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Cultivating Identities in a Place Called Home: Intersectional, Ever Changing Identities of Vietnamese American Youth in Culturally Sustaining Spaces

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Abstract

Educators and scholars have been advocating for culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom that extends, honors, and sustains the cultures and backgrounds of our growing Students of Color population. Moving beyond pedagogies in classrooms, I examine culturally sustaining spaces in culture clubs and community-based organizations and how they cultivate the identity development and sense of belonging of Vietnamese American high school students. I find that these students have complex identities that are intersectional and ever changing, existing outside the Black-White binary. Vietnamese culture clubs provide a space that allows students to belong and express their identity in a positive way, but with curriculum as colonizer (Goodwin, 2010), schools have not yet become a place of belonging for all students. Community-based organizations provide alternative spaces that center the experiences of Vietnamese American students, allowing them to engage with their complex identities in a place that becomes like a home.

Keywords: Vietnamese American, culture clubs, community-based organizations, identity, belonging, culturally sustaining pedagogy



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Introduction

The United States prides itself on its diversity, but history demonstrates that this country has been forcing its People of Color to conform to the dominant White culture rather than embracing the diversity of cultures it possesses. *E Pluribus Unum*, the motto of the United States, means “out of many, we are one”: the United States of America is well-known for its diversity as a nation of mainly immigrants that brings different people together as “Americans.” Yet, the dominant image of an “American” is a White person, commonly thought of as a person with light skin and of European descent, which is also reflected in the Eurocentric “American” curriculum taught in most schools in the United States today (Goodwin, 2010). From the mid-1800s onwards, compulsory education laws introduced new student populations, Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants, into an education system that originally taught only a homogenous group of White children (Donelan, Neal, & Jones, 1994). In response, the U.S. education system began to assimilate these students under the guise of “social efficiency,” pushing students to forget their culture, history, and way of life in favor of the superior “American” culture (Donelan, Neal & Jones, 1994, p. 380). Historically, the United States used the education system to “Americanize” People of Color that have cultures, languages, and practices that are different from the dominant White culture, literally making their people “one” (Goodwin, 2010).

As the Student of Color population has been increasing in America, there has been a push by educators and scholars for a culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom. Now with a “majority multicultural, multilingual society of color,” the U.S. education system has to transform to meet the needs of our diverse students in order to promote racial and ethnic equality and equal access and opportunity (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 89). Instead of pushing our students to become more like middle-class White people, a culturally sustaining pedagogy recognizes the assets of the cultures that our Students of Color bring and asks educators to center the diverse practices and knowledge of our Communities of Color in the classroom. However, most work on culturally sustaining/relevant/responsive pedagogies focus on Black, Chicanx/Latinx, and Native American students, those that are traditionally considered to be marginalized. Asian Americans, on the other hand, are often invisible in literature with their needs neglected because of the “model minority” stereotype, in which they are seen as perfect American immigrants that are academically successful in school (Goodwin, 2010). Not only is the “model minority” stereotype inaccurate, but Asian American students are also deserving of a culturally sustaining pedagogy due to the community cultural wealth that they possess (Yosso, 2005). Rather than looking at students through the “White gaze,” Paris and Alim (2014) urge educators and scholars to see all Students of Color as assets with a wealth of cultural knowledge and skills that should be fostered in the classroom.

Because Asian Americans have mostly been rendered invisible within literature as well as schools, their unique experiences have been largely neglected and understudied. The disaggregation of Asian Americans reveals that there are different sub-groups that have completely different stories, histories, and cultures from one another, such as South Asians, East Asians, and Southeast Asians, yet these diverse ethnic groups are still categorized into one homogenous group. In this paper, I focus on Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA), a unique ethnic group that mostly came to America after 1975 as refugees from the wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Unlike most of the other ethnic sub-groups of Asian Americans, Southeast Asians came to America seeking refuge from war, immigrating “out of necessity,” while other Asian Americans mostly immigrated voluntarily with an opportunistic lens (Museus et al., 2013; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998).

Coming from underdeveloped countries with little economic resources, most SEAA settle in low-income communities, and many SEAA youth struggle and underperform in school compared to their South Asian and East Asian peers (Museus et al., 2013; Ngo & Lee, 2007). SEAA, like other Students of Color, need a culturally sustaining pedagogy that brings light to their unique stories of struggle, oppression, and survival and helps them develop their own identity and sense of belonging, especially as an “invisible minority” within an “invisible minority.”

Specifically, I examine how culturally sustaining spaces can support the identity development and cultivate a sense of belonging among Vietnamese Americans, the largest sub-group of SEAA that migrated to America. Focusing on high school students, I explore culturally sustaining practices within schools and community-based organizations and how youth find their identity and create a sense of belonging in these spaces. First, I provide a general overview of the SEAA population and their demographics to demonstrate why we need to pay attention to them. I follow with an explanation of culturally sustaining pedagogies, how culture clubs in schools and community-based organizations can become culturally sustaining spaces, and my theoretical framework for identity development and belonging. Then, I elucidate the complex, intersectional, and ever changing nature of identity development that Vietnamese American youth experience, which contrasts with the Black-White binary notions of race and ethnicity. I argue that culturally sustaining practices within schools are mostly present within Vietnamese culture clubs that foster the identity development and sense of belonging of Vietnamese American students, but with “curriculum as colonizer” (Goodwin, 2010), school has not transformed into a place of belonging for all Vietnamese American students. Moreover, I suggest that community-based organizations provide culturally sustaining spaces that center Vietnamese American youth and actively engage with their culture to encourage students to find their identity and sense of belonging. I end with recommendations for schools and educators to adopt a culturally sustaining pedagogy and for teacher credentialing programs to fully train their teachers for culturally sustaining work.

Who are Southeast Asian Americans?

Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA) are an ethnic group that originated from the countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and most SEAA sought refuge in America beginning in 1975 when the civil wars in their countries ended (Ngo & Lee, 2007). SEAA refugees came in three different waves: the first wave lasted from 1975 to 1979 and consisted mostly of elites and educated peoples, especially those with ideological and political opposition to the new governments (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Rumbaut, 2006; Takaki, 1989). The refugees that fled during the later waves came from lower classes with less resources (Rumbaut, 2006). The second wave, from 1979 to 1982, saw the migration of people from various backgrounds: family members of refugees from the first wave, “boat people” from Vietnam that took refuge in nearby asylum countries, Cambodian survivors from the Pol Pot period, and refugees from Laos (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Rumbaut, 2006). Finally, the last wave, from 1982 to present day, largely contained Hmong, Lowland Lao, and Cambodian refugees, whom generally had little “education, knowledge of English, and transferable occupational skills” (Rumbaut, 2006, p. 267). With the exception of the large proportion of elites from the first wave, most of the SEAA refugees that came to America post-1975 were of a lower economic and educational status than other ethnic sub-groups of Asian Americans that came as voluntary immigrants (Museus et al., 2013; Ngo & Lee, 2007). The disaggregation of the Asian American category highlights the educational and economic disparities that still remain between SEAA and other Asian American sub-groups. The educational attainment and economic

characteristics of major SEAA groups are shown in Table 1 along with data for other ethnic sub-groups of Asian Americans and the national population for comparison.

Table 1. Educational attainment and economic characteristics.

Population	High School Degree or Less	Median Annual Household Income
U.S. Born		
Vietnamese	21%	\$67,800
Laotian	43%	\$50,000
Cambodian	45%	\$54,000
Hmong	36%	\$48,000
Chinese	14%	\$86,000
Japanese	21%	\$80,000
Filipinos	23%	\$73,001
Indian	12%	\$85,000
Foreign Born		
Vietnamese	52%	\$58,700
Laotian	61%	\$55,800
Cambodian	62%	\$55,300
Hmong	60%	\$48,200
Chinese	36%	\$65,000
Japanese	27%	\$60,000
Filipinos	23%	\$83,000
Indian	18%	\$100,001
National Population	41%	\$55,775

Note: The data for educational attainment is based on individuals that are ages 25 and older. All data looks at groups in the United States.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2013-2015 American Community Survey (IPUMS) and 2015 American Community Surveys (ACS)

Coming to America as refugees with little economic resources, most SEAA have a different experience than Asian Americans that came from more developed countries and more affluent backgrounds (Kibria, 1993; Takaki, 1989). Many SEAA risk their livelihoods and make numerous sacrifices, including “losses of economic security, social status, and self-esteem,” in order to migrate to America (Museus et al., 2013, p. 48). The data from Table 1 shows that U.S. born SEAA groups largely have lower levels of educational attainment and lower median annual household incomes than other ethnic sub-groups of Asian Americans, with the exception of U.S. born Vietnamese Americans and their educational attainment. The case is the similar for foreign born SEAA groups: foreign born SEAA have lower levels of education and lower median annual household incomes than other foreign born sub-groups of Asian Americans. The data demonstrates that both foreign born and U.S. born SEAA are still not as successful academically and financially today compared to their Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Indian American counterparts. The unique experiences of SEAA in comparison to other Asian American immigrants need to be highlighted, and the disaggregation of the Asian American category is crucial for seeing educational inequities and understanding that SEAA need further support from the education system.

Even within the SEAA category, there are differences within ethnic groups, especially with Vietnamese Americans compared to Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans. Of the roughly 2.5 million SEAA in America, Vietnamese Americans make up 1,737,433 according to the 2010 U.S. Census (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Unlike Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans, most of the literature on Vietnamese Americans focuses on how successful they are in the U.S. education system and how they have adapted well into American society; in the news, they were portrayed as the “model minority,” immigrants that are able to achieve economic and educational success in America through hard work and dedication (Goodwin, 2010; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Even though most Vietnamese Americans still do not have as much educational and economic success as other ethnic sub-groups of Asian Americans, they are the most successful within the SEAA category in terms of Bachelor’s degree attainment and median annual earnings, drop out of high school at lower rates, and have lower unemployment levels than the other SEAA ethnic groups (Lopez et al., 2017a; Museus, 2013; Rumbaut, 2006). Vietnamese Americans’ academic and economic success are attributed to the cultural and familial values placed on education and hard work (Ngo & Lee, 2007). For this group, education is an important stepping stone to economic success, and they see hard work and obedience as core values that will allow them to reach their goals. Other SEAA ethnic groups, Cambodian, Laotian, and Hmong Americans, also place high value on education, which often motivates them to be successful in school, but these groups have unique backgrounds and cultural ideas that could impact their ability to perform as well as Vietnamese Americans academically (Ngo & Lee, 2007). For instance, Hmong, Lowland Lao, and Cambodian people that took refuge in the United States generally come from rural backgrounds and have less formal educational experiences than other SEAA refugees (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Rumbaut, 2006). Cultural norms affecting girls, such as early marriages and childbearing, within the Hmong and Cambodian community are some barriers to the academic success and retention of Hmong and Cambodian American girls in school (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Statistics on SEAA show that Vietnamese Americans struggle academically as well: compared to 5% of Taiwanese Americans, 7% of Filipino Americans, and 19% of Chinese Americans, 29% of Vietnamese Americans, ages 25 and over, do not have a high school diploma (Museus, 2013). Large numbers of Vietnamese American youth fall behind in school and end up in the streets, often labeled as delinquents and gang members (Ngo & Lee, 2007). The literature shows that second generation Vietnamese American youth are the most vulnerable to fall behind in school due to a “loss of culture,” “over-Americanization,” and poverty (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Cultural values placed on education and hard work are lost, as students become “Americanized” and try to fit in (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Moreover, many schools fail to reinforce Vietnamese cultural values and accurately assess Vietnamese students’ language skills, placing them in classes that do not match their English language level (Kibria, 1993; Ngo & Lee, 2007). The demand from school policies to match students’ ages and grades and rapidly integrate students into regular classes further exacerbate their educational struggles, leading them to perform poorly in school (Kibria, 1993). Students that do retain their cultural values face immense pressure to do well in school, since their families’ future hinges on their educational success; these cultural values end up becoming a double-edged sword that can be detrimental to their academic achievement (Ngo & Lee, 2007). My study seeks to understand how Vietnamese American students develop their identity and sense of belonging in culturally sustaining spaces that center and focus on their cultures and experiences. I aim to demonstrate the importance of culturally sustaining practices in

helping students come to terms with their complex identity, accept and embrace their culture, and thrive in schools and society.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to Sustain our Students

Coined in 2012 by Django Paris, culturally sustaining pedagogy was born out of Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, which urges educators to see the "languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students" as resources and assets that should be taught and valued within the classroom (p. 93). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is a move away from a deficit view of our students that sought to eradicate the practices that students brought from their homes and communities; instead, it follows the wave of resource pedagogies that embodies an asset-based approach, which views students as sources of knowledge and skills and is based on the "cultural-linguistic reality of students" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). In Paris's (2012) words, this pedagogy seeks to "perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). It needs to do more than be responsive or relevant to the cultural practices and experiences of students—it also has to be grounded in their experiences and sustain multiculturalism and multilingualism within students in practice and perspective (Paris, 2012, p. 95). It has three main components: it aims to develop students' academic success, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Under this pedagogy, students are encouraged to grow intellectually, appreciate other cultures and their own, and apply their knowledge to the real-world to analyze and critique it in a sociopolitical context (Paris, 2012).

Most literature on culturally sustaining/responsive/relevant pedagogy focuses on Black and Chicana/Latina students (Alim & Paris, 2017; Morrison, Robbins & Rose, 2008), while Asian American students are mostly neglected within educational literature (Goodwin, 2010). SEAA students do not fit within the "model minority" stereotype, and like other Communities of Color, they also need a culturally sustaining pedagogy that supports their identity development and academic performance in schools. As sources of knowledge and skills, SEAA youth have "community cultural wealth" that brings cultural and social forms of capital from their communities and homes into schools (Yosso, 2005). Some researchers have recognized the need for culturally sustaining pedagogy for Asian Americans and SEAA and have theorized what it would look like in the classroom (Chang & Lee, 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Uy, 2018). Uy (2018) urges educators to create culturally sustaining pedagogy for SEAA youth that engages them in sociopolitical consciousness and supports their identity development to help them understand the world and the people around them.

Curriculum as colonizer poses an obstacle to the development of SEAA even with a culturally sustaining pedagogy in schools. In her analysis of the effects of curriculum on Asian American students, Goodwin (2010) argues that curriculum works as an agent of colonialism to oppress and control students, especially those that do not fit the White, middle-class norms that are valued in American society. Curriculum "embodies a society's implicit consensus" of what deserves to be taught and whose knowledge is valued, serving as a mechanism of social control and colonization of the mind (Apple, 2018; Goodwin, 2010, p. 3111). Students of Color, immigrant children, and poor children are among those that have been marginalized and cast aside by hidden messages about their "(in)significance and place in U.S. society" through their poorly resourced classrooms, unqualified teachers, texts that do not reflect their experiences, and the continuous disenfranchisement of their communities (Goodwin, 2010, p. 3112). Building on Goodwin's theory of curriculum as colonizer for Asian Americans, I argue that curriculum as colonizer has

unique effects on the SEAA community as well. As Asian Americans are made invisible within academic literature through the model minority stereotype, SEAA and their refugee experiences are further hidden within the homogenizing category of Asian American, as their experiences are distinct from other ethnic sub-groups of Asians that came to America as voluntary immigrants. Posited as foreigners and the “other,” SEAA are seen as either the model minority and successful immigrant or the problem minority, troublemaking refugees and delinquents in the streets that are alienated from school and society (Reyes, 2007). The dominant group in power uses this ability to name and define SEAA in order to colonize, oppress, and control them, instilling the idea that SEAA are inferior (Goodwin, 2010).

With curriculum as colonizer, culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom is not very effective in sustaining the cultural-linguistic realities of SEAA youth (Goodwin, 2010). Goodwin (2010) argues that multicultural education has mostly been superficial and inadequate at enforcing a pedagogy that truly challenges the dominant and colonizing narratives of curriculum: there are mostly White, monolingual, middle-class teachers that end up reinforcing a “tokenized perspective of minorities in this country with an emphasis on celebrations, contributions, food, and heroes” (p. 3120-3121). Consequently, I move beyond the pedagogies in the classroom to examine spaces that could cultivate and extend the culture, history, and experiences of students. These culturally sustaining spaces can be seen within culture clubs and community-based organizations that are created with students and are based on their realities and experiences. Ngo’s (2015) research examines the role of culture clubs in developing Hmong students’ cultural identity and sense of belonging. Unlike liberal multiculturalism that otherizes and exoticizes cultural diversity, the Hmong culture club seeks to sustain Hmong culture and helps students feel positive about their cultural identity and background (Ngo, 2015). As culturally sustaining spaces, culture clubs allow students to maintain and protect their cultural identity and also engage with the socio-political issues that affect their community in the real world. Culture clubs can become a “site of mobilization” for students to be involved with community activism and democratic change, urging them to learn and critically think about social issues that impact them in the world they live in (Ngo, 2015, p. 11).

Even though culturally sustaining pedagogy within culture clubs provide a more authentic space that is based on their cultural realities, the curriculum within classrooms at their school continue to devalue their cultural identity and negatively affect their sense of belonging in school. Thus, I suggest that community-based organizations provide culturally sustaining spaces for students outside of the school setting that center students’ cultural identity and experiences, allowing for a more impactful development of cultural identity and a stronger sense of belonging in the entire space. Freire (1996) emphasizes the importance of a pedagogy of the oppressed that is created *with* them, not *for* them. In order to regain their humanity, the oppressed need to be “engaged in the fight for their own liberation” and “be among the developers of this pedagogy” (Freire, 1996, p. 35-36). Research demonstrates that community-based organizations build authentic curricula that center the youth, valuing them as resources and learning with them (Baldrige et al., 2017; Heath & Mclaughlin, 1993, 1994; Watson, 2012). Unlike school settings that oftentimes continue the cycle of social reproduction, community-based organizations can be sites for a social justice praxis that encourages social resistance among the youth (Watson, 2012). Watson (2012) reveals that community-based organizations with a praxis founded on love and the 4 C’s—communication, community, compassion, and commitment—empower the youth and help them realize their fullest potential. Recognizing the assets of youth, community-based

organizations center youth's experiences, working and learning along with them: they create a safe learning environment and allow the youth to see value in themselves.

Identity and Belonging for Southeast Asian American Youth

A Theory of Identity Development

Racial and ethnic identity are salient in the lives of SEAA youth. In her study of Khmer American students, Uy (2018) finds that race and ethnicity are important to the identities of these students, despite the teachers' lack of knowledge and consideration of the students' race and ethnicity. However, racialization of SEAA youth with Asian American stereotypes create a binary understanding of SEAA that paint a misleading picture of the SEAA identity. Often stuck under the umbrella term of Asian American, SEAA are seen as "forever foreigners" that are not associated with being "American" (Lee, 2009; Reyes, 2007). As race in America is often seen in Black-White terms, SEAA are perceived as honorary whites/model minorities, embodying White, middle-class characteristics, or problem minorities, sharing similarities with African Americans whom are deemed as troublemakers in society (Lee, 2009; Reyes, 2007; Uy, 2018). Research shows that SEAA youth identity is extremely complex and fluid and not simply stuck within the binary of model and problem minority (Ngo, 2009; Rumbaut 1997; Uy, 2018). Ngo (2009) argues that SEAA identities are "ambivalent" to demonstrate the complexity, messiness, contradictions, and incompleteness of identity development. Using the SEAA identity model by Museus et al. (2013), I demonstrate that the identities of Vietnamese American youth are intersectional and ever changing. By intersectional, I suggest that these youth have identities that can intersect and overlap in different ways depending on the context and situation. These identities are also ever changing—the meaning that they put into their identities are always changing and adapting as they learn more about themselves, their culture, and the world.

The Southeast Asian American identity model consists of five different processes that are interconnected and interactive, as opposed to chronological stages that occur in one singular process: enculturation to ethnic cultures, acculturation to the dominant culture, awareness of oppression, redirection of salience, and integration of dispositions (Museus et al., 2013). (a) Enculturation to ethnic cultures refers to the "socialization into and maintenance of various elements of one's traditional culture, which includes cultural values, ideas, and norms" (p. 56). (b) Acculturation to the dominant culture describes the process in which there are "changes in attitudes, beliefs, and identity that an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures/adapting to dominant, White, American cultural values, customs, norms, and food" (p. 57). (c) Awareness of oppression is when "individuals gain increased social and political consciousness, resulting from learning about racial and ethnic inequalities and injustices" (p. 57). (d) Redirection of salience refers to how individuals can alter the importance of a specific identity to them in a given time or space. As identities are fluid, individuals can have multiple salient identities and change the salience of each identity depending on the context. (e) Integration of dispositions is "the process by which SEAA integrate their identification with various groups, attitudes about the dominant majority, and sense of activism and agency to address oppression and inequities among those populations" (pp. 58-59). In other words, the process of enculturation works with the process of acculturation so that individuals can balance their membership in a marginalized group with their membership in the larger American community. This identity model helps us understand how Vietnamese American youth conceptualize their identities and

demonstrates that their identities are complex, intersectional, and ever changing, rather than static and binary.

Transforming “Space” into “Place”

Because humans have specific identities that are salient to them, they make certain cultural meanings and connections to the spaces that they occupy (Entrikin, 1991). In the same vein, youth create their own meaning within their spaces; they “write in their presence, as they engage in relationships and attach meaning to space” (Ngo, 2015, p. 2). From the space acting as a simple location, the space becomes transformed into “place” when the youth develop their own relationships with the space and add meaning to it through actions and interactions with others in that space (Ngo, 2015). Culture, specifically, provides a space for belonging because culture yields a “sense of place much like that of a home” (Ngo, 2015, p. 3). In this way, culture imparts “a powerful sense of belongingness, of security and familiarity” among those that share the same cultural identity (Hall, 1995, p. 182). Among marginalized racial and ethnic groups, spaces that center their culture become places that provide safety and community and help to sustain their culture (Ngo, 2015). Additionally, these spaces allow the youth to develop their cultural identities, as their relationship to the place and culture “become elements in the construction of our individual and collective identities” (Entrikin, 1991). Consequently, I argue that culturally sustaining spaces, like culture clubs and community-based organizations that focus on specific racial and ethnic groups, embody culturally sustaining pedagogies that allow Vietnamese American youth to transform their spaces into places, develop their sense of belonging, and create their own cultural identities.

Methodology

I attended an all-day event called the Mid-Autumn Youth Summit (MAYS) hosted by the Viet-American Youth Association (VietAYA),¹ a community-based organization that works with Vietnamese American youth to foster their leadership skills and social responsibility. At this annual event, over 185 students from the Vietnamese Student Associations (VSA) across different high schools in the Silicon Valley area come together and participate in various friendly competitions, including debates, speech contests, Olympia games, cultural pitch games, and cultural performances. I chose to collect data at this event because I was able to get a large and diverse sample size. I initially wanted to look for culturally sustaining pedagogies within the classroom, but after encountering multiple roadblocks within the school institutions, I decided to look for culturally sustaining pedagogies in spaces elsewhere. I also had connections to the organization—I was a past participant of the event, and my colleague is one of the volunteers—so they allowed me to attend the event and survey their participants. The data for my research is mostly drawn from survey data that I collected from Vietnamese American high school students that participated in MAYS (n=80). I also conducted observations of the participants before, during, and after the culture show, focusing on the speech, debate, and cultural performances competition (skits, dancing, and singing) during the show. I had conversations with various participants (n=10) from different schools throughout the day.

The participants of 2019 MAYS come from 9 different high schools concentrated in San Jose, California, since the event takes place at a high school in San Jose. The survey respondents range from freshmen to seniors, and most (n=75) have attended school in America since

kindergarten. All of them are involved in the Vietnamese culture club, such as the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA), Vietnamese Student Union (VSU), or Chinese-Vietnamese-Korean (CVK) club, in their school; it is a requirement for them to be a part of their culture club in order to participate in MAYS. The community-based organization, VietAYA or the Viet-American Youth Association, is based in San Jose, California; as a not-for-profit organization, it is run by volunteers within the community with a mission to develop the leadership skills and cultural identity of students involved with Vietnamese culture clubs in high school. They were founded in 1992, originally under a different name, and have been holding their annual MAYS ever since, hoping to develop students' civic engagement within their community and their leadership potential. Their executive board, coordinators, and board of directors consist of mostly Vietnamese American individuals that have personally participated in these programs and hope to continue them to support more Vietnamese American youth in the future.

I coded the survey and observation data in two different phases. In the first phase, I coded my data using an emic approach, in which I looked for patterns, themes, and ideas that were based on the voice of the youth. Focusing on the raw data, I searched for salient themes as well as outliers that emerged from their voices, such as cultural and racial and ethnic pride, community, cultural appreciation, and (lack of) historical and cultural knowledge. The second phase of the coding involved an etic approach that is based on the academic literature, in which I used themes and theories from the literature to code the data. I focused on concepts of identity development, belonging, security, stereotypes, and social resistance.

My Position as the Researcher

As a 1.5 generation Vietnamese American raised in San Jose, California, I come from a similar background as the participants of the study. I attended one of the high schools that participated in MAYS and was involved with my school's VSA club and MAYS during the years 2014-2016. Personally experiencing the impact of being involved in a culture club and a community-based organization, I wanted to see how this involvement affects other Vietnamese American youth and how it differs among the youth. Now an undergraduate student at a public university, I am still continuing my journey of understanding my identities, especially my Vietnamese American and SEAA identities, as well as my sense of belonging within this university, community, country, and world. As a college student, I often feel frustrated and confused due to my lack of knowledge and appreciation for my own racial and ethnic identity. I was not able to realize the salience of my identities in my life, even though it affects how I see the world and the decisions that I make. I had to combat my own internalized racism, in order to conduct a study focusing on students of my racial and ethnic background. Thus, I aim to bring light to the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogies that can help youth develop their identity and sense of belonging within their K-12 experience, so that they would have a better understanding of who they are and learn to love their own race and ethnicity, especially in a society that fails to value and emphasize the importance of their racial and ethnic identity. In this next section, I use the SEAA identity model to look at how Vietnamese American high school students develop their identity.

Understanding the Vietnamese American Identity

Vietnamese American students have complex identities that are intersectional and ever changing, rather than identities that are confined within the Black-White binary. The identity model and its

different processes demonstrate the different ways Vietnamese American students develop their identity throughout their lives: learning about and engaging with their own culture, changing their attitudes about their identity to adapt to the dominant White, middle-class culture, being aware of the oppression and injustices facing the various groups that they belong in, shifting the importance of their various identities in different contexts, and integrating their traditional culture with the dominant culture to develop a will to advocate for the groups they belong in.

Enculturation to Ethnic Cultures

The Vietnamese American students have been able to engage with their Vietnamese culture at school with their Vietnamese culture clubs, like the Vietnamese Student Association, Vietnamese Student Union, or Chinese-Vietnamese-Korean club, and Vietnamese language classes if offered at their school. They also are exposed to their culture through their friend group; most have said that their friends consist of Vietnamese and/or Asian people. A student noted that her family is “white-washed,” so by joining her VSA club, she is able to be in an environment that allows her to learn more about her culture. Additionally, at the Mid-Autumn Youth Summit, the Vietnamese American youth were able to learn more about their culture and engage with it through various forms, such as singing, dancing, and acting. Many students have noted how participating in MAYS have taught them many aspects of their culture: “I’ve been able to appreciate Viet culture more than I already have!” Another student pointed out that “I am learning much more about my culture in ways I couldn’t before.”

Acculturation to the Dominant Culture

Most students are proud of their Vietnamese traditions and cultures, stating that they value the food, *Tết* or Lunar New Year, family, and familial values. Most students chose to remain Vietnamese or Asian if they could choose any race and ethnicity; however, there are some students that chose to be White, Black, or “Wasian”—white mixed with Asian. This demonstrates that these Vietnamese American students have become aware of the dominant culture and started to “internalize White values and standards” (Museus et al., 2013). Some students from the survey (n=24) stated they have felt that they needed to be more White. They pointed out that because we are living in America we “have to speak English” instead of our traditional language. A student said that White people have “sophistication,” so “we need to be more like them and be much richer.” These students internalized the idea that White, middle-class norms are more valued in society and lead to greater social mobility. This internalization is often reinforced “in schools,” as one student pointed out, where White, middle-class culture is adopted by some students to “fit in” and White, middle-class knowledge and ideology are often reproduced in the classroom (Goodwin, 2010).

Awareness of Oppression

Within school and society at large, these Vietnamese American students are cognizant of the oppression on their various groups, mostly regarding their Vietnamese American and Asian American identity. The students are aware of stereotypes placed upon Vietnamese Americans and Asian Americans, such as “All Asians are smart” or “good at math,” and most understand that these stereotypes are complex because “everyone is different.” They recognize the labels and

stereotypes that American society placed on their groups, and they realize that these labels are false and misleading. A student noted that “some of us [Vietnamese American students] are smart because we work for it, not because of our race.” Some students are even led to believe that their race and ethnicity is not as important as the dominant White cultural identity that is associated with being “American.” They said that they wanted to “be more American to fit in” and “felt as if Asians were less than others.”

Redirection of Salience

The students often redirect the salience from their Vietnamese/Vietnamese American identity and their Asian/Asian American identity depending on the situation and context. They often use Vietnamese and Asian interchangeably, especially when describing their friend group. In order to describe the group of people that they spend time with at school, the students use the racial and ethnic categories of Vietnamese, Asian, or Vietnamese/Asian. Some students (n=22) said that they would choose to be Asian if they were able to choose to be any race and ethnicity, while others (n=25) said that they would choose to be Vietnamese/Vietnamese American. The category Asian incorporates Vietnamese as well, but some students preferred the use of Asian to describe their race and ethnicity in these contexts. This could mean that their ownership of being Asian fit more in these contexts for them. Their identities are ever changing and situational; a different situation calls for a different identity. These identities intersect with one another and make up the complex picture of the identity of the individual.

Integration of Dispositions

This process involves moving away from a binary understanding of identity, Vietnamese or American and White or Black, into a more complex understanding of identities being intersectional and ever changing. U.S. racial discourses introduced many stereotypes to label Asian Americans, and Vietnamese Americans are affected by them as well. In this process, Vietnamese American students are coming into terms with their Vietnamese culture and the dominant White, middle class culture in order to develop their own identity. They are working to balance and integrate the two cultures, acknowledging the stereotypes placed on their minority group by the dominant group and maintaining their own minority culture. As Ngo (2015) describes in her study of ambivalent identities, there is not just a cultural loss; there is also a struggle with the racial politics of identity, which makes identity development a complex process.

Most of these students struggle with the model minority or the honorary Whites stereotype placed on Asian Americans. The honorary Whites stereotype portrays Asian Americans succeeding along with the White dominant group; based on the model minority myth, honorary Whites or Asian Americans are said to be academically and economically successful due to hard work (Reyes, 2007). Some students (n=34) recognize the stereotype placed on Vietnamese Americans about them being “smart” or “good at math,” which aligns with the model minority stereotype, but many students among those that know of that stereotype say that they disagree with it. They see their success as a solely a product of hard work with one student stating “We are only smart because of our hard work.” When asked about their accomplishments, many students (n=68) said that they believe their accomplishments are due to hard work, aligning with American ideas of meritocracy. So, even though these students reject the stereotypes that the dominant culture and society placed on their group, they still buy into the dominant ideology of meritocracy and

individualism, unable to fully break away from dominant values and norms (Uy, 2018). Their Vietnamese American identity that rejects White-middle class stereotypes intersects with their identity that conforms to White, middle-class ideology.

The problem minority stereotype, a label to describe SEAA as the problems of society due to their low academic achievement compared to their other Asian peers, is not a stereotype that many Vietnamese American youth in this study struggle with, but there are some students who could be affected by the problem minority stereotype as shown by their fixed mindset in academics. Some students are neutral (n=9) about and disagree (n=3) with the idea that they can improve academically in school and that their accomplishments are due to hard work. Moreover, a few students (n=5) also relate more to African American culture and indicated that they want to be African American/Black if they could choose any race and ethnicity that they wanted. In this case, these students identify “more with the experience of low-income African Americans,” whom are often victims of the problem minority stereotype, rather than the dominant White culture (Reyes, 2007, p. 62). Even though most of these students identify as Asian/Vietnamese and have positive views of their background and culture, they also identify with the experiences of African Americans.

The complexity of identity development can be seen in other contexts as well. Some students are proud of their Vietnamese background and culture, but they have felt that they wanted to be less Vietnamese and/or more White. A student, who scored high on how comfortable and proud they are about their background and culture, have felt that they wanted to be less Vietnamese “when [they] went to a previous school that bullied [them]” and more White to be “rich and white and materialistic.” This shows the ever changing nature of identities, in which the salience of different identities can change based on the context or situation. Additionally, some students want to be other subcategories of Asian or other races and ethnicities but are still very proud of their culture and background. A student wants to be Korean if they could choose any ethnicity they want, but they said that they have never wanted to be less Vietnamese because they “love [their] culture” and are “never afraid or embarrassed [about it].” This demonstrates that identities are complex and that the binary notions of identity are not sufficient to describe the fluidity of identity development for these Vietnamese American students. The students integrate the dominant culture and their traditional culture to create their own identities and own meanings about who they are, showing that identities are complex, intersectional, and ever changing.

A Journey of Finding One’s Identity and Belonging

Embracing One’s Own Identity within Culturally Sustaining Spaces

Curriculum as colonizer hierarchizes dominant White, middle-class ideologies and knowledge over those of People of Color. Consequently, Students of Color, specifically Vietnamese American students, rarely see their race and ethnicity reflected in the curriculum and inside the classroom, making it harder for these students to develop their racial and ethnic identities and sustain their traditional culture. Curriculum as colonizer only enforces the acculturation to the dominant White culture and ignores the culture of Vietnamese American students. When asked about their race and ethnicity being represented in the curriculum, most students said that their race and ethnicity is not represented in the curriculum, rather most of the representation is through Vietnamese culture clubs and Vietnamese language courses, if those courses are offered at the school. During one of my conversations with the participants, they stated that the only time they learn about their race

and ethnicity is during the segment on the Vietnam War. Thus, within schools, spaces like culture clubs allow for the enculturation of Vietnamese culture among the Vietnamese American students. As a culturally sustaining space, the culture club centers the experiences and cultural practices of the students, as it is created by Vietnamese American students for their Vietnamese American peers as well as those who are interested in the Vietnamese culture. Entrikin (1991) asserts that our “situatedness” in place and the “context of our actions contributes to our sense of identity” (p. 4). Their participation in culture clubs helps them develop their cultural identities and affirm their identity. Culture clubs provide a space that allows them to feel “positive about their cultural background and identity” (Ngo, 2015, p. 8). A student mentioned during our conversation that joining the club at their school made them more “confident in talking to others” about their own culture. They are able to create an identity that is associated with a positive understanding of their culture and background within a space that is conducive to this identity development. As a student summarized: “In school you learn basic stuff, but in VSA, you get to learn about your identity and showcase your background and culture.”

Community-based organizations, like VietAYA, can also provide spaces that foster the enculturation of ethnic cultures that the school curriculum lacks. Education does not necessarily have to be limited to the classroom (Freire & Macedo, 1986). Learning continues outside of the school, and many youth see the space created by community-based organizations as safe and supportive. These organizations put the youth at the center as resources with assets rather than broken objects that need to be fixed or taught (Health & McLaughlin, 1993). Specifically, VietAYA focuses on retaining the culture of Vietnamese American students, while developing their leadership skills. The event hosted by VietAYA, MAYS, supported the enculturation of Vietnamese culture through cultural and academic competitions that allow the students to create their own meanings for their identities. For instance, the culture show segment of the competition had students from different schools compete in the categories of singing, dancing, and skits. These students had to work together on their own time to learn about traditional Vietnamese dances, choose Vietnamese songs that they enjoy or relate to, and think of prominent cultural practices, themes, and issues that they share as a community to incorporate into their skits.

In the speech categories, students chose to speak about aspects of their identity and culture that were important to them, even though they could have chosen other topics. One student talked about how he struggled to find his own identity: he did not want to be the typical Vietnamese/Asian boy, so he started adopting other cultures. He first copied his Chicanx/Latinx friends because that was the group he spent the most time with, and then in high school, he wanted to be the “cool Asians” by acting and looking like the members of BTS, a popular Korean boy group. However, he soon realized that he was missing his own identity; he was too occupied with other people’s cultures that he forgot about his own. He ended by affirming his ongoing effort to overcome stereotypes affecting Vietnamese Americans and being proud of his Vietnamese American identity. MAYS provided a space for this student to engage with his journey of identity development and critically think about his identity and culture. Additionally, during the debate portion, students were able to take on different sides of an issue, the implementation of self-driving cars in this case, and provide rationales for or against the issue. Through this exercise, students were able to develop a civic mindset and think about the different ways the issue can affect their community, society, and the world at large; they were able to challenge preexisting ideas and engage with the possibility of alternatives, while applying them to the real-world.

MAYS offers a platform through their different competitions to allow students to learn about their culture, engage with questions about their identity development process, and foster a

social justice mindset. Within the survey, students mentioned that MAYS helped them become “more confident in who [they] are,” provided a space for them to “fit in and find [their] identity as a Vietnamese American,” and made them “more involved in the Vietnamese culture.” Both Vietnamese culture clubs and MAYS encourage the enculturation of Vietnamese culture as well as the integration of both the minority and dominant cultures. Students are able to develop their own meaning of their identities through the balancing of their culture and the dominant White, middle-class culture in culturally sustaining spaces.

The Search for a Home outside of the Home

The race and ethnicity of SEAA students are salient in their lives, and this is especially important in schools, since curriculum is only focused on the dominant White, middle-class values and perspectives (Uy, 2018). For Vietnamese American youth, they transformed the culturally sustaining spaces in their school, such as their Vietnamese culture clubs, into places of belonging. In the survey, the majority of Vietnamese American youth showed high levels of belonging in school with most agreeing/strongly agreeing with the following statements: “I feel close to people at my school.” “I am happy to be at my school.” And “I feel like I am a part of my school.” However, there is a considerable amount of students (n=11-18) that are neutral about those statements, and there are some students (n=2-9) that disagree with those statements, seen in Figure 1 below. Most strikingly, the responses for “I look forward to going to school” are mostly neutral or disagreement; 24 students feel neutral, while 24 students disagree or strongly disagree with that statement.

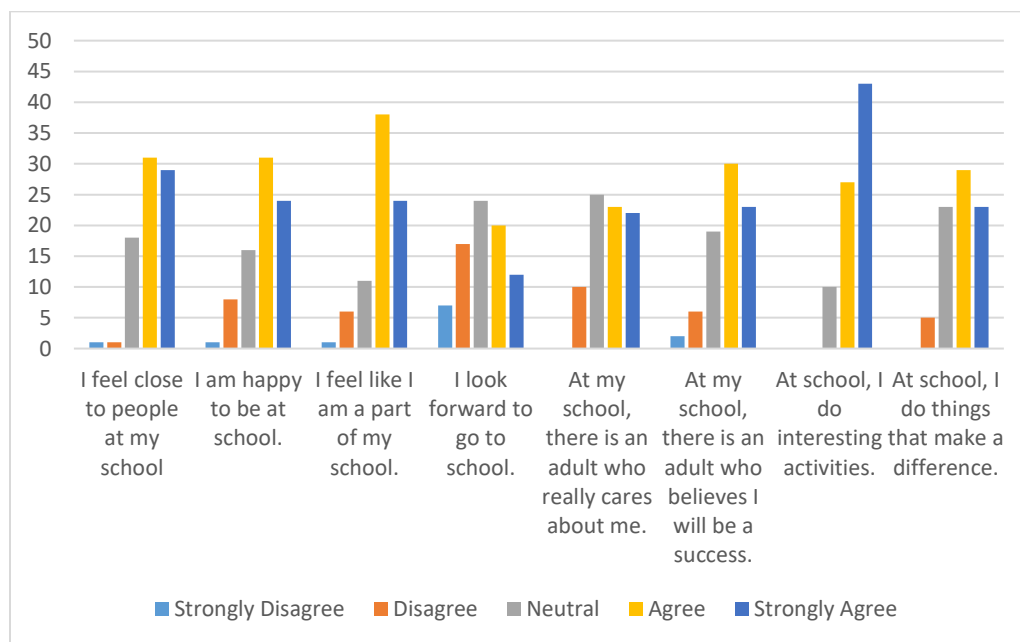


Figure 1: Student responses to school belonging questions.

In this case, the majority of students do feel like they belong in school, but not many look forward to going to school. When they are there, they engage in activities that make them feel that they belong, such as the Vietnamese culture club. Most students enjoy participating in clubs

(n=44), and many students named their culture club specifically (n=22) along with dancing—Vietnamese traditional dance performances are a main component of the culture club. I had a conversation with a couple of students from Sunnyside High School,² and their particular story portrays the importance of culture clubs within student life in high school. At their high school, the Vietnamese culture club stopped operating for five years, and it was not until last year that their club was revived. The Vietnamese American students at the school had to advocate for the reopening of the club, working hard to recruit members and bring awareness to the importance of a culture club. The revival of their VSA is due to the efforts, hard work, and persistence of the students who truly believed that a culture club was needed at that school. Spaces that sustain, center, and extend the cultures of students provide value and special meaning to their lives within the school and foster their sense of belonging. Not only do students feel like they belong in culture clubs, they also place the same value on the actual physical space where the club meetings are held, calling it the “Viet room.” The majority of students from Stonewall and Maple Leaf High School hang out in the “Viet room” or the Vietnamese advisor’s room. They created a space for themselves with the people they hang out with, where they hang out, and what they enjoy doing at school so that they can cultivate their own sense of belonging.

Culturally sustaining spaces, like culture clubs, helps the students develop their sense of belonging because they engage in activities and create relationships that add meaning to the space. The mixed responses of “I look forward to going to school” show that this is still not enough. Since curriculum as colonizer places higher value in the dominant White, middle-class perspectives and norms, it counteracts with the culturally sustaining work that is being done in culture clubs, causing some students to have mixed feelings about whether or not they belong in school.

As Hall (1995) says, culture provides a space of belonging and security, as it becomes almost like a home. VietAYA provides a space outside of the school for high school students to convene and showcase their talent, develop an appreciation for Vietnamese culture, and engage with their identities as Vietnamese Americans through the Mid-Autumn Youth Summit. In this culturally sustaining space, students are able to learn more about their culture, feel involved, and embrace their culture in an authentic way. They get to participate in competitions, in which they are able to develop their teamwork skills, grow their love for their culture, and interact with students from other schools that are also involved with a Vietnamese culture club. By participating in projects and constructing relationships within the space, these students inscribe their own values and meaning to the space, transforming it into a place of belonging. According to the survey, the majority of students said that MAYS changed the way they viewed their identity and culture. Students remarked that seeing other Vietnamese people makes the space fun and comfortable to be in, and it taught them to “view the Viet-American community even more proudly.” The space present at MAYS becomes like a home to these Vietnamese American students, where the community is welcoming and supporting them (Hall, 1995). Most of the students described the Vietnamese American community in a positive light, focusing on ideas of inclusivity and family. They describe the Vietnamese American community as “a loving, strong, and connecting family,” “welcoming and united as one,” and a place that “allows youth to find their identity.” Since MAYS is a gathering of Vietnamese American youth and families coming to see their students perform, the culturally sustaining space provided by VietAYA transforms into a place of community, culture, and family that allows the students to truly feel that they belong.

Transforming Schools into a Place of Belonging

Race and ethnicity play an important role in our lives, especially as we grow up and try to understand who we are. Yet, in schools, often the dominant White, middle-class culture is valued and reinforced within the curriculum. Culturally sustaining pedagogies are important to maintaining, honoring, and extending the various cultures of our diverse student body, but most of these practices can only be seen outside of the classroom. For the Vietnamese American youth in my study, they found places where they can develop their identity and sense of belonging in Vietnamese culture clubs and spaces provided by the community-based organization, VietAYA. Because culture clubs are still within the schooling space that frequently prioritizes the dominant culture and perspectives, not all of the students feel that they fully belong in school; for them, school has not yet transformed into a place that they feel truly comfortable in. However, the space provided by VietAYA, the Mid-Autumn Youth Summit, became a place that these students can learn more about their culture and identity, participate in meaningful activities, and build special relationships with the space and the people. As they spend time in these culturally sustaining spaces, these students are able to develop their identity, learn about their own culture, and balance it with the dominant culture. They are able to engage with the stereotypes and labels placed on their groups, struggle with them, and eventually construct their own identity, which is much more complex, intersectional, and ever changing than the Black-White binary notions that are usually used to think about race and ethnicity.

Demonstrated with my study, culturally sustaining pedagogies are lacking within the classroom and curriculum, so schools fail to be a place of belonging for all students. Even though culture clubs and community-based organizations do provide culturally sustaining spaces for identity development and cultivation of belonging, there needs to be more work done with the curriculum in the classroom to align with the work being done in the clubs and community-based organizations. Culturally sustaining pedagogies are important for students to develop their identity and sense of belonging; this way, students will be more interested in learning when they see themselves and their culture within the curriculum. It is also important for schools to sustain, preserve, and extend the culture of Vietnamese American students to honor the diversity of the United States. When implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies, schools and administrators need to be intentional and careful about how they will truly sustain the cultures of their students. Many efforts to incorporate multicultural education or activities often turn out to be unsuccessful due to the nature of “liberal multiculturalism” (Goodwin, 2010; Ngo, 2015, p. 7). Multicultural education manifests in the form of special days and events that are “easy to implement” and “require little or critical thought on the part of educators” (Goodwin, 2010, p. 3120; Ngo, 2015). Therefore, schools, administrators, and educators need to do more than just add one or two texts from Vietnam to the curriculum; they need to “extend the students’ learning beyond the classroom and into the real world where they become the agents of change” (Uy, 2018, p. 419). Like the community-based organization, educators can incorporate projects like debates and speeches, to have the students engage with real-world issues and apply what they learn about themselves and their culture to issues within society.

Teachers also have to be knowledgeable on the histories, cultural practices, and experiences of Vietnamese American youth as well. In 2015-2016, 80% of the teachers in the U.S. public education system are White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Consequently, the culturally sustaining pedagogy that these teachers attempt to implement often end up being “superficial” and are not reflective of the actual experiences of Vietnamese American youth

(Goodwin, 2010, p. 3120). Teacher credentialing and recruitment programs need to attract more People of Color, especially Vietnamese Americans, to diversify the teacher pipeline and support Vietnamese American students. However, White teachers and their role in the classroom are important as well; as Watson (2012) points out, a White person will never understand what it is like to be a Person of Color, but White teachers can always try to see from the perspective of their Students of Color. The training of White teachers, as well as other Teachers of Color, within the credentialing programs are especially crucial to the success of Vietnamese American students. First, teachers need to understand their own racial and ethnic identity and how that impacts their pedagogy and the way they view people of other races and ethnicities (Uy, 2018). They need to understand the impact of policies and practices that affect the various racial and ethnic groups differently (Uy, 2018). Additionally, they have to learn about the various racial and ethnic stereotypes that affect Vietnamese American youth and how their experiences differ greatly from these students, especially if they are not Vietnamese American (Uy, 2018). This is important because teachers will be able to create a culturally sustaining pedagogy that will be authentic to their students' lives.

With my research, I bring light to the culturally sustaining work that is being done by students and members of the community within culture clubs and community-based organizations. I have shared this research with VietAYA, the community-based organization that hosts MAYS annually, to corroborate the powerful and meaningful work that is being done by their organization. However, this study is limited because all of the student participants in the study are a part of the Vietnamese culture club, which can imply that they are more interested in their culture than other Vietnamese American students. This limits the generalizability of the study to other Vietnamese American students that are not in the club. Yet, the data did show that not all students (n=3-4) agree with the following statements: "I am proud of where I come from." and "I value my culture(s) and what it has to offer." Some students are neutral (n=5) and disagree (n=2) with the statement "I want to learn more about my background and culture." Although the numbers are small, this shows that the students do not necessarily have to be interested in their culture nor find value in their culture to join the culture club. They might join it due to wanting to spend time with friends, socialize, or make new friends. Conversely, students who are not in the club could be interested in the culture as well but do not join due to reasons such as having busy schedules or being afraid of socializing. Future research can look at the effects of joining and participating in culture clubs on students' views of their culture and interest in their race and ethnicity. Additionally, more research on Vietnamese American students can look at questions like: (a) How do Vietnamese American communities and families support the identity development of Vietnamese American students? And (b) How does the interaction of Vietnamese American students with those of other races and ethnicities, such as Chicax/Latinx and Black students, affect their identity development?

As an educator, I strive to see my students as assets and resources in the classroom. Acknowledging a student's race and ethnicity and educating them on their culture is crucial to their development and well-being. When we see our students as they are, with the wealth of knowledge and skills that they bring, then we will be able to foster critically-thinking adults and adequately prepare them to enter the world as social justice advocates, resisters, and world changers.

Notes

1. For more information on VietAYA and MAYS, visit their website: <https://vietaya.org>
2. All school names in this study are pseudonyms.

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Appendix A

The following survey questions were asked to 80 high school students.

High School: _____ Participated in MAYS? Y / N Since when?

Part 1

1. What year are you in high school?
2. How long have you been attending school in America?
3. Are you in the Vietnamese Student Association?

From a range of **1(Strongly Disagree) – 5(Strongly Agree)**, how much do you agree with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4	5
I feel close to people at my school.					
I am happy to be at my school.					
I feel like I am a part of my school.					
I look forward to go to school.					
At my school, there is an adult who really cares about me.					
At my school, there is an adult who believes I will be a success.					
At school, I do interesting activities.					
At school, I do things that make a difference.					

4. What are some things that you enjoy to do at school?
5. Are there adults that you can seek out to talk about school and non-school related topics?
6. Where do you like to hang out at school?
7. What is the racial/ethnic makeup of your group(s) of friends?
8. Do you think that your race/ethnicity is represented in the school’s curriculum? In what way?

Part 2

1. What are three words you would use to identify yourself?
2. If you could be any race/ethnicity, which would you choose?

From a range of **1(Strongly Disagree)** – **5(Strongly Agree)**, how much do you agree with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4	5
I believe that I can improve academically in school.					
My accomplishments in school are because of hard work.					
I understand my background, my family history, and what it means to me.					
I am proud of where I come from.					
I value my culture(s) and what it has to offer.					
I feel comfortable sharing aspects of my culture(s) with people from different cultures.					
I want to learn more about my background and culture(s).					

3. Describe the Vietnamese-American community in one sentence.
4. What is one thing you value about your culture, if any?
5. Do you speak Vietnamese at home? At school?
6. What is one thing you would like to learn about your background and culture(s)?
7. What is one stereotype that you know of regarding Vietnamese-Americans?
 - a. Do you agree with it?
8. Have you ever felt that you needed to be less “Vietnamese”? In what way?
9. Have you ever felt that you needed to be more “White”? In what way?
10. Has your perception of your identity and culture changed since your involvement with the Mid-Autumn Youth Summit (MAYS)? In what way?

About the Author



Thuy Vi Thi Nguyen, is an MA student in the Education Policy program with a concentration on K-12 education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She graduated from the University of California, Davis with a BA in International Relations and minor in Education. Her passion for education began when she volunteered as an English tutor for local children in Nicaragua. Since then, she has taught and worked with youth in the United States and internationally, specifically in Zimbabwe, as an elementary school classroom assistant, afterschool homework tutor, health and hygiene workshop facilitator, pen pal, and mentor. Her current research focuses on culturally sustaining pedagogy and identity development.



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