

symbolic ethnicity is not that it emerged out of third generations but that it was emerging as early as the first generation of immigrants. When people came to this country they were escaping something from their homeland and brought with them only the ideas and culture that they choose to preserve. As they settled in what was likely their own ethnic neighborhoods, they probably developed their own sense of ethnic identity. "Even in ethnic neighborhoods where conformity was expected and social control was pervasive, people had some freedom of choice about ethnic cultural practices." (Gans, 1997:211)

Research Question

Within the context of the theories presented in this chapter and variables selected to measure assimilation, this case study addresses the Basque assimilation experience in one American community across four generations. I will attempt to determine the level to which Basques in Johnson County have assimilated, how challenging or problematic this process was, and their assessment of what they see happening to their culture in the future.

CHAPTER II

THE BASQUE PEOPLE

The first generation Basques here in America are more than likely not exactly like the Basques either back in France or in Spain. Interestingly it is probably because the Basques in Johnson County consist of both French - Basques and Spanish-Basques that they have probably adjusted their "Basqueness" in such a way as to encompass both cultures and ideas into one. "Upon first contact, most Basque-Americans will reply that 'we are all Basques' and attempt to minimize the differences between French and Spanish Basques or between the various provinces within these divisions." (McCall, 1968:42) It is important to remember also that not only are their French-Basques and Spanish-Basques but that there are also Basques from different towns in Johnson County and this would also have an effect on how the Basque culture has developed. "These differences between provinces and even between towns are a common feature of Basque life in Europe and it is not likely that they failed to occur among first generation

Basque-Americans. The second and third generations tend to lose these feelings as well as the degree of other ethnic characteristics." (McCall, 1968:42)

When the first Basque, Jean Esponda, moved to Johnson County in 1902 he was looking for a better economic lifestyle through sheep ranching (Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995). Many left the old world because it was customary for the eldest child (either boy or girl) to take over the family farm; consequently the other children were left to either go into religious endeavors or other occupations to make a living. According to McCall (1968) their choices were prescribed by the economy of the time:

- Some are given payment in cash that they are expected to use in building an independent income, usually outside of the local community.
- Some become indianos, immigrants to the New World, who will in theory return with fortunes made there.
- Since they are devoutly orthodox Catholics, many Basques join religious orders or pursue other ecclesiastical careers.
- A very small number may remain in their natal communities as artisans or shepherds.

- Some become sailors, many are absorbed into industry, just as in the distant past many were absorbed in the armies of the reconquest and/or in the interior colonization attendant upon the expulsion of the Moors.
- A small number remain celibate within their own casarios

(McCall, 1968:38)

Iberlin explains (1981) that many of these immigrants came from farms where sheep herding was the primary means of surviving. Therefore, it is not surprising that they came to the United States and entered into the same business. The Buffalo/Kaycee area attracted the Basque immigrants because of the mountainous topography which is very similar to the Great Pyrenees. Many borrowed money from relatives or friends already living in America and worked for them for a period of about a year in order to pay back their passage. Both the men and women came in search of work, men settling into sheep ranching, and women working in domestic areas such as cleaning and cooking in the boarding houses. "Single women came looking for work, owing for passage and hoping for romance" (Iberlin, 1981:14). Many of them started working in the boarding

houses and paid off their debts before they married.

Boarding houses were an important part of Basque history in America because it was common for the sheepherders to live among the sheep many months out of the year and in the off-season they needed a place to stay.

Basque Characteristics

There are certain things that make the Basque part of a distinct ethnic group. First of all, research is inconclusive as to where they came from and with whom they are related. Archeological finds show that the Basques may have been living in the area of the Great Pyrenees before 3,000 B.C. although it is argued that this could have been much sooner (Ysursa, 2001:1). Still, at this point 3,000 B.C. was before the migration that built the ethnic compositions of modern Europe. "What is certain is that the Basques are the oldest indigenous people in Western Europe. They describe themselves as, 'Euskaldunak,' those who speak Basque. And their homeland is known as 'Eskal-Herria', or by its political name 'Euzkadi', and is in the western end of these mountains" (McCall, 1968:31). "The definition of Basqueness has been transformed today. Ysursa (2001) comments, in Spain and France the early emphasis had been on racial purity; today the emphasis is on the Basque language and culture.

There are physical characteristics that differentiate the Basque. For instance, according to the physical anthropologist Carlton Coon (writing in McCall, 1968:34) "They have a very high incidence of type O blood with a high RH negative factor, versus a low proportion of type B blood. The ideal face has been described as, "forehead straight or slightly sloping, brow ridges weak or absent, nasion depression slight or absent, nose thin or aquiline with thin tip, forehead broad, mid-face narrow, mandible extremely slender and narrow, and chin pointed." Most interestingly, "The Basque population is considered autochthonous because no connection can be found to any other region or ethnic group in the world" (Iberlin, 1981:8).

Most support the theory that to be Basque you have to be able to speak the distinctive Basque language. However, this omits a large group of those who consider themselves Basque who do not speak the language. In America, there are those who speak Basque who do not come from Basque heritage but consider themselves to be Basque. "The Basque language precedes the latter day derivatives of the Latin language by at least 3,000 years" (Ysursa, 2001:4). Words in the language do not resemble the French and Spanish speaking people surrounding the area. "The vast majority

of the modern languages of Europe (including English, Spanish and French, for example) all belong to a single huge family called the Indo-European family," meaning that they all descended from a common ancestor (Online, 196: 1). There have been many attempts to explain where the Basque language came from, but little scientific evidence to support these explanations. The Basque language was not written until the 16th century (Online, 1996: 3). Its origin also has religious explanations, "The Gipuzkoan priest Erroa petitioned the Chapter of the Cathedral of Pamplona, which after months of deliberations, accepted his theory that Basque was the language spoken in the Garden of Eden" (Ysursa, 2001:2) Interestingly, there is linguistic evidence to support it having been one of the first languages spoken. For example, their word for 'axe' has the same root as the word 'rock' (Online, 2002: 1)

Immigration

The Basques came into America in what is known as "chain-migration," meaning they helped one another mainly through blood ties to emigrate and make a better life for themselves. "It is generally the duty of a Basque who has been successful or at least established a place for himself in the United States, to send over for members of his family to join him. Thus someone who has established a

sheep ranch, will often call over his brothers and sisters to assist him in the enterprise." (McCall, 1968:41)

A good source of information on Basques is at the Center for Basque Cultural Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno. The Center reports that according to the 1990 Census there were 47,956 people in the United States who declared themselves Basque (Center for Basque Studies, 2001). The Center also notes, many Basques came over into the California during the gold rush of 1848, but found it easier to make a good living herding sheep and continued to do so successfully until the early 1900's. Immigration laws were then passed that consequently limited the number of Basques allowed into the country. In 1921 the Spanish quota that affected the Basque was only 912 persons per year (Center for Basque Studies, 2001). The Center also reports that Senator McCarran of Nevada sponsored a series of laws starting in 1950 that allowed more sheep herders into the country. "Basques who come to the U.S. today are not interested in herding sheep. And today's Basque-Americans citizens are mainstreamed into the population, although many of them ended up in construction, gardening, baking and various professions" (Center for Basque Studies, 2001).

Johnson County Basques

Johnson County is located in the Northeastern part of Wyoming, at the base of the Big Horn Mountains and has a rich history of the American West.

It's a land rich in both history and scenery. A place of sheep herders and cattle barons, renegades and rustlers. Where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid holed up after their outlaw exploits. Where miners consumed with gold rush fever passed through on the Bozeman Trail. Where some of the most famous Indian battles in American history occurred. And where the Johnson County Cattle War, a rangeland dispute which historians often deem one of the most notorious events in our history left its mark here in the late 1880's.

(Online, Chamber of Commerce, 2002:1)

The population of Buffalo in 2000 was 3900 people and the population of Johnson County was 7705 (Online, www.buffalowyo.com, 2002:1). Buffalo has sometimes been referred to as, 'a mini Jackson Hole' because its historic wild ways have been replaced by museums, art galleries, and interesting shops. The majority of the people are now employed in retail and service (Online, www.buffalowyo.com, 2002:3)

That first Basque, also known as the 'King of the Basques' in Johnson County, was Jean Esponda. Many people followed Mr. Esponda to this land shrugging off fear and the longing for home to find a better life (Iberlin &

Romtvedt, 1995). Immigrants who borrowed money were indebted to those friends and family that helped them. Therefore, it was not unusual for the new immigrant to spend some time on the sheep ranch or working in the boarding house to pay back the loan. Often times the payment for sheep ranchers was sheep. "Many of the new immigrants started their own flocks by taking sheep in lieu of wages. Often two Basques would become partners."

(Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995:71) Eventually a man would acquire enough sheep to start his own ranch. Over time this has led to the ownership of some 250,000 acres of Johnson County by the Basque sheepmen (Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995).

Much of the history of the Basque people in the Buffalo/Kaycee area has been researched and compiled by Dollie Iberlin, wife of a Basque immigrant. In her two books, *Buffalotarrak* (1995, written in conjunction with David Romtvedt) and *The Basque Web* (1981) she provides a good overview of the families and blood ties in the community. In her dedication in *Buffalotarrak* (1995) she mentions some 38 families. Most have immigrated from both the French & Spanish provinces of the Great Pyrenees between the early 1900's until the last few arrived in the 1960's. The majority came from the mountainous area around

St.-Etienne-de-Baigorry and Arneguy in the land between France and Spain. There are differences between towns and provinces in Europe and it is thought that these differences prevailed among the first generation Basque-Americans but that the second and third generations tend to lose these as well as some cultural characteristics (McCall, 1968). "Over 500 Basques passed through the gates of Ellis Island on their way to Wyoming." (Iberlin, and Romtvedt, 1995:16)

The periods of immigration have been divided into three main parts: 1902-1920, 1920-1950, and 1950-1969 (Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995). The first period is described as being the time when many Basques came over looking to make a living in sheep ranching. They brought with them and practiced the culture of their homeland such as the card game *mus*, the handball game *pelota*, and most importantly, a unique spoken language.

The period between 1920-1950 was time spent expanding on their land ownership. This was also the time when the first generation of American born Basques entered the public school system. This had a profound effect on their identity, as "American-born Basques who entered school unable to speak English were often ridiculed by their peers" (Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995:25). Even more

interesting, "These young Basque-Americans quickly became familiar with American ways and with the English language, so that, when they grew up and married, the language of the home became English except in cases when the Basque-American's spouse was born in *Euskadi* -the Basque country (Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995:25).

Traditional Basque culture was nurtured during this second period, 1920-1950, by the migrant Basque shepherders who only spoke Basque. It was because of them and such enduring practices such as *mus*, dancing, and festivals and other parts of the culture were kept alive.

During the third period, between 1950 and 1969, two factors led to the decrease of Basque interests in traditional culture. The first was a decline in immigrants coming to Johnson county from the homeland and the second reason was the reduction in the availability of land that made it possible to make a living in sheep ranching (Iberlin & Romvedt, 1995).

There are certain characteristics both now and in the first years of migration that help set Basques apart from their American counterparts. Basques in Johnson County have always been described as hard working and fun loving. They kept to themselves, and, although their differences were a bit unnerving to some locals in the town's bar

owners, their neighbors respected them even though they did not interact much with others in the area. Today, they are still thought about much in this way, but like generations of any ethnicity, things have changed within the Basque culture.

When Basques first came to this country their main goal was to acquire wealth and the way to do this was through acquiring land and sheep. This was their first priority and families would have to come later. When the men did marry and start their families, their families were smaller than their American counterparts and the family lifestyles revolved around the sheep cycles. It was hard work that everyone participated in. "A man and a woman were partners in a dual adventure that required hard work and faith in one another. Men were not 'knights in shining armor,' they were shepherders struggling to own their own ranches" (Iberlin & Romtvedt, 1995:78). By the same token, it is important to know that women have always been held in high regard by their male counterparts; "it is known that women enjoy a position of equal respect among the Basques" (McCall, 1968:32).

Shepherding was often times a very lonely occupation. It was common for the shepherd to spend many months in the mountains watching over a flock of sheep with no one

else to talk to. He had only the contents of his sheep wagon brought up into the mountains by horse. The sheep wagons were covered in canvas and included a double bed, a table that stowed away and a bench on one side that allowed for storage within it. On the other side of the wagon there was room for a small stove. Some new immigrants even lived out of this wagon with their new brides before they had enough money to build or buy their own homes.

As this was a lonely time, many men looked forward to the August fifteenth Feast of Assumption celebration as a time to get together with friends and family to stave off the loneliness. "In Arnegi, the original home of many of Buffalo's Basque people, August fifteenth, the Feast of Assumption, was a traditional holiday" (Iberlin and Romvedt, 1995: 25). These Basques brought and maintained that particular festival in their adopted homeland.

The celebration usually occurred at Esponda's cabin and lasted all night. It included a mass, a feast of Basque foods, and plenty of lamb with an abundant supply of wine and dancing. The men would then return to their flocks and stay until fall when the sheep would be brought down off the mountain to the ranches. Not many of the Basque men still operate their ranches in this manner. Sheep wagons and horses have been replaced by cabins and

trucks and few men even bring their sheep up to the mountains to graze anymore. However, the August fifteenth Feast of Assumption celebration continues to play an important part in social and cultural life.

Another important characteristic of the Johnson County Basque history is the importance of the local bar known as the "21 Club". It was a 'hang-out' spot for Basques to enjoy each other's company, to speak their native tongue and a great place to take part in the favorite card game known as *mus*.

In almost every area in which there are Basques, one will find 'Basque bars, where local Basques gather to talk over old times both in America and in the Basques country. Often, these bars would have been connected with boarding houses of 'Basque hotels', which serve meals both to their Basque borders and to non-Basque members of the community...It was a place where the immigrant could find help and job information...

(McCall, 1968:43)

The bar no longer exists in Johnson County but the *mus* game is still carried out elsewhere. There is now a tournament for the card game; the last one was held in Chino California on June 30, 2001.

Basque clubs are also an important part of the ethnic identity of Basque people. "Membership qualification for most of these are either being of Basque descent or being married to a person of Basque descent" (McCall, 1968:45).

married to a person of Basque descent" (McCall, 1968:45). The Buffalo Basque club, a branch of the bigger organization known as the North American Basque Organization (NABO) supports almost everything that makes up Basque identity today. It provides funding as well as knowledge for dance groups, music, games, festivals, and learning the language.

The Basques brought with them a rich culture with a heritage and traditions that are still practiced today. Even though many of the sheep ranches are gone, the local bar has changed and the language is spoken far less frequently, it is with the festivals and clubs, that the Basque culture is sustaining in Johnson County today and it is because of these that it will be maintained in the future.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Method

This particular study employed the use of the qualitative method. This method is used for gaining rich, meaningful data using in-depth interviews with members of the population being studied.

Some of the attributes of the qualitative method according to Cook and Reichardt (1997:10), are first of all, understanding the human behavior from the actor's own perspective. The material presented in this research is not an interpretation by the researcher but direct quotes from those being interviewed. Secondly, in qualitative methodology, there is a use of naturalistic and uncontrolled observation. As a researcher, I was able to observe and take notes on the Basque people in their own settings. Thirdly, the qualitative method allows the researcher to gain the insider perspective. The information provided in this research is from *their* point of view. More interestingly, this type of research is

grounded, descriptive, and exploratory. Meaning, it is through the interviews with fourteen different Basque people that themes emerge from their answers to the questions. Qualitative methodology also provides a valid, rich, deep data that is holistic. Sitting down and talking with members of the Basque community in Johnson County provided a lot of information for this research that would not have been as thorough had it been attempted another way.

It is necessary to use the qualitative method while researching the Basque community in Johnson County for several reasons. First of all, it is only through in depth interviews that I could discover the people's shared meanings and experiences within the Basque community. It is unlikely that such complete meanings and experiences could be obtained through quantitative analysis. Doing qualitative analysis provided me with the meanings to understanding the Basque community.

The Sample

The Basques included in this study reside in Johnson County, a northeastern part of Wyoming found at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The main town, Buffalo, has a population of approximately 3500 people with a few small towns surrounding it. In Johnson County there are

approximately 38 Basques families (Iberlin and Romtvedt, 1995). I chose to go to Buffalo and complete these interviews during the month of August during which time the annual Feast of Assumption takes place. As mentioned, this is a festival celebrated by the Basque people in mid-August, up in the mountains. It usually consists of a Catholic mass lead by the visiting local bishop, food, including an elaborate meal, followed by music and dancing. It was to my advantage to attend this function in order to make acquaintances as well as renew old friendships. (See Appendix A)

I proceeded to use snowball sampling to obtain my subjects. Bailey (1994) explains snowball sampling as occurring in three stages. In its first stage, a few persons having the right characteristics are identified and interviewed, then they inform the interviewer of even more people who can be included in the sample. They, in turn, lead to even more people to include. It was only through this snowball sampling technique that I was able to get the information I needed such as, who was of Basque descent, where did they live, and how could I contact them. It was through renewed friendships and acquaintances that I first made appointments with my interviewees. I attempted to get a wide range of ages as well as members that were of the

first, second, third and fourth generation Basques for the fourteen interviews which were conducted.

Instrument

My interview consisted of two parts, demographic and cultural information. The first part, demographic, was included in order to get data on the age, marital status, and occupation of the individual. More importantly, it provided the information needed to place the Basque member in the appropriate generation category.

The cultural information involved such questions as, why did they or their ancestors move to Johnson County? By asking this question we can learn what forces pulled them out of the old country and into America. An important question about what it takes to be considered Basque in Johnson County helps us to understand, from their point of view, how the Basque identify themselves and if this identity has changed across generations.

I proceeded to ask more cultural information such as whether or not they thought that there has been a revival in Basque cultural interests in Johnson County. Answers to this question would hopefully give some insight into whether or not traditions have decreased and where they may be headed. I was interested to find out if the Basque people spent more time with their Basque family and friends

than they did with their non-Basque family and friends because this might be a contributing factor to the increase or decrease of cultural interests and also provide indicators of structural assimilation. I reasoned that those who spent more time with their Basque family and friends would be more involved in their culture.

After the cultural information, it was important to ask questions about their experiences in assimilation. For example, did their cultural beliefs and practices ever cause any tensions with their non-Basque friends or neighbors? Answers to questions like these would tell us what the assimilation process was like for each of the Basque generations.

Finally, it was important to ask questions such as, "if there was one thing you could change about the Basque community in which you live, what would it be?" The answers would give insight into what the Basque people would like to see happen to their community. These are just a sample of the questions asked to give the reader an idea of the reasoning behind the research questions; for a look at the entire interview schedule see Appendix A.

Interviewing and The Sample

The interviewees were asked to sign a consent form informing them that their responses would be kept confidential, and letting them know that they were free to end the interview at anytime if they felt uncomfortable with any of the questioning. (See Appendix B) Information for future contact was also provided. The interviews were then held in the interviewee's home and were recorded on micro cassette tapes for later transcription. These interviews lasted anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour and a half.

I interviewed fourteen Basque people ranging in age from twenty-four to seventy-seven and spanning four generations. It was difficult to know until the interview started in what generation these respondents would belong to. I interviewed three full-blooded Basques, only two of whom had immigrated from the old country. All but one of the respondents was currently residing in Johnson County at the time of the interview.

Before leaving, I took a trip back up the mountains in order to take pictures of sheep wagons and some sheep herding that was taking place that day. I met with some of the Basque shepherders and spent some time experiencing sheep herding first hand. (See Appendix C)

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and compiled according to generation. As I read through the transcribed answers in each generation, I looked for the common themes to present. As the themes emerged the responses were organized to extract direct quotations which best expressed that particular theme. Where there was a differing view on experience, a quotation (or two) was selected to illustrate that thought or feeling.

Once the themes were identified and described, I searched through the literature to find appropriate theories or comparisons to relate to each theme. These ideas are presented in the last chapter.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Demographic Information

Most of the interviewees were married unless they belonged to the fourth generation group, of which none were married in that age category. Of those who were married, only two were married to spouses of Basque heritage. Of those that had, had children, only a few of the children were married to spouses of Basque heritage. Most of the people I interviewed were middle-class, working or retired. The younger generations were more likely to have had higher education. Many of the interviewees owned property. Among them most, owned the houses they lived in. A few of the older Basques still had land from sheep ranching that they were leasing out. Of those interviewed, none were full-time sheep ranchers and if they did own sheep it was usually in conjunction with running cattle. All but two of the interviewees answered Catholic as their religious affiliation. Almost everyone interviewed had lived in

Johnson County their entire lives and left for only a few years to attend college.

All of the first generation Basques spoke the native tongue, as well as about half of the second generation. None of the third and fourth generation Basques however, spoke their native tongue but many indicated that they would have liked to learn to do so.

Reasons for Immigration

When asked, about why the family moved to America, everyone's response was the same. They came to America looking for better opportunities, more money, and a richer lifestyle. It was difficult making a living in the old country on such small pieces of land so they came to Wyoming where there was more land and one could make a good living as a sheepherder.

You know the Basque families they raise quite a few children in every family but you know there is only room really for one in that family. The rest of the kids have to go someplace to find a job and already when you saw the Basque that came to America as sheep herder and came back with little money so, I thought why not do the same thing?

(1st generation Basque)

In addition to the economic reasons, the similarity of the terrain was also an attraction, as seen in the following quote:

They came here thinking that there just wasn't that much where they came from in France. They just had little areas for their little farming they might have 2 or 3 cows and maybe 50 head of sheep and usually the older boys in the family stayed there and took care of the parents and the ranch so they came here thinking there was more money and a good way to make a living. And they liked the area because it reminded them of the Pyrenees.

(2nd generation Basque)

Added to the basic economic motive was the possibility of a little "success":

They came over to make some money basically, to get out of the old country and come here for the opportunities to own sheep and land and to be more successful.

(4th generation Basque)

Each generation recognized the economic forces that drove the Basque people out of the old country and brought them to America. The small farms and large families in Europe would only be able to provide a meager way of living and America offered them the lifestyle they dreamed of.

Identity

I thought it was important to ask, what it took to be considered Basque in Johnson County. Their answers would provide an intimate Basque's definition of what it takes to be considered Basque among those living in the area. There was a different idea about Basque identity depending on which generation they belonged to.

The first generation Basque strongly feel that to be Basque you have to have been from the Basque country and knowing what the lifestyle there was like. Otherwise you have no idea of what being Basque really is.

We only about fifteen Basques born in the Basque country now that is Basque, full-blooded Basque born in this country to my notion, they are Americans. Like my daughter, they are Americans, and I don't blame them. You cannot, uh they claim at the same time I am from the Basque parents, I am a Basque. Really though, to be a Basque you've got to be born and raised in the Basque country. You can tell to people here but you cannot realize it until you live it. So, to be a Basque, you have got to talk Basque, which is very, very unusual here, and uh, you got, uh different dispositions and feelings if you are born there than if you are born here. The heritage and the culture is different there.

(1st generation Basque)

The second and third generation felt as though it is by "blood", you have to have had a parent who is of some

Basque blood. The fourth generation Basques doesn't feel as strongly about having to have had Basque blood in an individual, just some association with the Basque people through such things as the Basque club.

The Basques that are here, a lot of them to be considered Basque, you have to have been born in the Basque country, there are four or five remaining. They figure they are the real Basque and we are just the American born. But to be real Basque I think you have to be half blood or quarter blood. Your parents have to be Basque, both mother and father.

(2nd generation Basque)

There is not a great deal of difference between the second and third generations and what they consider it takes to be Basque, both feel it is by blood.

Well, I guess primarily by blood. Some portion of your blood needs to be Basque, you know other than that the standards anymore are not that strict. Anymore it is probably just by blood.

(3rd generation Basque)

The fourth generation, however, have a new idea about what it takes to be considered Basque. It goes from having to have Basque blood to simply being associated with the people and culture.

Not necessarily having Basque blood but having some association with the people and the culture and they will accept you.

(4th generation Basque)

What we can infer from the content of these quotes is that the first generation Basques see that being Basque is knowledge that can only come from the old country and Basques in America are an entirely different concept. The second and third generations look at the identity issue with the approach that if an individual has some "Basque blood," he/she is Basque. When we move to the fourth generation we see a significant change in attitude, you don't have to have Basque blood in you to be Basque, you need only to be associated with the people and culture.

There is not much of a difference in the way that the respondents answered the question, what is the most significant aspect of being Basque to you? What was important to them was the knowledge and the sense of belonging they gained from being a part of the Basque culture. This kind of response varied little across generations. The comfort level of being a part of something different grows with each generation. As life has become more chaotic and younger generations have moved away from home, the security of belonging to the Basque community becomes more of an important issue for them.

To me, you know, friends are friends and neighbors are neighbors.

(1st generation Basque)

While the first generation understands the importance of friends and neighbors that the Basque community provides, the subsequent generations mention the comfort in the community and the senses of identity that they gain from belonging to the group.

I think it is the close-knit community. I mean one of the things I like was that you don't see much of a generation gap. I remember going to these festivals when I was 13 or 14 or whatever and hanging out with guys who were 60 and being comfortable with each other across the generation, not feeling isolated from them. But I think here and everywhere the close-knit community and also the identity to cling to...

(2nd generation Basque)

Knowing the heritage and being a part of the community

(4th generation Basque)

Overwhelmingly the response across generations was that the best thing about being Basque was the feeling that they get of being a part of something special. It gave them part of their identity as well as a stronger tie to their friends and neighbors.

I think the best thing about being Basque is being able to speak the language and associate with other Basque people and communicating with them.

(2nd generation Basque)

The one that everyone mentions is the strong sense of identity so many people are talking about that sense of identity, that sense of culture. That richness and experience. I think it is real and true. People who come here from all over for the festivals just by virtue of being Basque you are friends. You don't shake hands, you shake hands and put your hands on each other's shoulder, there is a great comfort in that.

(2nd generation Basque)

Being a part of an ethnic culture. Something, most people are just American and this gives you a tie to something different.

(2nd generation Basque)

The things that stood out that they would want to change about being Basque usually had to do with getting more people involved in the culture, changes to the club, and more communication between Basque people both within Johnson County and between other clubs.

I think it would be nice if the younger ones that are around here would get together more and try and keep up some of the tradition but it is the same everywhere.

(2nd generation Basque)

What I would like to see is more communication in our clubs and between the self... and I think that is crucial to there being a Basque identity.

(2nd generation Basque)

To have more involvement in our club of the people that are Basque heritage. There has been a lot of sore feelings throughout the years for whatever reasons between the generations. First and second have miscommunications and I think that is why the second and third generations are not as involved or interested as they should be.

(2nd generation Basque)

The Basque community has had a relatively smooth assimilation into American society. From the fact that only two had married other Basques, we see that marital assimilation had, in fact, taken place early on in their history in Johnson County. It has been a positive experience supported by their economic success in the sheep industry. However, it is with the subsequent generations that they wish to enhance their identity within the Basque culture to give special meaning to their lives. This is being accomplished through what Gans calls, "symbolic ethnicity." For example, the Basques today have turned to such things as the Basque club to express their interests. They take part in dancing and traditional customs on certain occasions rather than it being an all-encompassing 'way of life'.

Generational Differences in Cultural Experience

The Basque people in Johnson County generally see a decline in cultural interests within the Basque community itself as well as in the surrounding community. There is a minority which considers it has increased due to the Basque club and when looking to the future, see that it is only through the club and festivals that the interests in their culture will be maintained.

Yes, definitely. These younger people seem to be more interested in their heritage and they keep the dancing going...

(2nd generation Basque)

Those who feel that there is a decrease, find this due to the busy lifestyles that their members are dealing with.

The first generation express concern with the subsequent generations not knowing what it means to 'be Basque'. The first generation is aware of the difference in values and beliefs between them and their descendents and they frustrated with the relationship.

To my opinion the Basque people born in the United States, they want to know everything. They are Basque they want to be Basque but they want it the American way. ...They were born here and go to school here, to the American schools and it is all right. They learn the American culture number one, and then he Basque culture is

number two or three or whatever, I understand that very well, that is okay. Like my daughter they are Americans because I am the old fashioned Basque. I can't understand why they say and do stuff like I am a Basque, they show off for certain occasions outside that, forget it.

(1st generation Basque)

There is also concern and frustration from the second, third and fourth generations about the lack of communication between them and the first generation immigrants. They feel that the culture and knowledge is being lost due to the lack of involvement and teaching from the first generation.

We are the second generation Basque and the third generation aren't keeping up the traditions and we're not keeping up the traditions. We are losing a lot of them that are my age too so there aren't that many older Basques here. We just don't have all of the activities and the things that we used to have years ago. The first generation Basque that came here area are all gone and the second generation are going too. The young ones just aren't keeping up the traditions.

(2nd generation Basque)

It just seems like the younger generation, it is hard to get them excited about it, I think everybody is preoccupied with their own lives and other things and if they don't focus on what their grandparents did and so forth, if they don't want to dig into that, then they just sort of lose it.

(3rd generation Basque)

I think it has declined more and more because the older generation are passing away and not passing on the knowledge in Johnson County we used to have thirty dancers in our club, now we have five or six.

(4th generation Basque)

One theme that was brought to my attention during the interviews was the generational discrimination within the Basque community. Responses took on a new meaning when asked about discrimination issues with the surrounding community, respondents focused on issues within the community.

Yeah, age discrimination. We have had an annual mus game, which is a tournament, and if you win that then you go to other states and play and there were a lot of older Basques who didn't want the younger ones to play. From that aspect there is discrimination.

(2nd generation Basque)

When asked, about practicing traditional dress and customs of the Basque, the answers given depended more on age rather than generation since immigration. The older Basques practiced more of the traditions such as speaking Basque, playing traditional games such as mus, and cooking. The younger generation responded with having some interest

and some had even made efforts however, they felt frustration at not being able to keep up these traditions.

My cousin and his family came up from Douglass and stayed over Wednesday night and we played, we play a lot of mus every Sunday and any chance you get two people, we do play often.

(Retired, 2nd generation Basque)

Yes, through the Basque club and being the instructor and we have learned from my father. My husband and I are trying to learn Basque from a course from Nevada but haven't had much time.

(2nd generation Basque)

My level of involvement is more of a learning process, more of an investigation process. Like my mother, both of her parents were full Basque and you don't think twice about it when it is day-to-day norm and common place so I guess my involvement has been more finding out the history and exploring it...I play mus, before I danced, I drink wine, and I play handball...I have taken some Basque lessons it didn't really stick together well. I have read some Basque literature that comes from the University of Nevada and I have been to a number of the festivals and I was an officer in NABO, went to a couple of functions and participated in those.

(3rd generation Basque)

The older generation is passing away and not passing on the knowledge and that. I've known Basque dancing my whole life but my dad has not taught me the language and I think there is just less interest.

(4th generation Basque)

The responses from the last two questions reveal an important difference between how the generations look at

their culture. The first generation see it as an all-encompassing way of life with the club being an outlet of 'showing-off' whereas the following generations look to the club as their source for knowlegement and understanding of their traditions. Both the first and subsequent generations acknowledge this difference between them on the outlook but have a hard time communicating with this wedge between them.

Social Networks

A third theme, which transcends generations, is the importance of ties to the "old country". When asked, what is your favorite story about your Basques friends or family? Those that had visited the old country chose to tell stories of that experience and noted particularly the warm reception they received while visiting relatives.

The entire family took a trip back to Europe to my father's half-brother's ordination as a priest, we had a great time seeing relatives, going to different areas of the Basque country my mother's sisters and her nephews and nieces and my father's.

(2nd generation Basque)

You know the favorite stories are the stories I experienced myself being in the old country with relatives and what not; just the party and warmth and companionship.

(3rd generation Basque)

Probably going back to the old country with my grandma and grandpa, the overall experience of that.

(4th generation Basque)

Others mentioned the get-togethers and parties they enjoyed years ago in Buffalo with their Basque friends and family.

There are so many memories of things that we did. Even growing up there were a lot of us here that were the same age going to school, we did a lot together as families in those days all of the families got together a lot but they don't do that anymore.

(2nd generation Basque)

We had lots of Basque friends and one of our things was a fourth of July picnic every year at our cabin which was at Upper Doyle Creek...and all of our Basque friends would get together and eat Basque food. They would go fishing and the kids would have fun and play games and we would all just go and have a good time. We always in the summertime liked to go fishing and get together and have parties. Those are always good memories and good times.

(2nd generation Basque)

Another viewpoint that emerged out of the social networks in the new country, were the tensions felt within the Basque community by its members.

I would say some among the Basques themselves, again there is this faction I don't think it is as bad now as it used to be, I would say fifteen years ago. A lot of it came up through this Basque club. There was a lot of shift in power and a lot of people got offended...Historically they have been known to be really hard-headed people and set in their ways and you can't hardly ever change them.

(2nd generation Basque)

The only tensions I can think of can be people smoldering within the Basque community. Someone would feel isolated or someone would feel jilted...They are tenacious, the fall is if someone feels jilted twenty years ago they will hold it forever. There are people that had feuds twelve years ago and cannot tell you why but they don't go.

(2nd generation Basque)

In conclusion, the majority of the interviewees had fond memories of their Basque community both in Johnson County and of their visits to the homeland. But they also talked about the tensions within their own community and the club.

Social Acceptance

Overwhelmingly, the respondents stated that they felt that there have never been any tensions, discrimination, or embarrassment between the Basque people and the surrounding community. One did the mention not knowing the English language right away as causing some tensions in town.

When we first came over here we couldn't talk a word of English. We stayed out in the hills, we had to herd sheep and we stayed in a wagon the whole year we came to town once a year...The American people, not everyone, but some did not like that, like when we were in the bars or in the street they used to ask; 'hey are you talking about me?' or 'why don't you talk English, you are in the States now, why don't you talk English so we can understand you?' We couldn't talk, we didn't know English.

(1st generation Basque)

The terrorist group known as ATTA in the Basque country present day seems to be an embarrassment to many Basques living in Johnson County. According to most informants, it was only when visiting the old country in the past that the Basque people ever felt it necessary to disguise their Basque heritage.

Atta is an embarrassment that comes over here. The terrorists are an embarrassment when it comes over here. We are always going to be Basque no matter who governs us because they kill innocent people.

(2nd generation Basque)

Over there in Spain on the real Spanish side, Basques are not very well liked because they are wanting to make their own government, they want to be totally separate from Spanish and French governments, which you probably heard of the Basque terrorists, so when you fly into Spain you don't really want to make yourself known that you are Basque because there your rights are limited.

(2nd generation Basque)

A minority of the older Basques did recall tensions between the Basques and the surrounding community in the past when the Basques were the major landowners in the area.

I think there has been associations where the Basques here have always been normally large land holders and large ranchers and there probably has been some dissensions as neighbors.

(2nd generation Basque)

Oh, I think there was some resentment. They were the major landowners and they owned all of Johnson County practically and the sheep and the fact that they ran sheep and not cattle so much caused some resentment but now those that are running sheep today are running cattle too. Whereas, at one time it was all just sheep.

(2nd generation Basque)

Although some did experience these tensions between the Basques and the surrounding community, more often the members mentioned the respect, admiration, and support that Johnson County has given them. It is recognized by the Basque people that they are known for their work ethic in the surrounding community, which has also helped them to gain this admiration and respect. These thoughts span across the generations.

We were okay here and the people took us as themselves as a neighbor. We were good workers and they could see that and in town we would mix with the people and buy them a drink and the Basque dances, Americans will come and join us. It was okay, we had a pretty good reputation and people would take us in their families and life.
(1st generation Basque)

If it weren't for the Basque people here in Buffalo things would be different. They have always been highly respected clear back to the beginning and they were a major part of Buffalo and they were always honest people an Americans from way back will tell you that they never had to worry about the Basques paying their bills and they were always highly respected here in Buffalo.

(2nd generation Basque)

I think that the people around here are more enamored with the Basque than the Basque are with themselves sometimes...they are supportive, both here and in Wyoming in general, of the Basque culture and community and they continue to be.
(3rd generation Basque)

As presented in this paper, the Basque population in Johnson County had a positive experience assimilating into the surrounding community. They were recognized as a group of people with good ethics and values and were respected for these.

In conclusion, the Basque people of Johnson County experienced a supportive immigration and assimilation into the community. However, the generations had different

cultural experiences. These generations also had differences of opinion in what it mean to be Basque.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The Basque people of Johnson County have had a relatively smooth assimilation into the surrounding rural community due to their relative success in achieving their economic goals, which occurred most significantly during the second generation. If we take a look at the four generations and the assimilation issues discussed in this study we can clearly see this taking place.

Immigration

When the first generation Basques immigrated to America, they quickly became involved in building an economic future for their families. They were also a source of future immigration to the region through their continued ties to their European relatives. It was clearly recognized across generations that the first immigrants left their homeland and came to America in hopes of making a better living.

Identity

The first generation's feelings toward being Basque are summed up into saying that they are, 'American-Basque' with a knowledge of their homeland and its struggles. The second generation's feelings toward being Basque are best described as having pride in the Basque heritage. Within the third generation Basques, the feeling toward being Basque turns toward their ethnic heritage and it becomes more of a symbolic novelty. Being Basque is not a way of life but something to celebrate on certain occasions. The fourth generation Basques are similar to the third in that they want to show their feelings in a revival of interest in Basque traditions. Here there is some evidence of frustration with wanting to know the Basque traditions but not being able to obtain the knowledge, along with knowing that it could be lost. For instance, having an interest in the Basque language but having no one to teach it to them is viewed as a source of frustration.

Herbert Gans's theory suggests that as the generations move further away from immigration, ethnic identity is less life-encompassing and becomes instead, a way of expressing the identity without conflicting with the person's own lifestyle. This is supported in the research in many ways.

For example, a third or fourth generation Basque person in Johnson County expresses his/her ethnic identity through the Basque club and its celebrations. Being Basque means having some affiliation with the club and its members.

As the Basque people of Johnson County move away from the first generation, the generation of immigration, to the third and fourth generations, being Basque takes on new meaning. During the second and third generations assimilation is complete and by the fourth generation ethnic identity is transformed; yet never has there been a generation not proud of being Basque. But what it means to be Basque takes on new meaning it goes from being an everyday part of life to a celebration, on occasion, of the heritage.

Unfortunately this has led to frustration and lack of communication between the generations. The older generation can see the difference and have a difficult time passing on only the bits and pieces of knowledge the younger generation is asking for, whereas, the younger generation see this refrain as being stubborn.

Generational Differences in Cultural Experience

In the first generation there is some marriage within the group, religion is important, as well as Basque traditions such as cooking, speaking the language, and

playing traditional card games. However, by the second generation, marriage is outside the group, religion is important, and for some of the older Basques; language is evident. Tradition is also more evident in this group for the older, 'retired', Basques.

In the third generation religion is still important however; there is a noticeable diminishment of native language usage and a loss of cultural traditions. In the fourth generation religion is still important and creates a basis for continuing social solidarity among people of Basque ancestry. Here the third and fourth generational interest becomes obvious.

The members of the third and fourth generations look to the Basque club and festivals for their continuing education and celebration of their ethnic heritage whereas their parents and grandparents had used family and friends for this purpose. The first generation had plenty of opportunities to share Basque experiences with other Basque people. The second generation fulfilled this need also, but it is the third and fourth generations, those who have fully assimilated, who see the need to make an effort to continue learning and educating others about their heritage in order to sustain it. This phenomenon has been referred to by Marcus Hansen (1952) as, *the principle of third*

generation interest. Hansen maintained that in the third generation "the grandchildren of the original immigrants-ethnic interest and awareness would actually increase" (Marcus Hansen, 1952). This has clearly been the case with the Basques living in Johnson County. Although the generations have become completely assimilated, their interests in their culture have increased.

Alba's theory of marriage (1990) has also been supported in this research. Inter-marriage first took place dramatically in the second generation of the Basque people in Johnson County. According to Alba, this decreases the use of traditions within the married couples home. Therefore, there is more than likely a decrease in the amount and consistency of traditions being passed on to the children (or third generation). This is evident in the interviews with the Basques in Johnson County. Many of their traditions were not an encompassing lifestyle when only one parent was of Basque decent. We can assume also that these families are less likely to speak the mother tongue, which leads to a primary loss of cultural awareness and differentiation.

Grant McCall's theory (1968) suggests that use of the mother-tongue decreases sharply after the 2nd generation. He goes on to add that knowledge of the culture is lost

when use of the mother tongue is lost since meaning is constructed out of language. Many (but not all) of the second generation Basques did not speak the language. There weren't any third or fourth generation Basques that I interviewed who spoke the language fluently, although there was an interest among some to learn to do so.

Social Networks

For those Basques that were able to visit their homeland, this was an experience they loved to tell about. They formed wonderful memories that they would never forget and they expressed it as being one of the highlights of being Basque. For others, the relationships found within their community in America were what they enjoyed most about being Basque. They loved to tell about the get-togethers they had experienced both in the distant past and recently. However, these social networks in the new country do have their tensions among members.

Acceptance

According to the assimilation theory presented by Milton Gordon, the assimilation process of the Basque people in Johnson County was completed around the third generation. The Basques are considered assimilated because they have completed the seven steps including,

1. Cultural of Behavioral Assimilation
2. Structural Assimilation
3. Marital Assimilation
4. Identificational assimilation
5. Attitude receptional assimilation
6. Behavioral receptional assimilation
7. Civic assimilation

(Gordon, 1964:71)

It can be argued that this occurred during the second generation and is completed by the third. The Basque people have changed their cultural patterns to that of the host society, there has been large-scale entrance into cliques, clubs and institutions of the host society, large scale intermarriage, a sense of people-hood based on the host society, and the absence of prejudice and discrimination and the absence of value or power conflict.

In conclusion, from the point of immigration the Basque people in Johnson County have had a positive experience in assimilating to the host society. Through experiences in assimilation we can see the generational differences in their cultural experiences and how they have moved from being Basque as an all-encompassing way of life, to a heritage that provides a sense of comfort and identity that is to be celebrated on special occasions.

Further Research

I would like to see more research carried out on other samples of Basque people. Was the assimilation process as relatively painless in other areas? It would be beneficial to know the differences not only across generations in assimilation, but also across age groups.

It has been my observation through this research that the older and closer to retirement the Basque person is, the more time and involvement he/she spends in Basque traditions. It would be interesting to see as the third and fourth generation reaches closer to retirement if they are more willing to spend time reviving and sustaining their Basque heritage or if it will continue to fade away.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview

Demographic Information

What is your name?

What is your age?

Are you married?

To whom?

Is your spouse Basque also?

What is your occupation?

If you own property, what can you tell me about the transfer of ownership through your family's history?

What is your level of education?

How many children (grandchildren) do you have?

Are any of your children/grandchildren married to Basque people?

(Can you list them for me?)

What is your religious affiliation?

How long have you lived in Johnson County?

Cultural Information

When did your family move to America? (Were these your grandparents, parents, etc.?)

Do you know what reasons led them to do so?

Do you speak the Basque language?

What does it take to be considered "Basque" in Johnson County?

(use probes where necessary)

What is the most significant aspect of being Basque to you?

Do you think that there has been a revival in Basque cultural interest in Johnson County?

In your experience has the rate of marriage within the Basque community decreased, increased, or stayed the same? Explain.

Do you see the Basque people in Johnson county becoming more or less interested in their culture? Do you have any ideas as to reasons why this is so?

In what ways do you think your level of involvement in your culture is different from your (parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren)? What do you think has led to the (increase/decrease) of the level of involvement?

Do you practice traditional dress and customs of the Basque? Explain.

Do you spend more time with your Basque friends or non-Basque friends?

What is your favorite story about your Basque friends/family?*

Do you spend time doing different things with your Basque family and friends than your non-Basque family and friends?

Has your experience in Basque culture ever caused you any negative feelings or embarrassment? Explain.

Have you ever tried to conceal your Basque heritage to any other non-Basque people?

Do you know of any situations in which your family or friends have had to conceal their Basque heritage?

Has your cultural beliefs and values caused any conflict with your friends or neighbors?

How do you think the surrounding community has responded to your culture in the past?
In the present?

Have you experienced any prejudice?

Have you experienced any discriminating acts towards other Basques?

Have there been any tensions that you can recall between the Basque people and the surrounding community?

What is the best thing about being Basque?

What is the best thing about living in Johnson County?

If there was one thing you could change about the Basque community in which you live what would it be?

If there was one thing about living in Johnson county that you could change, what would it be?

Appendix B

Consent Form

Dear Basque Family Member,

Greetings from Grand Forks, my name is Megan Olson-DeMontigny. I am a graduate student at the University of North Dakota working on a master's thesis in the Sociology department. The experiences of Basque families living in Johnson County is my field of study. I have chosen your community because I was born and raised there and have always been interested in the town's past, present and future. The goal of this study is to learn more about what it was like for the Basque people that immigrated to Johnson County and to understand what their family's experiences have been like living there thus far. In what ways has your family changed after four generations and in what ways have you remained the same?

You are invited to participate in this research project. It will involve two simple steps; signing this consent form and sitting down with me for a taped thirty minute interview of your family's experiences. If you are interested, I would also appreciate taking a look at any old letters or photos you may have in your possession about your family. However, these are not necessary for participation of this study.

There is little risk involved in this participation. Because I am interested in your family's experiences with the surrounding community, some of the questions may cause some discomfort. However, should you feel uncomfortable at any time, you are under no obligation to answer and can skip the question or end the interview with no penalty. Your information and experiences will be published under a different name in order to assure confidentiality. There are benefits to understanding your experiences both for the people living in Johnson County and also families elsewhere. By understanding your experiences, others can benefit from what they have learned about what it was like for Basque sheep ranchers living in a rural community for four generations.

If you are interested in the results of this study or would like a copy of this consent form, you may reach me at the following phone number; (701) 772-8040 or locally: (307) 684-5771, or my advisor, Dr. Janet Moen at (701) 777-4414. Call me if you have any questions regarding the study or this consent form. Thank you for your time.

I have read all of the above and willingly agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

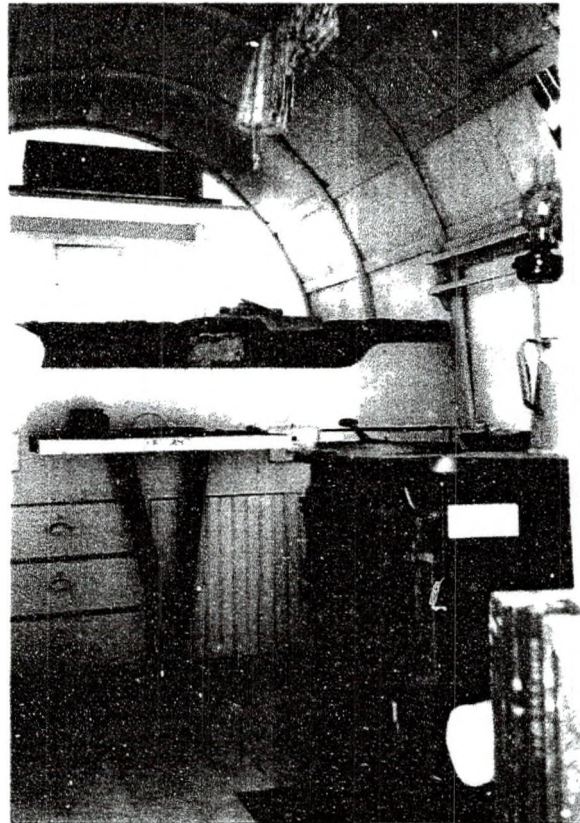
Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C



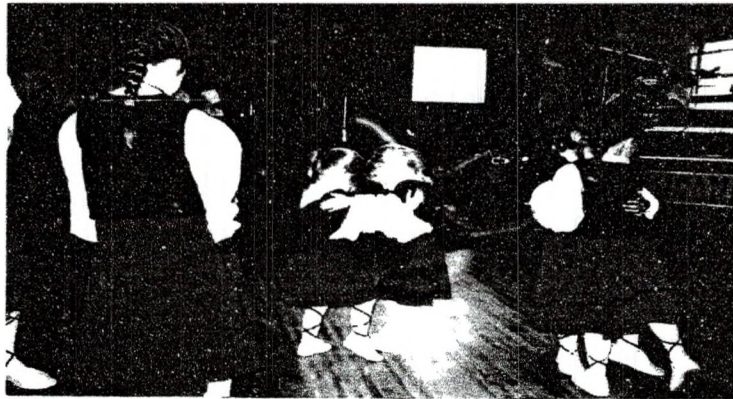
Sheep wagons parked on a side street in Buffalo, Wyoming



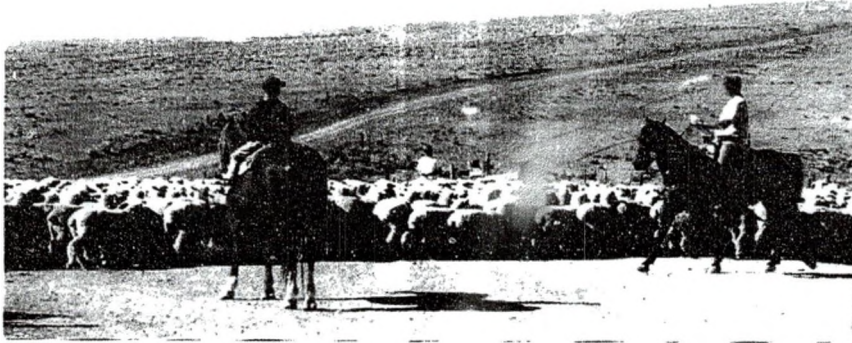
Inside of a sheep wagon parked in front of the Jim Gatchell museum, downtown Buffalo, Wyoming.



Feast of Assumption mass held in the mountains, August 15, 2001



Basque dancers at the Feast of Assumption celebration, August 15, 2001



Basque descendents herding sheep in the Big Horn Mountains August 2001



Sight of the NABO mural representing Basques in Buffalo, Wyoming

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