

ABSTRACT

“PERSISTENCE, DETERMINATION, AND HARD WORK ARE CRUCIAL
INGREDIENTS FOR LIFE”: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE
LIVES OF FIRST-GENERATION VIETNAMESE
AMERICAN STUDENTS

By

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Asian Americans are often regarded as the “model minority,” applauded for their ability to blend in to American society, achieve academically, and climb the socio-economic ladder. However, this model minority status is a myth that fails to recognize the variation that exists across different Asian American subpopulations. Recent studies have acknowledged the diverse ethnicities, cultural, economic, and social capital among different Asian American subgroups. This narrative inquiry explored the K-16 educational experiences of academically successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students. This Asian American subpopulation has experiences and outcomes that, in many ways, resemble those of traditionally underrepresented groups like African American and Latino students. Thus this study examined the experiences of those who have succeeded to better understand the supports upon which they have drawn and the obstacles they have navigated.

Through narrative inquiry, this study gives contour and voice to the educational experience and academic life of these students from their own perspectives. More specifically, this study employed narrative representation to retell lived experiences in the form of a chronology. Themes across participants were also examined and presented to honor the voices of other participants and provide deeper insights into the experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students. The stories of these understudied, disadvantaged students are examined to understand the personal, social, and institutional influences that affect the experience of this population and the possible interactions among these contributing factors as students navigate the K-16 educational pipeline. By means of storytelling, findings elucidate the factors that support the scholastic achievement of first-generation Vietnamese American youth and the barriers that hinder their success using a student retention and anti-deficit approach.

Findings indicate that first-generation Vietnamese American youth navigated the K-16 educational pipeline as active agents with a wealth of capital and great resilience. Like other marginalized students of color, youth in this study arrived at school with aspirational, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. Further, collectively, cognitive, social, and institutional factors enhanced students' ability to persevere and triumph in face of barriers. However, findings also suggest that some assets, such as family and language, were not absolute. In many cases, one form of capital interacted, facilitated, or constrained another form of capital. For instance, while family *could* be supportive and facilitative of student success, family members and traditions also presented significant barriers for at least some study participants.

Findings from this study inform policy, practice, and future research to facilitate greater participation, engagement, and educational achievement for first-generation Vietnamese American youth, as well as assist other first-generation youth navigate the educational process and create their own college-going tradition. Based on the findings of from this study, policy makers should increase funding for qualified support staff (such as, school counselors, school psychologists, school psychiatrists, school social workers, school-community liaisons, and bilingual aides) to help Vietnamese American youth overcome personal and institutional barriers to success. Schools and colleges should annually develop improvement plans, as well as publicize and evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts to promote minority student and parent engagement.

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AMERICAN STUDENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I envisioned a better life during the years my family and I lived in Vietnam. After facing persecution and numerous hardships from our impoverished existence, my parents refused to accept their harsh fate and were determined to flee Vietnam in search of a better future. Pushed out by oppression and attracted by the prospect of freedom, my family tried to escape in secrecy numerous times; however, our attempts were repeatedly unsuccessful. Fortunately, our prayers were answered on March 16, 1993, and my family and I set foot in the United States. This day changed our trajectory and marked a new chapter of our lives.

Thenceforth, I yearned to have the opportunity to live a better life by receiving a higher education, one that I could not afford in my native land. It is what I desired most in life. Yet, the journey to fulfill my dreams confronted me with great, seemingly insurmountable challenges. In addition to overcoming the language barrier, my family struggled financially while adjusting to the new environment. We were living without means of subsistence. Life's necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter, were lacking after we resettled in America. I can still remember those somber memories vividly. Indeed, after our move, my family and I became utterly destitute and we lived in poverty. In spite of continual adversities, my parents never gave up, even collecting recyclables to earn extra money. They often said, "Every cent will help my three daughters get into

college.” Undoubtedly, my parents’ sacrifices, sufferings, and courage have made a difference in my life.

As an immigrant and an English Language Learner (ELL), school was not an easy task. I was confronted with a plethora of challenges as I began to learn a new language and culture in a strange land. The obstacles I endured stem largely from cultural and linguistic differences. Not only was my capacity to speak, write, and read English insufficient, I was also largely isolated in school due to the high student-teacher ratios. My peers additionally heightened my anxiety. I was repeatedly mocked because of the way I spoke English. Such experiences of torment exacerbated my anxiety as an immigrant student. Undoubtedly, my struggle with learning the new language was one of the toughest obstacles I had to face as an immigrant student. With limited language skills, I found myself in a disadvantaged position as I navigated the process of acculturation.

Just as I have experienced challenges navigating the K-16 educational pipeline and have achieved educational success, other underrepresented minority students have also faced barriers and attained educational success. Through acts of remembering, I believe that we can use stories to explore the human experience. As stories can capture experiences, the act of sharing stories of experiences can relay and retrieve knowledge. Therefore, I am determined to give voice to Vietnamese refugee students who are often marginalized and overlooked in schools. Unlike other immigrants and most foreign born from Asia, a majority of Vietnamese Americans migrated to the United States as asylum seekers and refugees after the fall of Saigon in 1975. For this reason, they faced and still face different challenges and obstacles. Their backgrounds, past experiences, and

journey to America are especially distinctive. For instance, dissimilar from some other immigrants seeking a better life, Vietnamese refugees have faced a history of political persecution and were forced to emigrate from their homes out of fear and necessity.

As our nation becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse, schools must take a proactive approach to diversity. However, there is substantial leakage in our educational “pipeline,” especially for underrepresented and minority students (Swail, 2013). Racial and ethnic minority students are often marginalized and their educational needs are frequently neglected in schools. First-generation Vietnamese American students are part of the diverse population served by our education system. Having faced mental, physical, and emotional trauma as they were forced to flee from their homes, Vietnamese refugee students continue to face considerable barriers in their pursuit of education in the United States. Yet many persist as they navigate a system that may not be responsive to their needs. Their schooling experiences have seldom been voiced. First-generation Vietnamese American students have uncommon strengths, values, needs, and ambitions that must be explored. It is imperative that schools understand their unique needs and experiences to foster conditions that facilitate student achievement.

Problem Statement

According to 2010 census figures, Asian Americans are among the fastest growing minority groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Most recently, a U.S. Census report underscored this rapid growth within the past decade. From 2000 to 2010, the Asian American population increased 46% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Refugee resettlement and immigration may represent two prime causes for this growth in numbers. Currently, there are roughly 18.2 million people of Asian descent

who reside in America, including residents who were reported as Asian alone and Asian mixed with one or more other races. This number reflects a considerable increase in the Asian American population, which has increased over 50% since the year 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Out of the 50 states, California has the largest Asian American population with 5.8 million residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a).

Of those immigrants who identified as Asian Americans, Vietnamese Americans are among the largest refugee groups to have immigrated to the United States since the fall of Saigon in 1975 (Migration Policy Institute, 2010). The fall of Saigon is an event that marked the end of the Vietnam War and the start of Vietnamese resettlement to America (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Abruptly, America became a primary relocation center for countless Vietnamese refugees seeking to flee the communist regime (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Since then, the Vietnamese American population has increased by nearly a half million within the past decade, bringing the total number of Vietnamese residents in America to approximately 1.55 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c). When compared to other immigrant groups in America, Vietnamese Americans make up the fifth largest group (behind only Hispanic/Latino, Filipino, Indian, and Chinese). Presently, Vietnamese Americans are the fourth largest Asian population in the United States. By far, California is home to the largest concentration of Vietnamese American immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c). In California, Orange County is the county with the largest concentration of Vietnamese American inhabitants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c).

Historically in the United States, Asian Americans are typically pooled into one heterogeneous group that includes Indian, Laotian, Filipino, Cambodian, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese Americans. For quite some time, a myth has portrayed

an exaggerated, misleading image of all Asian Americans as the “model minority.” The phrase model minority was coined in 1966 by sociologist William Petersen in an essay titled “Success Story, Japanese-American Style.” The essay was published in *The New York Times* magazine and portrayed Asian Americans as a group of high achievers that has realized success despite discrimination and marginalization (Petersen, 1966).

Following Petersen’s essay, numerous newspapers and magazines in the United States continued to print accomplishments and success stories of Asian Americans that painted the image of this group of individuals as the model minority in contrast to African Americans and Latinos. By the 1970s, the model minority representation had entrenched itself so deeply into mainstream perceptions of the Asian American population that it had developed into an ethnic stereotype (Chen & Yoo, 2009). Some characteristics that align with the model minority stereotype include strong work ethic, high educational achievement, and affluence (Chen & Yoo, 2009; Taylor & Stern, 1997).

In fact, the Asian American category is extremely diverse, consisting of individuals from varied racial, cultural, and social backgrounds. Nevertheless, the model minority myth fails to recognize the variation that exists across different Asian American subpopulations. While some Asian American subgroups have attained success in the new land, there are many others who continue to face adversity and barriers as they navigate the process of acculturation.

Of late, scholars have begun to conduct research on Asian subpopulations. Recent studies have acknowledged the diverse ethnicities, cultural, economic, and social capital among different Asian American subgroups (Shields & Behrman, 2004; Wing, 2007; Yang, 2004). These researchers have recognized that there are enormous class

differences among individuals within each subgroup. For instance, children of immigrant and less-educated parents are far more likely than their American-born counterparts to come from low socioeconomic status (SES; Shields & Behrman, 2004). For the most part, immigrant families often lack the skills and education necessary to find high-wage work. Therefore, they are frequently found at the bottom of the low-wage gap. By overstressing the achievements of some Asian Americans, the model minority myth not only bolsters discrimination, but also masks the many severe problems challenging the Asian American population (Nadal, 2009).

Contrary to popular belief, many Vietnamese Americans do not fit the model minority stereotype. When data are disaggregated, statistics reveal that Vietnamese Americans continue to face numerous unique experiences and challenges. Similar to other underrepresented immigrant groups, Vietnamese American youth are generally from low SES families. With a total population of 1.73 million, 16.6% Vietnamese Americans are living in poverty and many are limited English proficient (LEP; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Further, according to the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC; 2011), Vietnamese American students are lagging in education. The facts are staggering: 26.0% are non-high school graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c), and only about 1 in every 4 Vietnamese American high school graduates is successful in higher education (SEARAC, 2011). Additionally, in many families, Vietnamese American students currently enrolled in college are first-generation students (students who are the first in their families to go to college; College Board, 2013). First-generation Vietnamese American students are at a special disadvantage because their families are unfamiliar with

the public education and college system. Their limited English proficiency, along with their parents' inability to effectively monitor their educational progress, additionally puts Vietnamese American first-generation students at a greater risk of academic failure.

In some ways, Vietnamese Americans are less like the model minority and more like other underrepresented groups. Their educational outcomes, challenges, and experiences do not fit the model minority stereotype. In contrast to East Asian American subpopulations, their refugee status, low educational attainment, and high level of poverty make them distinct as a group. Yet, due to the model minority misconception, the needs and challenges of Vietnamese Americans are often ignored and overlooked in schools (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2008; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008). In consequence, many Vietnamese American students often feel invisible, marginalized, and underserved (Nadal, 2009; Suzuki, 1977).

Given the facts, Vietnamese Americans appear to have some of the greatest educational needs in the country. Yet, much remains to be known about their unique educational outcomes and experiences. To date, research on Asian Americans, particularly on Vietnamese Americans, is still in its infancy (Han & Lee, 2011; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Furthermore, literature on first-generation Vietnamese American students is even more limited at present. Of the literature available, some have referenced the diversity of backgrounds and life experiences within the Asian American subgroups and the negative consequences of the model minority myth (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Nadal, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

In addition, although existing literature recognizes that each Asian American subgroup has unique needs and challenges, current research is habitually grounded in a deficit perspective (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Nadal, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). That is, much like available educational scholarship on other marginalized minority groups, research on Vietnamese Americans typically has taken a need-based perspective in which students of color are seen as lacking in cultural capital, skills, abilities, and/or economic resources (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing a deficit framework, existing research often focuses on student attrition and reasons why they are unsuccessful in schools (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Nadal, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). From this cultural deficit view, students of color are blamed for their underperformance. Under this myopic approach, schools and educators are absolved from their obligations to teach students of color appropriately. This need-based perspective is a concern because it frames the problem as one of underrepresented students and families. As a result of highlighting students' failure and underachievement, the approach fails to meaningfully and effectively address problems for students of color within schools.

Overall, existing literature suggests a need to explore the stories and educational experiences of varied subgroups to better understand the impact of cultural, social, and institutional factors (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Undeniably, Vietnamese Americans have unique characteristics and challenges. Given their distinctive perseverance, determination, backgrounds, needs, and strengths, it is vital for the researchers to explore the depth and breadth of their experiences to reflect the diversity of the Asian American community.

In summation, Asian Americans are typically romanticized as the model minority. In doing so, the great variation that exists across different Asian subpopulations is often neglected and overlooked. As evident from statistical data, Vietnamese Americans are a key growing population who face substantial hardships and challenges. Many are of low SES and are underperforming academically. To date, what little literature exists takes a deficit perspective. Thus, there is a need for a paradigm shift because a number of Vietnamese American students are succeeding. Clearly, an anti-deficit perspective is critical to understanding the values and capital successful first-generation Vietnamese students bring to school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students. Successful students are defined as 3rd- or 4th-year college students who are likely to graduate from a 4-year college or university. Through narrative inquiry, this study seeks to give contour and voice to the educational experience and academic life of first-generation Vietnamese American college students from their own perspectives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe humans as “storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 23). In other words, by means of storytelling, this dissertation elucidates the factors that support the scholastic achievement of first-generation Vietnamese American youth and the barriers that hinder their success using student retention and anti-deficit approaches. The stories of these understudied, disadvantaged students will be examined to understand the personal, social, and institutional influences that affect the experience

of this population and the possible interactions among these contributing factors as students navigate the K-16 educational pipeline.

Research Questions

In an effort to give voice to this often marginalized group, this study will explore the following central research question: What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students at a 4-year college or university? Correspondingly, the following sub-questions will help guide this inquiry:

1. What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as hindering or impeding their K-16 educational success?
2. What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as supporting or assisting their K-16 educational success?

Conceptual Framework

First-generation minority students have varied needs and assets that influence their educational experience (Cushman, 2006). These facilitators, both intrinsic and extrinsic, affect students' resilience, motivation, and success. In an effort to explore the K-16 experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students, it is vital to incorporate a conceptual framework to provide a more holistic perspective that contributes to an in-depth understanding of the experiences of this underserved student population throughout the educational pipeline.

Two theoretical models will be incorporated in this study to serve as the framework for highlighting factors that facilitate success of first-generation Vietnamese

American students. The two applicable theories are: (a) the geometric model of student persistence and achievement (Swail et al., 2003), and (b) the theory of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). These two frameworks will align with other aspects of the research to support and inform this investigation. Additionally, both models will map on to the research question about the Vietnamese American experience of first-generation college students. Accordingly, the following sections will present the relevant components of the conceptual framework. The next section will explain the geometric model of student persistence and achievement in greater detail.

Geometric Model of Student Persistence and Achievement

Vincent Tinto's early research in 1975, "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," prompted decades of discourse about student attrition in postsecondary schools. His Student Integration Model (SIM) outlines the factors that drive attrition behavior (Tinto, 1975). Despite the fact that Tinto's (1975) work has been criticized for not being generalizable beyond traditional students, his theory remains the leading work on student retention and persistence (McCubbin, 2003).

More recently, the geometric model of student persistence and achievement was added to the body of literature to reference student retention. Swail et al. (2003) argue that the problem of student attrition is a persistent concern in higher education, especially for nontraditional and minority students. Accordingly, the geometric model of student persistence and achievement is a framework that illustrates three forces that contribute to minority student retention and success. These forces include: (a) cognitive factors, (b) social factors, and (c) institutional factors. According to the geometric model, both student resources and institutional resources shape student experience. Cognitive and

social factors are what students bring to the institution, while institutional factors are what the school provides for the student. Because there is a delicate dynamic between these three forces, all three factors must combine to provide a concrete foundation for student development and persistence. Hence, when there is a balance between these three forces, students increase their academic and social integration with the school. However, when there is instability, students are at risk of dropping out (Swail et al., 2003).

In general, the geometric model of student persistence and achievement acknowledges possible contributing factors impacting students' experience and persistence in higher education. Thus, this approach to looking at experiences of disadvantaged students is appropriate for analyzing the needs and experiences of racial and ethnic minority students. For the purpose of this study, the geometric model of student persistence and achievement will be applied to identify and explore students' K-16 experiences. The objective of the investigator is to use this framework to identify the vital factors that contribute to the achievement and persistence of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students. The next sections will discuss the cognitive, social, and institutional factors and their impact on the persistence process.

Cognitive factors. Cognitive factors relate to the academic abilities of individuals. These forces measure students' intelligence and knowledge in academic-related areas. Cognitive factors, such as learning/study skills and content knowledge, are crucial for students, because they determine students' aptitude to grasp and successfully complete the school curriculum. A significant aspect of cognitive factors, in regards to student achievement and persistence, is that they directly relate to students' capacity to problem-solve and make decisions. In other words, cognitive factors interconnect with

students' decision-making process. Consequently, students who are cognizant are more likely to make informed decisions and persist in the face of obstacles (Swail et al., 2003).

Social factors. Social factors are resources that students bring with them to the educational institution. These forces include peer influence and parental support, as well as students' ability to cope with social issues and handle social challenges. According to Swail et al. (2003), social integration directly relates to students' achievement and retention. When students are integrated into the school environment, they will be more likely to persist in challenging times and situations. Correspondingly, social factors also interconnect with students' cognitive development. Advantaged individuals who are integrated in an educationally and culturally rich setting will more likely develop cognitive skills and high self-esteem necessary to be successful in their personal and professional lives. In contrast, individuals who come from disadvantaged backgrounds may be deficient in their self-efficacy and lack the self-esteem when compared with more privileged students. Hence, social factors are a critical force in developing the foundation for student achievement (Swail et al., 2003).

Institutional factors. Indisputably, college is one of the most significant transitions and may present stress for many students. This is particularly true for minority students and students of low SES who often lack the knowledge and resources to navigate the college system (Swail et al., 2003). Based on the geometric model of student persistence and achievement, educational institutions must react to students' diverse needs and attributes. Academic services and student support programs are critical for student retention and completion, especially in secondary and postsecondary education. Appropriate support services, both academically and socially, are essential for

student success. In short, institutional factors are significant forces for student achievement because they have a direct effect on students' ability to persist in schools. Swail et al. (2003) place institutional forces at the base of the geometric model because they form the basis for education success.

Figure 1 provides an illustration of the geometric model. The next section will explain how this theoretical framework will be applied in this study.

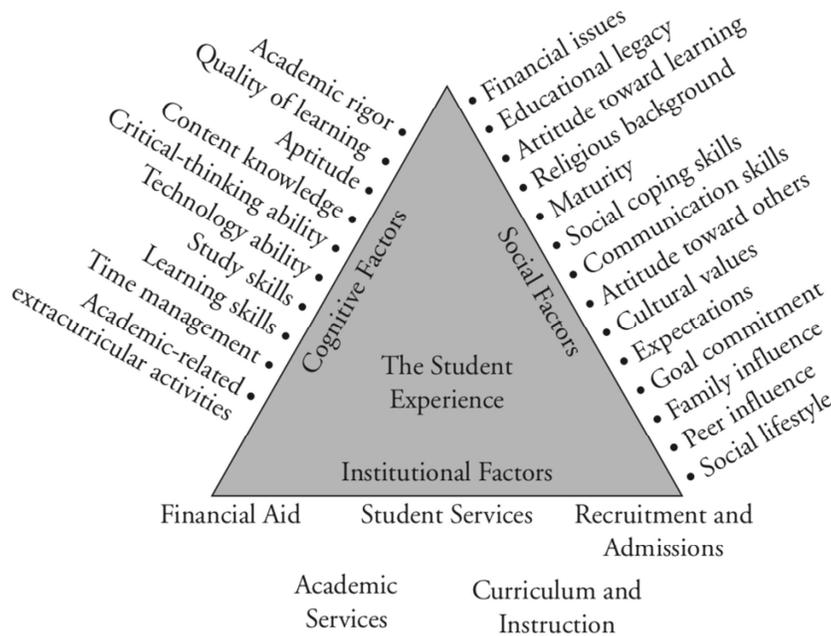


FIGURE 1. The geometric model. An illustration showing the dynamics between cognitive, social, and institutional factors, all contribute to the student experience. From "Retaining minority students in higher education: A framework for success," by W. Swail, K. Reed, and L. Perna, 2003. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report*, 30(2), p. 77.

Application of the geometric model. The geometric model of student persistence and achievement is a model for student retention. Although this model is about college retention, the framework can certainly be expanded to all K-16 levels because the issue of

student attrition is a persistent concern in many schools. Based on this framework, cognitive and social factors are interconnected and are on equal ground with institutional factors. Institutional factors are the underpinnings for student achievement; while students' intelligence and ability to participate in schools directly impact their social and academic growth. To ensure student retention, educational institutions must tailor their support services and programs to match the needs of their diverse student body. While this theoretical framework was developed to provide a perspective to examine how college students navigate U.S. higher education system, this dissertation will utilize the model to understand student's experience before and through college. This model is an appropriate fit for this study as it focuses on underrepresented and disadvantaged students. On the theoretical level, this framework will be applied to understand student persistence, as well as to explore the cognitive, social, and institutional factors that influence the overall student experience. For the purpose of this study, persistence is defined as students' resilience and tenacity to persist to and through higher education.

Swail et al. (2003) concluded their work recognizing the intricacy and complexity of the student experience. The authors concluded that one framework is not sufficient to apply to an entire student population. This was their critique of Tinto's (1975) SIM, which only focuses on student attrition and departure. As stated by Swail et al., "The complexity of the human condition makes it difficult to definitely prove the validity of one psychological or sociological theoretical model over another" (p. viii).

Consequently, this dissertation will also utilize Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory to identify and understand alternative pertinent factors affecting student educational experience and achievement.

Community Cultural Wealth Theory

Although the geometric model of student persistence and achievement recognizes the cognitive and cultural attributes students bring to school, it falls short on naming other intrinsic factors such as self-efficacy and personal aspiration. Thus, the application of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory is necessary to fill this gap. Further, Yosso's work centers around culture, which is a missing element (or at least not explicit) in Swail et al.'s (2003) framework. Through Yosso's value-focused lens, the cultural capital that minority students bring to school will also be considered and explored. This cultural aspect, which is distinct from the non-minority dominant group, is key to understanding the experiences of Vietnamese American students.

Literature on Southeast Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders frequently concentrates on deficits and student academic underachievement (Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Cunanan, Guerrero, & Minamoto, 2006; Goldberg, 1999; Han & Lee, 2011). Yosso (2005) highlights the need for a paradigm shift in perspective, particularly for Latina/o students. This framework can also be expanded to other underrepresented ethnic/racial groups because they, too, also have great sources of capital and strengths. Yosso contends that an anti-deficit approach to understanding people of color will provide a more strength-based and value-focused understanding of racial and ethnic minority students. The terms strength-based and value-focused will be utilized in this dissertation to underscore an anti-deficit outlook.

Applying critical race theory, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory moves away from looking at underrepresented communities through a deficit lens and shifts the focus to learning from these communities' cultural wealth and assets. Yosso

argues that education systems do not acknowledge the “community cultural wealth” of students from communities of color and suggests that minority students have capital that is advantageous in helping them succeed in schools (pp. 77–81). As defined by Yosso, community cultural wealth “is an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). Particularly, this model recognizes six different forms of capital students bring to school: (a) aspirational, (b) linguistic, (c) familial, (d) social, (e) navigational, and (f) resistant. Yosso suggests that these six forms of capital may increase an individual’s cultural capital (i.e., accumulated resources and assets) and promote social mobility. These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive; hence, they are interdependent and overlap with one another to construct community cultural wealth.

Aspirational capital. Aspirational capital can be understood as “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). This value refers to the ability to sustain resiliency and persistently demonstrate high hope for the future undeterred by challenges or obstacles to obtain goals. This form of value is associated with individuals’ determination and self-efficacy to persist and nurture their dreams. Yosso describes aspirational capital as the resiliency in individuals that enables them to vision a better future, even in the face of barriers. In education, aspirational capital influences students’ educational attainment and outcomes by enhancing their self-efficacy and self-esteem to persevere towards their goals (Yosso, 2005).

Linguistic capital. Linguistic capital consists of “the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). This form of cultural wealth refers to the ability of minority students to communicate in multiple languages. Multilingualism enables students of color to utilize multiple language registers to converse with various audiences. This asset contributes to students’ cross-cultural awareness, as well as develops their “real-world” literacy skills, family responsibility, and social maturity (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).

Familial capital. Familial capital is the “cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carries a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This aspect of cultural wealth relates to individuals’ connection and commitment to community. Minimizing isolation, familial capital expands the traditional notion of family to acknowledge the extended family as part of the “familia” (p. 79). Yosso (2005) contends that individuals learn the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with the community and its resources from these kinship ties. Through modeling (*educación*) from their kin, students additionally learn to be caring, well-mannered, and respectful. As a consequence, this connection to community informs students’ consciousness and develops their social, personal, and moral responsibility that serves as a foundation for all learning at school (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).

Social capital. Social capital is described as “networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This form of capital refers to the peer/social contacts, information, and support that help individuals navigate through society’s institutions. Yosso (2005) argues that by uniting with social networks, people of color are better able to transcend adversities and achieve goals. In addition to helping minority students

identify available community resources, these social networks may also provide the emotional support students need as they pursue higher education (Yosso, 2005).

Navigational capital. Navigational capital can be described as “skills for maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This form of cultural wealth refers to the resilience in communities of color to navigate through structures of inequality. In other words, navigational capital refers to minority students’ social and psychological critical ability to move through institutions and systems not created with people of color in mind. Examples of such systems may include the job market, healthcare and judicial systems, and racially-hostile educational institutions (Yosso, 2005).

Resistant capital. Yosso (2005) refers to resistant capital as the knowledge and “skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 80). This aspect of cultural wealth is cultivated through behavior that resists subordination. In turn, people of color learn to oppose inequalities to challenge the status quo and fight for racial and social fairness. With a social justice orientation, resistant capital relates to individuals’ motivation to defy societal injustices and transform oppressive structures for themselves and other people of color (Yosso, 2005). Figure 2 provides an illustration of the community cultural wealth theory.

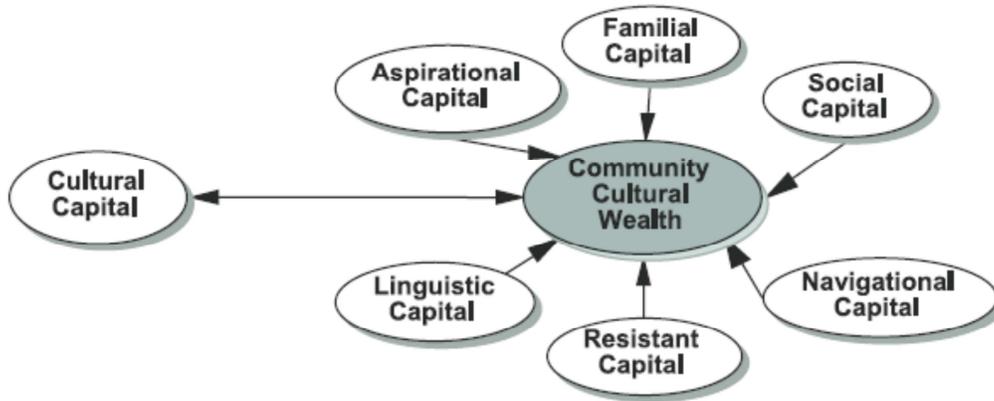


FIGURE 2. The community cultural wealth theory. A model of community cultural wealth theory depicting six forms of capital held by students from traditionally marginalized populations that are dynamic processes that build on students’ cultural capital. From “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth,” by T. Yosso, 2005, *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), p. 78.

Application of theory of community cultural wealth. According to Yosso (2005), minority students are frequently examined through a deficit-thinking lens, instead of being valued for the wealth of cultural assets, abilities, and knowledge they possess. Echoing Swail et al.’s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, Yosso’s community cultural wealth theory focuses on attributes and sources of value disadvantaged minority students bring to school. All students bring instrumental cultural value to school, which is often unacknowledged and unrecognized by educational institutions not set up by or for people of color (Yosso, 2005). She points out that by transforming the way students of color are viewed in schools, educators can leverage students’ cultural capital to enhance student achievement and decrease unnecessary discipline from taking place.

This framework is relevant to this exploration because it offers an alternative lens to understanding marginalized students. Rather than focusing on students' weaknesses, this anti-deficit approach allows the researcher to fathom how underprivileged minority students triumph over barriers and difficulties (Harper, 2010; Saleebey, 1996). This model is an appropriate fit for this study, because it helps the researcher better understand how first-generation Vietnamese students navigate their way to and through an educational system that may be unresponsive to their needs. This anti-deficit achievement framework is employed to gain greater insights on factors contributing to minority student development and success. Furthermore, this approach is utilized in this dissertation to focus on students' capital and wealth, in preference over a deficit thinking that students of color are at fault for poor academic achievement. This strength-based framework to understanding racial and ethnic minority students will allow the researcher to invert and reframe students' behaviors to construct an understanding of their non-traditional experiences.

Summary of Conceptual Framework

This study incorporates Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory as a conceptual model for understanding the lived experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students in relation to their educational pathways and academic achievements. Although there are some overlaps in perspectives, a combined approach is needed to guide this dissertation and ensure a more holistic understanding and analysis of Vietnamese American students and their K-16 experiences. The complementary nature of these two models is essential to understanding both intrinsic and extrinsic factors

contributing to educational retention and success of minority students. Figure 3 provides a visual depicting the application and overlap of the two approaches.

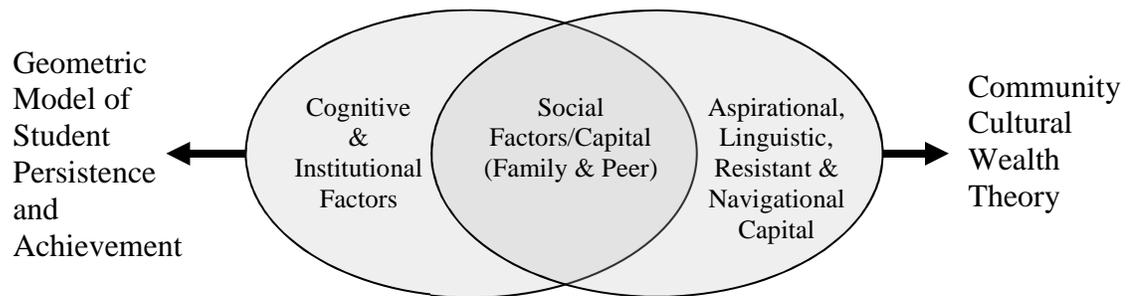


FIGURE 3. Application and overlap of conceptual framework. A representation depicting the application and overlap of Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory.

Specifically, Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement adds to understanding by highlighting the functions of cognitive, social, and institutional factors in student perseverance and performance. This model serves as a framework for examining the conditions contributing to student pre-college and college success. Yosso's (2005) approach contests traditional perspectives of cultural capital and shifts the inquiry away from a deficit perspective. In other words, Yosso's framework offers an unconventional and explicit cultural perspective to exploring the skills and attributes marginalized students bring to school. While both frameworks consider social components (such as, family and peer influences) related to student achievement, Swail et al.'s framework focuses on the cognitive and institutional forces that impact student experience and success (in which Yosso's work does not). However, Yosso's model is critical to this study because it acknowledges the value of culture and underscores the

array of cultural capital (aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic) students of color possess (in which Swail et al.'s work does not). Further, Yosso's framework also recognizes the intrinsic value of students' aspirational and resistant capital, elements that are not explicit in Swail et al.'s model. In general, both perspectives are necessary because they allow for an expanded understanding of the various assets and capital underrepresented students possess that facilitate their academic attainment, as well as provides a lens to conceptualize how minority students achieve academic success despite adversities.

Operational Definitions

The following is a list of terms and corresponding definitions to assist readers in a better understanding of the language used in this dissertation.

Acculturation: The “process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of another group” (Stein, 1975, p. 10).

Asian: A person having origins in any of the original countries of the Far East, Southeast, or the Indian subcontinent, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, China, India, Thailand, Japan, and Korea (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Asian American: A person living in the United States of Far East, Southeast Asian, or Indian origins (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Asian Pacific Islander: A person of Asian, Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ancestry (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

East Asian American: A person living in the United States who is of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

English language learner (ELL): An active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs. This term is used mainly in the United States to describe K-12 students (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008).

First-generation college student: A student who is the first in their family to go to college (College Board, 2013).

Model minority: A phrase sociologist William Petersen coined in 1966 in an essay titled “Success Story, Japanese-American Style.” The essay was published in *The New York Times* magazine and portrayed Asian Americans as a group of high achievers that has realized success despite discrimination and marginalization.

Pacific Islander: A person having origin in any of the original people of Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

Refugee: “Persons who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Vu, 1990, p. 234).

Second generation: A person who was born in the United States, with parents who were born in a foreign country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

Socioeconomic status (SES): The social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation (American Psychological Association, 2013).

Successful college student: An individual with junior or senior academic standing who is likely to graduate from a 4-year college or university.

Vietnamese American: A person living in the United States that is of Vietnamese descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations of the Study

This section describes the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations under which the research will be conducted to identify shortcomings in methodology of the design. For the purpose of this investigation, it is assumed that college students from 4-year colleges or universities with junior or senior academic standing are successful because they are likely to graduate. The researcher also assumes that successful first-generation students are confronted with similar obstacles and challenges as they navigate the K-16 educational system; thus, it is supposed that participants may share common experiences.

To assure manageability of the study, this study is limited to only one sub-population of interest (first-generation Vietnamese American students). Since this is a targeted group, this study lacks the perspectives of second-generation students (those who were born in the United States, with parents who were born in a foreign country). A mixed purposeful sampling technique is utilized to recruit participants for the study. Two methods, criterion and snowball sampling, are used to attain the desired sample. Participants are selected because of their fitting characteristics and convenient accessibility to the researcher. This delimitation is necessary to achieve the objective of the investigation and is dictated by time and resource constraints. Therefore, the participants may not be representative of the entire population of interest.

In regards to methodology, a small sample size is dictated by the design of this qualitative study. Hence, a key limitation of this qualitative research is that findings may not be generalizable beyond the specific experiences of the student population from

which data were collected. This, in turn, results in a low external validity of the study. Another major unavoidable drawback of this approach is that the researcher's presence during data gathering can affect the participants' responses. Accordingly, the quality of qualitative investigation is greatly reliant on the skills of the researcher and heavily influenced by the investigator's personal idiosyncrasies and biases (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). For these reasons, the researcher must be conscious of these limitations to avoid perpetuating partiality. The acknowledgement of assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and influencing factors is crucial in assisting the researcher to understand the inherent issues that may be encountered in the study. This recognition will additionally help the researcher to analyze and interpret the results of the study, as well as to offer ideas for implications and recommendations.

Significance of the Topic

Overall, the K-16 educational experiences of Vietnamese American students are often understudied in the field of research (Han & Lee, 2011; Long, 1996; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Of the literature that underscores the academic experiences of Asian Americans, the majority is focused on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) as a whole (Buonavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009; Empleo, 2006; Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011). In addition, very few researchers have given voice to immigrant Asian American students, particularly first-generation youth. Descriptions of first-generation Vietnamese American students must challenge the traditional deficit perspective and move beyond identifying barriers to success. While narratives of first-generation Vietnamese American youth can include challenges, research must explore students' assets and facilitators to success to understand how these disadvantaged youth

navigated and overcame barriers as they traversed the K-16 educational pipeline. A K-16 perspective is critical in assisting other first-generation youth navigate the educational process and create their own college-going tradition. This study aims to add to the literature on students of color, Vietnamese Americans in particular, by offering first-generation Vietnamese American youth the opportunity to share their personal stories through narratives. Unlike other qualitative research designs, narrative inquiry allows for deeper understanding of the trajectory of participants lives, as well as a closer examination of the inner section of their personal, social, and institutional experiences.

Further, this investigation also endeavors to inform policy and practice by encouraging honest dialogue about the strengths and inequities of the American school system. Stories of support factors and obstacles of first-generation students not only will help expand our understanding of their K-16 experiences, but may also assist policymakers and educational leaders in advocating for more equitable and effective policies and institutional actions (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008).

From a policy perspective, this dissertation offers recommendations about funding, provides information on the importance of the need to disaggregate data for Asian American subgroups, and suggests ways to create accountability measures to evaluate K-12 and higher education efforts. From a practice perspective, this study provides an understanding to help schools and colleges address how first-generation Vietnamese American students and their families engage with the American education system, as well as understand how to engage these stakeholders at both the K-12 and college levels. Consideration of challenges and facilitators to K-16 success can also

assist in the creation of language development programs, support services, supplemental educational opportunities, and extracurricular activities, for seamless pathways between K-12 schools and colleges for students, especially for first-generation youth. Awareness of the specific needs and special assets of this student population can further help staff, teachers, and faculty build rapport and offer more personalized academic assistance to students. Correspondingly, this study will help broaden students' support network and facilitate their K-16 success.

From a research perspective, on one hand, this dissertation begins to fill the gap in the literature on the experiences of Asian American subgroups, specifically Vietnamese Americans. At the same time, this study also raises interesting questions about the role of language, birth order, and whether the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American youth differ from other traditional underrepresented student populations. These are important inquiries that bear investigation.

Programs, strategies, and best practices in education must be grounded by evidence produced by research. This exploration attempts to give voice and highlight the educational experiences of this often overlooked and underrepresented population to provide meaningful data on their needs, assets, and navigation of the K-16 educational pipeline. Findings will help expand current understanding of strengths and offer recommendations for improving our existing education system. An anti-deficit perspective will be invaluable in understanding the impact of culture and reasons why and how these underserved students prevail and succeed in the face of obstacles.

Although Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model was originally developed for Latino students, I adapt and apply Yosso's framework to a new context by exploring the

ways in which Vietnamese American students build on their cultural capital to succeed in school. Through Yosso's lens, this dissertation will extend the conversation about students of color and traditional underrepresented groups, and contribute to a greater understanding of diverse communities. A value-focused approach will be instrumental in helping disadvantaged youth build on their individual capital and strengths, as well as aiding educational institutions replicate theirs.

Likewise, this research incorporates Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement to gain a perspective on factors impacting student retention and success in higher education. A deeper understanding of the ways marginalized or underprivileged students succeed in navigating personal, social, and institutional barriers will help identify key issues and problems associated with access and the gap in college readiness, as well as help inform institutional actions to ease the high school to college transition for first-generation youth. Particularly, this dissertation intends to identify and examine key issues affecting first-generation Vietnamese American students. The central focus is to encourage realistic discussions and facilitate a joint effort of policymakers and educational leaders, in order to guarantee access and improve the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American youth. Overall, findings of this dissertation will reveal practice and policy areas needed to ensure a quality education and create college-readiness reform for students of color.

Conclusion

Asian Americans continue to be described as the model minority and are often regarded by the general population as the group that is linked to economic success and high educational achievement (Nadal, 2009). The concept of the model minority implies

that Asian Americans have been flourishing economically and educationally more than other minority groups in America (Kwon & Au, 2010). Accordingly, the model minority stereotype is defined as the cultural expectation placed on Asian Americans as a group of individuals who are docile, self-reliant, and are living “The American dream” (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Wing, 2007). While the label model minority appears to be complimentary, it is a racial stereotype and bears negative connotations (Kwon & Au, 2010). Not all Asian Americans are the same. There is real diversity among Asian groups and combining them masks their needs. Some Asian Americans were born in America to immigrant parents. Others are first-generation Asian Americans who must overcome the language barrier after arriving in the United States (Wing, 2007). Many come from underprivileged backgrounds (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Some have attained economic success, while others live in poverty (Shields & Behrman, 2004). Additionally, a number of Asian American students are the first in their families to go to college.

Overlooking the differences between Asian American subgroups may spread inequity because the academic underperformance of several Southeast Asian American subgroups, such as Vietnamese Americans, is often overlooked in schools (Museus & Kiang, 2009). Even though some Southeast Asian American students have attained educational success, “a disproportionate number have found it difficult to succeed academically” (Yang, 2004, p. 127). For instance, when examining disaggregated data on student achievement, some ethnic subgroups within the AAPI population have obtained postsecondary degrees “at rates lower than the national population” (Museus & Kiang, 2009, p. 10). East Asian Americans (Asian Indians, Korean Americans, Japanese Americans, and Chinese Americans) are relatively more academically successful than

Southeast Asian Americans (Vietnamese Americans, Cambodian Americans, Hmong Americans; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). To expand, Asian Indians are among those who have the highest levels of educational and economic success, while Vietnamese Americans are among the lowest in academic attainment.

Although Asian American students have appeared to exhibit “a high academic profile on average,” many subgroups are still experiencing challenges and setbacks “in ways rendered invisible by widespread acceptance of the Model Minority Myth” (Wing, 2007, p. 455). Thus, by exaggerating the success of certain Asian Americans, the model minority stereotype may paradoxically advance inequity (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Wing, 2007). In other words, the model minority myth of academic success may possibly impede the success of Asian American students because their educational needs and disparities are often ignored. This dissertation recognizes the diversity among Asian Americans and seeks to explore the unique educational experiences and needs of first-generation Vietnamese American students to fill the dearth of research on this disadvantaged population.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Even though Asian Americans make up about only 4.8% of the American population, they constitute one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Within this heterogeneous group, Vietnamese Americans are the fourth largest in terms of percentage of population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c). Correspondingly, the increase in number of Vietnamese American youth reflects the growing student diversity in many schools. Despite their growth in population, Vietnamese Americans are frequently inaccurately subsumed within the widespread model minority myth. Consequently, erroneous model minority stereotypes have contributed to a limited and biased perspective of Vietnamese Americans, rendering the academic needs of this overlooked subpopulation invisible within schools (Empleo, 2006; Han & Lee, 2011; Kao, 1995; Kwon & Au, 2010; Le, 2010; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007).

This dissertation is an effort to address the invisibility and underrepresentation of Vietnamese American students on many K-12 and college campuses across the country. To enhance understanding of this population of interest, this chapter provides readers with an overview of literature to unearth the personal, social, cultural, and educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students. Accordingly, the focus of

this review is to: (a) discuss the various misconceptions associated with the model minority myth and the characteristics of Vietnamese Americans; (b) provide background information on Vietnamese Americans and their immigration history; (c) investigate the social, cultural, cognitive, and institutional factors hindering Vietnamese Americans' scholastic achievement; and (d) explore the cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional factors contributing to Vietnamese Americans' academic success. This chapter will also discuss the paucity in research on Vietnamese Americans and the need to achieve a more balanced coverage on this often-underrepresented youth. Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement and Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth will guide and inform this literature review. This conceptual framework will also provide a model for analysis of existing research. Since much of existing research tends to explore the factors attributed to Southeast Asian American students' academic performance through a deficit-focused lens, the exploration of their educational experiences through a value-focused perspective is necessary to provide grounding for this dissertation.

Given the dearth of research on Vietnamese Americans and their academic experiences, literature on other marginalized Southeast Asian American subpopulations is utilized to provide context for this investigation. Southeast Asian Americans include individuals from diverse ethnicities, such as people from countries of Vietnam, the Philippines, and Cambodia. Similar to Vietnamese Americans, the majority of Southeast Asian Americans migrated to America as refugees, not as immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Although this literature review includes the experiences of diverse Southeast Asian subpopulations, this study recognizes that their experiences are neither

correlative nor entirely transferable. Literature on Southeast Asian Americans is incorporated to add nuance and suggest comparable experiences of Vietnamese Americans to other Southeast Asian American subgroups. In general, an overview of the literature on Vietnamese American students will be explored in this chapter to present a synopsis of past and current understanding about their K-16 educational experiences.

Model Minority Myth Misconceptions and Characteristics of Vietnamese Americans

Asian Americans are often misunderstood due to the model minority myth (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Yang, 2004). Museus and Kiang (2009) suggested that the model minority myth is linked with five main misconceptions. The authors argued that the demystification of these assumptions is essential to lessen the pervasive influence of the stereotype on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The five misconceptions are: (a) Asian Americans are all the same, (b) Asian Americans are not really racial and ethnic minorities, (c) Asian Americans do not encounter major challenges as a race, (d) Asian Americans do not seek or require resources and support, and, (e) college degree completion is equivalent to success (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

Contrary to popular belief, the exaggerated positive caricature of Asian Americans as more socially, economically, and academically successful than other racial minority groups is oversimplified and false. While the model minority myth is a romantic notion, it ignores the complexity and heterogeneity that exist within different Asian American subgroups (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Wallitt, 2008; Wing, 2007; Yang, 2004). Scholars have refuted the distorted misconceptions associated with the model minority myth. The diversity in class, education attainment, cultures, languages, backgrounds, and histories of Asian Americans is noteworthy. In fact, within

one subpopulation, there are considerable differences in class background and educational level, as well as differing perspectives based on gender (Robbins, 2004), immigration status (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), and generation (Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007). Many Asian American immigrants and refugees also struggle to navigate multiple cultures, while having to learn the English language, as they assimilate into the American society (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Wallitt, 2008; Xiong & Huang, 2011). Indeed, the model minority myth exaggerates stories of some successful Asian American subpopulations and neglects the variation that exists within this racially diverse group. As a consequence, specific obstacles and barriers haunting Asian Americans are often overlooked due to model minority misconceptions (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Nadal, 2009; Wing, 2007; Yang, 2004).

The purpose of the following section is to elucidate the characteristics of Vietnamese Americans to unravel the myth for this population of interest. These characteristics include: (a) Vietnamese Americans' immigration history and refugee status, (b) their limited English proficiency status, (c) their low SES, and (d) their low educational attainment. Vietnamese resettlement in the United States is relatively recent. As an immigrant group, most Vietnamese Americans are refugees who fled the new communist government following the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Due to their recent immigration status, most struggle to acculturate with limited English skills. Further, as refugees, many currently live below the poverty line. This low English proficiency, along with the impact of financial and acculturation challenges, are factors that often contribute to the low SES and educational attainment of Vietnamese Americans. In this way, Vietnamese Americans do appear to not conform to the model

minority myth. Accordingly, the next several sections attempt to unmask the characteristics of Vietnamese Americans, in order to demystify the model minority myth and dispel all of associated misconceptions. The final section will provide an evaluation of the model minority myth in the case of Vietnamese Americans.

Immigration History and Refugee Status

Unlike other Asian American immigrants, Vietnamese have been generally admitted to the United States as refugees. Having come with a history of exile and trauma has undoubtedly left marks. This section will: (a) explain the immigration history of Vietnamese Americans, and (b) describe the differences in migrant characteristics of the three waves of Vietnamese refugee exodus to the United States, and (c) provide a general overview of Vietnamese refugees' unique struggles in navigating and assimilating into American culture and society following resettlement to the United States.

The abrupt immigration of Vietnamese refugees to the United States was largely caused by U.S. military involvement in the Vietnam War (Vietnam War, 2010). The U.S. government was in support of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) in attempting to prevent the expansion of the power of communist North Vietnam and avert the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asian countries (Vietnam War, 2010). Saigon (the capital of South Vietnam) was defeated and fell to North Vietnam on April 30, 1975. This day marked the end of the Vietnam War and Saigon was unified and renamed Ho Chi Minh City (after the leader of the Communist Party of Vietnam).

Following the war, the Vietnamese refugee exodus to the United States was marked by three waves (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Takaki, 1989; Zhou & Bankston, 2000a). Vu

(1990) defined Vietnamese refugees as “persons who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of nationality because of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in particular social group, or political opinion” (p. 234). The initial wave of Vietnamese refugees (1975–1979) was composed of many professional, educated, skilled, and elite individuals. These individuals mostly came from urban areas and had more social and economic resources than later refugee families (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 2000a). The second wave (1979–1982) included political prisoners and “boat people” (individuals who sought refuge in secrecy by boat in the open seas). These people were often family members of the first wave refugees and more likely to have an above-average SES (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 2000a).

The third wave of Vietnamese refugees (1982–present) was comprised of boat people and individuals leaving their homeland under the U.S. Orderly Departure program (Zhou & Bankston, 2000c). By far, the third wave of Vietnamese refugees was the largest among the three waves, attracting roughly over 615,000 refugees by 1990 (compared to fewer than 15,000 Vietnamese refugees in the early 1970s; Zhou & Bankston, 2000c). A large proportion of individuals from the third wave were the least educated of the refugees (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Many also lived in refugee camps prior to migrating to America. As a result, third wave refugees are more likely to have lived in poverty and have been deprived of many resources before they emigrated to America (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 2000c). Presently, the United States provides asylum for over 1.5 million Vietnamese refugees and their children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Continuing immigration has contributed to the growth of the Vietnamese

population. This increase in population is echoed in many of today's K-12 schools and colleges, especially in California. While a large number of Vietnamese immigrants continue to be refugees, a growing proportion has been admitted to the United States through family-sponsored programs.

Vietnamese immigrants and refugees have encountered unique struggles compared to other minority immigrants in recent years. As a group, Vietnamese refugees were displaced from their motherland under relentless political repression. A majority of refugees were sponsored to the United States by government or voluntary agencies; therefore, they did not have control over their resettlement location (Lanphier, 1983). For this reason, a significant number of Vietnamese refugees did not initially arrive in ethnic neighborhoods. The lack of ethnic ties and social relationships, along with the effect of culture shock, has made it extremely difficult for Vietnamese refugees to navigate the process of acculturation. The degree of social dislocation, along with the absence of preexisting community ties, has made it difficult for many Vietnamese refugees to assimilate into American society (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore, 1991; Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Rutledge, 1992; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Ultimately, the story of Vietnamese resettlement in America is unique and complex. Their immigration history is very different from many other Asian Americans. Prior to the 1970s, Vietnamese immigration to the United States was nearly non-existent. The third wave of immigration marked the exodus that resulted in the relocation of over 1.5 million Vietnamese refugees and their children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Looking closely, the diverse experiences of this subpopulation confound the model minority myth. Countless Vietnamese refugees are still struggling to navigate American culture and

society due to their recent immigration status. For that reason, in grouping all Asian Americans as the “model minority” fails to recognize the disparity and nuance among this unique subpopulation.

Lack of Acculturation and Limited English Proficiency

Immigration alone counters the model minority myth because many Vietnamese immigrants and refugees are living in harsh conditions and facing a myriad of acculturation struggles. Immigration is a life altering change that involves dealing with cultural transitions and a variety of migration challenges. Due to their relatively recent arrival to the United States, a number of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees have low levels of acculturation and limited English language proficiency (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Accordingly, this section will: (a) identify and explain key indicators associated with the acculturation of Vietnamese Americans, and (b) elucidate the influence of language barriers during the acculturation process of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees. By far, lack of English was identified as among the most challenging barrier faced by Vietnamese American immigrants and refugees (Brown, Schale, & Nilsson, 2010; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Robbins, 2004; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Without knowing the language, many Vietnamese immigrants and refugees found it difficult to navigate and adapt to the new American culture and society.

Research has been consistent about the cultural and social adjustment experiences of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees. Indicators, such as, age of arrival, length of stay, and English language proficiency have all been associated with acculturation of Vietnamese Americans (Brown et al., 2010; Chung, Bemak, & Wong, 2000; B. C. H. Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Matsuoka, 1990; Phan & Silove; 1997; Sodowsky & Plake,

1991). Matsuoka (1990) suggested age to be correlated with the speed of acculturation. Younger refugees at early developmental stage, before the onset of adolescence (typically under the age of 12), are able to learn English and assimilate into American culture more rapidly and easily than those who migrated to the United States at an older age. In the same way, Chung et al. (2000) also found that Vietnamese refugees who migrated at later life stages tend to struggle with language acquisition, as well as with the adoption of new cultural behaviors and values.

Likewise, Sodowsky and Plake (1991) also suggested that length of stay could implicate levels of English language proficiency, as well as levels of acculturation. In this regard, greater length of stay is associated with less acculturative stress (such as, language constraints and cultural/social differences) and higher levels of behavioral acculturation (Brown et al., 2010; B. C. H. Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Sodowsky & Plake, 1991). Likewise, Phan and Silove (1997) also found length of stay to influence Vietnamese refugees' level of psychological distress, such as depression. Thus, those who stay in the United States for a longer period of time tend to be more acculturated in adopting new American language, values, and behaviors.

Acculturation of Vietnamese immigrants and refugees has been studied in relation to their English language acquisition. In a survey study conducted by Brown et al. (2010) of 83 Vietnamese immigrant and refugee women in the Midwest, the researchers found English language proficiency to influence subjects' levels of acculturation and mental health. The Hopkins Symptom Checklist-21 was the instrument utilized to measure mental health symptoms, while the General Feelings of Distress and the Somatic Distress subscale was used to assess subjects' emotional and physical concerns (respectively;

Brown et al., 2010). Based on their findings, Brown et al. concluded that English language skills were the significant predictor of distress for Vietnamese immigrant and refugee women. According to these scholars, English language ability is associated with mental health, as well as subjects' cultural adjustment experiences. Women with less English language ability generally reported greater distress than women with proficient English language skills. Brown et al. speculated that the limited English language ability possibly makes it more difficult for Vietnamese immigrants and refugees to effectively communicate, which leads to "a lack of connectedness or isolation from the host culture" (p. 71). However, it is noteworthy that a key limitation of Brown et al.'s research is that the study does not include male subjects. The inclusion of both women and men in research would help avoid gender-bias findings.

Similarly, Oppedal, Roysamb, and Sam (2004) also acknowledged the importance of English language proficiency in host culture competence. According to the scholars, knowing the language helps immigrants and refugees adapt and develop closer ties with their new culture. In this regard, limited English language ability may contribute to disconnectedness with mainstream culture and society (Oppedal et al., 2004). Consistent with previous research, Beiser and Hou (2001) also found English language proficiency to be related to higher acculturation and income levels. Based on findings from a 10-year longitudinal study, researchers reported that Southeast Asian refugees who are more fluent in English are more likely to have greater income-earning potential, due to having more employment options than those without the English language ability (Beiser & Hou, 2001). Thus, research shows that many Vietnamese Americans lack the language skills

and have not acculturated. This finding may help provide a plausible explanation for the low SES of recent Vietnamese immigrant and refugees.

Low Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Despite improvements in language acquisition and human capital since arrival in the United States, Vietnamese refugees still fall behind their American counterparts economically (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Besides the first wave of refugees of 1975, many Vietnamese evacuees were from poor, rural cities (Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Distinct from other post World War II refugees, such as refugees from the former Soviet Union and Cuba, many Vietnamese refugees had to bear prolonged hardships in refugee camps, and many were unable to bring financial/personal assets on their journey (Zhou & Bankston, 2000a). Thus, many Vietnamese refugees are of low SES upon their arrival in the United States.

As refugees, most arrive in America unprepared and with limited resources. Although a small proportion of Vietnamese refugees have prospered economically, many are still living in destitution (Le, 2010). For instance, in Oakland, “one third of the city’s Vietnamese live below the poverty line, and per capita income is half that of the overall population” (Texeria, 2005, para. 5). This data suggests many Vietnamese families are still struggling day to day.

In 2000, Vietnamese Americans had the highest poverty rate (23%) among all other Asian subpopulations. This number was virtually equal to African Americans from low-income households. From 2007 to 2011, the poverty rate of Vietnamese Americans (14.7%) remained among one of the highest for the Asian population, only slightly behind Korean Americans (15.0%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b). Nationally, roughly

228,381 Vietnamese Americans are still living below poverty, with a majority of those residing in California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b). At present, about 10% of Vietnamese Americans collect government assistance income, such as food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) payments (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b). Based on the facts, a large number of Vietnamese families are still living below the poverty line. Thus, romanticizing that Vietnamese Americans are the model minority renders the economic inequality invisible and diverts attention from past and existing disparity.

Low Education Attainment

In many schools and institutions across the nation, Asian Americans appear to be leading in education. This impression is misleading because this profile of high educational achievement fails to take into consideration the tremendous diversity within the Asian American communities, such as the differing SES and recent immigration status (Um, 2003). Consequently, this high academic profile does not accurately reflect the fact that many Southeast Asian Americans are failing in education (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Disparity in education attainment among Asian American groups is striking and noteworthy when academic performance data are disaggregated by ethnic specificity. Compared to other East Asian groups, Vietnamese Americans are attaining lower education and not achieving academic success (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Um, 2003). This lower level of education attainment reflects the recent immigration history of Vietnamese Americans in the United States. There were hardly any Vietnamese students in American schools prior to 1975 (Zhou & Bankston, 2000a). However, due to the

recent population influx, many Vietnamese refugees and/or their children are entering higher education as first-generation students, those who are the first in their families to go to college (College Board, 2013). Accordingly, this section will: (a) present nationwide statistical data on Vietnamese American education attainment, and (b) discuss the unique characteristics and experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students.

Looking at nationwide data, Vietnamese Americans account for low academic success at both secondary and postsecondary levels. As stated by SEARAC (2011), the Vietnamese community falls below the national average for people who have obtained higher education (both bachelor's degree and higher). As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), approximately 8% of Vietnamese Americans aged 25 or older have no formal education. Further, only 25% of all Vietnamese Americans obtain a college degree (SEARAC, 2011). Among pre-K to fifth grade Vietnamese American students, 42% are classified as ELLs, 41% are of low SES, and 26% have parents without any educational degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In Washington State, 52.1% of Vietnamese Americans have less than a high school education. In California, the average number of years in school is 9.6 years for Vietnamese Americans, as opposed to the national average of 12 years (Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 2013). Irrefutable, these statistics reveal the academic underachievement of Vietnamese American students.

As noted, an overwhelming majority of Vietnamese Americans in the United States are refugees from the third immigration wave (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). As a consequence, many first-generation Vietnamese American students tend to come from families who are uneducated, with little or no formal education (Stritikus & Nguyen,

2007). This unprivileged family background and a lack of a college-going tradition places first-generation youth at severe disadvantage as they enter postsecondary education.

Most research on first-generation students, such as Vietnamese Americans, has found them less engaged academically than other students. Pike and Kuh (2005) suggested that first-generation students have lower educational aspirations, less experience with college life, and lower tacit knowledge of higher education when compared with students from families with a college-going tradition. Further, first-generation students tend to experience lower levels of intellectual and learning development in higher education attributed to the immutable characteristic of being the first in their families to go to college (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Parents of these students also tend to lack the ability to help their children, even when inclined to do so, due to their lack of knowledge (Kenny & Stryker, 1996; London 1992; Pike & Kuh, 2005). In the same way, these students often lack guidance of available options regarding higher education (College Board, 2013). These challenges are intensified for first-generation students attending schools with dissimilar predominant ethnic, racial, and religious cultures (Allen, 1992). The isolation of Vietnamese in the United States, along with the lack of community and ethnic ties, has further exacerbated their academic struggle (Caplan et al., 1991; Rutledge, 1992; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Thus, Allen (1992) suggested that these students might face additional unique adjustment challenges as they navigate higher education. These challenges will be discussed in greater detail in the section on barriers to educational success.

Summary of Model Minority Myth and Characteristics of Vietnamese Americans

Like other Asian Americans, Vietnamese Americans are often perceived as high achievers who are associated with high educational attainment due to the model minority myth. However, this stereotypical image of the model minority fails to consider the diversity that exists between varied Asian ethnicities, as well as failing to account for the variation within the three migration waves. Similar to other minority students, Vietnamese American youth often come from low-income families, with parents who have limited financial resources, minimal formal education, and low levels of English language proficiency. Compared to their white counterparts, Vietnamese Americans remain to lag behind by significantly huge margins (Zhou & Bankston, 2000a). Many researchers have suggested that family SES and parental education are strong indicators of academic performance (Diez, Gatt, & Racionero, 2011; Lubienski & Crane, 2010; Usher, Kober, & Center on Education, 2012). Accordingly, unprivileged backgrounds put minority students, including Vietnamese Americans, at a great disadvantage as they navigate the K-16 educational pipeline. These characteristics of Vietnamese Americans lead to challenges for their educational experiences that will be the focus of the subsequent section.

Barriers Influencing Educational Success

As noted, there is a mistaken notion that all Asian Americans are academically, financially, and socially successful (Empleo, 2006; Kao, 1995; W. H. Kuo, 1998; Kwon & Au, 2010; J. Lew, 2004; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo, 2006; Ngo & Lee, 2007). National data on Asian Americans in education have further propagated this notion. Consequently, this misconception has led to inequitable treatment and silenced the needs

of many Asian American subgroups, particularly Southeast Asian Americans (Empleo, 2006; J. W. Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005; Pang et al., 2011). In fact, research suggests that Southeast Asian Americans, such as Vietnamese Americans, do experience educational challenges and lack parity with more affluent peers, similar to other minority groups (Empleo, 2006; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Pang et al., 2011).

There are many factors that hinder the educational success of Vietnamese Americans. These factors include social, cognitive, and institutional factors. Socially and culturally, intergenerational conflicts between Vietnamese parents and their children often contribute to greater depressive symptoms in Vietnamese American students. In addition, unrealistic parental expectations also lead to low self-esteem and decreased motivation for many Vietnamese American students. This cultural gap is a major challenge for academic success. Cognitively, a number of Vietnamese Americans have limited knowledge about higher education and lack the study skills necessary to succeed in schools. Their language barrier further puts them at risk for academic failure. Institutionally, Vietnamese students' progress through the K-16 educational pipeline with inadequate support services and resources that undermine their scholastic achievement. These challenges continue to accumulate, resulting in Vietnamese American students having lower academic attainment than their non-minority peers.

Cultural/Social Factors

Limited academic success of Vietnamese Americans can be traced to several cultural and social factors. Cultural risk factors undeniably can influence Vietnamese Americans socially. Specific risk factors, such as: (a) having intergenerational conflicts due to cultural differences between Vietnamese American parents and their children, (b)

having high levels of stress and depressive symptoms from racial discrimination and unrealistic parental/cultural expectations, (c) having low levels of self-esteem and self-motivation, and (d) living in low-income households place students at risk of not achieving academically. These barriers, although they may be interrelated, do not necessarily foretell school failure. Nonetheless, Vietnamese American students facing combinations of these barriers are more likely to face challenges in school.

Intergenerational conflicts. Intergenerational dissonance, a conflict between children and their parents over differences in social and/or cultural values, is a common concern for Vietnamese Americans (Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008). Research suggests Vietnamese refugee children and parents often experience intergenerational conflicts due to differential acculturation processes (Choi et al., 2008; Ying & Han, 2008; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Zhou & Bankston, 2000a). In consequence, this intergenerational social/cultural disconnect between Vietnamese youth and their parents often result in: (a) lack of engagement at home and (b) delinquency at school. This section will define the differences in social and cultural values between Vietnamese youth and their parents, to explain the ways in which this intergenerational gap contributes to problem behaviors in Vietnamese American youth.

Vietnamese immigrant parents tend to acculturate more slowly than their children (Choi et al., 2008; Ying & Han, 2008). Vietnamese refugee adults are more likely to retain their ethnic cultural values of familial obligations and respect for elders, while their children tend to adopt American cultural values of innovation and individuality (Choi et al., 2008; Ying & Chao, 1996; Ying & Han, 2008). These acculturation differences contribute to the intergenerational conflicts found in many Vietnamese American

families. According to Ying and Han (2008), intergenerational conflicts often compromise adults' abilities to parent effectively. For example, their findings show that intergenerational conflicts decrease communication and intimacy between parents and their children (Ying & Han, 2008). Correspondingly, overprotective and controlling parents are often unable to relate to their children both at school and at home.

The abovementioned findings echo those of similar studies (Baumrind, 1971; H. Kim & Chung, 2003; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Nguyen, 2009) focused on the influence of acculturation and intergenerational conflicts between Asian American parents and their children on student achievement. For instance, Nguyen (2009) performed a quantitative study with 159 low and high performing Vietnamese American youth and their parents from two high schools to examine the role of acculturation, intergenerational conflict, and parenting styles on student performance. The classification of high versus low performing students was determined using their assessment scores from the California Standards Test (CST) and overall grade point average (GPA). Nguyen (2009) found that higher levels of intergenerational conflicts correlated with lower levels of academic performances in Vietnamese American high school students. He further suggested that having high expectations for student success and pressure put on youth could contribute to parent-child conflict (Nguyen, 2009).

Other scholars (E. Kim, 2002; Ying & Chao, 1996; Ying & Han, 2008; Zhou & Bankston, 1998) also found that parents' inability to acculturate and speak English impedes their participation in school meetings and activities. As a result, Vietnamese American parents often lack knowledge on how to be involved in their children's

education. Thus, there is evidence to suggest that slower acculturation by parents can heighten intergenerational conflict and impact student success in school.

Zhou and Bankston (2000b) also reported similar findings. The researchers found that Vietnamese children growing up in a new land had to face bicultural conflicts that define their experiences. As stated by Zhou and Bankston (2000b), Vietnamese youth “find themselves straddling two social worlds” (p. 2). In other words, these Vietnamese American youth have to balance values, beliefs, and standards of both Vietnamese and American culture.

Consistent with previous studies, Supple, McCoy, and Yudan (2010) perceived the cultural gap between Hmong parents and their children to be a challenge for academic success. Through a series of focus groups with Hmong parents and their children, Supple et al. discovered that intergenerational differences were a source of acculturative strain for Hmong American students. Respondents reported much pressure stemming from the struggle to balance their “home culture” (which is accentuated and enforced by their parents) and their “new culture” (which is enforced in school and by their peers; Supple et al., 2010, p. 13). As a result, students also reported feeling distant from their parents due to divergent ways of thinking (Supple et al., 2010). Hence, the need to straddle two very different cultures might contribute to students’ educational failures (Supple et al., 2010).

Intergenerational difficulties have also been linked to decreased engagement at home (E. Kim, 2002). This risk is especially prominent during children’s adolescent years, when children desire greater independence and individuation from parents. For

instance, disengagement at home may look like decreased family communication, which may lead to defiance or disrespect.

Research shows that home detachment may lead to disengagement from school. For instance, Choi et al. (2008) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the effects of intergenerational cultural dissonance (also known as acculturation gap) on youth problem behavior using longitudinal data from the Cross Cultural Families Project. The sample included 164 Vietnamese and 163 Cambodian immigrant families with adolescents. All youth participated in the study were high school aged. The researchers found that parent–child intergenerational conflict over differences in cultural values weakens parent–child bonding and significantly contributed to problem behaviors among both Vietnamese and Cambodian youth. Analysis of the longitudinal data revealed that children who experience intergenerational conflict (which is characterized by frequent anger, arguments, disagreements, and fights between parent and child) were more likely to exhibit problem and delinquent behaviors (which included lying, fighting, shoplifting, and being arrested). Correspondingly, research has shown disengagement at home to be linked to student disengagement in school. When students are disengaged at home, they are more likely to exhibit lower homework completion rates and more off-task behavior at school (E. Kim, 2002; Ying & Han, 2008). Overall, research suggests social and cultural dissonance/gap between Vietnamese parents and their children to contribute to students’ delinquent and misbehaviors in school.

Stress, depressive symptoms, and mental health. Scholars have shown interest in investigating the root of stressors and depressive symptoms among Asian American immigrant and refugee groups (Han & Lee; 2011; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Portes &

Rumbaut, 2001; Ying & Han, 2008). Social and cultural stressors and barriers to educational success include language barriers, overt racism, subtle discrimination, social isolation, emotional stresses, issues of identity, and family expectations/pressures/responsibilities (J. W. Lew et al., 2005). J. W. Lew et al. (2005) further stressed that Southeast Asian refugees face additional trials and tribulations as a consequence of posttraumatic stress disorder. Consequently, these individuals are often depressed because they have been forced from their native countries' religious persecution and/or political oppression. Furthermore, Southeast Asian refugee students frequently experience feelings of anxiety, anger, guilt, and depression because they are unfamiliar with the new American educational system (Han & Lee; 2011; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Ying & Han, 2008). Careful examination of the literature has revealed that different Asian American subgroups face different challenges. Nevertheless, much existing research fails to examine the differences between first-generation students and other students.

Stritikus and Nguyen (2007) completed a 2-year ethnographic study to better understand the mental pressures and struggles of 22 Vietnamese immigrant high school students from an urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The study consisted of two phases. The first phase concentrated on the immigrant students' experiences and the second phase focused on students' transition to mainstream high school. Findings revealed that Vietnamese immigrants battled with acculturative stress, as well as social and academic adjustment anxiety, after arriving in the United States. In addition to overcoming the language barrier, participants also disclosed that racial marginalization

was another obstacle they encountered that exacerbated their angst and intensified their mental pressure (Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007).

Correspondingly, Han and Lee (2011) performed a quantitative cross-sectional study with 134 Vietnamese American college students to examine the factors that contributed to their mental well-being. Results from their research indicated perceived racial discrimination was a life stressor for Vietnamese American students (Han & Lee, 2011). This study shows the negative impact of racial bigotry on Vietnamese American students' mental health. In general, research suggests that experiences with perceived racism resulted in episodes of anxiety and depression in Vietnamese immigrant students.

Low self-esteem and self-motivation. Asian Americans differ in their persistence, motivations, influences, as well as educational goals and intentions (J. W. Lew et al., 2005). Based on research, Southeast Asian American immigrant students often experience lower self-esteem and self-efficacy than immigrant children of other racial groups (Han & Lee; 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Ying & Han, 2008). Scholars have suggested that high and unrealistic expectations from family members often leads to low self-confidence and depression (Han & Lee; 2011; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Ying & Han, 2008). For these reasons, scholars reasoned that Southeast Asian Americans tend to display lower self-motivation than other minorities (Han & Lee; 2011; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Ying & Han, 2008).

Living in low-income households. Many researchers have also noted the negative consequences of poverty on Vietnamese American students' educational achievement (Conchas, 2006; Long, 1996; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Based on the literature, the low SES of Vietnamese American students would often result in greater household responsibilities

(Conchas, 2006) and lower parental support (Long, 1996). Ngo and Lee (2007) deduced that a lack of parental involvement in school is perhaps owed to parents' long hours at work.

Similarly, Cunanan et al. (2006) examined the hardships and barriers faced by Filipino Americans living in Hawaii by gathering data from four separate focus group sessions (Cunanan et al., 2006). Participants included community leaders, parents, professional young adults, and youth. All participants were identified as Filipino American. Findings from qualitative data analysis revealed that Filipino Americans in Hawaii were "at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy" (p. 170). Consistent with the U.S. Census report, the average per capita income of Filipino Americans in Hawaii was much lower (\$16,500) than the state average (\$21,500; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Consequently, many Filipino immigrants experienced much financial stress due to their low-income status (Cunanan et al., 2006; W. H. Kuo, 1998).

In general, research has shown that low SES is linked to limited access to a good education. Students living in low-income households fall behind their more affluent peers due to lack of access and unequal distribution of resources. Further, schools in low socioeconomic communities are often underfunded and under-sourced, contributing to lower student achievement (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). From a social class perspective, Vietnamese American immigrant and refugee students face inequities in wealth and privilege. Their low SES correlates to less academic skills and lower educational opportunities (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Understanding the correlation between education and SES is essential to reducing these risk factors for Vietnamese American students.

Cognitive Factors

Literature has shown that cognitive skills determine students' ability to learn and succeed in school. However, many Vietnamese American students come to school without adequate cognitive skills rendering them underprepared academically (Ngo & Lee, 2007). According to research, Vietnamese Americans experience several cognitive challenges that negatively influence their ability to attain educational success. These cognitive challenges include: (a) Vietnamese Americans' limited English proficiency, and (b) their insufficient knowledge and skills needed to succeed at both the K-12 and college level. Due to their recent immigration, most Vietnamese American students are likely to be identified as LEP (Kao, 1995; Ngo & Lee, 2007). In consequence, they often are unfamiliar with the complexities of the American education system. This section will explain the impact of cognitive deficit on academic performance of Vietnamese American students.

Limited English proficiency (LEP). Failing to know and understand English puts Vietnamese immigrant and refugee students at a disadvantage as they integrate into American society and schools. For instance, Ngo and Lee (2007) conducted a review of Southeast Asian American education attainment and found evidence of struggle and existence of concerns in the education of Vietnamese American youth. They found a significant number of Vietnamese American students are "estranged from American culture" and "alienated from school," due to their inability to speak English and navigate the new American society. The scholars attributed Vietnamese immigrants' and refugees' disengagement in school and society to be the result of their inability to communicate in English and lack of transferable study skills (Ngo & Lee, 2007). In the

same way, Zhou and Bankston (1998) also attributed the existence of struggle in education of Vietnamese American students to their insufficient knowledge of the school system and not having adequate English language skills to successfully maneuver the educational pipeline (Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Inadequate knowledge and skills. There is reason to believe that Southeast Asian groups, perhaps including Vietnamese Americans, may have insufficient skills and limited knowledge of higher education, and this, too, hinders their educational success. Partly as a result of their limited English proficiency, minority students are often deficient in study skills. For instance, in a study of the Hmong population, S. Lee and Xiong (2011) conducted a qualitative study using surveys with 55 Hmong college students at a public university. The researchers sought to examine Hmong students' perceptions of factors as obstacles or support in higher education. S. Lee and Xiong's (2011) work found many Hmong American college students in their sample were first-generation students. Accordingly, the Hmong students' limited knowledge about postsecondary education and the deficiency in necessary study skills were found to be major barriers to their educational adjustment and advancement in higher education (S. Lee & Xiong, 2011). S. Lee and Xiong (2011) additionally revealed that many of the Hmong students perceived poor time management, poor study habits, lack of motivation, and lack of direction on career goals to interfere with their academic success in higher education. According to the researchers, because most Hmong students were the first in their families to go to college, their parents were unable to impart higher education experience and necessary skills to their children for them to excel academically (S. Lee & Xiong, 2011).

In addition to being associated with lower educational achievement, Hmong American youth also suffer from a higher degree of crime and delinquency (Supple et al., 2010). For instance, Supple et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study with Hmong American university students to understand their perspectives and educational experiences. Data from four focus groups were thematically analyzed using inductive techniques. Findings revealed that because many Hmong families emigrated as refugees, they often lived in poverty and performed poorly in school (Supple et al., 2010). Supple et al. (2010) credited Hmong students' high truancy rates and school failure to students' lack of adaptive skills. That is, Hmong students' inability to adapt to American schools contributed to their lack of academic motivation and achievement (Supple et al., 2010).

Similar to the Hmong population, Cambodian Americans also struggle academically (Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Wallitt, 2008). For instance, the dropout rate of Cambodian Americans is "comparable to those of African-American students" (Wallitt, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, many Cambodian Americans are also associated with high rates of truancy, dropout, failure, and underachievement (Goldberg, 1999). Thus, in opposition to popular belief, not all Cambodian American students meet the educational expectations of the model minority stereotype (Goldberg, 1999; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Wallitt, 2008). Like Vietnamese refugees, most Cambodian refugees migrated to the United States during the third wave of refugee migration that consisted of the least educated of the Southeast Asian refugees (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Many also lived in refugee camps prior to migrating to America. As a result, third wave Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees were more likely to have little or no formal education before immigrating to the United States (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Consequently, these refugees are less educated and

have limited knowledge of the educational pipeline (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Wallitt, 2008). Their unfamiliarity with education translates to their inability to help their children navigate K-16 education.

It is noteworthy that only few of the abovementioned studies address Vietnamese Americans. However, like other Southeast Asian groups, Vietnamese Americans share many similar characteristics in terms of immigration status, English Learner (EL) status, and limited understanding of postsecondary education. Further, although research on the impact of student background and cognitive skills as a foundation for student success has become popular, most of the earlier studies on Southeast Asian Americans do not take into account students' precollege experiences as a precursor to educational success. That is, existing literature tends to fall short on exploring the effect of high school experiences on postsecondary education.

Summary of cognitive challenges. At the K-12 level, Southeast Asian American students (such as, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Hmong) have high dropout rates, earn comparatively lower GPAs and receive lower scores on standardized assessments than their East Asian and non-minority counterparts (National Education Association, 2005). As reported by the National Education Association (2005), educational research on experiences Southeast Asian refugees has uncovered the many challenges faced by Southeast Asian Americans as they navigate K-12 education. These challenges include limited English language skills and insufficient familiarity and experiences with formal education. Consistent with Yosso's (2005) framework, individuals with better communication skills (such as, the ability to use and converse in multiple languages) carry linguistic capital that enables them to better access and succeed in school. This

suggests that Vietnamese Americans will be challenged and may have a more difficult time in school.

At the college level, Southeast Asian Americans continue to face difficulties and experience low levels of educational success. When national data are disaggregated, Southeast Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have low college enrollment and completion rates (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2010). One plausible explanation for the low college participation of Southeast Asian Americans is attributed to their low level of English language proficiency. As explained by the National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (2010), students' lack of English language skills often results in poor performance on standardized tests. This low performance is especially problematic for Southeast Asian American students in college admission. Correspondingly, the underachievement of Southeast Asian Americans in K-12 education is linked to their poor representation in postsecondary colleges and universities.

Institutional Factors

Institutionally, Vietnamese and other Southeast Asian students proceed through the K-16 educational system with insufficient support services and resources, and this undercuts their scholastic realization. It is noteworthy that literature on institutional barriers for Vietnamese Americans is very limited. Thus, literature of other Southeast Asian groups will be used to suggest similar experiences. Two institutional challenges emerged from the literature. These barriers include: (a) the lack of relationship between student and faculty, and (b) the exclusion of minority students from the school curriculum and culture.

Nadal, Pituc, Johnston, and Esparrago (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore the experiences of 29 Filipino American graduate students to examine the factors that may contribute to their graduate school successes or failures. Using snowball sampling, the researchers utilized online surveys with open-ended questionnaires focusing on the participant's challenges and positive experiences in graduate school. Data were analyzed using the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method. Filipino American graduate students perceived a lack of relationships and connections with faculty and weak social support within the organization to be factors contributing to their educational failures. Additionally, some participants also disclosed that they felt "marginalized" and "invisible" due to the lack of understanding from peers and faculty. Participants recommended improvements in institutional resources and programs, communication, and support to target their specific needs as they transition to graduate schools.

In a study conducted by Wallitt (2008), Cambodian American high school students reasoned that they dropped out of school "because they felt invisible, uncared for, and disrespected by their teachers, and because the curriculum and school culture excluded them" (Wallitt, 2008, p. 9). In other words, students felt the school curriculum was neither culturally relevant nor responsive to their needs. Correspondingly, participants confessed feelings of alienation and discontinuity between home and school cultures as barriers to their success. Participants additionally disclosed that the model minority myth appeared to affect the teachers' perceptions of them (Wallitt, 2008). As a result of the preconceived notions credited to the model minority myth, Cambodian

American students shared that they are not “recognized as needing help in school” (Wallitt, 2008, p. 4).

In the same way, Suh and Satcher (2005) also found a sense of alienation in K-12 schools to be a contributing factor in Asian American students’ underperformance and disengagement in class. According to the researchers, a feeling of alienation in school is an obstacle to Asian American students’ academic success. Based on data from interviews, students shared that the lack of sense of belonging is a result of students not knowing how to participate in school activities. In consequence, this inability to access school events adds to Asian American students’ sense of loneliness in the educational institution.

In similar regards, Supple et al. (2010) reported that Hmong American students at the K-12 level reported that in addition to their peers, teachers and school personnel would often stereotype them. Thus, Supple et al. concluded that these factors are “likely to lead to relatively low feelings of connection or support from school and, as a result, school failure and high dropout rates” (p. 4). Teachers’ and staffs’ insensitive and sometimes aversive attitudes to students evoked a desire to disconnect from school. This detachment from school further contributed to school avoidance behaviors, such as frequent class-cutting and absenteeism (Suh & Satcher, 2005; Supple et al., 2010).

Overall, previous studies have taken into account students’ academic experiences from social and cultural perspectives. However, little attention has been given to the importance of institutional structures, practices, and processes that may impact Vietnamese American student achievement. This gap in the literature suggests a need to

explore Vietnamese American students' K-16 experiences from an institutional/organizational perspective.

Summary of Barriers Influencing Educational Success

While East Asian Americans (such as, Koreans, Japanese, and Asian Indian Americans) tend to demonstrate high levels of social mobility and education achievement, Southeast Asian Americans (like, Vietnamese, Hmong, Filipinos, Cambodian, and Laotians Americans) unfortunately do not share similar experiences. A review of the literature has uncovered many social, cultural, cognitive, and institutional barriers to academic achievement associated with Vietnamese American students.

According to existing research, Vietnamese American students are not performing well in school when compared to their non-minority peers. Vietnamese Americans migrate to America from a culture that is immensely different. Behavioral standards, cultural norms, values, beliefs, and expectations of Vietnamese Americans, for instance, are distinct from existing American cultures (Zhou & Bankston, 2000b). In large part due to their turbulent immigrant history, as well as their limited English proficiency, one of the challenges Vietnamese Americans face is the lack of acculturation to the American culture. Consequently, in families with adolescents, the common acculturation gap often results in heightened intergenerational conflicts between parents and child. These intergenerational conflicts, such as parent–child misunderstanding and miscommunication result in home disengagement and lead to lower school engagement.

Further, many Asian American students often report experiences with racial prejudice and grapple with acculturative stress because of their minority status. Similarly to their minority peers, a significant number of Vietnamese Americans are also

socioeconomically disadvantaged. In consequence, underprivileged Vietnamese American youth are facing disparities in opportunity and access at both individual and societal levels. Overall, Vietnamese Americans are performing below their abilities, alienated from school, stressed out from high expectations from parents and society to achieve, and socially dislocated and completely disconnected from their and our culture (Hune & Takeuchi, 2008). Therefore, high academic performance is not likely to extend to all Vietnamese Americans (Hune & Takeuchi, 2008, p. 1).

Yet, due to the prevalence of the model minority stereotype, the academic troubles of Asian Americans have often been ignored. As a result, their needs and experiences are frequently disregarded and go undetected (Empleo, 2006; Kao, 1995; W. H. Kuo, 1998; Kwon & Au, 2010; J. Lew, 2004; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Nonetheless, a number of Vietnamese American students continue to persevere and achieve high academic standards in the face of challenges and barriers. The next sections of the review will explore the cognitive, social/cultural, and institutional factors, respectively, that contribute to the educational success of Vietnamese American students. The researcher will analyze past and current literature through a strength-based perspective to discuss the different forms of capital students bring with them to school.

Factors Influencing Educational Success

As noted, literature in the area of Vietnamese Americans and their K-16 educational experiences, especially first-generation Vietnamese American students, is very limited; thus, literature on other marginalized Southeast Asian subgroups will be reviewed to suggest corresponding experiences. In the subsequent sections, the

researcher will investigate the factors of educational success for Southeast Asian Americans.

There are many factors that potentially inform Vietnamese American students to succeed in their educational journey. These factors include cognitive, social, cultural, and institutional factors. Cognitively, research suggests English language proficiency, critical thinking ability, and work ethic to be contributing factors associated with academic success. Socially, as part of culture, Vietnamese Americans value education and its role in upward social mobility, coming from a rich heritage that stresses the importance of education, respect for the teacher, and obedience to authority. Culturally, children are taught and encouraged to adhere to cultural values and traditional norms. Last but not least, research has found institutional commitment to student success to be critical in the academic attainment of minority students. Correspondingly, the following sections will highlight the cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional factors contributing to the academic success of Vietnamese American students.

Cognitive Factors

Cognitively, English language ability, a strong work ethic, and critical thinking ability are linked to the academic success of Vietnamese Americans. According to Swail et al.'s (2003) model, cognitive attributes are important determinants of scholastic success of college students. Research is consistent concerning the value of academic/intellectual skills in the academic achievement of Southeast Asian American students, at both K-12 and college levels.

English language ability. Studies discussed above have shown that failing to know English hurts minority's ability to integrate into American culture, as well as limit

their educational success. In opposition, research seems to suggest that immigrants and refugees who are fluent in English are more likely to be successful in school because they are able to better access necessary educational services. For instance, at the college level, Bottrell, Banning, Harbour, and Krahnke (2007) conducted interviews to explore students' educational experiences. The researchers used a qualitative approach to investigate the value of heuristic knowledge (knowledge gained through experience) of five Vietnamese American students at a Midwest community college. Using a narrative inquiry method, data revealed that students' English language skills were linked to a more positive college-going experience. Analysis of interview data further uncovered that students identified English proficiency to be a primary factor for college success. According to one participant, learning the English Language provided greater freedom and self-confidence. Other students also claimed communication to be a critical component to forming social connection on and off campus. Further, the ability to speak English was found to relate to students' ability to navigate the college processes. Students shared that improved English skills allowed them to obtain assistance and access to educational resources, while students in English as a second language (ESL) classes felt that their inability to speak English was a barrier to academic success. In short, Vietnamese American students expressed that their struggle with language has made it even more difficult for them to assimilate into the school community (Bottrell et al., 2007).

Strong work ethic and critical thinking ability. From an educational standpoint, a strong work ethic is a key asset in student achievement. Researchers have suggested that Vietnamese American students with a good work ethic are more likely to excel in the

academics and are frequently highly productive in school. For instance, at the K-12 level, Conchas (2006) sought to understand the academic and social experiences of native-born and immigrant Vietnamese American high school students. At the heart of his study, Conchas sought to understand how low SES minority students succeeded in schools despite the many inequities that exist in school. Through students' narrative of their high school experiences, Conchas found that the highest achieving Vietnamese American students (those with at least a 3.5 GPA) were hard-working students who were extremely dedicated and committed to education. According to Conchas, these high-achievers possessed higher levels of critical thinking ability and work ethic. That is, high-performing Vietnamese American students often exhibited self-disciplined, self-guided thinking with reason and rationality. Therefore, as described by Conchas, most high-achieving Vietnamese American students were academically challenged in courses with higher academic rigor, such as honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. At the high school level, these students felt strongly about their ability to persist in attaining high academic standing. High-achieving Vietnamese American high school students shared that their hard work ethic and academic abilities helped them maintain a solid academic record (Conchas, 2006). Resonating with the geometric model for student persistence and achievement, cognitive abilities can help enhance, although not completely, students' performance and ease in learning (Swail et al., 2003).

Cultural/Social Factors

Cultural values. Cultural values are thought to be a component associated with the academic success of Asian American students. According to research, Vietnamese emphasis on the importance of Confucian ideals (such as, the value of school and

learning, respect for teachers and elders, and family obligation) is fundamental to student academic achievement (National Education Association, 2005). Researchers have also recognized the important role of ethnic identity in the educational attainment of minority students (Caplan et al., 1991; Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Additionally, many scholars have highlighted the value of education and its role in social and economic success for Asian Americans (Caplan et al., 1991; Feng, 1994; Y. Lee, 1991; Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Accordingly, the following section will elucidate: (a) the influence of Confucian ideals, (b) the concept of ethnic identity and its relevance for students' academic attainment, and (c) the belief in the importance of education as a means for upward social mobility.

Confucian ideals. Researchers have attributed Confucian ideals, which include discipline, respect for the elderly, and deferred gratification, to be a major influence in the educational success of many Southeast Asian cultures (Feng, 1994; Y. Lee, 1991). Feng (1994) reasoned that it is possibly Confucian ideas that emphasize the importance of education and family values that contribute to the educational success of Southeast Asian students. For instance, as in many Southeast Asian cultures, most Vietnamese parents teach their children to respect authority and value educational success (Feng, 1994). Correspondingly, school failure is often seen as a lack of will and a dishonor (Feng, 1994; Y. Lee, 1991). As stated by Y. Lee (1991), "Academic achievement is not a personal matter for children but is related to the honor of the family, especially for the parents" (p. 149). For this reason, many Asian parents offer a great deal of support for their children, to ensure their children are afforded with the best opportunities to achieve

in school (Y. Lee, 1991). Resonating with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory, through modeling (educación) from their family, students' familial capital helps them achieve academic success, which additionally helps them feel connected and grounded as they grow and develop their cultural knowledge.

Similarly, Zhou and Bankston (1998) and Caplan et al. (1991) also accredited Asian American students' academic success to their adherence to cultural values and traditional norms. Academically successful students are more likely to conform to community and family values. According to the authors, the significance of belief in the value of education, respect and obedience to family and authority, and family obligations are paramount to academic success of Vietnamese American students. Vietnamese children are taught to respect and obey their elders. Along with a positive attitude toward education, students are socialized to also respect their teachers. This reverence for educators and the elderly is thought to positively influence academic attainment and aspirations for higher education of Vietnamese American students (Caplan et al., 1991; Y. Lee, 1991; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Strong ethnic identity. Scholars have suggested that strong ethnic ties relate to a sense of belonging, greater student engagement, and positive academic achievement (Caplan et al., 1991; Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Phinney, 1990; Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). According to researchers, a positive ethnic sense of identity helps Vietnamese American students overcome perceived group barriers, such as discrimination and other race-related experiences (Rutledge, 1992; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). That is, close ties to their country of origin help students bolster their resiliency in the face of challenges.

Additionally, Vietnamese American students with strong commitment and attachment to their ethnic background tend to have a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic social group, and are better able to recognize their distinct identities assets rather than shortcomings (Phinney, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). In other words, Vietnamese American students' ethnic identities help them define themselves and self-construct their individual identities.

These self-definitions also shape the way Vietnamese American students make-meaning, respond, and adapt to their social contexts at school (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Garcia & Pintrich, 1994; Ngo & Lee, 2007). As suggested by Garcia and Pintrich (1994), students' personal identity (such as, their social position and roles as learner and student) is linked to their academic engagement and achievement. For example, social identities are salient in the academic domain for minority students, due to heightened social comparison and influence of ethnic/racial stereotypes during adolescence (Garcia & Pintrich, 1994). Vietnamese American youth who understand themselves and know their ethnic identify beliefs are able to maintain higher academic engagement and achievement. Researchers have reasoned that student success and resiliency correlate with their self-definitions and ability to buffer against the impact of stigmatized status and discrimination (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998). Overall, studies have been consistent in acknowledging that a strong ethnic connection may positively impact Vietnamese American students' academic attitudes and educational performance (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Cross et al., 1998; Garcia & Pintrich, 1994; Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Education as a means for upward social mobility. Vietnamese cultural values and traditions have and continue to influence the valuation of education as a means of social

respect and economic success for most Vietnamese Americans. Accordingly, Asian Americans often regard education as an investment in the future (Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992). Robbins (2004) regarded Vietnamese cultural values to be a significant aspect in the educational attainment and success of Vietnamese American students. Robbins (2004) asserted, “Education is extremely valued and respected among the Vietnamese and is viewed as an effective way to realize goals” (p. 68). In other words, attributed to Vietnamese cultural values, education is regarded as fundamental to economic opportunity and social mobility. Consistent with Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth theory, students’ aspirational capital helps them maintain and exhibit high hopes for the future, even in the face of barriers.

Likewise, Rutledge (1992) also suggested that the educational attainment of involuntary refugees is largely due to their perceptions about the relationship between schooling and future opportunities. According to Rutledge, involuntary minorities attain academic success because they tend to perceive education as an obligatory step to gain upward mobility. Hence, for many Vietnamese refugees, education for their children was a main motive to emigrate to America (Rutledge, 1992). In this way, many Vietnamese refugees see education as a way to achieve a better future; and therefore, they aspire to take advantage of the educational opportunities not available in their native countries (Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992).

In general, like most Southeast Asian Americans, Vietnamese Americans consider and utilize education as a means of attaining success within society, because they have a tendency to believe that obtaining an education is the difference between a secure

economic future and a lifetime of poverty (Caplan et al., 1991; Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Review of the literature suggests that cultural adherence and the significance placed on education is linked to educational success and is an asset for Asian American students (Caplan et al., 1991; Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Robbins, 2004; Rutledge, 1992; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Echoing Yosso's (2005) strengths-based approach, these cultural values and beliefs may fuel students' motivation to succeed in school. However, research rarely has explored differences among Asian Americans by generational/immigrant status.

Social factors. Swail et al. (2003) created the geometric model for student retention to establish a link between the student and the educational institution. This model assumes that students come to school with certain social attributes that define who they are and what their strengths and areas of needs are. Resonating with Yosso's (2005) value-focused perspective, these attributes influence students' academic achievement and help define their future success. Socially, Vietnamese American students potentially have a variety of cultural traits that give them social assets that can help them navigate the educational journey. These include: (a) Vietnamese American students' attitude towards learning and education, (b) family/parental contribution to student success, and (c) strong intrinsic motivation. When taken together, these three factors help Vietnamese American students more likely succeed in school.

Attitude towards learning and school. Vietnamese refugees and immigrants are often eager to benefit from educational opportunities that were not accessible to them in their motherland, because they deem school as an asset. In an ethnographic study

conducted by S. Lee (1994), the researcher attempted to explore Asian American students' attitudes toward education in relation to their perceptions about future opportunity, to give voice to high- and low-achieving Asian American high school students. Participants included students from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea attending a high school located in Philadelphia during the 1988–1989 academic year. Thorough analysis of fieldwork documents, observation records, and interview transcripts revealed that in spite of the high percentage of Asian American students earning high academic standing, not all are successful academically. Although achievement among Asian American students varied, data seem to indicate a correlation between student success and their attitude toward school. According to S. Lee (1994), high-achievers have a more positive perception about education and learning than their low-achieving peers. These high-achievers appreciate education and regard school as essential for future success. As a result, high-achieving students also exhibited a stronger drive and commitment in attaining goals.

Family/parental contribution. High-achieving Vietnamese American students additionally attributed family influence as a vital factor for academic and economic success. As stated by S. Lee (1994), Asian American students acknowledged “that their parents decided to come to the United States because of the educational opportunities for their children” (p. 417). As a result, they expressed a sense of “responsibility and guilt . . . for their parents’ sacrifices” (S. Lee, 1994, p. 417). This strong feeling of obligation and sense of duty is what Asian American students attributed to their hard work and dedication to school. Aligning with Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth theory,

students with familial capital may exhibit greater effort in school, as well as demonstrate persistence when encountering setbacks.

The value of family contribution to student success is consistent in numerous studies. An analysis of the literature revealed parental contributions as a common factor of support for Southeast Asian Americans (Ying & Han, 2008). Parental involvement is critical to student achievement for students of all races and ethnicities (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012), and several researchers have attempted to study the effects of family involvement on Southeast Asian American student outcomes (Fan et al., 2012; Han & Lee, 2011; Ying & Han, 2008). For example, Ying and Han (2008) conducted a mixed methods study involving 491 Southeast Asian American refugee families (including adolescents and their parents) to investigate the impact of parent involvement on Southeast Asian youth. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of parental involvement, parental acculturation, and intergenerational relationships on Southeast Asian American adolescents. Using data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, which included a combination of questionnaires and interviews, Ying and Han (2008) found that parental involvement improved “mutual understanding and intimacy in the intergenerational relationship” between the Southeast Asian parents and their children (p. 293). In other words, as parents’ home-educational involvement increased, family conflict decreased. Moreover, children also reported more family cohesion and less depressive symptoms with greater parental participation (Ying & Han, 2008). Resonating with the Swail et al.’s (2003) geometric model for student retention, social factors (such as, family influence, emotional/social skills, cultural values/attitude and

family heritage/background) can define the students and influence their experience at school.

There is also a positive correlation between parental involvement, parental acculturation, and Southeast Asian American student outcomes (Han & Lee, 2011; Ying & Han, 2008). Based on the research, parental acculturation appears to allow adults to participate and contribute to their children's education (Han & Lee, 2011; Ying & Han, 2008). For instance, parents who speak English are more likely to engage in active discussion with their children about their school and their educational progress (Han & Lee, 2011; Ying & Han, 2008). Therefore, the researchers concluded that parents' English speaking ability played a significant role in facilitating family cohesion, and thus, promoting their children's academic success. Accordingly, parental contributions are associated with greater school engagement and higher student outcomes (Han & Lee, 2011; Ying & Han, 2008).

Intrinsic motivation. Researchers have suggested that students' self-motivation and self-determination is linked to high-quality learning and greater academic achievement (Daoust, Vallerand, & Blais, 1988; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Supple et al., 2010). According to the Supple et al. (2010), students who are self-motivated and self-determined often have a positive aspect of the self and a strong sense of personal worth. These positive beliefs and attitudes seem to motivate students to overcome the challenges they face in school (Ngo & Lee, 2007). Further, research indicates that students with greater intrinsic motivation tend to be more resilient, have greater desire to do their homework, and more motivated to stay in school (Daoust et al., 1988).

Surprisingly, studies have also found negative life experiences and challenges to be a source of motivation for some Southeast Asian American students (S. Lee & Xiong, 2011). For these students, the need to succeed was “a result of their own lack of skills, awareness and resources” (S. Lee & Xiong, 2011, p. 4). This belief ties to Yosso’s (2005) aspirational capital, because individuals with high levels of ambition and determination are more likely to view challenges and difficult barriers as something to be defeated and mastered. Hence, students’ intrinsic aspiration tends to influence their effort and work ethics.

Similar to previous literature on the effects of aspiration and ambition on student outcomes, Mizokawa and Ryckman (1990) also attributed student success outcomes of Asian Americans to effort and resiliency. As noted by the researchers, “Economically disadvantaged Asian-American students seem to find value in working hard to achieve success” (p. 442). In other words, Asian American students with limited economic resources seem to believe in their abilities. Consequently, the belief in their capabilities appears to intensify their aspiration for success (Mizokawa & Ryckman, 1990).

In brief, resonating with Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth theory, intrinsic aspiration and personal motivation are significant factors that support the academic success of Southeast Asian American students (S. Lee & Xiong, 2011; Supple et al., 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). According to Supple et al. (2010), educational achievement is attributed to strong determination and personal drive. For many Southeast Asian Americans, the realization that minorities students often “do not do well in school was the impetus for wanting to achieve” (Supple et al., 2010, p. 22).

Summary of cultural/social factors. Ultimately, findings from the review of the literature indicated that social factors (such as, students' attitude towards education and school, parent involvement, and intrinsic aspiration) contribute to the educational success of Southeast Asian American students. It is important to mention that culture is interwoven into many social factors. Culture cannot be separated as an asset. It is culture that places great value on school, as well as promotes the family to be involved. It is also culture that gives students their intrinsic motivation to succeed in school to honor and not disgrace their family. These findings resonated with Yosso's (2005) idea of the value of aspirational capital. Students who believe in themselves and their abilities seem to show greater effort in school and exhibit stronger work ethics (S. Lee & Xiong, 2011; Supple et al., 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). While research on Asian Americans has been increasing in recent years, studies examining differences and variations among Asian Americans by sub-ethnic groups continue to be lacking.

Institutional Factors

Institutionally, schools and college's commitment to student success is paramount to the educational achievement of minority students. Accordingly, Swail et al. (2003) identified institutional support as a factor affecting the student experience in higher education. According to the authors, the institution and their practices play a pivotal role in college student persistence. Research has shown that the institutional commitment to student success is a strong predictor to students' retention and is critical in the achievement of high-achieving minority students (Bean, 1983; Dowd et al., 2006; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004).

In regards to Vietnamese Americans, past and recent literature is consistent about the institutional impact on student success. Using an inductive qualitative approach involving five Vietnamese students at Midwestern community college, Bottrell et al. (2007) found school personnel and practitioners to be one of the main sources for student success. According to participants, school personnel, such as the ESL Director and staff members, offer valuable advice and help them “navigate the college processes” (Bottrell et al., 2007, p. 121).

Similarly, Nadal et al. (2010) also found institutional factors to be a fund of support for Southeast Asian Americans students. Utilizing a qualitative method to examine the experiences of 29 Filipino American graduate students, Nadal et al. elicited open-ended answers to allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives. A major theme that emerged was the role of institutional and organizational support in student success. Based on research data, Nadal et al. concluded that a variety of institutional supports, such as the Graduate School office, Financial Aid office, Counseling office, and Multicultural Affairs office, helped students self-assess their own competencies and assisted them to formulate appropriate professional development plans. Further, data also revealed that community organizations also played an instrumental role in supporting students. According to participants, community organizations (such as, cultural programs) stimulate their mind about issues in their community and helped foster a more inclusive society (Nadal et al., 2010). Last but not least, Nadal et al. also found faculty to be a source of social and emotional support. Participants often described faculty as mentors who helped promote their personal and profession growth as they navigated higher education (Nadal et al., 2010). Aligning with Swail et al.’s (2003)

student retention model, research suggests student and academic services increase college persistence and help ensure that marginalized students are academically successful.

The Vietnamese community has been identified as a source of capital for Vietnamese American youth. According to Zhou and Bankston (1998), the larger Vietnamese American community helps preserve cultural standards and supports Vietnamese American students by providing after-school programs. For instance, the Catholic Church is recognized as a source of institutional support for Catholic Vietnamese Americans. The authors also asserted that maintaining strong ties to the Vietnamese community also helps protect working class Vietnamese American youths from the dangers of city life, such as reducing youth involvement in drugs and gangs (Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

Likewise, Hune and Takeuchi (2008) also identified community-based institutions, organizations, and programs to be beneficial in helping immigrant and at-risk Asian American youth. According to Hune and Takeuchi, social service agencies, support programs, and community-based organizations “can help close Asian American achievement gaps” because they have the potential of improving parental involvement in schools (p. 44). The authors reasoned that these community support services can narrow the achievement gap by helping youth of color with study skills as well as assisting to “bridge the cultural barriers between school, home, and the larger American culture” (Hune & Takeuchi, 2008, p. 44).

Existing literature indicates that institutional actions can facilitate students’ persistence, motivation, involvement, and success (Bean, 1983; Bottrell et al., 2007; Dowd et al., 2006; Hune & Takeuchi, 2008; Nadal et al., 2010; Strauss & Volkwein,

2004; Swail et al., 2003, Zhou & Bankston, 1998). These findings link to the work of Zhao and Kuh (2004), whose findings suggest that increased student engagement (which institutions can act to encourage), academic performance, and satisfaction with college are positively associated with the actions of learning communities. The research of Zhao and Kuh corroborates previous literature focused on student participation and engagement in schools, indicating that effective institutional practices are positively related to enhanced student outcomes.

Summary of Factors Influencing Educational Success

An examination of the literature has uncovered several support factors that may contribute to the academic success of Southeast Asian American students. These factors include cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional factors. Cognitively, Vietnamese American students' English language ability and critical thinking ability contribute to their high scholastic achievement. The ability to understand and speak English proficiently is a major part of the acculturation process. Culturally, teachers are well respected and school is seen as a way for social mobility. Education is valued in the Vietnamese American culture. Socially, Vietnamese American students perform better in school when their families are involved in their education. Research shows that when parents are acculturated, they are more likely to be involved. Additionally, one of the assets students have is their own intrinsic motivation. This comes from within. Surely, part of this self-motivation is the idea of responsibility and obligation to the family, given the value in education. Finally, research also confirms the important role of institutions' commitment to student outcomes.

Discussion of Strengths and Challenges

The line between strengths and challenges is not always clear. Strengths can be seen as challenges when looking from a differing perspective. This awareness is essential in understanding the complexity of the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students. This section will discuss the relationship between cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional strengths and its corresponding challenges.

Cognitively, English language ability plays a critical role for immigrant and refugee students. Studies have shown that English proficiency has a profound effect on Vietnamese American students' preparedness for school and their success in navigating the K-16 educational pipeline. Students with adequate English skills are able to access and comprehend academic contents more easily. For these students, their English skill is seen as an asset. However, immigrant/refugee students face a plethora of problems stemming from cultural and linguistic differences. Vietnamese American ELLs often lack exposure to the English language; thus, they are not prepared for the language and academic demands of school. Accordingly, English language ability is both a strength and a challenge for Vietnamese American students.

Culturally, high expectation for achievement and emphasis on the importance of education serves as an impetus for Vietnamese Americans to succeed in school. High parental expectations are linked to greater student motivation, retention, and achievement. Yet, researchers have also suggested this immense pressure to succeed in school and the fear of academic failure as likely contributors to stress, depression, and mental health problems. Thus, it is imperative that we recognize that parental expectations can positively and negatively impact children's mental health and outcomes.

Socially, high intrinsic motivation is correlated to increased persistence in Vietnamese American students' study and learning efforts. On one hand, self-motivation stimulates Vietnamese American students to succeed in school and triumph in the face of barriers. On the other hand, lack of motivation leads to low self-esteem and low self-efficacy. Recognizing sources of intrinsic aspiration and causes for lack of motivation for Vietnamese American students may help us understand and accommodate for students' lack of effort and engagement in school.

Institutionally, schools/colleges and their practices play a paramount role in student persistence. Research has suggested that institutional commitment to student achievement is essential to the success of Vietnamese American students. Strong positive relationship with school personnel and staff members also contribute to student success. On the contrary, insufficient support services and lack of relationship between student and faculty undercut Vietnamese American students' scholastic achievement. Thus, the same institutional factors can facilitate or hinders students' success.

Overall, sources of cognitive, cultural, social, and institutional strengths can also pose as challenges for Vietnamese American students. For instance, when strengths are demonstrated at extremes, they could befall challenges (such as, high/unrealistic parental expectations and value place on education). Understanding the interrelated role strengths and challenges play in shaping the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students is critical to exploring different realities of this unique student population.

Conclusion

While not all literature reviewed is of Vietnamese Americans, it suggests similar experiences and challenges and is relevant to the understanding of Vietnamese Americans. The review supports the notion that the model minority stereotype conceals the diversity and complexity that exist within and among the various Asian American groups. Like other Southeast Asian American subgroups, Vietnamese Americans do not appear to conform to the model minority myth of academic success. Exploration of the literature suggests Vietnamese Americans face many barriers that the model minority stereotype fails to address. Some factors include diversity of backgrounds, SES, immigration status, acculturation status, generational differences, and life experiences within the various Asian American subgroups. Yet, these challenges are often overshadowed by the model minority myth and are frequently overlooked by data that are not disaggregated.

Despite numerous barriers and challenges, research shows that Vietnamese Americans are an extremely resilient population. There are a variety of cognitive, social, cultural, and institutional factors that help Vietnamese Americans succeed educationally. Evidence reveals that personal aspiration, parental involvement, and adherence to cultural values to support the academic success of Vietnamese American and other Southeast Asian American students.

At the same time, thorough examination of existing literature on the academic experiences of different Southeast Asian subpopulations further revealed that these individuals experience many challenges and obstacles. For instance, Vietnamese Americans and other Southeast Asian Americans often struggle with acculturation, social

and academic adjustment, and racial marginalization (Han & Lee, 2011; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007). Numerous studies also have suggested that low SES and a sense of alienation in school to have a negative correlation with student achievement (J. Lew, 2004; Suh & Satcher, 2005). In general, Vietnamese Americans do not fit the image of the model minority because they face similar challenges as other minority groups. However, much of existing research on the underachievement of Asian Americans has been taking on a deficit perspective. That is, this deficit approach has been traditionally prominent in which past research tends to emphasize the reasons why students fail, rather than taking into account students' strengths and underscoring successful school practices.

Overall, although a number of researchers have noted the successes of Asian Americans and explored the challenges and obstacles faced by several Asian American subgroups, especially Southeast Asian Americans, research on specifically first-generation Vietnamese American students from a strength-based and value-focused perspective still remains to be scarce. Exploration of existing literature offers only a general account of the experiences of Vietnamese Americans.

The geometric model of student persistence and achievement suggests that student retention and resilience is influenced by cognitive, social, and institutional factors (Swail et al., 2003). From a strength-based perspective, Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth sees students of color as "holders and creators of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106). Yet, available research often deems Vietnamese American students as lacking or being deficient in knowledge and capital. Thus, this dissertation attempts to fill this gap in research to provide greater insight into the unique K-16 experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American students from a strengths-based perspective. This dissertation narrates the educational experiences of 3rd- and 4th-year first-generation college students who are likely to graduate from a 4-year college or university to give contour and voice to this marginalized, understudied population. It is focused on addressing the gap in literature on first-generation Vietnamese American students from their own perspectives. In this investigation, I understood that first-generation Vietnamese American students face unique challenges as they navigate the K-16 educational pipeline. Taking an anti-deficit approach, I presumed that first-generation Vietnamese American youth also possess great sources of capital and strengths that assist them in attaining academic success. Using student retention and anti-deficit approaches, stories of successful first-generation Vietnamese American students were analyzed to explore the factors that support their scholastic achievement and the barriers that hinder their academic success.

My central research question was:

What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students at a 4-year college or university?

Correspondingly, I sought to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as hindering or impeding their K-16 educational success?

2. What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as supporting or assisting their K-16 educational success?

In this chapter, the purposes for utilizing narrative inquiry as a research design will be explained. Subsequently, a description of sampling choices for recruitment, participants, data collection methods, procedures, and instruments will be discussed. The process of data analysis will also be described. Finally, a discussion of protection of participants and researcher trustworthiness will be elucidated, followed by a conclusion section to summarize relevant points of the chapter.

Methodological Design and Defense of Method

As shown in Chapter 2, the extent of research on the lived experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American youth is very limited. While a number of researchers have explored the struggles of some Southeast Asian subpopulations, the stories of first-generation Vietnamese American students may be trimmed from these marginal groups. Of the existing research on Vietnamese students, little affords Vietnamese Americans who are the first in their family to go to college the opportunity to tell their stories. Moreover, of those studies available, most are often focused on risk factors associated with home and school disengagement. Experiences of Vietnamese Americans cannot be limited to struggles and challenges. Although their own narratives may include those

factors, research must draw attention to how Vietnamese Americans navigate the school system, how they access educational resources and services, and how they succeed in the face of barriers from an anti-deficit perspective. Since little is known about the K-16 experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American youth, this exploration was conducted using narrative inquiry. This qualitative design allowed me to capture and analyze students' told stories to understand the ways they experience the world and make meaning of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through exploration of individuals' personal, social, cultural, and institutional narratives, I was able to inquire about how experiences are constituted, interpreted, and expressed (Clandinin, 2013).

More specifically, scholars have noted the value of narrative inquiry in particular in exploring understudied realities and giving voice to unheard populations (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2008; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). For instance, Clandinin (2013) highlights the value of narrative inquiry as a method of understanding lived experiences and stories. In narrative inquiry, the researcher views narratives as interpretive devices through which participants represent themselves and their worlds to themselves and to others (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In regards to this dissertation, narrative inquiry helped me construct individual identity and offered perspectives of first-generation Vietnamese American youth. This approach was utilized to focus on the ways in which first-generation Vietnamese American students used stories to conceptualize and define their experiences (Chase, 2005). With practical justification, it is imperative that students' stories are lived, told, retold, and relived so that schools and educational practices can be understood and inform future actions (Clandinin, 2013). With personal and social justification, it is essential to look for deeper understanding and address the

gaps in the literature on first-generation Vietnamese American students whose stories have previously been unheard in educational research (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2008). In this way, narrative inquiry allowed me to understand the trajectory of my participants' lives, capture and tell their stories, and examine the inner section of their personal, social, and institutional experiences at a deeper level than other qualitative research designs.

Like other qualitative methodologies, narrative inquiry explores deeper understanding of a specific life experience (Clandinin, 2013). However, what makes narrative inquiry unique is that it looks into a particular life experience with an emphasis on story or narrative, where participants' stories are the data and unit of analysis (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The words "narrative" and "story" are commonly used interchangeably in narrative inquiry. However, it is important to differentiate the analytical differences between the two terms: participants tell stories of their experiences and narratives are the data produced from the analysis of their stories (Frank, 2000). Data (also known as field texts in narrative inquiry) may include participants' stories and include place, time, scene, characters, and plots (Creswell, 2008; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In addition to interview transcripts, field texts may also include photographs, reflective journals, and letters from participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). For the purpose of this dissertation, both field text and data refer to interview transcripts.

In general, some key tenets of narrative inquiry include: extended/prolonged engagement, small sample size, serial in-depth interviews, and storytelling. In regards to data analysis, narrative researchers present and examine life experiences using story or

narrative representation. For instance, narrative inquiry data analysis calls for coding and interpretation of field texts in which the researcher uses language and storytelling to “re-story” (or retell) participants’ experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Coding of field texts often also involves the development of common categories or themes across stories (Bamberg, 2010). The process of narrative representation and creation of themes will be described in greater detail in the data analysis section of this chapter. In alignment with the tenets of narrative inquiry, I focused on stories and narratives of events of first-generation Vietnamese American college students over two occasions to give voice to these individuals whose experiences often go unheard in educational research (Chase, 2005; Creswell, 2008). Narrative inquiry offers these marginalized students an opportunity to participate in knowledge construction in the field of education (Bell, 2002).

In short, narrative inquiry was chosen as the methodology for this study because it provided deeper insights into participants’ unique experiences over and above other qualitative research methods. As stated by Clandinin and Connelly (2004), “Experience happens narratively, and therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (p. 19). Unlike other qualitative designs which only capture experiences at certain points, narrative inquiry capture experiences in chronological stages and intervening points (Bell, 2002). Due to the complexity of life experiences, narratives will provide a holistic way for the researcher to understand, recapture, and re-present participants’ life stories (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2008). In its fullest sense, narratives allowed me to gain a richer understanding of participant’s unique experiences than other qualitative research methods.

Participants

Criterion (also known as purposeful/purposive, non-probability, or judgment sampling) and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit participants in this research. Under the umbrella of purposeful sampling, Patton (2001) defined criterion sampling as selecting “all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). Correspondingly, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) asserted that criterion sampling should be “based on the particular research question as well as consideration of the resources available to the researcher” (p. 45). In this way, participants were recruited and selected on the basis of specific traits or characteristics. A detailed description of the recruitment process will be explained in the procedures section.

Similar to other qualitative methods, the aim of narrative inquiry is to explore deeply the small number of cases rather than to achieve generalizability (Creswell, 2008). That is, to preserve the complexity of lived experiences and generate data in the form of stories, narrative inquiry focuses on deep understanding of a smaller sample of participants rather than a representative sample (Clandinin, 2013). Further, the time commitment necessary makes narrative inquiries unsuitable for a large sample (Bell, 2002). For these reasons, this narrative inquiry must inevitably use a small sample.

Corresponding to the tenets of narrative inquiry, I interviewed fewer participants with more in-depth interviews. Therefore, I interviewed seven (7) students total and sought a balance between males and females (3 males and 4 females). Although the sample size and number of interviews conducted may seem limited, scholars have suggested that number of interviews and sample size “does not necessarily translate to

quality of findings” since the goal of narrative inquiry is to yield deeper understanding and greater insights rather than generalization (Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012, p. 10).

In this narrative inquiry, criterion and snowball sampling were utilized. Going into the study, my criteria for participation consisted of being over the age of 18, enrolled at a research university as a 3rd- or 4th-year first-generation Vietnamese American college student, and maintained a minimum cumulative (overall) GPA of 3.5. For this inquiry, first-generation is defined as a college student who is the first in their family to go to college, with neither parent having received a 2-year nor 4-year college degree. I made my sampling choices contingent on specific conditions of GPA and class standing, because junior or senior level students with a 3.5 GPA or above are very likely to be on a path to complete college; and therefore, considered to be successful first-generation Vietnamese American students. All participants met my sampling criteria for selection and were a good fit for the inquiry. General characteristics and individual profiles of participants will be presented in subsequent sections.

All participants were students from the University of California system. These youth were active as mentors in either the Vietnamese American Scholar Society (VASS; pseudonym) Mentorship Program or similar non-profit student organizations. All but two (2) participants were recruited from the VASS Mentorship Program. VASS is a nonprofit student association located in Southern California committed to community service and education. Members are volunteers and included college students and alumni. Members from VASS provide mentorship, academic support, and opportunities for leadership/professional development to Vietnamese American high school students from local communities. Similar to the VASS program, the other non-profit Vietnamese

American organizations also aim to increase student retention and promote educational excellence at the K-12 level.

All participants recruited from VASS mentored high school students. Although the other two participants recruited through snowball sampling were not members of VASS, they also mentored high school students through a similar non-profit Vietnamese American organization with a comparable mission. Therefore, all participants from this study aimed to cultivate future generations of Vietnamese American leaders through quality youth mentoring relationships. All participants from VASS and non-VASS sites provided education support, such as free tutoring services for high school students, on a weekly basis during the academic school year. In addition to helping mentees with homework, mentors also helped students improve their academic skills and assisted them with the college application process. In general, participants in this study were accomplished students who were very motivated to giving back to the community.

General Characteristics of Participants

As previously mentioned, participants for this narrative inquiry were limited to successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students. Based on the age and years in college requirements for participation (over 18 years old and 3rd- or 4th-year in college), I recognized that my participants would most likely be children of Vietnamese refugee or immigrant parents from the third immigration wave (1982–present; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 2000b). Accordingly, my participants were born into an existing community of cultural resources; and therefore, their stories may differ considerably from their parents' experiences. Further, as many third wave refugees were the least educated of the refugees and more likely to have lived in poverty, participants in

this study would most likely come from families with low SES (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 2000b). As I speculated, all parents were third wave refugees.

All participants were first-generation college Vietnamese American students enrolled full-time in three separate research universities located in California. Through purposeful and snowball sampling, four females (Jackie, Kate, Tammy, and Ngan) and three males (Robert, Larry, and Tony; all pseudonyms) were selected to participate in the research. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 22. Two participants (Robert and Larry) were in their 3rd year of college, while five participants (Jackie, Kate, Tammy, Ngan, and Tony) were in their final year. Only one female participant (Ngan) was born in Vietnam. The other six participants (Jackie, Kate, Tammy, Robert, Larry, and Tony) were born in the United States. All participants' parents were born in Vietnam and emigrated to America as refugees. Table 1 presents a table containing participants' pseudonyms and their corresponding demographics.

TABLE 1. Participants' Pseudonyms and Corresponding Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Born in America or Vietnam	Highest Education Obtained by Father	Highest Education Obtained by Mother	Third- or Fourth-Year College Student
Jackie	Female	21	America	High School	High School	4 th
Kate	Female	22	America	High School	High School	4 th
Tammy	Female	21	America	High School	Middle School	4 th
Ngan	Female	21	Vietnam	High School	High School	4 th
Robert	Male	19	America	High School	High School	3 rd
Larry	Male	19	America	High School	High School	3 rd
Tony	Male	21	America	High School	High School	4 th

All seven participants were the first in their families to go to college in the United States. Scholars (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 2000b) have suggested that many third wave refugees had minimal formal education; however, most of these parents received a high school education (Tammy's mother completed only middle school). Larry indicated that his mother got accepted into a college in Vietnam but dropped out soon after due to the Vietnam War. Similarly, Ngan's father went to college in Vietnam but also dropped out and never finished higher education. In addition, some participants shared that their parents took English classes at local community colleges after emigrating to America to learn the new language. Thus, while the formal education level (generally high school) of these parents may seem low according to American standards, these parents may be more educated compared to other third wave Vietnamese American refugees. Accordingly, parental education level might have influenced their expectations, and hence, affected their child's achievement in school.

Three participants (Jackie, Robert, and Tony) grew up in a single-parent household. One participant (Jackie) was the only child. Other six participants (Kate, Tammy, Ngan, Robert, Larry, and Tony) were firstborns and had one or two siblings. Due to their birth order, I speculated that these firstborns might experience a greater sense of responsibility, which in turn might have shaped their motivation and resilience. All participants disclosed coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Although six participants were born in the United States, all stated that Vietnamese was the first language learned inside the home. Therefore, all participants are bilingual. Nonetheless, some participants are more fluent in Vietnamese than others as a result of more language practice and usage in and outside of their homes.

Profiles of Participants

The purpose of this section is to introduce the reader to participants. More details and comprehensive descriptions of participants' unique lived experiences will be presented in Chapter 4. The following accounts offer a short profile on each individual and their backgrounds.

Jackie

Jackie was particularly reserved and respectful. She was born in the United States to a low-income family in 1993. Jackie was the only child. Both of Jackie's parents were Vietnamese refugees who fled their homeland following the fall of Saigon. Due to irreconcilable differences, Jackie's parents filed for divorce when Jackie was only 4 years old. Jackie's mother had full custody of Jackie. The reality of divorce was extremely difficult for Jackie to comprehend. Further, as a product of divorce, Jackie endured financial, emotional, and psychological distress due to her father's absence. Jackie disclosed that she rarely had contact with her father throughout her K-12 years. It was not until Jackie's sophomore year in college that her father tried reconnecting with her. Jackie's mother also had a hard time dealing with the loss of a partner. Unable to put her grief behind her, Jackie's mother fell into major depression and was later diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Jackie confessed that her family instability played a salient part in her life and well-being.

Kate

Kate was an outspoken and opinionated young woman. As the older of two daughters, Kate endeavored to become a role model for her younger sister. Both of Kate's parents also fled Vietnam as refugees following the Vietnam War. Kate shared

that she was born in the United States when her mother was 42 years old. Due to her parents' older age as first-time parents, Kate disclosed that her parents were very traditional and protective. They expected Kate to practice most Vietnamese traditions and to speak only Vietnamese at home. As a consequence, Kate considered herself bilingual. She felt that being bilingual helped her connect and communicate with a wider range of people.

Tammy

Tammy was remarkably shy and soft-spoken. Although she came from a two-parent household, Tammy disclosed that her father was emotionally disengaged. According to Tammy, her father was unsupportive and often neglectful. Hence, Tammy regarded her mother as the main source of support due to her constant guidance and visible presence. Coming from an impoverished background, Tammy was determined to escape poverty by succeeding in school. With the highest academic standing among her peers, Tammy was the high school valedictorian. In college, Tammy majored in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics (MIMG) at a large public research university in Southern California. Tammy wished to become a physician in the future to payback her mother for her sacrifices. Tammy revealed that her biggest fear in life was failure because she was afraid of disappointing her mother.

Ngan

Ngan was the only participant in the study (besides me) who was born in Vietnam. Due to her immigrant status and past experiences in Vietnam, Ngan believed America would provide better economic and educational opportunities than her homeland. Ngan was the eldest of three children. Her twin brothers were also born in

Vietnam. Her family emigrated to the United States in hope of finding better healthcare and treatment for one of Ngan's twin brothers, who became mentally disabled due to medical malpractice in Vietnam. Ngan felt that both of her parents were encouraging and had high expectations for her. She disclosed that her parents' expectations motivated her to work hard in school. Nonetheless, Ngan also expressed that her parents' desire and push for her to succeed in school and life often resulted in a great deal of stress for herself.

Robert

Robert was an insightful and talkative individual. Both Robert and his younger brother were born in the United States. As Vietnamese refugees, Robert's parents emigrated to the United States in search of the American Dream. Robert came from a very poor family. His family lived below poverty line; therefore, they relied on welfare assistance for food and shelter. Due to financial stress and irreconcilable differences, Robert's parents filed for divorce when he was only 3 years old. As part of the grieving process, Robert's mother fell into a deep depression and became estranged from her family. Fortunately, Robert's grandparents assumed the role of surrogate parents. Robert's grandparents became his primary caregivers and provided both emotional support and financial assistance. Through role-modeling, they taught him right from wrong and instilled a strong work ethic in Robert. To Robert, his grandparents played a pivotal role in his development.

Larry

Larry was an athletic and optimistic individual. He was born in America; however, English was not his primary language. Growing up in a two-parent household,

both of Larry's parents encouraged him to speak Vietnamese at home and motivated him to retain the Vietnamese language and culture. Larry disclosed that, because he did not learn English until he entered elementary school, he was placed in an ESL program during his elementary years to develop his English language proficiency. Larry said the ESL program improved his reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. In general, Larry was appreciative of his parents' efforts to raise him to be bilingual. To Larry, being bilingual helped him connect with others through their own language and culture.

Tony

Tony was born in Houston, Texas, to Vietnamese refugee parents. He was the firstborn. His sister was 2 years his junior. Tony was very charismatic. He seemed very optimistic, assured, and confident even though he had a dysfunctional childhood. As a product of divorce at a young age, Tony grew up without a father from the age of 2. Tony lived with mother because she had sole custody of both children. His father was deemed unfit by the court. However, Tony's mother was neglectful and emotionally unavailable. She failed to provide Tony with the necessities of life, such as love and emotional support. Without both a mother and father figure, Tony felt depressed and abandoned as a child. Tony found solace in friends and music. Tony considered his friends as a means to relieve distress and anxiety because he was able to confide in them. As part of the string orchestra, Tony considered music therapeutic because music allowed him to ease his disappointments and helped him be more focused in school. In short, Tony was a strong and resilient individual. He recognized that the road to success is paved with adversities and was willing to overcome all.

Data Collection Methods: Interviews

Typically, narrative inquiry calls for interviews where the researcher actively listens to participants' stories and engages participants in the re-telling of events (Chase, 2005; Lal et al., 2012). Conducting interviews is the central method for narrative inquirers to explore people's stories and lived experiences (Chase, 2005). Because "storytelling is an elementary form of human communication," narrative interviews allow human experiences to be recalled, relived, expressed, and understood (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 2). Corresponding to the tenets of narrative inquiry, data for this study were collected through in-depth one-on-one open-ended interviews. Face-to-face interactions allowed me to observe the interviewees' social cues (such as, their behaviors, reactions, voice, body language, intonation, etc.). These cues provided me with extra information for data analysis.

My role as the narrative researcher was to gather data about participants' experiences and stories. Some narrative inquiry advocates suggest interviews be conducted unstructured and without an interview protocol, and that the researcher engage in the data collection process over an extended period of time (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2008); given time and resource constraints, that ideal was not feasible for this study. For example, in addition to having my own time constraints due to personal and professional obligations, participants' time pressure made it even more difficult when scheduling two interviews with each participant. Many participants also hurried to complete the two interviews for this study prior to the start of their next class quarter or semester.

For these reasons, interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol shaped by the research focus of this study. As Hermanns (1991) and Flick (1998) have

suggested, semi-structured interviewing with storytelling elements is conducive to generating enriched narratives and reliable stories for narrative inquiries. From my experience, an advantage to conducting semi-structured interviews included having the flexibility to adjust interview questions accordingly to provide thick and rich description of participants' experiences and stories. Due to the less structured format of both protocols, participants were able to answer interview questions in as much detail as they pleased and I was able to clarify responses when needed. With this data collection method, I was able to follow up the ideas behind given responses and change direction of the interview as it was taking place. This data collection strategy allowed opportunities for prompts and probing questions, which helped elicit greater detail about previous questions or responses (Kendall & Kendall, 2013).

For this study, I conducted two in-depth interviews with each participant. I conducted two interview pilots to assist me in determining if there are flaws to my interview protocols and procedures. Based on the interview pilots, I deemed that two interviews were sufficient. The initial pilot test ran 1.5 hours. The later interview pilot ran 2 hours. Likewise, each interview actually ran approximately one to two hours in length, with most lasting close to one point five hours. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission of participants.

The overall objective of the interviews was to explore the K-16 educational experiences and stories of Vietnamese American students who are first in their families to go to college. The purpose of the first interview was to explore participants' K-12 (elementary school, middle school, high school) educational experiences and stories. Following the first interview, I scheduled the second interview (via email). The purpose

of the second interview was to explore participants' educational experiences and stories in higher education/college.

Narrative responses were transcribed (verbatim) by a professional transcriptionist. To ensure confidentiality of interview and transcription data, the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix F) prior to me releasing the digital files to be transcribed. In addition to audio recording, personal/handwritten notes were taken to record the interview data and participants' social cues.

Instruments: Interview Protocols

The development of research instruments is central in the process of conducting in-depth interviews (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Interview protocols direct the administration and execution of interviews. For this study, two semi-structured open-ended interview protocols were developed to provide instructions and help to make sure there is consistency between interviews (see appendix D for both interview protocols). Broad background questions were incorporated to establish rapport with research participants (Creswell, 2008). Specific interview questions were built from the research questions, conceptual framework, and review of the literature related to the K-16 educational experiences of marginalized Vietnamese American students. Appendix E presents a table showing the research related to protocol questions.

Both protocols were developed with a focus on exploring participants' assets and capital, as well as what they perceived as cognitive, social, and institutional support factors and barriers to their educational success (Swail et al., 2003; Yosso, 2005). My prompts and probes were grounded in the literature and my conceptual framework. For instance, the probe related to language barrier is tied to the literature which discusses the

challenges faced by Vietnamese American immigrant and refugees (Brown et al., 2010; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Robbins, 2004; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Similarly, the probe related to culture comes from the literature which credited Vietnamese American students' academic success to their adherence to cultural values and traditional norms (Caplan et al., 1991; Y. Lee, 1991; Zhou & Bankston, 1998).

In this inquiry, open-ended questions were developed so that participants could fully express their perspectives and experiences in their own words. Open-ended interview questions permitted unanticipated findings, provided richness of detail, and allowed self-expression (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This format has allowed for more valid and reliable information about interviewees' experiences, feelings, and attitudes (Seidman, 2013). Moreover, open-ended questions have helped me gain greater insight into the experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students. For instance, open-ended interviews elicited breadth and depth of reply, as well as revealed avenues of further questioning that may have gone untapped (Kendall & Kendall, 2013). In general, adaptability is an important advantage of semi-structured, open-ended research interviews.

The VASS Program Coordinator and a dissertation committee member reviewed both interview protocols. To avoid sampling from the limited group of potential participants, both interview protocols were piloted with two recent Vietnamese American college graduates. Both individuals were Vietnamese American refugees and the first in their families to enroll and receive a college degree. Prior to conducting the two pilot interviews, I was contemplating conducting three interviews (approximately 3 hours in length) with each participant (the first interview to explore participants' elementary and

middle school experience; the second interview to explore their high school experience; and the third interview to explore their college experience). However, based on the suggestions of both reviewers and both pilot participants, I decided to conduct two in-depth interviews (approximately 1 to 2 hours in length in total), rather than three shorter interviews with each participant due to limited recollection of K-12 stories and experiences.

Procedures

Recruitment of research participants is often regarded as one of the most difficult parts of the research process (Blanton et al., 2006). For this reason, I contacted the VASS Program Coordinator via email to request permission and assistance in the participant recruiting process. The Program Coordinator was the gatekeeper of VASS. The text of the email provided a brief description of my proposed study and requested permission to contact and recruit potential participants for my study prior to the participant selection process. I purposefully selected this student association as the site to recruit my participants because every VASS Mentorship Program's mentor exhibited qualities of a successful Vietnamese American college student. For instance, active members of VASS were all high achieving college students with a cumulative GPA above 3.5. Further, I also had professional experience with VASS. As a high school teacher in Southern California, I have worked with VASS to help coordinate orientation sessions for high school mentee recruitment. Written permission was granted by the Program Coordinator (for approval to conduct research with VASS mentors) and I was able to confirm that the VASS Program Coordinator was willing to assist me in participant recruitment. I continued to maintain communication with the gatekeeper throughout the investigation to

ensure that the Program Coordinator supported my study and paved the way for executing my research once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was in hand. This ongoing communication process allowed me to assure that I followed all procedures and policies to minimize potential risks and protect possible participants.

Following IRB approval, the VASS Program Coordinator provided a list of potential participants for me to contact via email. I then personally contacted and recruited my study participants. An initial letter was sent via email to each potential participant (Appendix A). The text of this letter explained who I am, the purpose and title of the proposed study, their role in the research, the number and length of each interview, the option of audio-recording the interview (not mandatory), and asked potential participants to contact me (via email) if they were interested in participating or had any questions regarding the research. A follow-up email (Appendix B) to potential participants was sent 1 week following the initial email because I had not recruited the number of participants needed for the research. Accordingly, my initial point of recruitment was through the VASS Mentorship Program. However, I also planned to recruit using snowball sampling.

Five members from VASS (Jackie, Kate, Ngan, Robert, and Larry) showed interest and agreed to participate in the study. One of those five participants (Jackie) connected me to the other non-VASS participants (Tammy and Tony). In this way, I relied on referrals from snowball sampling to recruit additional participants and achieve my desired sample size.

Once the individual agreed to be part of the study, I scheduled (via email) the first interview with each individual. When scheduling the interview, a mutually agreeable

date, time, and location was decided to be sensitive of both parties' school, work, and/or family obligations. To promote confidentiality, I suggested an interview location with heightened privacy to encourage participants to be more honest and open to tell their stories and perspectives. I also suggested each interview be conducted in quiet areas free from distraction, and at times and dates that were most suitable and comfortable for each participant. With the exception of one participant, who requested to meet in my classroom, all others wished to meet at my home because it is quiet and private. Hence, participants felt safe and comfortable to speak during all interview sessions.

Each participant received an electronic copy of the informed consent form (Appendix C) for review at least 1 week prior to the scheduled interview date. I also brought two hard copies of the consent form to the scheduled meeting date. At the start of the first interview, participants received a \$25 Starbucks gift card for their participation. Participants only needed to show up to the first interview to receive the gift card. Prior to engaging in the interview, I reviewed the consent form with each participant and answered any questions he/she may have regarding the consent form and/or the interview process. I also explained to each participant that he/she had the right to withdraw from involvement at any time without penalty. Further, I explained verbally the potential risks they might face as a result of their participation. Written consent was obtained if they chose to participate.

Once informed consent was obtained, I began the interview. Each interview was audio recorded only with permission (not mandatory) from the participant (both on the consent form and verbally at the start of the interview). However, I explained to each participant that whether or not the individual participant consents to audio recording, I

would take personal/handwritten notes to record interview data and social cues. All participants consented to audio recording. Following the first interview, I scheduled the second interview (via email) based upon a mutually agreeable date, time and location.

Following the second interview, I reminded participants that they would be receiving an email from me (within 2 weeks) detailing my preliminary findings of their individual interviews. Each participant received a distinct three- to four-page preliminary findings document based on his or her own K-16 stories and experiences. This document included my interpretations of their challenges/obstacles and support factors as they navigate the K-16 educational pipeline and I welcomed their responses/feedback in reviewing my preliminary findings of their interviews. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the preliminary findings documents either via email, phone calls, or in person. In general, member-checking helped improve the trustworthiness and integrity of the study. The member-checking process will be described in greater detail in the data analysis section. Further, following each interview, I also reminded participants that they could contact me at any time to share information, refine, or clarify points made in our interviews, or ask questions.

In summation, I conducted two in-depth one-on-one interviews with each participant, for a total of approximately 14 interviews (about 25 hours of interviews). The duration of each interview ranged between 1 to 2 hours in length. Following the interviews, at the students' request, I continued to keep in contact and developed rapport with all participants. Development of relationships and trust resulted in greater understanding, as well as facilitated the co-construction (co-interpretation) of meaning

process. The nature and value of my prolonged engagement with participants in this study will be described further in the sections of benefits and trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis refers to the various approaches researchers use to re-present participants' stories during narrative inquiries (Clandinin, 2013). Understanding narrative analysis begins with an understanding of the term "narrative." According to Clandinin (2013), when interviewees share their story, they provide a narrative to their experience in which they position characters in time and space in order to make meaning of what happened. That is, narratives attempt to explain what has taken place to make sense of why things have occurred the way they did (Clandinin, 2013). Therefore, narratives do two things: (a) provide a portal into people's lived experiences, and (b) confer meaning to make sense of those experiences (Bamberg, 2010). In the context of this study, narrative inquiry is used to understand and re-present participants' experiences through the stories they live and tell. Field texts (also known as data or interview transcripts in narrative inquiry) document participants' stories in their own words (Clandinin, 2013). Of course, individuals seldom speak in linear, time-based and/or thematic format when describing their experiences. Therefore, it is typically up to the researcher to assemble the narrative. Hence, I analyzed narrative transcripts to retell (or "re-story") participants' stories into a chronological framework that makes sense (Clandinin, 2013).

There are multiple methods to narrative analysis; however, for the purpose of this study, I used a method called narrative representation. Narrative representation refers to the method of collecting raw interview transcripts and then unifying them by organizing

the series of events in chronological order to retell lived experiences in the form of a story (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008). The retold story is known as the “narrative representation” of the phenomenon of interest (Clandinin, 2013). In this case, the creation of the story by the narrative researcher is regarded as the act of narrative analysis.

Narrative researchers are encouraged to include and interweave their own stories when and where appropriate (Bamberg, 2010; Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008). Thus, I presented my own personal stories in narrative form at the start of the findings section to help readers understand my personal connection and perspective to the research under study. I wrote my own narrative representation prior to collecting and analyzing data as a method of bracketing. Bracketing helped ensure transparency throughout the data analysis process and encouraged me to consciously acknowledge my biases and assumptions. The sharing of my own narrative representation also helped make my narrative analysis more transparent for readers (Ellis, 2004). By making my own story, backgrounds, purposes, and intentions apparent throughout the research process, I was able to safeguard the integrity of my study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This strategy will be described in more detail in the trustworthiness section.

Throughout the course of my study, memo writing via a research log was used as a powerful and essential part of the coding and analysis process. For example, I wrote notes on patterns that emerged both during and after data collection. I also made comments and reflections on what I thought were my major findings. The act of memo writing provided an outlet to help me collect and think about my ideas. In this way,

analytic memo-ing helped me elaborate on ideas regarding the data, as well as contributed to the credibility of the research.

I strived to gain familiarity with the data as soon as the data collection process began. Therefore, throughout the data analysis process, I listened to the digital recorded data repeatedly to gain familiarity with the data. This process enabled me to wash myself in the data and helped me develop a general understanding of the breadth and depth of each participant's story.

After hearing and reviewing each interview transcript many times, I unified all parts of the data by manually coding and reorganizing the series of events in chronological order (e.g., elementary school, middle school, high school, college). To do this, I first highlighted relevant representative quotes for each participant to use as sample data quotes in my findings chapter. I then cut up each interview transcript into strips and manually reorganized them into chronological form.

Once I was comfortable with the manually created flow, I interpreted the data and created a three- to four-page preliminary findings document of the participant's individual interviews. Transcript data from the first and second interview were analyzed to develop this preliminary findings document. A distinct preliminary findings document, without quotes, was created for each participant within 2 weeks following the second interview. The preliminary findings document of their interviews was generated according to established research questions with participant's challenges/obstacles and support factors as they navigate the K-16 educational pipeline. This preliminary findings document of participants' interviews was shared (via email) with each individual as an opportunity for member-checking. I welcomed their responses and feedback in

reviewing my interpretation of their stories. Some participants chose to provide feedback in person. Others chose to respond via phone calls and emails. This process took approximately 30 to 45 minutes (approximately 10 minutes to read and 20 to 35 minutes to respond). All participants confirmed the accuracy of my preliminary interpretation of their K-16 experiences and there were no corrections. This document helped me validate the credibility and validity of my analysis to ensure that each narrative account is represented accurately. This process was repeated for each of the seven participants.

After I received all participants' confirmation of my preliminary findings, I was confident that I had accurately captured each of my participants' K-16 experiences. I then developed two matrices to examine the supports and barriers to success within and across participants' stories. Appendix H presents the barriers and support factors participants faced throughout their K-16 educational experiences. To create the matrices, I identified the barriers and support factors on one side and grouped them based on the conceptual elements (e.g., with names of participants across the top). In this way, I used my conceptual framework to categorize barriers and support factors.

The resulting matrices elucidated patterns across participants and showed me which participants represented the larger group or outliers. From these matrices, I was able to identify and select my representative cases. Three participants were representative of my larger study sample: Jackie, Ngan, and Tony. I selected these three individuals because they were similar to others in the study and different from each other. In other words, these three participants were representative of the larger sample, but also distinct from each other. Hence, they were also representative of the diversity in the data. For instance, like Kate, Tammy, and Larry, Ngan came from a two-parent household and

grew up with a strong family unit. However, her experiences were different from Jackie and Tony, who grew up in divorced families and lacked parental support.

To carry out narrative representation for the three representative individuals, I retold their stories by constructing a chronological framework for explaining the essence of their experiences. As part of narrative inquiry, I examined each narrator's setting, place, time, scene, and plot to identify significant information within each participant's story (Chase, 2005; Clandinin, 2013). In other words, I rewrote each participant's story to place them within a sequential plot (with beginning, middle, and end) that incorporated the participant as the main character who experienced unique challenges and support as he/she navigates the K-16 educational pipeline. Each narrative representation was approximately 10 to 15 pages in length and included previously selected exemplary data quotes. In this way, narrative representation allowed me to "re-story" or re-present each participant's narrative (Clandinin, 2013).

To honor the voices of other participants and provide deeper insights into the experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students, I looked for themes across participants in the final part of my analysis. I used the aforementioned matrices as part of my narrative analysis to look for similarities and differences across participants' stories. Four themes emerged from the individual narrative representations and were also reflected in the voices of the other four participants who were not covered by the narrative representation analysis. This final analysis section allowed me to engage voices of the other four participants and integrate their unique experiences with the major themes that were evident in the larger story and the individual narrative representations.

To shed light on the focus under study, this final analysis section also included an examination of my own representation and experience as a refugee and first-generation Vietnamese American student (Ellis, 2004). Through this analytic process, my own personal experiences and reflections were interwoven with participants' stories (Chase, 2005; Ellis, 2004). This act of interweaving has allowed me, as a narrative researcher, to emphasize the role I play in shaping the research findings and constructing their narrative representations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this way, I was able to discuss the relevant ways in which the narratives complement or challenge my own stories and experiences.

In short, interview data were explored and analyzed through a manual coding process. In addition, I also attempted to accurately reflect an overall perspective of all participants using the *in vivo coding* process (codes in the participants' actual words). Data exemplars were identified and incorporated in the findings chapter of this dissertation. Trustworthiness was achieved using methods of prolonged engagement, a research log, member-checking, negative case analysis, and bracketing. These strategies will be described in greater detail below.

Protection of Participants

The research was conducted with IRB approval. As with all research, there are always risks for research participants. To ensure protection of participants, my goal as a researcher was to anticipate and mitigate possible risks for research participants. There were two main potential risks associated with this study: (a) the interview could lead participants to experience some level of emotional discomfort due to recalling frustrating or distressing memories about difficult challenges and obstacles; and (b) were those

stories and/or comments to be linked to the participant, it could lead to embarrassment or strain personal and/or professional relationships. These anticipated risks were clearly explained in the informed consent form (Appendix C). This section will explain the measures taken by me to minimize these potential risks.

First, I was prepared to direct participants to sources of free and low-cost counseling/support services (Appendix G) when the interview led participants to recall difficult memories about their past experiences and stories. Further, to lessen the level of discomfort due to recalling/retelling of personal events and stories, I was non-judgmental. I also strived to build rapport with the participants in order to obtain honest and open responses.

Second, all interviews were held in a one-on-one situation in a private location. All data are stored in a locked file cabinet and password-protected computers at my private residence. All interviews were transcribed and participants have had the opportunity to review preliminary findings of their interviews for factual errors and flag those which they feel may put them at any risk. In addition, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant to ensure anonymity. I also encouraged participants to communicate with me via their personal email account rather than school/work account. Through the process of informed consent, participants were well-informed about the purpose of the research they were asked to participate in.

All consent forms and raw data will be retained for a period of 3 years following completion of the research. After 3 years, I will destroy all data. Only myself will have access to both digital and hard-copy data. However, at times, data (with a pseudonym) will be shared with my dissertation chair.

Benefits

Participants might reasonably have expected three benefits from research participation. First, participants might have benefited from the opportunity to explore and reflect on their experiences and stories as first-generation Vietnamese American college students. This process might have provided them with the opportunity to discuss their successes and/or challenges. As a first-generation Vietnamese American myself, I expected the interviews to be more of a conversation where I may provide some level of validation of their experiences and perceptions. Often, first-generation students in this study navigated the educational pipeline in isolation and, with little knowledge of the American educational system, assumed their experiences were unique or atypical. Learning this was not the case may have helped relieve some anxiety/frustration and have provided perspective on navigating the American education process. For instance, two participants expressed that talking to me about challenges they faced while in school provided an outlet to reduce stress. Both students have continued to reach out to me for help with coping when responding to stressors.

Second, students also have benefited from the nature of my prolonged engagement. These participants opened up to me and let me into their lives; thus, I felt privileged and wanted to honor their participation with my prolonged engagement in return. Consequently, following the conclusion of the second interview, I continued to keep in contact with all participants to establish rapport and assist youth in overcoming personal challenges. For instance, one participant called me for help when his car ran out of gas. Several youth consistently contacted me on a weekly basis for guidance in preparing for career success. Some youth also requested to meet up with me in person so

that I can help with their job search and resume building. To me, this dissertation was not all about research because I took pride in helping participants at a more personal level. Overall, as I moved beyond my role of a narrative researcher to one of engagement, youth in this study trusted me and looked to me for mentorship.

Last, but not least, as findings are analyzed, presented, and/or published, I expect to share them with participants. I anticipate that linking findings to the literature and the knowledge that the findings are invaluable will further validate both the struggles and successes participants often experience. It is my hope that participants' stories will help expose the unique needs and/or challenges of this often underrepresented and underserved population. Should educational leaders become more sensitive to the issues faced by first-generation Vietnamese American students, or even choose to take action as a result of these findings and other information, it is possible that participants might benefit from an improved educational climate or additional sources of support for first-generation students.

Researcher Positionality and Trustworthiness

Positionality has been recognized as an essential component in qualitative research (Ganga & Scott, 2006). Positionality is especially important in narrative inquiry because researchers often insert themselves into the story (Clandinin, 2013). Reflexivity allows researchers to understand and reflect on the relationship between themselves and their fields of inquiry. Positionality is vital to enhance trustworthiness in the practice of qualitative research because it allows the researcher to reflect on the research process (Bourke, 2014). In this way, positionality and trustworthiness are critical in ensuring quality study, as well as essential in managing researcher biases.

Researcher Positionality Statement

The topic of this study resonates with me due to my personal background and experiences as a Vietnamese American. I am drawn to the investigation of the academic experiences of various Asian American subgroups; however, I am particularly interested in exploring the experiences of Vietnamese Americans. As a world language educator committed to teaching high school students how to read and write in Vietnamese, I am committed to heritage preservation and academic achievement. As the club advisor for a Vietnamese American student club at my school site, I advise Vietnamese American students and am committed to empowering Asian American students in order to advocate for social justice. Consequently, I am dedicated to community service and cultural awareness and am passionate about increasing college access to empower underprivileged and underrepresented students.

In addition, I am also a supporter of and believe in the value of the VASS Mentorship Program. As a high school teacher, I often collaborate with the VASS Coordinator to help with student recruitment. This collaboration has given me access to recruit potential research participants. For this reason, I recognized that I might know some of the participants. Hence, it is possible that these participants may assume that I know their experiences and understand their stories. However, I reminded participants that their experiences are unique and encouraged them to retell their stories freely without preconceived notions or assumptions.

As presented in Chapter 1, I clearly have biases due to my own personal views, beliefs, and experiences as a Vietnamese American, heterosexual, first-generation female. For example, my background as a refugee clearly motivates my interest to study the

academic experiences of first-generation students. As a first-generation student, I have faced many barriers to success as I have navigated through the American educational system. For the abovementioned reasons, I sought to understand the factors that support or hinder the academic success of Asian American students, particularly Vietnamese Americans. Through this narrative inquiry, I hope to shed light on the unique characteristics, challenges, and needs of this subpopulation. My ultimate goal is to empower underprivileged and underrepresented students from varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, I am focused on elucidating the Vietnamese American experience.

After reflecting on my own personal, social, and professional identities, I understood that these factors may influence data collection, analysis, and reporting. For instance, because I am also a first-generation Vietnamese American student and was successful in school, this experience may lead me to portray participants' stories as common and typical. Further, it may additionally lead me to assume that I understand their experiences. But in fact, I had to remind myself that their experiences are unique and anything but ordinary. What these students are able to accomplish despite much hardship and obstacles is considered heroic to some people. Therefore, I was aware that I had to keep myself in check and manage my biases in order to portray all participants accurately and fairly. In short, I acknowledged that the above-mentioned factors might not only influence my interpretations, but might also influence the questions I asked, as well as what participants disclosed or not disclosed to me. I was mindful that my position and personal/professional experiences might affect data collection and analysis.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that research trustworthiness is significant in evaluating the worth of a study. The authors posit four evaluative criteria for establishing trustworthiness: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility refers to the integrity, or “truth value,” of the research findings and interpretation. Transferability involves the degree in which findings can be useful in other contexts or settings. Dependability entails the consistency, or replication, of the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which findings are corroborated by other data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This section will describe a series of five techniques that were used in this narrative inquiry to achieve the trustworthiness criteria outlined above: (a) prolonged engagement with participants, (b) research log with reflective/analytic memo-ing, (c) member-checking, (d) negative case analysis, and (e) bracketing. These strategies were implemented to reduce methodological threats and increase the study’s trustworthiness (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009).

Prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement helped establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As requested by participants, I kept in contact with all students following the interviews to provide mentorship and guidance. For instance, participants would often contact me via email, phone calls, or text messaging for college and life after college advice. By spending time and interacting with my participants in their natural settings, I was able to develop rapport and build trust with my participants. Through prolonged engagement, participants felt comfortable in sharing their experiences and thoughts with me. My engagement further allowed me to gain deeper understanding of participants’ values and behaviors. In this way, I had the opportunity to test my own

perceptions and biases, as well as those of my participants. In general, prolonged engagement helped provide “scope” and “depth” to my study because it limited my biases and facilitated the co-construction (co-interpretation) of meaning process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304).

Research log. A research log was kept to establish credibility and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I maintained an ongoing research log via a spiral-bound field notebook throughout the course of the research to record all research ideas, thoughts, analytic/reflective memos, activities, and questions that arose in regards to the study (Saldaña, 2013). For instance, during the data collection and narrative analysis process, I used the research log as a running record to articulate to myself about common patterns and emerging themes. My purpose for keeping a research log was to document factors that affected each step of the research process. Thus, the research log functioned as an audit trail for my work. More importantly, the research log helped me engage in narrative inquiry by supporting the “unpacking” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 81) and managing of “living, telling, retelling, and reliving” processes of narrative inquiry (p. 34). Additionally, the log was also utilized to note problems and brainstorm possible solutions for problems. In brief, my research log was an invaluable method to aid me in answering my research questions because it helped me craft workable ideas, learn about emerging/recurring themes, and capture reflections on data analysis.

Member-checking. Member-checking helped establish dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As noted in earlier sections, participants were given the opportunity to review preliminary findings of their interviews following the second meeting. Member-checking allowed participants to provide feedback, respond,

edit, refine, or clarify my interpretation of their stories. This was done in writing via email and in person. Since all participants confirmed my preliminary findings, member-checking helped validate and enhance the correctness of the study. In general, by being transparent with the findings, participants were able to critically examine my preliminary findings of their interviews, as well as validate or refute them. Thus, reporting findings to the participants helped to validate the research outcomes and promote trustworthiness.

Negative case analysis. Negative case analysis is a technique used to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Negative cases (or outliers) were thoroughly examined during the narrative analysis process to improve the integrity of the findings. For this study, I searched for contradicting or deviant elements of the data that differ from my expectations or assumptions to refine it until it can be explained for a majority of data. For example, in the case of language barrier, I unexpectedly found that even participants born in the United States were classified as ELLs because they only spoke Vietnamese at home. This finding disconfirmed my expectations of the level of English proficiency of American-born students. Therefore, I looked for similar experiences across participants to support this unexpected finding. I realized that this process allowed for a more nuanced narrative analysis. When an unexpected finding can be accounted for, the findings and interpretation for the remaining majority cases is strengthened (Creswell, 2008). Thus, negative case analysis was essential to add rigor to my data analysis.

Bracketing. Bracketing was used in this study to ensure credibility of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Bracketing is especially important in narrative inquiry due to the close relationship between the focus of study and the researcher (Plano Clark

& Creswell, 2009). Through the process of in-depth reflection, I was able to reduce my own personal biases by setting aside existing presuppositions and assumptions. For instance, I was able to sort out the qualities and/or experiences that belong to the participants versus those that belong to me. More specifically, bracketing allowed me to set aside my personal experiences and assumptions as a Vietnamese American refugee, as much as possible, before continuing with the experiences of my participants. This process enabled me to have a fresh perspective towards the unique experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study. By being reflective and honest across all stages of the research (e.g., topic selection, interview design, data collection/analysis/reporting), I have had the opportunity to enhance my perception of the research, as well as facilitate more profound data analysis (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed description of the narrative inquiry design and all major parts of the research study (including site, sample, procedures, data collection methods, instruments used, data analysis, protection of subjects, and researcher positionality and trustworthiness) that were used to explore the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generational Vietnamese American college students. Given the dearth of understanding on the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American youth from current literature (at both the K-12 and higher education level), narrative inquiry design was chosen as a methodology to collect and re-tell unique stories about participants' lives and experiences (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2009). Narratives about participants' experiences ensured that voices of this

understudied population are heard and explored. This narrative inquiry was guided by research questions that are devoted to conceptualizing and preserving stories, as well as to giving contour and meaning to the lived experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American college students. Representing participants' voice using narrative inquiry must be done with humility and respect (Hunter, 2010). Thus, through storytelling (or restorying), I employed narrative inquiry as a tool for the sharing, preserving, and retrieving stories to derive meaning and new understandings from participants' lived experiences (Clandinin, 2013).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The hallmark of narrative inquiry is that the researcher brackets his or her own personal experiences to mitigate the possibly negative effects of preconceptions or biases that may cloud the research process. Bracketing is done by understanding the researcher's own narrative relative to the research topic at hand. Therefore, this chapter begins with my own personal narrative as a first-generation Vietnamese American student. My personal narrative will provide a history of my K-16 educational journey, as well as elucidate my challenges and sources of support. More than positionality, my narrative representation is my story, my voice. My narrative representation will offer my realities and reflection about my personal and educational experiences.

My own narrative representation is followed by narratives of three participants. As discussed in Chapter 3, these participants were chosen due to their unique dimensions and because they represent the larger population of my study. Following the individual narratives is an analytic section where I will integrate voices from the other four participants to illustrate and add depth to the broader narrative emerging from these individual stories. This section will discuss key ideas and themes found across all narratives to honor my participants' voices. The conclusion will provide a synthesis of key points from the chapter.

My Story

My life in Vietnam was very different than life in America. Both of my parents were educated in their homeland. My father was a pilot during the Vietnam War where he aided the United States to counter the spread of communism. During that time, he was an officer in charge of flying the C-47, a military transport aircraft. My mother worked as a secretary in the accounting department at an import/export company. After South Vietnam fell to North communist forces in 1975, my father was put in a reeducation camp for 8 years due to his involvement with the former anti-communist party (South Vietnam government). My father felt the reeducation camp was a means of revenge because he was imprisoned without any proper trials or due process. Time and again, he would tell me stories of the countless occasions of abuse and repression during his time served in the reeducation camp. He was repeatedly beaten physically and mentally tortured. Due to constant fatigue and sadness, many were unable to endure the torment. Some of his friends in the same labor unit eventually died because they were incapable of withstanding the physical pain and backbreaking labor. Even with his optimistic outlook and courageousness, my father was fearful of death because he was afraid of not being able to reunite with his family.

My father was not the only one that suffered after the fall of Saigon. My mother suddenly became a single mother during his imprisonment. She had to take sole care of her first-born daughter. My older sister was barely 1 year old when my father was held captive by the communist government. Life as a single mother was filled with hardships. My mother would often speak of her loneliness and challenges of single parenthood. In addition to dealing with social isolation, my mother faced financial struggles. She was

further overwhelmed with many household responsibilities, such as childcare and financial management. The emotional burden of raising a child without a spouse was especially draining.

When my father was released from the reeducation camp in 1983, my parents had me, and then my younger sister. I am the middle child. My older sister is 10 years my senior and my younger sister is 2 years younger in age. Following his disimprisonment from the reeducation camp, my father worked as a teacher and my mother continued to work in the same company. From what I can recall, my family was from low SES. Living under a communist regime and in a developing country, we lacked many financial and social resources. Wanting a better life for their children, my parents fled Vietnam in 1993 as political refugees to seek the “American Dream.” Ironically, the reason why my father was put in the reeducation camp was the same reason why we were able to escape Vietnam. When the United States granted refuge to Vietnamese political prisoners, our entire family was permitted to emigrate to America.

I was 9 years old when I emigrated to America with my family. We did not have much to bring with us and lived in deep poverty after our arrival in America. My parents struggled to find a job because they could not understand or speak English. For shelter, all five of us rented and shared one small bedroom for the first few years after our relocation. I remember all five of us having to share one king-sized bed to sleep. Despite the conditions, this is one of the fondest memories I have of my childhood. I can still recall all of the tears and laughter we shared in that cramped bedroom. Although we did not have much, we had each other.

My parents had non-transferable job skills and were unable to find work during our first year in America. We were in financial despair. After learning some English, my mother was able to get a job working in a sweat factory. She worked nights and days for pennies sewing each piece of clothing. I could tell that my mother was exhausted from working long hours for low pay. As for my father, his health was slowly deteriorating due to his prolonged imprisonment. Therefore, he was unable to work after our resettlement. However, he helped out in any way that he could, even collecting recyclables to support us financially. For these reasons, I am forever indebted to my parents' sacrifices and hard work for me to accomplish the "American Dream."

Living below the poverty line, community-based support systems were vital to our acculturation. After our arrival in America, my family and I struggled to learn new roles and assimilate in our new community. Thankfully, due to our participation in local churches and community activities, we were able to gain social and economic assistance. In addition to emotional support, our larger community directed us to community and government resources. For instance, our local churches provided spiritual support and helped us connect to available services. These services included citizenship preparation classes and English language instruction. Community members further assisted us with accessing current information regarding our eligibility for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a government program providing nutrition assistance to low-income families. In short, faith- and community-based organizations served our needs by linking us to English education and governmental assistance programs. These organizations additionally made us feel less isolated and gave us a sense of belonging.

The role of these institutional supports was paramount in our successful integration into American society and life.

I was in the fourth grade when I arrived from Vietnam. Language issues were instantly evident throughout my first few years of school in America. I did not understand a single word in English. I began to learn English in my fourth grade class, one word at a time. Since the English language differs from my mother tongue to a great extent, I had a very challenging time acquiring the new language. In addition to producing errors in pronunciation, I repeatedly erred in spelling and syntax. At that time, I felt that it was impossible to become fluent in English. To me, learning English was challenging due to its difficult accent, complicated grammar, and countless vocabularies.

As a Vietnamese refugee student in the United States, I faced various barriers in elementary school. Culturally, I was confronted with the challenge of integrating and adapting to life in America. Due to dissimilarity in traditions and way of life between the two worlds, making cultural adjustments and transitioning to life in the United States were incredibly difficult and stressful. Hence, the process of acculturation was gradual as I slowly learned the new language and way of life. I struggled to adopt the American cultural values and norms as my parents stressed the importance of preserving my native beliefs and practices. For example, I was pushed to quickly learn the new language at school while at home I was expected to only speak in our native tongue. In school, I celebrated all the American holidays; but at home, I had to adhere to traditional practices. Conflicting understandings of the worldviews and lifestyles additionally constrained my adaptive responses. While the Vietnamese culture places higher value on individual modesty and interdependence, the American culture promotes self-promotion and self-

reliance. Therefore, in elementary school, I did not have a sense of belonging and was confused over my own identity.

Socially, I experienced discrimination and racism during my early years in America. Looking back, I endured racial discrimination and biases from my peers at a young age due to my dissimilar cultural background. In both fifth and sixth grade, I was subjected to frequent verbal harassment, which included name-calling, denigrating jokes, and negative stereotyping. Discrimination from my peers was especially traumatic during my adolescent years given the importance I placed on peer acceptance. I can still remember the harsh names my classmates used to call me. Because I was one of the few Vietnamese students in my elementary school, some ridiculed and made fun of my Vietnamese name. They even laughed at the way I looked because my parents could not afford to buy me new clothes. I can still recall the numerous times I used to hide in the restroom to cry. Recess was meant to be the fun break in my school day, but the fear of hostility and discrimination had made recess anything but pleasant for me during this time. These depressing experiences negatively impacted my mental health and contributed to my depression and insecurities as an adolescent. Certainly, these experiences hampered my assimilation process, as well as shaped my educational experience and outlook.

I continued to struggle with writing, reading, and speaking English in middle school. As an ELL, learning a new language concurrent with learning academic contents was overwhelming. Having to complete assignments and projects was particularly arduous. My English language deficiency indirectly increased my workload burden. I remember having to use the dictionary to look up one word at a time to understand each

task. Reading and writing assignments were even more taxing. An assignment that would take a fluent English speaker minutes to complete would require hours of my time to finish. I recollect many sleepless nights struggling to balance content and language. I was even envious of other more fluent students because I was a great student in Vietnam; but now, I could not fully express myself or effectively communicate in English. Because of my language limitation, I had a difficult time with reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending fundamental English. Indeed, this language shock had intensified my anxiety and stress in adjusting to American life.

Middle school was a difficult transition period but my parents' love, encouragement, and support motivated me to persevere. Growing up, my parents led by example. They showed me the value of diligence and hard work. Through their actions, they instilled a strong work ethic in me. According to my parents, a good work ethic is defined by three determining factors: (a) punctuality, (b) goal-orientation, and (c) hard work. They taught me that if I work hard, I could face any adversity. As described by my father, "Being punctual means showing up prepared and on time [speaking Vietnamese]." Hence, I was never allowed to be absent from school. My parents reasoned that I could not learn if I was not present at school. Moreover, my father said that if I am late to class, I will not be prepared to do my best work. Thus, being tardy or absent from school was unacceptable in my household. Undeniably, my work ethic has and continues to enable me to tolerate stress and frustration in life and school.

My parents also highlighted the importance of goal setting in planning for educational success. My mother would say, "You need to know what your objectives are before you can accomplish them [speaking Vietnamese]." Living by her advice,

education was always a goal. I was determined to succeed in school and failure was not an option. In middle school, I envisioned a better life and I knew having an education was the path to a better future. I understood there would be many barriers to overcome on the road to success; but I was willing to tackle them all. In this way, being goal-oriented enhanced my determination and motivation to do well in school.

My past experiences taught me that goals could only be obtained with hard work. As I reflected on my early years in America, my desire to keep trying and persevering in the face of challenges has unquestionably strengthened my resiliency. Life as a Vietnamese refugee was filled with inevitable difficulties, which included experiencing language limitation and meeting between two cultures. In spite of this, I was committed to reaching my educational goals, regardless of how many challenges I must conquer. Thus, in middle school, I sought help and stayed after the instructional hours to get additional assistance from my teachers. I tackled one assignment at a time. I understood that there was no shortcut in life. Overall, I accredited my middle school success to my strong work ethics and the will to persevere.

Like many other Vietnamese Americans, I have always valued education and believed educational attainment is vital to success and social mobility. Therefore, I was frustrated that the high school I attended often lacked bilingual teachers and aids, counselors, and interpreters who could connect and work with refugee and immigrant students like myself. In essence, I was disconnected in school largely because I did not have the resources and support I needed to overcome cultural barriers. Without bilingual pupil services, I felt isolated from the school environment. During my high school years, I felt lost. I did not have a sense of belonging because I did not feel that the schools I

attended were culturally responsive to my needs. As a refugee student and an ELL, I needed assistance and hoped to establish relationships with school officials who could relate to me and understand my unique challenges and concerns. During my high school years, I longed for help in navigating the American school system. I did not know which resources were available to me or how would I secure them, nor did my parents. Consequently, I believed that a lack of bilingual pupil services prevented me from receiving advantageous educational opportunities and contributed to my disengagement in school.

In spite of many obstacles, my parents' high expectations motivated me to succeed academically. Due to their high expectations, I was driven to excel in high school. For instance, I was expected to do all my schoolwork and earn nothing less than an A in all my classes. Perhaps it was a self-fulfilling prophecy, but my parents' belief in my potential was especially powerful in enhancing my self-efficacy, confidence, and school performance. During these 4 years of high school, my intrinsic motivation and confidence were vital to my ability to tackle difficult learning activities. Without a doubt, my parents' expectancies have had a great impact on my educational aspirations and academic choices.

Although my parents' high expectations pushed me to achieve excellence in school, the very same expectations often resulted in excessive stress arising from fear of not being good enough. Not only was I afraid of failure, I was even more fearful of letting my parents down. I did not want to disappoint them. Accordingly, what I feared most during my high school years was being perceived as imperfect in my parents' eyes.

Culturally, I was raised to see education as a means of attaining success in school and in life. These cultural values were clearly reflected in my past educational decisions and achievements. This was also evident in my desire to learn. I understood the importance of education and saw the value in learning. Simply put, I studied with a purpose. In high school, I was extremely focused and had the motivation to get into college. I did not know the steps necessary to get there, but I was willing to take all. I prioritized education. As expected of me, attaining higher education after high school was not a choice to be made; it was the only option. Thus, looking back, both parental and cultural expectations definitely fueled my academic ascension.

As a first-generation college student, I lacked adequate knowledge of the college system. I was unfamiliar with the college application process. Further, the scholarship and financial aid system was new and unknown to me. Certainly, the college and financial aid application process was very daunting. In addition to being unfamiliar with the steps and procedures, the multipart forms and in-depth questionnaires were difficult to respond to. My parents wanted to help but they, too, did not have any knowledge of the American higher education system. This inexperience made it challenging for me to develop a college-ready resume, search for colleges, and pursue financial assistance. Additionally, I did not know the steps to take during the college selection process. Without guidance, I did not have a clear road to college and did not know which career path to pursue. Fortunately, my high school friends (particular those with older siblings already in college) helped guide me throughout the college application and college search process. For example, they assisted me in making my own college list to compile my top university choices that fit my decision factors. With the help and advice of my friends, I

selected the institution that offered the best financial aid package. This college, which was a public research university located in Southern California, was also my top choice because it was the closest to home.

During my first year in college, I moved out and lived in the dorm. As a 1st-year college student, I struggled adapting to a new learning environment. Having to navigate a new environment was frustrating. I had to learn the art of negotiating the different demands of college. For instance, I needed to adapt to a huge campus with large lecture classes. Moreover, I also had to establish new friendships and learn how to manage my time efficiently. In general, negotiating these challenges as I came to terms with moving away from my family was especially trying.

Unlike high school, there was a great deal of flexibility and freedom in college. However, the amount of work and rigor also increased at the college level. Therefore, I had to polish my time management skills to get the most of my higher education experience. Correspondingly, my organizational and time management skills have allowed me to successfully balance my personal and academic life. When prioritizing my time, my schoolwork was always my main concern. As with any skills, my ability to stay organized and effectively manage time was mastered with plenty of practice throughout my K-12 years.

In college, I had a system for organizing my time. I used the traditional paper-planner model. My planner in postsecondary school also functioned as my to-do list. I prioritized important responsibilities at the top to undertake them first. For instance, I would organize my schedule way in advance to figure out my academic commitments and to set aside regular study time. This system of creating a dedicated time to study and

complete assignments prohibited me from procrastinating. In addition to keeping me organized, maintaining a flexible, personal schedule allowed me to prepare ahead and plan for the unexpected. For instance, by working backward, I was able to figure out the amount of time needed to finish a project or write a research paper. By planning in advance, I was able to accommodate unforeseen events. In this way, my organizational and time management skills enabled me to efficiently schedule my time and make progress towards my goals on a daily basis.

In terms of challenges in college, I felt the culture of education in American colleges differs tremendously from Vietnamese institutions. I quickly noticed that colleges in the United States center on classroom participation and independent learning. On one hand, I observed that schools and colleges in the United States are student-centered. In my college classrooms, American students were highly encouraged to be active in their own learning. On the other hand, I perceived that institutions in Vietnam are more teacher-centered because students are only allowed to act with permission from the teacher. From my experience in college, I was encouraged to share my ideas, thoughts, and opinions. In contrast, the Vietnamese culture expects students to always listen and be quiet to show respect for educators. Any talking or discussions in class were considered a sign of disrespect and misbehavior. Correspondingly, I was often afraid to speak my mind and express my perspective in class. As I transitioned into college life, I realized that the way I learned to study in Vietnam was no longer appropriate and effective for learning in American colleges.

Growing up in Vietnam, I was also accustomed to expecting more assistance and direction from my teachers. For this reason, I lacked the knowledge to be proactive in

my own learning. I struggled making the transition to a more independent learning approach essential at American colleges. Gradually, I began to adapt to the concept of self-regulated learning. I understood that I must take ownership of my learning and be self-motivated. I became aware that I was accountable for my own success. The challenge was to shift the learning responsibility from the teacher to me, the student. Although the abovementioned barriers threatened my college success, they also played a role in strengthening my self-efficacy as a learner.

How come Vietnamese Americans are not represented in college curriculum? Why are we excluded? Is it because we are not significant? These are questions I often asked myself in college. Looking back, I realized that the exclusion of Vietnamese Americans from the college curriculum contributed to my sense of isolation and disengagement at the college level. In my opinion, the education I received in college did not incorporate the perspectives and histories of Vietnamese people. Although educational programs in college did underscore the importance of diversity, classroom texts and learning contents failed to reflect a Vietnamese point of view. That is, the Vietnamese perspective and references were often nonexistent in textbooks and other learning materials. In addition, I was not afforded the opportunity to share and discuss my cultural stories and experiences throughout my 4 years in college. Hence, I regularly found the teachings not relevant to my personal cultural outlook.

In general, since my college learning did not address the Vietnamese point of view, I did not see my cultural group included or represented in the content and lessons taught. For this reason, the college curriculum did not help me validate my perspective, identity, or experiences. Consequently, the exclusion of Vietnamese Americans in school

curriculum further alienated me, who was already struggling to assimilate into an educational culture that differs vastly from my place of origin.

Socially, I felt developing good social skills were vital to learning and thriving in college. These skills promoted positive behavior and enabled me to make connections with my peers. These aptitudes were carried over to the classroom setting, where they impacted my academic performance and learning outcomes. At the college level, my social skills strengthened my interpersonal relationships with peers and faculty. I realized that establishing high-quality relationships with my peers and professors at the institution increased my engagement and improved my learning experiences.

In particular, my relationship with my peers played a significant role in my personal and intellectual development during my college years. For instance, classroom discussions and competitions with my peers expanded my knowledge and afforded me with differing perspectives. Peer relationships also affirmed my identity and self-concept. That is, my college peers reinforced my values and contributed to my personal growth. Therefore, the influence of peers and value of social skills cannot be underestimated at the college level.

Extracurricular organizations and activities played a paramount role in contributing to my positive college experience. For instance, involvement in extracurricular clubs engaged me to reflect on my own interest and facilitated with identity exploration. Participation in these organizations also encouraged greater interactions with peers, which allowed me to negotiate personal differences and helped honed my social skills. Further, organizational affiliation with ethnic organizations during my college years assisted me with ethnic identity development. For example, by

interacting and maintaining close relations with other Vietnamese American peers, I was able to enhance my awareness and understanding of ethnic-related concerns and help other students establish a sense of connection to their ethnic background and culture. In general, extracurricular affiliations allowed me to explore my background and interests, as well as gave me the golden opportunity to become more socially integrated into the American college setting.

In summary, my ethnic identity helped facilitate my success in college. Due to my strong and positive sense of ethnic identity, I understood my place in society and had a clear self-constructed definition of who I am. Accordingly, my ethnic identity had a strong influence on my sense of competence. That is, I knew what was important to me and what motivated me. Consequently, not only did my ethnic identity fuel my need to excel in college, it also solidified my commitment for further education.

Jackie's Story

Jackie was the first person I interviewed. She wanted to meet at my house for both interviews. Jackie later shared that she did not wish to meet at her house because she was “too embarrassed” of her living conditions. Jackie was particularly shy and soft-spoken. She would often use her long black hair to cover her face. She described herself as “hardworking and dedicated.” Jackie was born in the United States. She shared that she is 21 years old and is in her 4th year at a research university located in Southern California.

We started the interview by talking about Jackie's family background. Jackie's father was a Vietnamese refugee who fled by sea as a teenager in 1979. Facing attacks from pirates and chronic overcrowding, his journey as a boat person was highly

dangerous. Many refugees on the same boat failed to survive the perilous and long passage. Jackie said her mother is also a refugee, but emigrated to America by plane in 1990. Both fled their homeland due to the fear of retribution from the Vietnamese communist government. Jackie's parents met in America through a mutual friend and got married soon after. Sadly, they filed for divorce when Jackie was only 4 years old.

Growing up in a single-parent household was extremely difficult financially and emotionally for Jackie. After the divorce, Jackie's father was almost non-existent in her life. He visited her every other weekend during her elementary years. Then, soon after he remarried, the visitations dwindled to only once every 2 months during middle school. It was heartbreaking when Jackie shared that her father did not visit her at all throughout her high school years. Jackie expressed that this big cutoff with her father made her feel insecure and unwanted. It was not until Jackie's 2nd year in college that her father wanted to reconnect with her. But even so, it was just "a call every now and then." Jackie disclosed that growing up without a father made her lose trust and confidence in men.

Jackie confessed having a difficult time coping with her parents' divorce. Often times, she was stressed and confused about the legal custodial agreement and shared parenting obligations. Further, Jackie reported ongoing "money worries." Without a second income, Jackie and her mother had to rely on government assistance, such as SNAP and Section 8 Program (Housing Program), for food and shelter. Living in poverty, Jackie and her mother frequently had to relocate every time rent was raised.

Jackie shared experiences and challenges after her parents' separation:

Elementary was more challenging because there was more hardship in between child custody and just a lot of confusion in general as a kid, trying to learn the concept of like divorce and just going with my mom to counseling sessions and

those big government agency places with social workers and just waiting out in the lobby while she goes in and I had like no idea what she was doing. So that was more challenging, 'cause you're younger. . . . Also, I moved a lot . . . so there wasn't like a constant place where I went to school, so that was my experience. Because my mom had to work, I would go to different caretakers all the time. . . . One year it would change to another caretaker, after six months I would go to another different daycare person.

Due to the constant change in housing, Jackie attended seven different elementary schools. Accordingly, Jackie disclosed that the dramatic changes divorce introduced into her life made elementary school the most challenging of all her K-12 years.

Additionally, although born in the United States, Jackie's first and home language was Vietnamese. Therefore, Jackie did not learn English until she started elementary school. As a result, Jackie struggled with reading and writing in elementary school. Further, without a strong command of the English language, mathematics also presented a huge difficulty. Jackie had a hard time understanding basic mathematics vocabulary and struggled with problem solving. Further, Jackie expressed that her struggles with mathematics intensified during elementary school because her math teacher was incapable of working with ELLs. According to Jackie, this math teacher did not take into account her needs as an ELL in a content classroom and did not provide the necessary support needed to meet the rigorous math curriculum. Without the necessary interventions from her elementary math teacher, Jackie worked below her expected ability in mathematics and continued to struggle with the content matter until middle school.

Jackie's mother noticed that mathematics, reading, and writing presented many challenges to Jackie during elementary school. However, she could not afford extra tutoring services for Jackie due to their poverty status. Fortunately, Jackie was placed in

a school-funded program called Accelerated Reading during fifth grade due to her low reading level. This program taught Jackie to read for comprehension and gradually helped enhanced her English literacy.

Being a part of Boys and Girls Club also helped Jackie academically in elementary school. Since her mother had to work during the day and there was no adult supervision or care after school, Jackie's mother signed her up for the local Boys and Girls Club in lieu of childcare. With one-on-one attention, Jackie felt that the program helped develop her fundamental academic skills and offered her the additional tutoring she needed to overcome difficulties in school. The extra help was exactly what Jackie needed to overcome her struggles with mathematics. Further, Jackie's involvement with the Boys and Girls Club gave her a sense of belonging and increased her self-confidence.

Once in middle school, Jackie and her mother were able to find a more permanent apartment. Therefore, Jackie went to one middle school and had "a constant stream of friends." As a result of the stability, Jackie was more focused in school and found middle school to be a much more enjoyable experience.

During this time, Jackie's mother lost her job and began to experience major depression. She was later diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a brain illness that causes sudden shifts in behavior and mood. Due to her illness, Jackie said her mother experienced regular episodes of depression and mania. Being the only child from a single-parent household, Jackie had to rely on her friends for both emotional and academic support throughout these trying times. As stated by Jackie, her friends were a source of "social support" and "a motivating factor" for her to succeed.

A male co-worker, Jim (pseudonym), who worked with Jackie's mother as an engineer, knew about their struggles and reached out to help. Although he had no romantic ties with Jackie's mother, Jim offered financial support after Jackie's mother lost her job. Jim also motivated Jackie to do well in middle school. She shared:

So, he was a constant figure . . . just some stranger that my mom had worked with for a while, and then he took me under his wings and just helped me out. And, he had like successful kids as well, so, then they motivated me, like just having someone to look up to, like family members, they motivated, too.

With Jim around, Jackie found a father figure and role model outside of her family. Jim emphasized the importance of having a college degree. Therefore, Jackie wanted to follow in Jim's footsteps and be the first in her family to go to college. Unfortunately, Jim passed away a few years later. Jackie's grief was intensified because Jim had committed suicide due to some personal problems. Although Jim was no longer physically present in Jackie's life, she did not want to disappoint Jim. For this reason, Jackie pledged to keep Jim's "legacy" of academic achievement alive by excelling in high school.

In high school, Jackie's mother's high expectations also motivated her to succeed academically. Jackie associated her mother's high expectations to the Vietnamese culture and value placed on education. She said, "I think it [the Vietnamese culture] helped because everyone I encountered who were Vietnamese, they would, you know, talk about going to college, so my goal was set when I was young just to hear about that." As a result, Jackie knew from a young age that going to college was her only and best option after high school.

Jackie said she wanted to make her mother “proud” and trusts that higher education will enable her to climb out of poverty. When I asked about her drive and motivation, she responded:

Definitely seeing my mom struggle so much for me, so I want to struggle for her. Pay her back in a sense, I guess you could say, for all the sacrifices that she has made. So, I really want to see her live a happier life after I graduate and get a job. That’s what motivated me in high school . . . Just the hope for a better tomorrow.

In this way, Jackie used her mother’s sacrifices and poverty status as a source of self-motivation to achieve and excel in school.

The same high parental and cultural expectations to succeed that motivated Jackie were also sources of pressure for Jackie during her high school years. Wanting to make her mother proud, Jackie was motivated to complete all schoolwork to earn high grades. However, she often experienced a high level of academic stress arising from high academic pressures. The large amount of time spent on studying also contributed to Jackie’s excessive tension and anxiety. Moreover, since she was the first in her family to apply and go to college, Jackie deemed the hardest challenge to overcome in high school was “learning about the path to college.” To Jackie, high school was especially stressful because her mother could not help academically, even when “she really wanted to.” For example, with low literacy skills in English, Jackie’s mother could not help with the financial aid or college application process. Hence, to overcome this obstacle, Jackie would ask older students, her friends’ older siblings, and school counselors for advice on classes to take and requirements needed for college.

Jackie's middle school principal also helped academically. This principal kept in touch with Jackie throughout her high school years and encouraged her to pursue higher education. Jackie explained:

She [middle school principal] kept in contact with us . . . she reunited with the good kids, and she was the main person who helped us kids go to college. . . . She would meet up with us, have like meetings in the library after school every once in a while and helped us choose our colleges or helped us determine our goals, and helped us with financial aid. Just learning like little things about college in high school.

Accordingly, Jackie strongly believed that this middle school principal's guidance played a critical role in her success at the K-12 level, as well as her decision to attain a college degree.

Wanting to make her mother proud, Jackie enrolled in many Honors and AP courses in high school. Although these high-level classes were rigorous, Jackie had the support of her friends. She explained the important role her friends played in her academic success:

They were my biggest resource and motivation to get out of high school. So, because AP classes were a lot more difficult, there was a lot more struggle there, but I learned the charm of it by like working with friends. . . . I would speak to my friends, and mostly, my friends were the group that helped me the most.

In addition to her friends, Jackie also attributed her success in high school to her work ethics and engagement in sports, such as track and field. She stated:

I think because of my mentality, you know, hard work gets you somewhere and in track and field, we have this saying, "Always finish your race." So, I applied that to my schoolwork and academics as well. So, just fight through it and you'll be all right.

Being involved in track and field had many advantages. For example, participation in sports taught Jackie goal-setting skills, improved her resilience to overcome hardships,

and showed her the meaning of teamwork. Jackie said she transferred these skills to the classroom, which enabled her to endure and overcome difficulties at school. Track and field additionally helped her cope with stress. For example, as Jackie's mother's illness and symptoms worsened during her high school years, Jackie would often "hit the tracks and run" to forget about her problems. Jackie found that running relieved her stress and helped her stay calm and focused in times of turmoil. This coping mechanism allowed Jackie to persist amid her many struggles at home and school.

In addition to talking to her friends, Jackie found comfort when speaking with her high school counselors and teachers. Jackie shared an example of her geometry teacher, who always made her classroom available during lunch and after school to help students. Jackie also disclosed that her high school academic counselor was very "approachable and supportive." This counselor was particularly helpful during the college application process. However, she felt that there was a huge disconnect between the high school administrators and students. She mentioned that the administrators' "rough and tough exterior" made them "not very approachable."

Being the first in her family to apply and go to college, Jackie depended on college workshops, high school AP and English teachers, counselors, and friends to learn of the various college prerequisites and deadlines. She also sought their help to fill out the complicated college and financial aid (FAFSA) applications. Writing the two personal statements was especially demanding for Jackie. Fortunately, a UC reader was available during her junior and senior year in high school to help with the brainstorming, writing, and editing process.

Coming from a low-income family, Jackie was eligible for a fee waiver when applying to college. Jackie disclosed that she would not have been able to afford the application fee if it was not for the fee waiver. During the college decision process, Jackie selected the university with the closest proximity to home. She said that it was her obligation as the only daughter to stay home and take care of her mother. As the only child in the family, Jackie felt the burden of carrying all of her family's expectations on her shoulders. For this reason, Jackie expressed that going to an institution far away from home was never an option due to her "unique position in the family."

By the time Jackie started college, she felt that she had become "so Americanized" that she was beginning to lose some of her heritage language. Since Jackie spoke English at school, she rarely had the chance to practice her home language. Without formal training in the heritage language, Jackie had limited Vietnamese literacy skills. She described this language barrier when communicating with her mother:

Language barrier wise, when my mom say a vocabulary word I didn't understand, we would go back and forth with examples of what that word means. So, maybe she would use gestures, or she would use an example or reference something from TV that I've watched to help me understand what she's talking about.

The loss of Vietnamese fluency made communication between mother and child very difficult for Jackie. For example, her mother was unable to inquire about Jackie's academic progress. Consequently, she was not as involved in Jackie's education as she would like. This language barrier undoubtedly posed a challenge for Jackie in college. For instance, Jackie said her mother "lacks the know-how" to assist her in higher education. Further, due to her limited English language skills, Jackie's mother was "unable to understand major issues" related to Jackie's schooling; thus, could not help

improve Jackie's college experiences. Nevertheless, during our discussion about her college experience, Jackie consistently recognized her mother as an inspiration to succeed in higher education. She repeatedly spoke of her mother's sacrifices as her motivation to persevere.

Not having enough money was always a concern for Jackie and her mother; but the financial stress was especially overwhelming during her college years. Jackie's mother's health continued to deteriorate during her college years. Therefore, she could not work and had to rely on monthly government Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability payments and Medi-Cal for financial assistance. Jackie's financial aid package covered tuition and books, but not her commute to and from the university. Feeling the need to help out, Jackie took on a part-time job at the university's dining hall during her freshman year. She continued to work at the same job throughout her 4 years in college to earn extra income. To save money, Jackie organized her school and work schedule around her friends' agenda so that she could carpool with them. She also took the bus and used shuttle services for her regular commute. Jackie said, "Just to save money, because, you know, I'm the only person who's earning income right now, so it's important to save as much money and gas as I can." After 2 years of working and sacrificing, Jackie finally saved enough money to buy an old used car during her junior year in college.

Having a car allowed Jackie to explore her career interests and passion. As a Political Science major, Jackie said she aspires to become a lawyer. Being proactive, Jackie visited the university's Career Center. The center connected Jackie to different available resources and opportunities. For instance, she interned at a law firm and

participated in field studies for various private investigation firms during her 3rd year in college. Jackie enjoyed the challenge and experience, but identified time management as a major stressor in her college life. She felt it was exceptionally hard balancing school, work, internships, field studies, and at the same time, having the responsibility to take care of her ailing mother. To manage her time, Jackie used a planner to organize her academic and personal time. Although she had countless things going on, she regularly reminded herself the reason she was in college: to graduate, find a job, and get out of poverty. Hence, Jackie said she always put academic and study time first when prioritizing her time.

While in college, Jackie also planned time for social activities, such as joining the VASS Mentorship Program (pseudonym). She explained her reasoning for partaking in VASS:

I think because we would be involved with high school students. I wanted to be a part of something big, part of their lives. Maybe some people, you know, are struggling, and you could help them, or identify with some of them.

Overall, Jackie felt that her involvement with VASS was a “very positive experience,” because she experienced a sense of “togetherness, community, and unity.”

Our interview concluded with a discussion of Jackie’s support factors in college. Again, she accredited her academic excellence to her mother and friends. When asking about her self-efficacy and motivation to succeed, she responded:

Probably just thinking about the struggles we had, my mom and I, and just keep pushing forward and think of how lucky I am just to have my job and internship at school. Just being grateful in general. Just counting my blessings . . . and not letting the flicker of hope extinguish.

Listening to her stories and experiences, I could not help but admire Jackie for her dedication and persistence through it all. Not only was Jackie hardworking and dedicated, she was also very inspiring. Jackie did not let her struggles define her, but rather, used it to drive her goals and ambitions. As our interview came to an end, I asked Jackie to describe herself in a word or two and she responded, “perseverance” and “resilience.” Indeed, Jackie is one of the strongest individuals I have ever met.

Ngan’s Story

Ngan was the only Vietnamese American immigrant of my participants. She emigrated to America with her parents and younger twin brothers in the year 2001. Ngan was 8 years old when she came to the United States. At the time of our interviews, Ngan disclosed that she was 21 years old and in her final year at a research university located in Southern California. Ngan stated that she is the oldest of the three children in her family. She was very respectful and emotional. When I asked her to describe herself in a word or two, she used the words “determined” and “strong-willed.”

We started the first interview by talking about her journey to America. When I asked Ngan for the reasons why her family came to the United States, Ngan suddenly became extremely emotional and open in her responses to my questions. She explained that she is a very private person and this is the first time she has talked so candidly about her past experiences. She began by sharing her childhood memories of Vietnam. Her mother was an accountant and her father was a private math tutor back in her homeland. Ngan said her father does not talk much about the Vietnam War because it brings back many distressing memories for him.

Ngan carried on by describing her life in Vietnam. She said life in Vietnam was ordinary until one incident changed everything. With teary eyes, Ngan shared an incident that happened to one of her twin brothers, “My brother was healthy and normal when he was born, but he was taken to the hospital one day because of a high fever.” She continued by explaining that her brother was harmed by negligent care in Vietnam, leaving him with a unique neurodevelopment disorder. The symptoms of this condition were similar to autism. Due to this medical malpractice, Ngan’s younger brother became severely handicapped. This neurological disability has restricted Ngan’s brother’s capability to function mentally, socially, and physically.

Having a handicapped child was incredibly stressful for the entire family to accept and endure. Wanting to help, Ngan’s paternal aunt from America sponsored Ngan’s entire family in hope to find better medical care and treatment. Ngan and her family initially settled in San Jose, California, with her aunt after coming to America. Extended family relatives also provided a great deal of post-arrival assistance, such as food and clothing. Still, life in America was filled with constant instability for Ngan and her family. Wanting the best medical care possible, Ngan and her family traveled wherever treatment sounded promising. Ngan described her experience:

Mainly for treatments for my brother, we moved around the country a lot actually. I think it was like once per year. I remember I was always changing school when I was little, like once per year. So, we started in San Jose, and then we went over to Virginia, and I lived there until middle school. So, like in seventh grade, I came back here to California, and I’ve been living here ever since.

Ngan continued by reminiscing about her family’s struggles after their arrival in the United States. She shared they were living below the poverty line. She recalled, “My dad tried to get a couple of jobs, but there wasn’t much he could do, especially with the

language barrier.” Ngan’s mother became the sole breadwinner by working as a manicurist. She expressed that life was very tough for a family of four to live off one income. Further, due to the 24/7 care needs of Ngan’s disabled brother, one person always had to be present to provide at-home care and services. High out-of-pocket medical expenses further put greater burden on the family budget.

While facing financial hardship, Ngan’s family applied for several government assistance programs to assist with living expenses and bills. For instance, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program provided supplemental nutrition for Ngan’s younger brothers up to the age of 5. SNAP, or Food Stamps, helped the family pay for the cost of food. Due to their low SES, the family was also eligible for the Medi-Cal Program, which provided them with necessary healthcare needs. Moreover, SSI provided the family financial aid to meet Ngan’s disabled brother’s basic needs. The Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8) assisted the family to afford shelter. Last, but not least, Ngan’s father also sought donations from local churches, such as canned foods and used clothing. According to Ngan, her family had to rely on all these support services for their daily needs to be met.

When I asked about her immigrant experience, Ngan immediately spoke of her struggle with the language barrier as she started fourth grade in America. Having never been exposed to the English language, Ngan struggled in elementary school. Ngan felt that her limited knowledge of the English language negatively affected her academic readiness. She had difficulty with academic and oral language development. Her struggles were further exacerbated by teachers who lacked the knowledge and skills needed to address the needs of ELLs.

To help narrow the achievement gap between ELLs and their non-ELL peers, Ngan was placed in an ESL program at her elementary school. Because of her family's constant relocation to find the best possible treatment for her disabled brother, Ngan was put in a different ESL program each time she transferred to a different school site. This continual disruption made it difficult for Ngan to adjust and assimilate during her elementary years in America.

Ngan also struggled with mathematics during elementary school. She felt that learning and understanding mathematics required a strong command of the English language, which she clearly lacked due to her immigrant status. She described her difficulty with mathematics:

I think I was never interested in math. I thought word problems were hard, and the numbers just didn't make sense to me. In humanities, I like the fact that they tell me that there is no certainty so I know what to expect. In math though, they tell you there are rules, but then sometimes the rule just doesn't apply. So that just always really messed me up.

Since Asian Americans were often stereotypically associated with doing well in math, Ngan disclosed that she felt "embarrassed and ashamed" for not fitting into the "mold." She shared, "I got picked on for not doing well in math. Because, you know, they said things like 'you're Asian, why aren't you good at math?' Everyone was really puzzled and thought that I didn't care about school." Being a math tutor in Vietnam, Ngan's father perceived that mathematics was a difficult subject to grasp for many students. Accordingly, he comforted her and tried his best to help her improve her math skills through one-on-one tutoring and support. She said, "My father knew it wasn't because I didn't want to learn, but because it was hard for me to understand it. . . . He

just gets me.” Ngan’s father’s reassurance has boosted her confidence in herself, as well as enhanced her persistence to learn in elementary school.

Ngan also spoke of the acculturative stress she experienced as a Vietnamese American immigrant. In addition to learning a new language, Ngan additionally had to adapt to the new American culture. Changes in social institutions (such as, schools), food, clothing, and customs negatively impacted Ngan’s mental health. Ngan felt alienated at school. Her feelings of loneliness were intensified every time she thought about the extended family she left behind in Vietnam. Fortunately, Ngan was surrounded by a very supportive and diverse community. Ngan reported that the available networks of social support served as a buffer against the negative impact of acculturative stressors. She described:

When I came to California, the neighborhood that I lived in was very diverse. There were a lot of Vietnamese people actually, and a lot of other races, too. So I think the kids got along well. The Vietnamese community was a lot of help. Kids in school were used to having other children around them who didn’t speak English. . . . This made me feel like I belong.

When I asked whether she was ever discriminated against due to her race or ethnicity, Ngan quickly replied, “Yes, in middle school.” She continued:

They joke around all of the time, you know, when kids mock about how this is what your language sounds like. And I would be like, I’m not even Chinese. Or when they would pull their eyelids back to make them look very slant. . . . People made fun of my accent . . . and my Vietnamese name a lot, too. . . . That was really the biggest joke that I ever faced, actually, continually face. . . . And I would always just brush it off. . . . But I remember it always really bothered me.

Although Ngan was troubled by her peers’ bigotry, she decided to keep quiet for the fear of being “ostracized.” Due to her experiences with racism, Ngan deemed middle school to be the toughest transitional period of her K-12 years.

Academically, mathematics remained a challenge for Ngan throughout her middle school and high school years. However, she excelled in reading during middle school. Consequently, Ngan exited the ESL Program at the start of seventh grade after demonstrating sufficient progress in English. According to Ngan, reaching the proficiency level in listening, speaking, writing, and reading assured her cognitive and academic skills in middle school and beyond.

Achieving success in second language acquisition made high school a much more positive experience for Ngan. For instance, having English proficiency facilitated and enhanced her social skills. Ngan was able to better communicate and interact with her peers in high school. Correspondingly, she found it easy to make long lasting and fulfilling friendships. To Ngan, her friends were and have always been a source of emotional and psychological support. She explained, “Difficult times are much easier to bear with good friends.”

Being involved in extracurricular activities also enhanced Ngan’s social skills. She participated in multiple clubs and volunteered at various non-profit organizations in high school. These included the Red Cross Camp and the Young Senators Program. Partaking in these extracurricular activities encouraged skills development, such as promoting Ngan’s leadership skills. In addition, Ngan’s involvement in activities outside of school further developed her strong work ethic and solidified her dedication to community service by empowering her to become an active member of her community. Accordingly, working towards a cause further raised Ngan’s confidence level and boosted her self-esteem.

Ngan's participation in various extracurricular activities also introduced her to many role models. For instance, by interning for the Young Senators Program, Ngan had the opportunity to shadow the coordinator of the program. According to Ngan, the coordinator's powerful presence inspired and encouraged her to aim for greatness through one-on-one mentorship. The coordinator's passion for her work and commitment to academic excellence motivated Ngan to work towards her goals and gave her the impetus to overcome obstacles. Ngan said she continues to go to her for advice and strives to emulate the coordinator's success.

When I asked about the impact of educators in her K-12 years, Ngan told me she believes most of her high school teachers were very "helpful and encouraging." She spoke of a journalism teacher, who she would "go to for advice" when dealing with "personal problems or stressful situations at home." This teacher also encouraged Ngan to attain higher education and advised her set goals for herself.

Ngan also spoke of the challenges she faced in high school. She felt that some teachers exhibited racial biases and unrealistic expectations toward Asian American students. According to Ngan, several teachers at her school site regarded Asian American students as high achieving, and therefore, "expected more from Asian students." As a result, many Asian students did not get the support they needed, as compared to other minority student groups. She stated, "When I truly needed help, they [teachers] would brush it off, because they expected me to already know this. Or, they expected me to live up to my ability and study harder." She continued, "People see us as the model minority; but in actuality, I think we are really the forgotten and invisible

minority.” In this way, the model minority stereotype held by a few of her teachers caused a great deal of anxiety and stress for Ngan throughout her high school years.

Another source of pressure came from the high expectations of Ngan’s parents. Although they were notably supportive and loving, they were also very explicit about Ngan’s responsibilities. For instance, her parents clearly communicated Ngan’s obligations as the oldest child and a Vietnamese daughter. For instance, being the firstborn, Ngan was expected to always be a good role model for her younger brothers. She said that she is obligated to help teach her younger siblings right from wrong, as well as take care of them. Moreover, as the oldest child, Ngan disclosed also having the responsibility to take care of her parents as they reach old age. Furthermore, as a Vietnamese woman, Ngan was additionally expected to be “obedient, feminine, nurturing, and accommodating.” For instance, Ngan was responsible for the vast majority of domestic obligations. She remembered having to cook, clean, and take care of her two younger brothers during her high school years. It troubled her that her two brothers were not required to do house chores “because they are boys.” Ngan admitted that she thinks it was “unfair” that her parents treated her differently because of her birth order and gender. She shared:

I think I’ve known since high school that the older I get I would have to be the one to take care of my little brothers and parents. Since high school, like probably around junior or senior year, where they were like you should be looking into a five year or ten-year plan. For me, it was more like having a ten or twenty-year plan, because I’m the oldest, every decision I make would affect my family. So, I’m always trying to balance between what I want, my dreams, versus realities. So, my plan, my responsibility, or the responsible thing to do for now is to do well in school so I can help support the family in the future. . . . And also, because my parents said that I must fulfill my duties as a Vietnamese daughter, I am expected to be nurturing and obedient at the same time. I mean, I don’t agree

with this way of thinking . . . I think it's totally unfair . . . but I don't want to disobey my parents and make them sad.

Accordingly, Ngan understood the significance of having an education and vowed to be the first in her family to go to college to make her parents and brothers proud.

Ngan found the college application process to be “completely overwhelming.” She struggled with the college and scholarship applications, as well as with her personal statement. Ngan said her parents could not help much due to their language barrier. Being unfamiliar with the college process, she sought help from her high school counselors. However, the counselors could not provide the much needed help due to their overloaded work schedule. Further, she felt they only gave “generic answers” and did not provide assistance tailored to the needs of first-generation students. She expressed, “I felt so unprepared in high school. The counselors couldn't help us much. I think they were really overworked and didn't have time for us.” In general, Ngan did not find high school guidance counselors to be a great resource for college preparation.

For the abovementioned reasons, Ngan relied on her friends, their older siblings, teachers, and school offered workshops for guidance and support. Her friends and their older siblings instructed her and gave directions on how to obtain information about college. They advised her to visit online forums to find answers about the college search and application/ admission process. Her English teacher helped edit and provided feedback on her personal statement. She even stayed after school to help Ngan with her grammar. Further, AP teachers helped inform Ngan of the various college requirements and prerequisites. School workshops, daily announcements, college flyers, and messages on bulletin boards were also helpful in reminding Ngan of the upcoming deadlines for

college. Through hard work and support of various stakeholders, Ngan got accepted to her first-choice college, which was a major public research university located in Southern California. She took pride in her accomplishment.

Ngan's acceptance was jeopardized when she gave in to peer pressure. Knowing that she "already got in," Ngan began to "slack off" in the spring of her senior year. She started to spend more time with her friends and performed poorly in school. At the end of her last semester in high school, her grades plummeted and she received a D in two classes (AP French and Physics). This significant change in her academic performance resulted in her acceptance being rescinded. Ngan was devastated and ashamed. She felt that she had let her family down.

Wanting to "validate" her parents' sacrifices, Ngan vowed to never let them down again. She said, "I fear not doing well for my family. . . . I know that sounds really weird, but fear is a motivator for me to do well." In this way, Ngan's fear of failure and fear of disappointing her parents gave her the impetus to overcome obstacles and succeed.

When I asked about her motivation to pursue higher education, Ngan credited her parents' high expectations as her inspiration. She said, "They [parents] always push me and talked about how college was really the only pathway. . . . So, it just seemed like a natural progression of education." Accordingly, Ngan attended a nearby community college and was eager to transfer to her first-choice college, the same 4-year university she was rescinded from. To Ngan, this university was and had always been her top-choice due to its prestige and dedication to research. In addition, since the university was close to home, Ngan was able to commute from home. According to Ngan, the close

proximity allowed her to save money and permitted her to perform her duties as the oldest child. That is, to take care of her twin brothers and parents. Ngan explained, “My parents always wanted me to live with them. They really needed me at home.” Thus, with this mindset, Ngan was persistent to make the leap to a 4-year university and was determined to be the first in her family to earn a bachelor’s degree.

During her time at the community college, she visited the counselors and asked for tips on the transferring process. Ngan’s community college counselors helped her plan ahead and made sure she took all the required courses. Ngan admitted that although the counselors were a big help with scheduling and goals setting, she felt they did not have enough time to help students in distress. She reasoned that the cause might be that the community college had too many students and there was not enough time for individualized attention.

After 2 years at the community college, Ngan successfully transferred to her first-choice public university, the same research university that previously rescinded her college admission. She was elated to make her family proud. Ngan was enthusiastic about being the first in her family to go to a 4-year college. She looked forward to making wonderful discoveries and was even more eager to have more independence during her college years.

However, life in college was not what Ngan had anticipated. Her parents remained protective of her. Ngan had a curfew and was not allowed to go out past the specified time. Moreover, she was given more household chores and duties. The increased difficulty and workload in college, along with greater accountability at home, left little time for Ngan to participate in extracurricular activities or socialize with new

acquaintances. Ngan shared, “the increased responsibility undeniably demanded more of my time.” Consequently, Ngan expressed that she felt socially isolated and stressed in college. Overall, she found it draining to balance multiple obligations and said she struggled with managing time.

Indeed, college life was overwhelming for Ngan. To reduce stress, Ngan sought the support of her friends. She said, “I can always vent to my friends about things that bring on stressful feelings.” Having friends helped Ngan face challenges and encouraged her to be more resilient. In general, Ngan felt that her friends have been a significant source of support and strength because they were vital to her emotional and mental health.

As Ngan learned to take control of her time, she felt the need to explore potential careers. As a Political Science major, Ngan said she endeavors to become a lawyer in the future. Her parents supported the idea and permitted her to take advantage of multiple internships. Through interning, Ngan gained valuable knowledge outside of school. The real-world experience gave her a broader outlook on life. The hands-on experience developed essential and transferable skills, such as enhancing her computer proficiency and interpersonal skills. These internships additionally helped connect Ngan with experienced mentors, ones she hopes to emulate.

As we continued conversing about factors that supported her college success, Ngan shared that her English language fluency unquestionably facilitated her academic success in college. Her English ability helped her acclimate to the American culture and excel in class. However, Ngan admitted that her retention and usage of home language has decreased significantly in recent years. Ngan said that because she only speaks

Vietnamese with her parents, she has not been able to fully retain her primary language. Outside of her home, Ngan shared she uses English exclusively. Hence, Ngan blamed the erosion of her home language on the lack of exposure and interaction with the Vietnamese language.

The loss of Ngan's first language has resulted in miscommunication and intergenerational conflicts between her and her parents. Although she was able to understand Vietnamese, Ngan found it hard to express herself verbally to her parents.

She explained:

There were a lot of things that I was feeling, but because I was separated from Vietnam at such a young age, I couldn't really express myself. So, it was kind of hard to communicate. I think it's because I've been taken away at such a young age. Growing up, I've been trying to learn a new language and a new culture. But now, I couldn't express myself in Vietnamese. So, it was just a weird limbo at times.

I could tell the language barrier really troubled her. Ngan continued to express her frustration:

I remember one time, I was in the car, and I don't remember what I was mad at my mom for, but she would be like 'Oh, why don't you tell me how you're feeling and talk to me. And I'm just like, 'But I can't, I can't tell you how I feel.' I just don't know how to describe it. So, I had to open Google translate in order to tell her certain words.

Ngan shared that she wishes to retain her native tongue. She knew that being bilingual will help her connect with her parents, as well as relate to others. She disclosed that she has been working on improving her Vietnamese literacy and said she will continue to do so because she recognizes being bilingual as a real asset to her future success.

When I asked Ngan about other barriers she faced in college, she spoke of the lack of connection and interaction with faculty and staff. She felt that the faculty and

staff at both the community college and university were “intimidating” and “not approachable.” Further, she disclosed that a lack of Vietnamese representation at both institutions made her less engaged in the learning process and the college experience. Ngan suggested that positive interactions between students and faculty/staff would foster successful social and academic integration within the institution. She additionally stated that greater minority representation at colleges would expose students to minority role models and empower first-generation Vietnamese American students to succeed in higher education.

As we concluded our interview, Ngan discussed her ongoing financial struggles. She told me that financial stress was and continues to be a daily reality for her and her family. She said, “Finances are always on my mind, even when I’m at school.” Since Ngan was in her final year in college, she feared that her financial situation would affect her decision to further her education. Ngan said that she might decide to find a job after graduation, instead of continuing with law school, to help out her family. Before she left, Ngan voiced that her past experiences made her stronger and helped her realize that “educational success cannot become reality without determination, hard work, and resilience.” She promised me she will be a lawyer one day. She said she will find a way, she just does not know if she could afford it right now.

I admire Ngan for her unrelenting commitment and dedication to education. Certainly, Ngan’s stories of struggles and triumphs helped define her as a truly “determined” and “strong-willed” individual. I wholeheartedly respect Ngan for her resilience and applaud her self-motivation.

Tony's Story

Tony was the last person I interviewed. He was very well-mannered and well-spoken. His demeanor and behaviors exhibited confidence and pride. Tony was 21 years old and was about to finish his study at “a very prestigious university.” As a political science major, Tony said he ventures to become a renowned and influential human rights lawyer in the near future.

Tony said he is very content with the current state of his life. However, he expressed that he did not have a pleasant upbringing. Tony was born in Houston, Texas. He is the elder of two children. His sister is 2 years his junior. He recalled growing up in poverty and having to rely on government welfare benefits to get by. His parents emigrated to America as refugees after the fall of Saigon. Without formal education and transferable skills, Tony's parents could not hold a stable job. The financial distress put tremendous strain on their relationship and they were divorced when Tony was 2. Tony said his mother also blames their break up on his father's excessive drinking habit and addiction with gambling. Accordingly, she was granted sole custody of both children.

Growing up in a single-parent household, Tony had no recollection of his father. His mother cut all ties with his father soon after their separation. Without child support, she took both children and moved to Arizona. There, she relied on her extended family to help raise her two young kids. Tony admitted that his maternal relatives were extremely supportive during his childhood years. Nonetheless, he further confessed that his mother “was not a very good mother.” He reasoned that she was not nurturing and did not fulfill her maternal role. He explained that she was not around much, and when she was, she did not want to bear the responsibility. Tony explained, “I lived with my

grandma, aunts, and uncles while my mom was not around or looking for work.” The lack of a father and mother figure in his life made Tony feel abandoned and mistreated as a child. Thus, he attributed much of the blame for his struggles to his parents’ absence and neglect.

When talking about his primary education, Tony had a saddened expression on his face. He told me he felt his mother raised him wrong. He elaborated that his mother decided to move to Southern California during his elementary years due to an employment prospect. Tony’s younger sister did not want to leave Arizona, so her grandmother, aunt, and uncle established guardianship of her. Craving a mother figure, Tony made the decision to relocate with his mother. Regrettably, life with his mother was filled with disappointments. He described:

So, my primary education, I moved between states a lot. I moved between Arizona and California. I was a troublesome kid, my mom would say. And whenever she had a problem with me, she would send me to Arizona to live with my uncle. This is why I attributed her for not raising me well. If there’s a problem, I feel that you should deal with it rather than send it away to be dealt with.

In this way, Tony was put in a different elementary school each year. Consequently, he struggled to adjust socially. Making the transition to a new school was difficult for Tony each and every time. In addition to having to make new friends, he also had to be acquainted with new teachers. Looking back, the constant change in school environment and demographics of the new community contributed to Tony’s lack of motivation to engage in social behaviors with peers.

In addition to having trouble adjusting, Tony was often “picked on” for being “the new kid in school.” Tony disclosed that he was teased and bullied in elementary school.

Further, Tony felt he was discriminated against, particularly in Arizona, because he was of a different ethnic background. He said:

In California, I did not experience discrimination because I was surrounded by individuals that looked a lot like myself. In Arizona, I was “the Asian.” There were not many Asians in Arizona, so their preconceived notions of Asians were what they saw on T.V. or the movies. They expected me to know “Kung Fu” and Karate, be good at math, be good at science. . . . Growing up, I was made fun of because of my Vietnamese name. My [Vietnamese] name rhymes with many inappropriate things. It is not a typical American name so people would try to find ways to make fun of me for it. Being different was the new target.

The continued harassment and intolerance really bothered Tony. He felt isolated and stressed for being perceived as a “representative of the Asian community.” From this experience, he realized that discrimination is common for many students of color in school. Nonetheless, Tony learned to cope with prejudice and bullying. He used humor to combat against the effects of discrimination and racism. He also confided in a few friends he had to counteract the negative attitudes.

Learning to read and write in English was also a challenge for Tony in elementary school. Although born in America, Tony had to acquire ESL. He said:

So, Vietnamese was my first language. My mother didn’t speak much English at all, and so, I would have to communicate with her in Vietnamese. . . . And because I spoke Vietnamese at home, I couldn’t practice my English. And that was always my struggle.

As a result, Tony had limited English proficiency when he entered primary school. When in school, Tony found himself in an English-only environment. Tony asserted that he struggled to learn English and keep up in class during his early elementary years.

To help improve Tony’s literacy, his elementary school teachers provided numerous opportunities for him to enhance English language fluency. They helped him understand the language concept with explicit instruction and reviewed frequently using

multiple teaching strategies. Through exposure and practice, Tony became more confident in his English skills, which assisted in developing his self-confidence. Further, he acknowledged that his English language ability aided him academically. He understood the value of learning and knowing English. Knowing English allowed him to better communicate and exchange ideas with his teachers and peers. It also gave him the ability to access information and resources. Therefore, Tony was grateful for his “great” elementary school teachers because they were “a major contributor” in his life.

Once in middle school, Tony was still moving from school to school, state to state. The inconsistency in school environment, along with his struggle to connect socially, resulted in Tony’s disengagement in school. He became alienated and was unable to perform academically. He received a D in History. This was the lowest grade he had ever earned up to that point. His underperformance was not due to the difficulty of the subject, but rather a consequence of his lack of willingness to learn. He shared, “I didn’t necessarily struggle, but I had no motivation in school. I didn’t care. I was just there because it was a thing I had to do every day. I’d wake up, go to school, and I’d just do it.” Certainly, Tony recognized the adverse impact of the constant adjustments.

Tony considered himself an introvert, particularly in middle school. He was “socially awkward” because he was not integrated in the school settings. His repeated relocation hindered him from many opportunities to establish interpersonal relationships with peers and maintain close friendships. To improve his social situation, Tony made a conscious decision to join the tennis team at his middle school while he was in Arizona. The benefits of his involvement in sports transcended the borders of the court. He absolutely “loved” being a part of a team. Being involved in tennis gave him the chance

to engage in positive social interactions in a supportive and safe atmosphere with his peers. For once, he felt accepted in school. Further, the sport gave him a sense of purpose. Tony expressed that tennis taught him the importance of setting goals and staying focused. In hindsight, Tony believed this mental skill was helpful in increasing his commitment towards achieving his own personal and academic goals.

When I asked about his motivation to succeed in middle school, ironically, Tony spoke of his History teacher, the same teacher who gave him his first D. He said that this History teacher noticed his decrease in academic motivation and cared enough to “expect” more of him. She believed in his true potential and motivated him with verbal encouragement. Tony described her influence on his educational outcome, “She was like, ‘Don’t worry about it. I know you can do better.’ I just knew, while she gave me a D, she entrusted that I would do better. And I thought that to myself, too.” Her praises sent him a message that she wanted him to keep trying and succeed. According to Tony, her meaningful words and reassurance gave him the emotional support he needed to persevere. From then on, Tony pledged to try harder in school. He became more focused and got back on the right track. Knowing that she valued his education and success was a powerful and effective motivator for Tony to enhance his future educational outcomes.

Although Tony’s English skills improved since elementary school, he persisted to experience some difficulty in reading and writing in middle school. Wanting to overcome this language barrier, Tony decided to fully immerse himself in the language. He decided to stop speaking Vietnamese, even when he was at home or speaking with his mother. He explained:

When I hit a certain age . . . I stopped speaking Vietnamese . . . the assimilation process made me think that Vietnamese is not important . . . I also see that my mother is discriminated against a lot because of her accent and inability to communicate in English. . . . No one respect her because she can't speak English without an accent. . . . So, I began to only speak English with my mother. I decided, well, it's going to help her with English, and I need to work on my English.

Tony believed that he must master his English skills to “assimilate” into American culture. He also supposed that being fluent in English would help him obtain a well-paying job and a higher status in society. That is, knowing English would help him “escape poverty.” However, as Tony shifted from the use of Vietnamese to the use of English, he became less proficient in his first language. Accordingly, he was slowly losing his ability to communicate in Vietnamese.

Tony's cultural identity also suffered due to his primary language loss. Because he could not speak Vietnamese confidently, he felt less attached and devalued his connection to the Vietnamese community. Further, Tony confessed that while he used to practice Vietnamese customs and traditions as a child, his mother never really explained the norms or reasoning behind those practices. As a result, he had limited understanding of his ethnic heritage. Correspondingly, he did not maintain a strong tie to his culture of origin. He shared, “I never really identified with my ethnic community, my ethnic self.” Without a strong ethnic identify, he was unable to hold on to the manifestations of the Vietnamese culture and experienced a limited sense of belonging to the Vietnamese community.

The reduction in Tony's Vietnamese linguistic skill resulted in a different form of language barrier as he entered high school. He had difficulty communicating with his

mother, for she could hardly speak English. Poor communication additionally generated unnecessary distress and pain for both parties. He clarified his struggle:

So, I knew as I started high school that the language barrier was occurring. When I would say something, she would not know how to respond. We would get into a lot of arguments and I would just be like, well, why can't you understand me. And when she responded, she seemed flustered and angry. She was saying things, but it just didn't make sense to me.

Because of the language barrier, Tony felt even more distant from his mother and disconnected from his family. He admitted the despair over deteriorating relations with his family and wished to retrieve his native tongue.

After his promotion from middle school, Tony knew that the chronic uprooting and relocation needed to stop. The repeated change in school environment undeniably affected his mental health. Regardless of how many times he had moved, re-integrating into new schools was always a wrenching emotional and social experience for Tony. He no longer wanted to feel excluded or marginalized in school. Wanting to establish educational stability during his high school years, Tony sat down with his mother and pleaded, "I need to go to the same high school for four years because I can't keep moving like this." He told her that he wished for a different and more positive experience in high school. He needed a stable school environment and constant stream of friends. His mother listened and allowed him to stay in California throughout his high school years. According to Tony, going to one high school for all 4 years positively influenced his social, psychological, and education well-being.

Tony was much more social in high school. He joined the JV badminton team, Environmental Club, and Vietnamese Club. He even started the Orchestra Club at his school site. When I asked why he joined the Vietnamese club, Tony said it was his quest

for self-identity. He admitted he wanted to be with “people of the same ethnic group,” people he “could relate to.” Partaking in various extracurricular activities provided many additional benefits. For instance, it gave Tony many opportunities to take on leadership positions. In addition, volunteering in the Vietnamese community promoted his cultural awareness and encouraged him to embrace his roots. Community service further taught him the value of civic participation. Overall, extracurricular activities contributed to Tony’s personal growth. Tony learned about long-term commitments and the importance of making a contribution. Through social involvement, he also gained an understanding of advocacy on behalf of underprivileged individuals. Correspondingly, Tony became interested in issues regarding human rights and social justice.

Through active participation with extracurricular activities, Tony was able to establish a strong network of friends in high school. He described his friends as “high achievers” who were very “goal-oriented.” With positive peer influence, Tony was encouraged to plan for life after high school. His friends also challenged him through friendly competition. For instance, he began to take AP classes to be with his friends and to prove to his peers that he was “smart.” Further, his friends motivated him to overcome his challenges and fueled his ambition to “get into a top college.” He spoke about the value of friendship:

I was surrounded by students that wanted to go to great schools, do amazing things and who were more motivated. So that pushed me to apply to college. My friends, they were definitely my motivator in high school. . . . They were an outlet. I was able to rant about my life, my problems, and they would be able to empathize and understand. They wanted me to talk about what was bothering me. And they would show their sincerity like they cared.

Consequently, he took “almost all” AP classes during his sophomore, junior, and senior year. He loved the rigor. Additionally, his AP teachers talked about college and explained the subject requirements for higher education. Some AP teachers even invited an alumni panel to give advice about college. For the first time in his life, he felt like he had “a purpose in life,” and that was to go to college. Tony yearned for “prestige” and was “obsessed with rankings.” From that moment on, his mind was set on attending only “the best institution.”

Taking loads of AP classes demanded much of Tony’s time. He felt stressed and had difficulty managing time. To spare more time to study, Tony quit the JV badminton team. He also found a hobby in playing the violin to help him cope with anxiety and stress. Tony described his experience being a part of the string orchestra:

In high school, I took a big liking to music. . . . Since then, I’ve always found my home in music. . . . I was fortunate because music guided me. So throughout high school, I excelled in music. I was the concertmaster of my string orchestra for my junior and senior year.

Tony said he believes in the power of music. He found it to be a tremendous effective stress management tool because it helped relax his mind and reduce his emotional distress.

As we continued to discuss about factors of support in high school, Tony expressed his gratitude for his music teacher. Tony considered this music teacher his role model. He looked up to this music teacher because he exuded passion and had the ability to inspire. Tony recalled this music teacher commenting that Tony “will be the next Isaac Stern” (an accomplished musician) on his progress report. Ever since, this

teacher's praise had left an imprint on Tony. It motivated him to strive for greatness to make his teachers proud.

Although Tony performed well in high school, he always felt the negative impact of an absent father. Hence, during his final high school years, Tony attempted to reconnect with his estranged father. He described the searching process:

I Googled, a lot . . . I just wanted to meet my father. I had never met this man. I met him when I was two, but I never met him since. All I knew was his name . . . and everything that was on the birth certificate. So, I knew his name, his birth date, and I did a lot of investigating. Finally, I was able to contact him.

However, the reunion was not what Tony had expected. According to Tony, although his father "seemed excited," he felt it was not very sincere. Tony explained, "There was a motive that I felt he had." Consequently, Tony came to realize that the idea of reconnecting with his absent father was charged with romanticism and not grounded in reality. While Tony said he continues to make contact with his father from time to time, Tony disclosed that reconnecting with his father proved to be an extremely emotionally challenging task because he found it hard to heal old wounds.

We continued our interview with a conversation about Tony's college application and admissions process. Tony reemphasized that his friends motivated him to apply for college through positive peer pressure. When I asked about the role his family played in his preparation and decision to go to college, he said:

They [family] didn't directly encourage me to go to college . . . it was implied . . . I didn't feel like they were a good support system. They never guided me in the right direction. They were just expecting for the best. They were hoping that I would find a way. And I don't blame them for that, because they didn't know. They didn't know what comes after high school. They didn't know how to get into college and what are the things you have to do in high school to prep you for college. All they knew was that they trusted the educational system would guide me, and that was it.

As a first-generation college applicant, the lack of parental support and limited understanding of higher education made the process intimidating and overwhelming for Tony. The process was daunting because he did not know which college to apply to or how he could afford the cost of a higher education with his low-income status. Tony also did not know there was a myriad of colleges that needed letters of recommendations in addition to GPA and SAT scores until he started the application process. Tony had many concerns and questions when applying to and choosing where to attend college.

Fortunately, Tony's high school offered college prep workshops to aid students in the application process. These workshops were presented in conjunction with English classes to promote college awareness and planning. They were designed by counselors to provide students direction in their later years of high school. On one hand, the role of the counselors was to put students on a successful path to graduation and higher education attainment. On the other hand, the role of the English teachers was to assist students with the personal statements. Although Tony felt that both the counselors and English teachers did not provide enough personalized attention, he admitted that they helped with the college search and facilitated the application process. At this stage, Tony found school-offered workshops beneficial, because they guided him through the process of researching colleges, as well as completing and submitting applications to his schools of choice.

As a low-income student, Tony was eligible to receive four college application fee waivers. Tony claimed that if it was not for the fee waivers, he would not have applied to any colleges. He applied to three UCs and one CSU. Tony received acceptance letters from one UC and one CSU. However, he was rejected from his

“dream college.” He cringed at the thought of not getting into his top-choice school. Thus, he decided to take the community college route. He knew that beginning postsecondary education at a community college was his alternative pathway to an “elite” institution.

Tony was determined to transfer to a “prestigious” university. His best friend, who was attending a 4-year institution at the time, helped him with transfer preparation and admission requirements. After completing all required coursework at the community college, Tony applied to his dream college and was accepted. Tony felt proud and believed he was heading to down an amazing path and future.

Life in college was taxing and challenging. The increased responsibility and demand for time management gave Tony tremendous anxiety and stress. To make things worse, his family continued to give him psychological distress. According to Tony, their unsupportive nature and unrealistic expectations compromised his emotional and physical well-being. Tony disapproved of their parenting choices. Further, conflicts and “unresolved issues” among family members created a negative and unproductive home environment. Tony desperately needed to get away from his dysfunctional family unit. Consequently, during his junior year in college, Tony decided to separate from his “overburdened” family. He told me that he no longer speaks to his mother and only communicates with his estranged father through email. Yet, Tony said he continues to contact his younger sister on a regular basis. Tony felt that it was his role as an older brother to provide guidance and mentorship. Tony expressed that being the older sibling meant he must be a role model for his younger sister, “from childhood and into adulthood.” Therefore, due to his birth order, Tony was always protective of his younger

sister. Tony obviously understood his roles as an older brother and knew that his choices would affect his younger sibling. Therefore, he disclosed that he strives to be responsible and make good decisions to set a good example for his younger sister.

The separation from his family was a devastating financial event. Tony moved to a shared-residence near campus. Although Tony was glad to rid of his sources of stress, he struggled to make ends meet. His financial aid package only covered his tuition and fees so he took out subsidized loans to help pay for expenses. To gain financial independence, Tony worked five part-time jobs. He explained:

I worked a lot in college. I had five jobs. I worked at Wendy's, Abercrombie, Walmart, and Hollister. I was also a private music instructor for a music academy. I worked because I needed money and I knew I could work to save money for college. . . . Yes, I was working at a fast food joint. Yes, I was working in retail. But I felt like I was doing something with my time, which is something I felt was important.

Tony did not mind the hard work. He believed the increased obligations reminded him “obstacles were meant for overcoming.” That is, those jobs taught him responsibility and resilience. They also enhanced his people skills. Although exhausted, Tony was happy to be self-sufficient at last.

During his first year at the 4-year institution, Tony visited the Career Center on campus and learned that he could help fund his education through grants and scholarships. With a 3.9 GPA, Tony met the merit criteria to receive many awards. In addition to providing financial support, his participation in study and research grants also offered him the opportunity to undertake international undergraduate study. For instance, Tony had the opportunity to study abroad in France and Nicaragua. Further, through the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, Tony studied the stigma upon disadvantaged groups,

which included LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), women, and the disabled. The experience was “eye-opening” for Tony. He gained new perspectives and was able to better understand his own cultural biases and values. Overall, studying and researching abroad contributed to his personal growth and intercultural development.

Tony’s participation in extracurricular activities and internships in college enhanced his “sense of belonging” and social skills. As stated by Tony, being involved in various clubs on campus helped him “fit in” and broadened his social network. He joined the Undergraduate Student Government and the Political Student Association. He also interned for the Queer and Ally Student Assembly to advocate for LGBT rights and equality. Taking part in extracurricular activities and internships solidified his identification and perception of affiliation with the college community. Correspondingly, Tony identified this “sense of belonging” as key to his motivation in higher education.

Building good rapport with faculty and staff also contributed to Tony’s engagement in college. Even though Tony admitted that reaching out to his college professors was intimidating, he felt that the time investment was well worth it. By going to office hours, Tony was able to establish good relationships with his professors.

Accordingly, when I asked Tony to compare his K-12 and college experience, he said:

You get more individualized one-on-one time with the professors that have office hours. In high school, teachers often want to leave right after class and at lunch . . . so there isn’t really enough time to get that sense of connection with your teacher. In high school or K through 12, the teachers are there to teach you. There isn’t a real world connection and that’s what I got in university.

The connections with faculty provided both academic and emotional support. Their one-on-one guidance and assistance clarified course-related materials, as well as uncovered the source of his questions. Further, their mentorship also helped Tony explore other

related interests and available resources. In general, Tony attributed his academic engagement and success in college to positive relationships he had established and maintained with faculty and staff.

Before we parted ways, I thanked Tony for his openness and commended him for his commitment to education. Following our interview, I continued to keep in contact with Tony to provide mentorship. Tony said my advice helped him think about career options and develop solutions to career issues.

Themes Across Participants

The above narrative representations, including my own, presented detailed accounts of individual experiences in narrative form. Each story was unique and, in a broad sense, provided a portal into participants' experiences. Nonetheless, these narrations provided only snapshots of a larger story because they represented narrative data of just three participants. Voices of other participants in this study must be heard and honored to provide deeper insights into the experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students. A closer look into lives of first-generation Vietnamese American students also requires greater specification. I endeavor to give voice to other participants in the inquiry to honor their distinctive stories and broaden our understanding of their experiences.

As I analyzed data across participants, patterns and common themes began to surface. Four major themes emerged from the narratives: (a) the components of a diverse support network (such as, family, peers, teachers, and mentors/role models), (b) the critical role of engagement and involvement in extracurricular activities, (c) the influence of language and culture on identity formation and engagement, and (d) the

importance of self-motivation and resiliency in overcoming challenges. These themes emerged from the narrative representations above, as well as reflected in the voices of the other four participants that have yet to be told. Therefore, the purpose of this final section is to engage voices of the other four participants by integrating their unique stories with the major themes that are evident in the larger narrative and the stories above.

In essence, these themes are representative of individual voices that I will highlight in this section. In most cases, the same factor can pose both as a barrier and a source of support for first-generation Vietnamese American students. Accordingly, following is an amalgamation of other participants' narratives to provide context and add depth to the findings of this narrative inquiry.

Components of a Diverse Support Network

All participants in this inquiry were remarkably resilient at navigating diverse environments and getting their needs met. These individuals had assembled and relied upon a diverse support network, consisting of their family, peers, as well as mentors and role models from various parts of their lives. From the data, all participants identified family, peers, teachers, and mentors/role models as vital components of their support network. These students acknowledged the significance of having a strong support system in facilitating their educational success. To these individuals, the support of their families, friends, and mentors, or lack thereof, had a tremendous impact on their road to college success.

Family. The role of family emerged as a major theme across all participants' stories. To many participants, their nuclear family was a constant source of support. Most participants treasured their parents for their encouragement and sacrifice. Some

also acknowledged the value of their siblings and grandparents. These students shared that they appreciated their families' values and guidance. They believed their families provided an upbringing and environment that fostered learning both at school and in the home. However, some participants also noted the negative impacts of parental and family emotional/mental instability on their development and well-being. For these students, their experiences with instability in their families influenced their mental health and shaped who they are. Accordingly, family could be either a factor of support or an obstacle that disrupted their behavioral and emotional development.

Further, due to the lack of formal education and inadequate English skills of immigrant and refugee parents/families, even functional and effective family members did not know how to advocate for their children in school. While most parents were eager to help, they were incapable of participating in the process. That is, first-generation Vietnamese American youth came from families without a college-going tradition and their parents lacked the knowledge of the American educational system. Thus, participants need varied forms of support (such as, nuclear family, extended family, peers, and role models/mentors) to help them successfully navigate the K-16 educational pipeline.

Parents. Family stability was a critical source of support for the first-generation Vietnamese American students. Most students in this study identified their parents as key players in their educational success. To these participants, their parents were their first teachers and their motivators. Like myself, many participants spoke of the positive influence of parents. Similar to Ngan, Kate, Larry, and I were also raised in two-parent households. We concurred that we admired our parents for their strong ethics and valued

their opinions. All of us agreed that both our mothers and fathers played significant roles in our development and growth. Through modeling, our parents instilled strong values in us and contributed to our sense of responsibility. Kate explained how her parents' actions affected her:

What supported me were my parents. . . . I have the drive to succeed in school and give back to my community because my parents taught me that. I don't think you can learn this at school. There are just some things you can't learn in school. I learned about giving back through my parents because they are always so generous, even when we don't have much. That value comes from family. For example, my parents always send money back home to Vietnam, even when we don't have much money here. There's always something about giving back, but not receiving in return, that helped shaped me and how I perceive the world.

Larry, like his peers, also expressed high regards for his parents. He said that his parents encouraged him to take on challenges. From a young age, both of Larry's parents "provided honest feedback in a supportive and gentle fashion." They praised Larry for his effort, rather than his intelligence or abilities. For instance, his parents often commended him for his hard work and dedication to school. Larry said that the impact of his parents' praise was strongly linked to how he viewed his intellectual ability. Correspondingly, Larry felt that he was "well-equipped to deal with setbacks." With the encouragement of both of his parents, Larry enjoyed his K-12 years and said he was determined to invest himself in continual learning.

Siblings. Similar to the critical role of parents, siblings also played an influential role in their emotional and social development. For instance, Kate expressed her gratitude for her younger sister. For Kate, her sister was and continued to be her most cherished companion. She viewed sisterhood as her "most important friendships." Kate

considered her sister a great listener and said her sister shared her feelings and thoughts since they came from the same background. Kate described:

Another support factor is my sister . . . definitely my sister. She's the only individual that will ever understand me more completely than any other person that I'll ever interact with in life. So, even if I have a partner, I don't think he'll ever understand me the way my sister understands me. She understands my background and everything because we have similar backgrounds. She listens to me. She gets me. So, we connect in that way . . . that's why I'd say my sister is a big support. She's a very big part of my life.

Further, Kate's sister helped form her informal behaviors, such as "how to behave or act around friends and at school." In other words, their supportive relationship taught Kate the importance of cooperation, mutual respect, and the ability to deal with problems.

Like Kate, I also consider my two sisters to be my best friends. In addition to supporting me emotionally, my sister also helped increase my social competence. My positive interactions with my sisters improved my ability to communicate with my peers and the wider world. In general, my siblings played an integral part in shaping my social behaviors and emotional development. For this reason, I was able to relate to Kate because I understood the significance of sisterhood. To both of us, our sisters were a key source of social and moral support throughout our K-12 and college experiences. In essence, we both recognized sisterhood as a bond that is eternal.

Echoing Kate's and my beliefs on the value of siblings, Robert also found his younger brother to be a source of emotional and social support. To Robert, the close relationship he had with his brother was a key contributor to his mental well-being and resilience. Further, through consistent support, guidance, communication, trust, and companionship, Robert's younger brother played a major role in shaping Robert's "self-identity" and "future academic choices." In other words, Robert's positive interactions

with his brother guided his actions and behaviors. Thus, sibling relationship mediated Robert's motivation to succeed at the K-12 level and beyond through ongoing social support and encouragement.

Family instability. Although many students in this inquiry identified stability of the family structure to be a salient part of their lives, data also revealed that the nuclear family was not always healthy or functional. Some students were majorly affected by this disruption and instability in the family structure. Therefore, although family was recognized a key source of support for first-generation Vietnamese American students, family instability (when it occurred) was also associated with poor peer relations, greater emotional distress, and lower self-esteem.

Tammy's story is a perfect example of the negative effects of family instability. While Tammy was raised in a two-parent household, her experiences were unlike those of Ngan, Kate, Larry, and myself. Similar to Jackie, Tammy grew up in poverty and without a strong father figure. Although Tammy's father was physically present, he was emotionally disengaged and unsupportive throughout her K-12 and college years. According to Tammy, her father was insensitive, impulsive, and irrational, especially during childhood. Tammy said that his disengagement and emotional instability have had lasting effects on her emotional development. For instance, Tammy disclosed that she "distrusts men" and blamed her father for her poor peer relations.

Tammy's father's detachment from home meant Tammy's mother, alone, had to bear all the burdens of childrearing. Therefore, Tammy attributed her academic achievement to her mother. In spite of all her struggles, Tammy was the valedictorian of her high school and earned high academic achievement in college. According to Tammy,

her mother played an essential role in shaping her drive, personal values, and behavior.

To Tammy, her mother was a source of encouragement, comfort, and protection. Tammy shared:

My mom always tells me that there's more to learn. Growing up, she encouraged me and told me that I'm smart. She would say, "Oh, you're so smart. Just push yourself a little more and then you can do this." And I'd think, "Yeah, I'll do it." Also, she would teach me how to draw or teach me something new. And when I think I have done everything, she would teach me something else, like spelling or knitting, so I have always had that drive to learn something new. That's what I wrote in my personal statement . . . that my mom taught me to be a lifelong learner. . . . So I think my mom influenced my decision-making because I always want to make her proud.

Like Jackie, Tammy placed her mother at the center of her life. As her first educator, Tammy's mother had a strong impact on her learning. Through ongoing reminders and guidance, Tammy's mother helped her organize priorities in high school and supported her desires to pursue higher education. Further, Tammy also explained that her mother's teachings and positive attitudes motivated her to take charge of her own educational journey. In this way, Tammy felt accountable for her own failures and successes.

Similar to Tammy's experience with her father's disengagement and neglect, Tony and Robert also came to accept their parents' absence as a hurdle to overcome. Like Tony, Robert disclosed that he was a product of divorce at a very young age. Robert was only 3 years old when his parents separated. Robert's mother had sole custody of Robert and his younger brother. To cut all ties with their father, she made the decision to move to North Carolina after the divorce was finalized. As a result, Robert had no recollection of his father. Robert talked about his father's absence as an adverse experience in his early childhood. Psychologically, Robert associated the lack of father-

child relationship with his childhood depression and anxiety. Throughout his elementary school years, Robert felt lingering symptoms of stress, which resulted in many sleepless nights and occasional problematic behaviors (such as, temper tantrums and anger).

Robert's stress level escalated when his mother fell into a depression as part of her grieving process and grew distant from Robert and his younger sibling. Her depression was destabilizing for Robert because she became emotionally and mentally disengaged from her children. Robert's mother was uninvolved and uninterested in her children. Robert said he knew from a young age that his family was dysfunctional because his father was not around and his mother was not much of a mother figure. Unlike other participants with much parental support, Robert felt his parents failed to provide the emotional needs he yearned for. For this reason, Robert shared that his parents' abandonment interfered with his educational success. He expressed that being a child from a dysfunctional family contributed to his low self-esteem and limited his expressions of needs and feelings.

Clearly, family structure influenced children's development and educational outcomes. Family instability posed great challenges for first-generation Vietnamese American youth. Students from unstable or unresponsive families faced a number of emotional, cognitive, and social obstacles that impacted their child and adolescent development. In cases where there was instability, extended family was often a vital component in closing some of the gaps.

Extended family. In most cases, when parents failed in their duties, grandparents stepped in and became an essential part of the family system. For participants who lacked parental participation, grandparents served as surrogate parents and provided a

sense of family continuity. In this way, grandparents assumed the parenting role as a result of the failure of their own offspring to be effective parents.

The supportive role of grandparents was evident in both Tony and Robert's stories. Like Tony, Robert's mother relied on extended family members to look after her children. The support of Robert's maternal grandparents made all the difference. Robert's grandparents took over the parental role and were responsive to his needs. As Robert's surrogate parents, his grandparents raised him as their own son. To Robert, his grandparents provided the father and mother figure he lacked. Their parental figures substituted for the deficit of care and affection at home. In consequence, Robert was adamant that their role in his life contributed to his ability to overcome the negative psychological impacts of his parents' divorce. Robert disclosed he continues to look up to his grandparents as a source of support and guidance.

Raising grandchildren was a daunting challenge but Robert's grandparents perceived it as a reward. To Robert, his grandparents were his learning models. Since the early years, his grandparents were his first teachers. Their love and positive attitudes about education inspired Robert to take charge of his own educational journey. He explained:

My mother figure within the family is really my grandma because she was the one who taught me everything. I feel really blessed to have my grandparents. They took care of me, love me, and supported me. I really do love them. . . . I want to make them happy and anything short of making them happy is a failure in my eyes. They motivated me to do better in school and in life. I want to make them proud.

Robert further disclosed that he valued and respected his grandparents because he learned manners and appropriate rules of behavior from watching them. Although Robert

admitted that his parents' inaccessibility and absence had a profound influence on his mental health, he also said that he felt extremely "fortunate" to have his grandparents in his life. Robert shared that their role was profoundly important to his emotional, social, cognitive, and developmental growth. To Robert, good quality experiences and home learning with his grandparents contributed to his childhood and intellectual development.

In general, most participants deemed their families as inspiration and sources of support. Nonetheless, parents were not a panacea. Some individuals reported their parents' emotional instability, disengagement, and neglect to be an obstacle that hindered their development and psychological well-being. In cases where absentee parents failed to fulfill their duties as parents, extended family members (such as, grandparents) played a critical role in helping participants move forward. In addition, due to the limited educational backgrounds and English proficiency of immigrant/refugee parents, many were unable to advocate and assist their children as they navigate the American educational system. Hence, having a diverse social support network consisting of family, peers, mentors, and role models was key to facilitating and promoting first-generation Vietnamese American students' success. Clearly, there are different dimensions to experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American youth and a close examination across participants helps deepen our understanding of the various layers of support.

Peers. Outside of the nuclear and extended family, students in this study recognized another integral source of support: their peers. All individuals repeatedly expressed their appreciation for peers and friends throughout their K-12 and college educational experiences. These students considered their friends as a key source of emotional and psychological support. Participants reasoned that their friends listened to

their feelings with understanding. Further, friends also provided an outlet for participants to communicate their opinions and vent their emotions.

First-generation Vietnamese American college students in this study expressed that peers with similar life experiences and backgrounds were able to listen, motivate, and provide valuable guidance. Most associated healthy friendships with their emotional and social development. Further, these students disclosed that friends made them feel accepted and helped lessen the isolation through companionship. As trustworthy confidants, loyal friends were significant in helping participants in this study deal with stress and challenges.

Similar to other participants, Tammy appreciated her friends because they provided support during difficult times. At the middle school, high school, and college levels, friends provided Tammy stability during times of transition and stress. She said:

My friends, they understand me and help me with school and life. . . . My friends encourage me to do well in school. They motivate me. . . . Whenever there is a problem and I don't know exactly how to approach it, I would just go to a friend who is dealing with the same thing, or has dealt with the same thing. . . . It helps just knowing that they are there for me when I needed them. . . . I don't know what I would do without them.

To Tammy, her friends enriched her life and improved her mental health. Not only did they boost her sense of belonging in school, they also helped reduce her stress. Through active listening and meaningful feedback, Tammy's friends helped her cope with challenges and steered her from negative behaviors. For example, Tammy expressed that she could always openly ask her friends for advice and suggestions on how to solve personal problems. Therefore, Tammy considered her friends as one of the greatest factors of moral support during her K-12 and college years.

Similarly, Larry acknowledged his friends to be a source of academic support. During high school, Larry's friends assisted with the college application process. For instance, when Larry had trouble remembering all the activities he had participated in throughout his high school years, his friends reminded him and helped to brainstorm a list of extracurricular activities. They additionally helped Larry explore different essay topics while he was working on his personal statements for college. At the college level, Larry's friends helped him navigate the new college environment. They connected Larry with many services and resources available on campus. Due to the rigor and increased workload of assignments in college, Larry and his friends also planned many peer study groups to help each other prepare for midterms and finals. These study groups gave Larry the opportunity to share knowledge and information about different courses. By studying with his friends, Larry was able to review class materials and seek clarification on challenging concepts. Hence, Larry believed that he learned faster and more efficiently working in a group setting among his peers.

Like other participants and myself, Kate and Robert also recognized the strong influence of friends on their academic success. During our teen years, we found it helpful to have friends who were going through similar times because they helped ease the anxieties of the situations. Through positive peer influence, friends motivated Kate and Robert to succeed in school. Kate explained:

When I was growing up, I generally had good friends and I chose them because my mom would always say, "If you are near black ink, you'll get dark; if you're near a light, you'll be bright" [speaking Vietnamese]. Which means, you are influenced by the company you keep. If you are closer to the bright, or good friends, then you should do better. So, I actually put that in my mind when I chose friends and I made sure that happened. I'm not saying that your friends will lead you to bad roads. It's how you choose to interact with them. I believe I

have good friends because they supported me. During my high school years, my friends motivated me to take more AP classes and maintain a high GPA. In college, they encouraged me to study more and not procrastinate. My friends definitely help me focus and do better in school.

Likewise, when asked about the value of his friends, Robert answered:

My friends, they know my personality. They know when I struggle and how to help me. In a sense, my friends are a group of people I can turn to, trust, and talk to about anything. They are really supportive and understanding. . . . They help me better myself because they see a better side of me, the person that I hope and want to be.

Like all other participants and myself, Kate and Robert deemed positive peer relationships to be a support factor in their personal and academic lives.

In general, first-generation Vietnamese American college students disclosed peers played a large role in their lives even while their families remained to be significant. All participants considered peer friendships and family support to be important in providing them with social and emotional support for dealing with life's barriers and challenges. Many reported having fond memories and fun moments with their friends during their adolescent years. They also spoke of the positive influences of their families in their motivation to learn and succeed in school. Thus, participants said that these personal relationships are vital components of their achievement and mental health.

Mentors and role models. Another significant system of support for first-generation Vietnamese American college students in this narrative inquiry outside of family was mentors and role models. All participants spoke about specific role models and mentors who supported them as they navigate the educational pipeline. Like the others, Tammy, Robert, Kate, and Larry also attributed their academic success to

individuals who positively affected their lives and choices. To these high achievers, their role models and mentors motivated them to advocate for themselves and their goals.

For Tammy and Robert, their AP teachers in high school were their role models. Tammy explained that her AP Biology teacher in high school encouraged and inspired her to “strive for greatness.” Robert aspired to be like his AP English teacher. Tammy and Robert both said they respected their AP teachers for their abilities to make students realize their own personal and academic growth. During their high school years, both Tammy and Robert looked to these AP teachers for guidance and support. These two participants identified their AP teachers as some of the most influential individuals from their high school years.

As for Kate, her mentor and role model in college was a Vietnamese American sociology professor. Like myself while growing up, Kate could not understand why there was no Vietnamese representation at her schools. So it was surprising to Kate that her college environment reflected that. She was glad to see ethnic minority figures in higher education. Kate shared her feelings about her professor:

So, my mentor in college happens to be Vietnamese American and I was very happy about that because I didn't feel a connection talking to any other professors. I guess I just didn't feel connected to them because I don't think they could relate to me. I know they could teach me the concepts and methodologies, but they could never really understand my experiences as a Vietnamese American student. That is why I really appreciate my Vietnamese American professor . . . for the first time in my life, my role model happens to look like me, who might have similar backgrounds as me, and could relate to me.

Kate was glad to see diversity represented at her educational institution. Kate stated that she idolized this professor because the professor was a minority role model who had achieved the American dream. Kate disclosed that she looked up to this professor in

college and often went to her for advice during office hours. As a role model of the same ethnicity and gender, this professor had left a strong impression on Kate. According to Kate, this professor showed a sincere interest in helping minority and underprivileged students. Through words and actions, this professor shared Kate's frustrations and understood her enthusiasms as a first-generation Vietnamese American student.

For Larry, it was his high school basketball coach who inspired him to behave and achieve in school. He explained:

My basketball coach was the best role model I have ever had. . . . He would do what he preaches. To be on the team, he expected us to do well in school and we better not get in trouble, too. He taught me that persistence, determination, and hard work are crucial ingredients in life. He said that you have to be strong and work hard on your own because no one else cares more than you do. . . . He just opened my eyes to how hard I have to work to get to where I want to be.

By having a coach as his mentor, Larry was able to get advice on his personal and professional development, such as how to be successful on and off the court. Larry appreciated the constructive criticism he received from his mentor because it helped him reflect on his strengths and areas for improvement. In short, Larry's basketball coach was an influential individual from his K-12 years. This coach was a leading influence on Larry because he encouraged Larry to perform to his best ability, gain confidence, improve his social skills, and develop strong character. Thus, Larry recognized his basketball coach as a trusted mentor, tutor, guide, and counselor who motivated him to take performance to the next level and achieve his best.

Having positive role models and mentors emerged as one of the greatest support factors for first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study. All participants looked up to their mentors for their guidance and support. Participants saw them as their

confidantes with whom to air frustration, to bat ideas around, and to seek advice.

Participants recognized that these key individuals played a significant role in helping them overcome both personal and academic challenges. Moreover, these mentors also helped enhance participants' potential, skills, and performance through honest and meaningful feedback. Further, many participants acknowledged that their role models and mentors have imparted important social and personal values to them. Most agreed that their role models led by example. To many, the actions of their role models and mentors created the most lasting impression.

Overall, participants in this study demonstrated great adaptability and were able to navigate different worlds. Most disclosed that they had a strong network at home; however, their narratives revealed that family support alone was not sufficient. All participants said they also relied on other systems of support, such as peers, teachers, coaches, mentors, and role models for extra help and guidance. Clearly, there was no single best model of support. To these first-generation Vietnamese American students, having a diverse support network was paramount to them overcoming the many challenges and obstacles of life. As I analyzed for themes across participants, I realized that even the most resilient, at times, require a comprehensive system of support to succeed in school.

Role of Engagement and Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

As evident across narratives, first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study used engagement as a way to engage peers and other adults outside of family and academics. Therefore, participants' engagement in extracurricular activities transpired as a key source of support for enhancing students' knowledge, personal

growth, and providing access to other available resources (such as, connection to peers, mentors, and role models).

In looking across participants' narratives, it was evident that all students viewed extracurricular engagement as a channel for learning and a well-rounded education. These youth said their involvement in extracurricular activities (such as, debate team and academic clubs) helped them learn and improved their educational outcomes. Echoing their points of view, I also saw value in extracurricular participation. As mentioned in earlier sections, my affiliation with ethnic organizations during my college years crystallized my sense of community and culture. Community events further helped me gain valuable life skills and expanded my intellectual interests. Akin to Jackie, Ngan, and Tony's perception of the value of extracurricular activities, all other participants further conceived the role of engagement as the fuel for educational opportunities and higher levels of learning (such as, critical thinking/problem solving, career development, and intellectual growth).

As disclosed by many students in this study, various academic counselors and several teachers were seen as underprepared individuals who lacked the competencies to work with ELLs or first-generation students. Accordingly, students deemed their involvement in academic and non-academic clubs, sports, music, community service, and volunteer work as beneficial because these activities offered students access to greater opportunities for personal, social, and professional development.

As music gave Tony access to his role model (high school music teacher), Larry similarly shared that his involvement in basketball introduced him to his coach, who became a mentor throughout his high school years. Moreover, Larry's involvement in

sports also acquainted him with other supportive peers, such as his basketball teammates.

Larry explained:

Initially, I joined basketball during high school because I wanted to keep myself busy. I didn't realize that being involved in sports would help me connect with so many great people. Like, my basketball coach and other players on the team. . . . They [basketball teammates] all became my closest friends in high school. . . . Basketball taught me teamwork and group responsibility. I also learned the importance of individual responsibility. . . . My coach became my role model and mentor, too. He helped increase my mental endurance and physical strength. Because of that, I feel attached to my high school and want to make him [coach] proud.

Larry's participation in sports led to his success in high school. To Larry, his engagement in sports provided psychological, social, and academic benefits. Indeed, basketball played a positive role in giving Larry higher self-esteem, provided access to a wider network of friends, and improved his educational achievement through mentorship.

As with Larry's positive experiences with basketball, Kate also regarded engagement in sports as an avenue for increasing educational success at both the K-12 and college levels. Like Tony, Kate played tennis in high school. Participating in tennis helped Kate emotionally, mentally, and physically. As a tennis player, she experienced lower tension and anxiety in school. Moreover, tennis helped relieve stress and enhanced Kate's cognitive abilities. She said, "Tennis requires tactical thinking and alertness. So, I would say my involvement with sports improved my mental skills." Kate further added other benefits associated with such a competitive sport. She stated that tennis increased good "sportsmanship" and fostered a "positive code of ethical standards." For instance, tennis helped Kate develop her integrity and strong character. Under the direction of her tennis coach, who also became her mentor, Kate's level of determination and

perseverance were tested. Thus, Kate felt that being challenged on the courts helped her become “stronger over time.”

While Robert and I were not involved in sports, our engagement in academic and non-academic organizations improved our aspirations for academic achievement at the K-12 level and desires for higher education. In addition to increasing our network of friends and supports, our participation in cultural clubs also helped with self-identity. For example, my organizational affiliation with ethnic organizations during my high school and college years helped with my ethnic identity development. Like me, Robert joined various cultural-based student clubs during high school and college. He felt these organizations provided a forum for advancing his interests and awareness of issues concerning the Vietnamese American population. Robert shared, “Joining Vietnamese Club (pseudonym) increased my understanding and respect for different cultures. . . . In a way, my participation in these clubs cultivated a sense of unity and consideration for diverse populations.” Further, Robert felt that these ethnic/cultural clubs also provided “informal yet supportive environments” for him and peers to interact. From his engagement, Robert gained access to good friends and mentors through extracurricular cultural activities and programs. During our interview, Robert recognized the significant role of his college ethnic club advisor. To Robert, this club advisor served as a mentor to support all members. The advisor was also effective in providing Robert with community and university connections (such as, available resources on and off campus). In general, Robert’s engagement in extracurricular activities led him to his club advisor, who was a source of information of advice and other resources.

In brief, participants in this study elucidated the significance of social engagement. A close examination of narrative data across participants revealed the critical role of student engagement in enhancing student learning and promoting positive youth development. To first-generation Vietnamese American students in this inquiry, extracurricular participation helped facilitate connections and foster positive interactions between students and their peers, mentors, and role models. In addition, student engagement also yielded higher levels of learning. Thus, student involvement in extracurricular activities was a critical learning opportunity for first-generation Vietnamese American youth.

The Influence of Language and Culture on Identity Formation and Engagement

Across participants, culture was the thread that moderated the support network and engagement of first-generation Vietnamese American students. Data analysis revealed four aspects of culture: (a) language barrier, (b) communication gap, (c) gender roles, and (d) birth order. In essence, culture weaved through and managed these four facets. First, the language barrier participants experienced created a generational divide between students in this study and their parents. This language gap limited students' connection and communication with their parents, which was an integral part of their support network. Second, largely due to culture, gender roles and birth order also played a role in participants' self-identification (such as, their self-expectations), as well as influenced the extent of in which their engagement further developed their support network. Hence, this section will explain the impact of language and culture on participants' identity formation and engagement.

Language barrier. Students in this study were very committed to their culture. However, data revealed that the influence of culture was a double-edged sword. On one hand, the value of culture was seen as an advantage for many participants in this study for it carried high expectations for academic success. Many participants disclosed that norms about educational achievement were clearly defined in the Vietnamese culture. To these students, the culture of high academic expectations motivated them to do well in school. On the other hand, several students also confessed that their status as first-generation students created cultural tensions. For example, all participants identified language barriers as a challenge to their academic success. These students said that the challenge of overcoming the language gap made it difficult for them to navigate and excel in school.

Like other immigrants and refugees, Ngan and I struggled to learn the English language after our arrival in the United States. Being LEP, we were eligible to receive ESL instruction in school. Excluding Ngan, all other participants were born in America. Interestingly, although born in the United States, the other six participants disclosed that they, too, suffered a language gap similar to other ELLs. Living in immigrant families, these American-born participants shared that they did not learn English until they entered elementary school. Consequently, they also struggled with English grammar, reading comprehension, and writing.

Like Jackie and Tony, English was not the primary language of Kate, Tammy, Larry, and Robert (although born in America). Since these participants learned only Vietnamese at home, they struggled to reach English language proficiency and lagged behind their English-only peers in mainstream classrooms. At the elementary level, Kate,

Tammy, Larry, and Robert read below grade level. Some participants revealed that they were classified as LEP and were placed in ESL programs designed to help ELL students learn both English concurrently with course content in mainstream classes. Kate, Tammy, and Larry exited the ESL program during their elementary years. Robert continued to be identified as an ELL even at the middle school level due to his struggle to perform assignments in English. Robert described his language barrier:

I was raised by my grandparents and they didn't speak English to me. So, you know, I had to learn Vietnamese first. Growing up, I struggled learning Vietnamese at home and faced difficulties learning English at school. . . . Sometimes, I feel like I can't speak both Vietnamese and English that well. . . . I feel that I'm not great at both languages. . . . I took English as a Second Language classes in elementary and middle school. My teachers told me I had an accent when speaking English, which was really confusing to me because I was born here. I know that my English isn't perfect. . . . I know reading and writing were never my strong suits. I think it might be because I never fully developed my first language before learning my second language.

Likewise, Larry, Tammy, and Kate expressed their frustration learning ESL. To these participants, grammar was the most challenging aspect of the English language. All faced difficulties with word order and tenses. To them, learning English required a change in basic sentence order. For example, in English, adjectives must come before the nouns they describe (such as, "red car"). However, in Vietnamese, the word order must be switched so that adjectives come after the noun it modifies (such as, "car red"). Thus, very often, the English sentences Larry, Tammy, and Kate produced in their Elementary years sounded strange to their ears. Tammy elucidated her language barrier:

I'm bilingual. I learned Vietnamese before learning English in kindergarten. So, I was exposed to bad grammar from a young age. I'm used to bad grammar. My parents used bad grammar and taught me to pronounce English words incorrectly. So, in my opinion, it led me to a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding of the English grammar.

Overall, American-born Vietnamese students in this study struggled to learn English because they spoke mostly Vietnamese in their homes. These students confessed that they did not have sufficient mastery of the English language to excel in mainstream classrooms during their early years in school. Some students, such as Robert and Larry, revealed that they continued to face difficulties with reading comprehension and writing throughout their middle and high school years. All students who were placed in ESL programs recognized that the added English instruction they received in school indeed helped them bridge the language gap. In this way, both immigrant and ELL American-born students said that ESL programs helped meet their academic needs.

However, some participants have reported that they felt some K-12 teachers were unprepared to work with ELL students. Like Ngan and myself, both Jackie and Robert shared that at least one of their K-12 teachers failed to meet the needs of ELLs. Their struggles with unprepared teachers echoed my story. I recall not having adequate models and exposure to learn how to speak or write in English, particularly during my middle and high school years. Further, a few of my English teachers at the middle and high school levels did not know how to support my oral and academic language development. Consequently, I felt these teachers lacked the skills and knowledge to address my needs as an ELL. Likewise, in Jackie's story, she disclosed that her math teacher in elementary school did not possess the skills necessary to provide effective instruction to ELLs. Similarly, Robert claimed that several teachers in his elementary and middle school were "ill-prepared to work with ELLs in their classrooms." Robert said these teachers lacked the understanding of how to best educate the diverse student population in their

classrooms. As a consequence, Robert felt he did not demonstrate proficiency in academic areas, such as writing and reading, during his K-8 years.

In general, both foreign-born students and those born in America experienced the language barrier in school. All participants were identified as ELLs during their initial years in American schools, because they were either immigrants themselves or came from immigrant families. All spoke Vietnamese at home and had varying levels of literacy in their native language. As these ELLs navigated the American educational pipeline, they voiced the value and significance of effective ESL programs in developing their academic literacy across subjects.

Communication gap. As students achieved academic proficiency in English, many experienced the erosion of their primary language. According to some students, the erosion of their first language resulted in many language-based problems, such as cultural tension and frustration, due to the absence of a common language in their homes. In this way, the communication gap between first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study and their parents affected participants' family support network, because they were unable to effectively voice their needs and feelings with their families.

In relation to the language gap participants shared, participants repeatedly spoke of the role language played on the intergenerational conflict they experienced with their parents and families. All seven first-generation Vietnamese American college students in this study and I recognized the difference in language skills between parents and children. Across participants' stories, students shared that they attended American schools in which they used English daily while their parents and families were not literate in English. Hence, the language gap between two generations made it difficult for children

to communicate with their parents and older family members as they transition and assimilate into the English-speaking world. Like Jackie and Ngan, who confessed their frustration when unable to express their emotions and convey their thoughts in Vietnamese to their mothers, Tammy also found it difficult to communicate in her native tongue. Tammy explained:

I find it hard to communicate with my parents when I need to use more advanced terms, like political, science, or academic terms. So, I would have to use English words or I would have to elaborate, or use sound effects and gestures to get them to understand. . . . When they still don't understand, I try to use another approach, or I would just give up. But I do try to get them to understand the best I can.

Mirroring Tammy's story, Robert also expressed his anxiety when speaking in Vietnamese with his grandparents. He said:

Living with my grandparents was hard because they didn't understand English. It was hard on me because I'm really not that fluent in Vietnamese as well. I mean, I can understand what they're saying, but I just can't express and answer like how I am supposed to. I tried my best to guess the right words to say . . . but then sometimes it's still unclear to them. And in the end, I have to answer in English or result to pointing and acting out what I mean to say.

As first-generation Vietnamese American students in this inquiry learned English, they tended to not retain their first language. For these individuals, the erosion of their primary language occurred because English became the dominant language used in school and society. In consequence, participants slowly began to lose their Vietnamese language skills due to the decrease in frequency of first language usage. Accordingly, participants shared that they utilized the Vietnamese language to an insufficient degree because they spoke Vietnamese only at home.

Clearly, participants were discontent with not being able to communicate confidently with their own parents and family members. As a result, several participants,

such as Tony, Jackie, Tammy, and Robert said that they were making a conscious effort to retain their Vietnamese language skills. These students recognized the advantages of being bilingual. As stated by Robert, “Knowing a second language will help me connect with my family and others within the Vietnamese community.”

Overall, there are also different dimensions to barriers to effective communication. For instance, Ngan and I were both born in Vietnam; thus, the challenge we faced with language involved our inability to understand the English language after our arrival in America. Unlike Ngan and I, other participants were not foreign-born; yet, they also struggled with the English language because they spoke Vietnamese at home. Contrastingly, as students grew older and assimilated into the American culture, their primary language was eroded and the challenge became their lack of fluency in Vietnamese. To participants in this study, first language attrition had led to miscommunication and misunderstanding between parents and children. Consequently, experiences in regards to the language gap faced by first-generation Vietnamese American students varied widely among participants.

Gender roles. Culture also influenced gender dynamics. According to several female students, their behaviors and levels of engagement were ascribed by the Vietnamese culture. For example, several students in this study experienced social isolation due to parental overprotection and influences of the traditional Vietnamese culture. Some even shared their distressing experiences with strict rules and obligations as a result of unrealistic parental/family expectations and cultural values (such as, gender roles and birth order).

Although Tammy was a valedictorian in high school, she confessed she did not have a fulfilling K-12 experience. Tammy said her parents were extremely traditional. They were protective of her and were against participation in extracurricular activities. Her parents supposed her involvement in extracurricular activities would come at the expense of academic success. Tammy explained:

They [Tammy's parents] felt that since extracurricular activities don't concentrate on academics, they are not advantageous to academic outcome. They just wanted me to focus on my schoolwork. . . . Because of this, I felt isolated, especially in high school. . . . Sometimes, I felt lonely because I didn't have a lot of friends. I mean, I had a few close friends . . . but I think I would have had a lot more friends if my parents allowed me to join more clubs and sports.

Tammy continued by expressing how her lack of engagement in different extracurricular activities affected her college experience. For Tammy, her sheltered upbringing was the culprit for her weak social skills; which transcended through college. Because her parents were overly protective, Tammy did not have many opportunities to practice and hone her social skills. For this reason, she felt "unprepared" and "insecure" when interacting with others in the college setting. Tammy described:

I don't have many people experiences . . . social experiences. Oftentimes, I come off as bossy, blunt, or inconsiderate . . . but I don't mean for it to come out that way. I think my lack of social skills is due to the fact that I wasn't presented with social conditions and situations where I can learn from. . . . I was never really exposed to that because of my isolation. . . . My parents were just very protective . . . they just wanted me to focus on getting A's in all my classes during high school. . . . That's why I had such a difficult time adjusting in college. Like, it was hard for me to make new friends and ask for help from other people. You can say that I was a bit antisocial in college because my parents distanced me so much. I was too sheltered. In a way, I felt my isolation from social activities prevented me from becoming an even better student.

As we talked about the negative consequences of overprotective parenting, Tammy said she felt her parents were strict and overly protective of her due to her gender. As a

consequence, Tammy believed cultural expectations around gender limited her engagement and opportunities for learning.

Although gender roles did not come up quite as often in the interviews of Jackie, Larry, Robert, and Tony, the topic did come up in the interviews of Tammy and Kate; thus, it bears mentioning here. Like Ngan's family, Tammy's parents also viewed assertiveness and competitiveness as "unfeminine," and therefore, were not considered as "acceptable female behaviors." Tammy stated that her father, in particular, expected her to "fulfill traditional feminine qualities" (such as, being soft-spoken and passive). In the home, Tammy was not to speak her mind and was expected to be obedient at all times. Although Tammy identified herself as assertive and competitive, she noted that those characteristics were not valued in her family or Vietnamese culture.

Hence, Tammy said it was a constant battle as she strived to be true to herself while living up to the expectations of "an obedient Vietnamese woman." She described her experiences at home and her struggle to balance the two worlds:

Culturally, I was taught to think in certain ways and views. For example, my parents want me to be obedient and soft-spoken because I'm a girl . . . that's why I'm trying really hard to keep my voice loud right now. I'm just used to speaking softly. I feel that a lot of things they exposed me to, like the certain Vietnamese values, will not help me to be successful in life. Like, to be successful in school, you need to be loud and clear. You need to be direct. You can't just be passive all the time. You have to be aggressive and go for things that you want. So, it's really contradicting for me. I have to go back and forth between the Vietnamese expectations and American values. It's confusing. Sometimes, it just gives me stress and I think I have a mental disorder . . . thinking about it gives me a giant headache, like a migraine.

Similar to Tammy, Kate was also expected to conform to the gender roles established from Vietnamese cultural expectations. Kate said she developed anxiety and stress in response to differences in cultural gender roles. According to Kate, Vietnamese

women were often responsible for domestic chores (such as, cooking and cleaning) due to the patriarchal way of life. Both Tammy and Kate shared that they were under strict parental supervision because of their gender. Therefore, these cultural expectations were sources of stress for Tammy and Kate. Kate disclosed how experiences with gender inequality lead to her psychological distress:

My parents always remind me that I'm Vietnamese American, that I am both Vietnamese and American. . . . So, I find it hard to negotiate my identity between being Vietnamese and being American. For example, being outspoken for a girl is not normal in the Vietnamese culture. Having an opinion about politics and stuff like that is not normal. But, I'm a Political Science major. I want to speak my mind and I'm very interested in politics . . . my parents think it's not normal. So, I have to remind myself to be more girly around them . . . but I don't really agree to this way of thinking because I don't think I need to stop myself. I am an outspoken woman and I have no shame in it. But, it's not just my parents; it's other Vietnamese people, too. They don't understand that they shouldn't force women to domestic roles. I shouldn't be the one to always clean the house. I don't believe in that. I think it should be equal share. So, that's something that I continue to struggle with. I find it hard to balance my Vietnamese and American culture.

Kate identified herself as a forthright and assertive individual and was very proud of it. However, she also recognized that these behaviors were not considered acceptable for a Vietnamese woman in her household. In general, both participants were evidently troubled by the gender stereotypes around them and wanted to challenge the unequal treatment of Vietnamese women. Tammy and Kate opposed the held beliefs about the expected behavior and characteristics of Vietnamese women, and men, and considered gender inequality as a barrier to their success.

As for myself, my experiences with gender issues were quite different in my family. I grew up with mostly females in my household; my father was the only man. Having only girls, my parents encouraged us to be strong, confident, and assertive. They

constantly told us to voice our opinions and thoughts. My parents empowered us by listening to us and complimenting on our specific accomplishments. Thus, in my opinion, self-confidence starts at home.

In short, as participants in this study reflected on their K-16 educational experiences, some disclosed that the traditional Vietnamese culture and gender-specific expectations ascribed by culture limited their social engagement, as well as, impeded their opportunities to explore the real world and narrowed their support network. Tammy and Kate lacked the chance to engage in many extracurricular activities; and thus, were unable to reap the benefits of successful participation. These individuals blamed their strict parents and traditional Vietnamese values for their feelings of alienation in school, lower levels of motivation, and missed academic opportunities.

Birth order. Besides gender roles, birth order also created pressures for first-generation Vietnamese American students in this inquiry. As stated earlier, six participants (Kate, Tammy, Ngan, Robert, Larry, and Tony) were firstborns and had one to two siblings. When I asked participants in this study to expand on the influence of family expectations and cultural values, some participants spoke of their birth order and its effect on their obligations and life choices. For these students, being the firstborn meant they had a greater sense of responsibility for their actions.

Like Ngan and Tony, the firstborn in their families, Larry and Robert also expressed a duty to look after their younger siblings. Similar to stories of Tony and Ngan, these participants felt they had to lead and mentor their siblings through modeling expected behaviors. Therefore, they strived to conform to the norms of society in order

to set a good example for their younger brothers and sisters. Larry spoke of the pressure to be a role model for his siblings:

I am the oldest child in my family. I have one younger sister so I am supposed to be a role model for her . . . she looks up to me and always compares herself to me. So, my mom expects me to keep her straight and set a good example for my sister. . . . My parents want me to be the first in my family to get a college degree. They expect me to be successful so I can carry the family name with pride. I know they expected more of me because I'm the oldest child. They want me to motivate my sister to do well. They have high expectations for both of us because they want us to have a better life than theirs.

Synonymous with Larry's experiences as the eldest sibling, Robert also endeavored to set a good example for his younger brother and make his family proud.

Robert described his family's expectations of him:

My family, especially my grandma, expected straight A's and nothing less than a 4.0 GPA. She wanted me to do really well in school so my younger brother can follow my footsteps. During my high school years, she wanted me to take AP classes and she was always pushing me to try harder and do better in school. I would get yelled at if I don't give my all. . . . It was hard. And it wasn't just my grandma; it was like the rest of the family, too. They all wanted me to be the first to go to college. It was just a lot of stress. I feel like I cannot fail because I will let my family and younger brother down. They expected me to give my all and that is what I am determined to do.

Overall, Jackie, Ngan, Tony, Tammy, Larry, and Robert all expressed the pressure to perform and succeed, either by their own intrinsic motivation or by their families' expectations. As the oldest sibling in their families, Ngan, Tony, Tammy, Larry, and Robert felt the pressure to serve as role models for their siblings, in school and at home. These participants described their pressure to be responsible and work hard to lead their brothers and sisters down the right path. Larry and Robert also expressed the demands of being the first in their families to obtain a college degree. These students said they worried about their siblings' well-being and were very protective of them. Like

Robert, Larry also feared that he could not meet these high expectations and often experienced high levels of stress due to the “need to be perfect and succeed.” Evidently, the drive to succeed was ingrained in these first-generation Vietnamese American students from a young age and the idea of failure would cause them to experience a great deal of stress. Accordingly, these high achievers disclosed that they put the burden to succeed on themselves and admitted that they would accept nothing less than a stellar performance in school.

Overall, culture moderated participants’ identity formation and their opportunities for engagement. Participants highlighted the impact of language and cultural expectations on their identity formation and behaviors. Across narratives, language barriers affected Vietnamese American ELLs’ performance in school and satisfaction at home. Several participants also expressed high levels of stress due to birth order and traditional cultural expectations placed on Vietnamese women. As firstborns, these individuals were expected to be assertive, responsible, and task-oriented. Several female participants in this inquiry also expressed their difference of opinion on the roles of women in the Vietnamese culture. As Vietnamese women, participants said they were expected to be feminine, proper, obedient, timid, and submissive. In the stories of Jackie, Ngan, Tammy, and Kate, participants disclosed experiencing many occasions of mental stress for fear of not living up to the high cultural and parental expectations and the constant worry of letting their families down. Consequently, this differing opinion, gender inequality, and unrealistic expectations often resulted in high incidences of psychological distress for first-generation Vietnamese American students.

The Importance of Self-Motivation and Resiliency in Overcoming Challenges

All of the participants in this narrative inquiry were motivated to demonstrate excellence in school. All expressed a commitment and passion for learning. To all participants, education was a means for upward social mobility. Most connected their motivation to their desire to climb out of poverty. Like myself, they hoped to break the cycle of poverty by obtaining a college degree. In my conversations with these participants, many displayed inner strength, persistence, and confidence to move out of poverty.

Like Jackie, Ngan, and Tony, Larry was also born to poor, under-educated parents. Larry described his hardships living in poverty and expressed a hunger to escape his current financial situation. Growing up without many material assets, Larry articulated a great deal of ambition to be the first in his family to earn a college degree. He was determined to do well in school in order to break free of poverty. Larry discussed his aspirations and dreams of doing better than his parents:

My family was and is still very poor. My mom can't find work and my dad is making minimum wage. My dad drives a really old car that would break down frequently. Life is tough when you don't have money. . . . Growing up, my family stayed with my grandparents. Then, we moved into a mobile home when I was two or three years old. We moved to an apartment a few years later. And now, we are still renting. We have been renting for the last eleven years. So, I guess I would classify us as low-income. I remember having a very limited wardrobe compared to other kids. I always felt they had more. I was also bullied for the old clothes I wore. . . . That is why I want to do well in school. . . . I want to become a doctor . . . so I can be successful in the future. . . . I don't want to always think about money, or lack thereof. . . . I want to be better off than my parents.

Similarly to other low-income participants, Robert also had the drive to escape poverty. He aspired to better a life, for himself and for his family. Robert realized that

low-income status was just his past and current condition; he refused to accept that poverty is his permanent identity. He shared his experiences:

My family is really poor. I know this for sure. Growing up, I had a lot of hand-me-down clothes. I remember one incident in middle school when I had to wear girls' clothes because none of my clothes would fit, and we couldn't afford to buy new clothes. My uncle tried to help out and gave me some of his old clothes, but they were too big. So, I ended up having to wear my cousin's jeans because she outgrew them, but I could fit them. And one day, one of the girls in my class called me out on it. I was really embarrassed so I denied it. From that point on, I only wear basketball shorts because they were more convenient . . . I mean, they are one size fits all. Also, I remember I would often trade clothes with my friends when my family couldn't afford to buy me new clothes. I hate being poor. That's why I'm working so hard now to escape poverty. I know I will have better days . . . I just know it.

The same theme of motivation and perseverance to combat poverty surfaced across participants' narratives. All consider education to be a key factor in determining future earnings and success. Like Larry and Robert, Tammy and Kate were also trapped in destitution. Their families lived paycheck to paycheck. They admitted not having toys during their childhood years and lacking presents on their birthdays. In school, they were also targets of ridicule for wearing used clothing bought at thrift stores. Using their financial struggles to fuel their motivation to succeed, Tammy and Kate endeavored to rise up from the bottom through education attainment. Both shared a passion for learning and promised to make great strides against poverty. Tammy and Kate said they believe education is a tool to attain social mobility and break the poverty cycle.

In general, participants' low SES affected their motivation, educational choices, and outcomes. Similar to other participants, Tammy, Larry, Kate, and Robert recognized the role education plays in attaining higher social and economic positions. Most

expressed their hunger to escape poverty. Despite adversity, these participants used their hardships and struggles to foster optimism, strength, and hope for a better tomorrow.

Indeed, first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study were highly motivated, resilient, robust, strong, and driven individuals. All of the participants' stories were defined by their perseverance and resilience to overcome obstacles. These high achievers had a resilient mindset that enabled them to conquer life's barriers and challenges. They were adept at navigating different worlds, as well as managing cultural tensions. Their perseverance and positive outlook helped them cope with stress and enabled them to recover from hard times. Even through adversity, all participants retained a positive view of the world and had the confidence that they will one day prevail. All participants in this inquiry accepted that certain circumstances, such as being born into poverty, could not be changed. Thus, instead, they focused their attention and energy to circumstances that they could alter, such as moving towards goals and tasks that were achievable. In short, maintaining a hopeful and optimistic outlook enabled participants to expect that better things will occur in their lives.

Conclusion

This chapter gave voice to individuals whose voices are often invisible in American educational institutions. Like Jackie, Ngan, and Tony, all of the first-generation Vietnamese American college students who participated in this narrative inquiry have contended with various challenges and barriers. Living with immigrant families, many referred to the differences in language skills as an obstacle when communicating with their parents and older family members. Growing up in poverty, all were too familiar with not having enough money to meet basic needs for shelter and

clothing. Parental and cultural expectations also contributed to students' high levels of stress. Across narratives, participants admitted that their anxieties often resulted from their perceptions of both cultural and parental expectations.

Participants also spoke of the wide array of factors that supported them in their quest for higher education. All identified their family and friends as vital variables to their healthy development. To these participants, families and friends played an essential role in their social and emotional development. Participant also expressed their gratitude to various role models and mentors for their vested time and ongoing support. Further, participants credited their self-motivation and resiliency as the basic drive for their actions, choices, and behaviors.

Through narrative inquiry, participants' backgrounds and stories, along with their educational experiences and perspectives, were elucidated. Participants shared their unique stories of success and barriers while navigating the K-12 educational system and higher education. These findings laid the underpinning for conclusions, implications, and suggestions for policy, practice, and research that could support other first-generation Vietnamese American students in overcoming social, cultural, institutional, and cognitive barriers to success.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings and Interpretation

This narrative inquiry explored the K-16 educational experiences and academic life of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students. The central research question of the study is: What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students at a 4-year college or university? By means of storytelling, this study gives contour and voice to these understudied, disadvantaged students from their own perspectives to impart greater understanding of the factors that support the scholastic achievement of first-generation Vietnamese American youth and the barriers that hinder their success using a student retention and anti-deficit approach. In this final chapter, findings from approximately 25 hours of semi-structured interviews with seven first-generation Vietnamese American youth will be interpreted through the two research sub-questions. Overall conclusions and implications are derived from findings related to each research question. Recommendations for policy, practice, and further research are offered for both K-12 and college levels. The conceptual framework guides the interpretation of the personal, social, and institutional influences that affect the experience of this population and the possible interactions among these contributing factors as students navigate the K-16 educational pipeline using a value-focused approach.

Research Sub-Question 1: “What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as hindering or impeding their K-16 educational success?”

First-generation Vietnamese American youth in this narrative inquiry faced cognitive, social, and institutional challenges to success as they traversed the K-16 educational pipeline. Data revealed three key barriers that restricted the road to academic success for first-generation Vietnamese American youth: (a) family instability and difficulty with family support for education; (b) a language barrier and communication gap between generations; and (c) lack of assistance from educational institutions, particularly K-12 institutions. This section will review key barriers as they relate to the literature.

Family instability and difficulty with family support for education. One of the key challenges first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study faced as they navigated the K-16 educational pipeline was family instability and lack of parental/family support in education. Participants indicated that disruptions to their family system impacted their emotional, psychological, social, and cognitive development. Findings suggested that both family stability and structure play an important role in children’s outcomes and mental well-being. Across participants’ stories, extreme psychological and emotional distress ran through the generations. Early experiences of family instability shaped participants’ outlook and had lasting impacts on their behavioral and cognitive development. For example, without stable, responsive parents, first-generation Vietnamese American youth like Jackie, Tammy, Robert, and Tony experienced limited access to the family support they need to overcome obstacles at home and school. Further, in cases of divorce, students from single-parent households often experienced

feelings of rejection, confusion, depression, and low self-esteem. These youth also tended to lack parental attention and fare worse financially than other participants from two-parent households.

The abovementioned finding echoes those of similar studies (Fan et al., 2012; Han & Lee, 2011; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Swail et al., 2003; Ying & Han, 2008) focused more broadly on students of color. According to scholars, family instability is linked to negative behaviors and depressive symptoms. Children from dysfunctional families, lacking emotional support at home, tend to experience anxiety and demonstrate more negative behaviors in and out of school. This narrative inquiry adds to the literature by presenting data on the lived experiences and mental health of first-generation Vietnamese American students exclusively.

Lack of parent/family ability to assist their children in education was further described by first-generation Vietnamese American youth as a challenge to student success in general. While many Vietnamese American parents were a means for emotional support, oftentimes they were uninvolved in their children's education, because they did not know how to play an active role in their children's educational journey due to their limited educational backgrounds. For instance, because youth in this study came from families without prior knowledge of the American educational system, their parents often could not help with schoolwork or the college application process. Limited parental involvement in children's education had lasting effects on their academic achievement. This finding is consistent with research (Fan et al., 2012; Han & Lee, 2011; Jacobson, 2007; Ravitch, 2007; Reid, 2014; Swail et al., 2003; Tadesse, 2014; Ying & Han, 2008) regarding the critical contributions of family participation on

children's educational outcomes. Across ethnic groups, Fan et al. (2012) found that a lack of parental advising, aspiration for children's education, and participation in school functions is linked to lower levels of student intrinsic motivation and engagement. While students in this study did not demonstrate lower engagement or motivation, they described challenges in both areas, making their educational success all the more difficult.

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory argues that familial capital influences the educational experiences of students of color. This framework underscores the importance of family support in fostering youth's academic success. Further, the critical role family involvement in schools also aligns with Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement, which suggests that students rely on social factors (such as, parental and family support) to cope with social issues and handle social challenges. However, findings from this study raise questions about the impact of family structure on student outcomes, as well as the desire and ability of immigrant families to support and participate in their children's education.

Language barrier and communication gap. First-generation Vietnamese American youth came to school linguistically unprepared for immersion and participation in English-only environments. While most participants in this study were born in America, all were classified as ELLs in school because they did not speak English at home. As a consequence, they were not equipped with the English skills needed to compete and succeed in school. All participants felt that their lack of English language proficiency negatively affected their ability to participate in education. For instance, their limited English vocabulary restricted their ability to understand and access course

materials across academic disciplines. Although ESL programs helped improve students' English abilities, and students appreciated this support, some participants felt that school staff and faculty were ill-prepared and unequipped to work with minority, first-generation, and ELL students. These youth indicated that some teachers and school officials lacked understanding of this student population, as well as knowledge and application of culturally relevant effective teaching strategies/practices.

The abovementioned finding indicates that the language barrier, along with ill-equipped ELL educators, widened the achievement gap and contributed to first-generation Vietnamese American youth's low self-esteem and academic outcomes. This finding mirrors many studies (Kao, 1995; Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998) focused largely on the struggles of foreign-born ELLs and found parallel experiences in first-generation students who were born in and outside of the United States. As data from this narrative inquiry revealed, all first-generation Vietnamese American youth learned and spoke only Vietnamese at home; thus, they did not learn English until they entered American schools.

Notably, as first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study achieved proficiency in English, many reported a gradual loss of their first language. Language attrition was experienced by most participants who routinely spoke more English than Vietnamese. As a result, these youth struggled to be understood at home and were unable to express their thoughts when communicating with family. For Tammy, Ngan, Robert, and Tony, the process of English language acquisition coincided with their Vietnamese language erosion. For example, these participants found it difficult to remember particular Vietnamese words when conversing with their families. They also felt that the

language acquisition and attrition they experienced was a forced choice, because they were obligated to only use English at school and were not given the opportunity to practice or preserve their native language. Accordingly, some participants who experienced first-language attrition felt alone at home and had to rely on the use of symbolic gestures and manual signing to convey their ideas. This loss in Vietnamese fluency made it very difficult for first-generation Vietnamese American youth to communicate and seek support from family members with limited English language skills (who were an important part of their social support network). While previous studies involving Asian American minority youth (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Zhou & Bankston, 1998) have found evidence of a language barrier, they did not highlight the emergence of a communication gap between immigrant parents and children as the children lost their “native” language. This narrative inquiry revealed that first-generation Vietnamese American students struggled to retain their native language as they achieved English language fluency.

Although Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth theory suggests that minority students’ linguistic capital enables them to communicate and network in multiple languages, the abovementioned finding highlights a tension that may exist around language. Findings from this inquiry imply that we must take a closer look at the association between first language retention and second language acquisition, as well as their impact on communication, or lack thereof, between students and family. This is consistent with Swail et al.’s (2003) geometric model of student persistent and achievement in that students’ cognitive factors (such as, language skills) are significant aspects of student success. This issue impacts student success because it provides

awareness on language readiness of Vietnamese American students, as well as offer insights on the need for institutional actions (Swail et al., 2003) to address literacy needs of these youth.

Lack of assistance from educational institutions. Institutionally, another major barrier youth in this inquiry faced was a lack of preparation for and assistance in schools. Despite having high levels of determination, first-generation Vietnamese American youth felt that their needs often were not met as they navigated the American educational system. As the first in their families to apply for college, first-generation Vietnamese American students felt academically unprepared and under-assisted when navigating the college admission process. Many also said they attended schools in low SES communities that were stretched for resources. Hence, due to limited pre-college resources and services at the K-12 level, students felt they lacked the knowledge and skills required for higher education. Further, many were not aware of available sources of support and how to access them. Sadly, unequipped and overburdened school counselors further exacerbated students' struggles as they failed to provide guidance with college readiness and planning. Many youth in this study disclosed that their academic counselors and school administrators at the K-12 level were unable to respond effectively to their special challenges (such as, limited knowledge of the requirements and expectations for higher education) and did not provide the necessary individualized attention, due to their excessive workload. For these reasons, Ngan identified herself the "forgotten and invisible minority" rather than the model minority.

Once in college, first-generation Vietnamese American students continued to struggle socially and financially as they navigated the new college environment. Without

targeted support from colleges once they arrived on the college campus, first-generation Vietnamese American youth experienced high levels of stress and anxiety. For example, some participants felt alienated and isolated upon their arrival in college due to a lack of understanding and guidance from staff and faculty. Additionally, due to their low-income status, all participants in this study expressed that they needed greater financial support while in college. Given that most financial aid packages only covered tuition and fees, several participants like Tony and Jackie had to work multiple jobs while in college to compensate for their limited finances. Thus, in addition to having to navigate the new college environment, these youth found it hard to manage time and struggled to balance multiple responsibilities (such as, school, work, and home obligations). As a result, all Vietnamese American college students in this study experienced a great deal of stress and anxiety while transitioning and adapting to college. Clearly, the social and financial struggles first-generation Vietnamese American youth experienced affected their ability to remain engaged in schools and lowered their self-esteem.

In general, first-generation Vietnamese Americans felt that they needed more assistance and support from both K-12 schools and colleges as they made the K-16 transition. As indicated by Swail et al. (2003), institutional factors have a direct impact on students' achievement and ability to persist in schools and colleges. The abovementioned findings are consistent with studies on other marginalized youth, who identify inadequate knowledge and skills for the American education system (Carlson & Rosser-Hogan, 1991; Han & Lee, 2011; S. Lee & Xiong, 2011; J. W. Lew et al., 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007; Supple et al., 2010; Wallit, 2008; Ying & Han, 2008). Since many of these studies failed to take into account students' pre-

college experiences and fell short on examining the effects of K-12 experiences on higher education, this dissertation fills this gap in literature by exploring the entire K-16 educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students. A K-16 perspective is crucial to bridge the disconnect between K-12 competencies and college readiness.

Findings on setbacks related to students' SES resonate with literature on the negative consequences of poverty on student success (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Conchas, 2006; Long, 1996; Ngo & Lee, 2007). For instance, many of the negative consequences described by participants were corroborated by various researchers, whose findings suggested that students living in low-income households often had greater household obligations (Conchas, 2006), lower parental involvement perhaps due to parents' long work hours (Long, 1996), and lower educational opportunities (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). However, beyond these studies, first-generation Vietnamese American students navigated the K-16 educational pipeline with even more barriers to success than other low-income students due to conflicting demands of home and school, each with differing norms and expectations around language.

Research Sub-Question 2: "What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as supporting or assisting their K-16 educational success?"

First-generation Vietnamese American students in this study were confronted with a multitude of challenges as they journeyed through the American school system. However, when supported and engaged, these resilient youth were able to meet their personal and academic goals. Data underscored three facilitators to student success: (a)

aspirations for a better future, (b) student engagement, and (c) ability to navigate different worlds.

Aspirations for a better future. With a strong belief in education and a solid work ethic, first-generation Vietnamese American youth initiated their own college-going traditions in hope for a better future. At both the K-12 and college levels, Vietnamese American youth in this study were determined to succeed in school and beyond. Across participants' narratives, first-generation Vietnamese American students disclosed that their families stressed the value of education and instilled in them that hard work will help them to escape poverty. Hence, these youth believed that poverty was not a permanent condition and education was key to climbing the social ladder. This finding about the transmission of cultural values by family aligns with Yosso's (2005) theoretical framework, which suggests that familial capital develops students' personal, moral, and cultural responsibilities. As articulated by Yosso (2005), students of color learn the importance of attaining an education and hard work through modeling (*educación*) from their kin (*familia*; p. 79). In this case, familial capital facilitated first-generation Vietnamese American youth's positive attitude, intrinsic motivation, hard work, and strong commitment toward school, as well as served as a basis for student success. While Yosso's framework applies to Latino youth, this finding suggests the idea that familial capital also applies to Vietnamese American students, as well as other students of color.

The abovementioned attributes of first-generation Vietnamese American students also suggest that these youth possess a great deal of aspirational and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). For first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study, their hard work and optimism enabled them to persevere and prevail despite adversity. That is,

their positive mindset towards education and about the future helped them overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. High achievers in this inquiry exhibited a great deal of enthusiasm, patience, commitment, and dedication as they navigated the scholastic journey. While many earlier studies on underrepresented ethnic/racial groups which looked at minority students through a deficit-thinking lens (Choi et al., 2008; Han & Lee, 2011; Harper, 2010; E. Kim, 2002; Saleebey, 1996; Stritikus & Nguyen, 2007), this study demonstrates the assets people have even when faced with challenges.

Student engagement. Socially, first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this inquiry reported that student engagement in extracurricular activities provided rich connections to other peers and adults outside of family and academics. Like myself, Jackie, Ngan, and Tony felt their involvement in music, sports, academic/non-academic clubs, and community events had countless beneficial outcomes. For instance, participation in extracurricular activities and programs improved first-generation Vietnamese American youth's self-esteem, enhanced their personal/interpersonal skills, and developed their positive social behaviors. In essence, first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study found the role of student engagement to be paramount in their developmental and educational outcomes.

Institutionally, first-generation Vietnamese American students disclosed that their engagement and participation in school-based extracurricular activities and community service further expanded their social support network by connecting them to friends, mentors, and role models. Like myself, students in this study felt that extracurricular activities helped maintain and develop new connections with faculty and friends. While some participants felt that the process of rapport building was difficult, because some

adults were not relatable or did not understand their unique needs and backgrounds, most youth spoke of individual teachers and/or professors who were relatable and provided them with the necessary support and guidance. First-generation Vietnamese American students in this inquiry found that positive relationships with school staff and faculty allowed them to be more receptive to existing support programs, resources, and services, as well as increased their engagement and motivation in school. To these youth, their connection and positive relationship with faculty contributed to a sense of attachment and belonging to school. These faculty members oftentimes also became students' positive role models and mentors through their consistent support and encouragement. Clearly, student engagement facilitated healthy relationships at both the K-12 and college levels. While this finding broadly reflects Swail et al.'s (2003) institutional factor, this study suggests that teachers and faculty members play a critical role in students' intellectual, social, and personal development.

The aforementioned finding on the critical role of student engagement in promoting positive experiences in and outside the classroom is consistent with similar studies (Kuh, 2009; Lane & Perozzi, 2014; Nadal et al., 2010; Viadero, 2011; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) focused on a broader student population. These studies suggested that student engagement in campus-based cultural programs and community events helps foster a more inclusive learning community and results in higher levels of student success. This finding also echoes Yosso's (2005) idea of social capital, in which students' "networks of people and community resources" (such as, peer/social contacts and support) help them develop social capital and facilitate their navigation of the American educational pipeline. In this case, Vietnamese American youth's social

interactions and ties (Yosso, 2005) extend their network for academic and personal benefits.

Likewise, the abovementioned support factor is also consistent with many studies that indicate that social and institutional supports, such as peers, school officials, personnel, practitioners, and faculty, to be important main sources of student success (Bottrell et al., 2007; Hune & Takeuchi, 2008; Nadal et al., 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Based on Swail et al.'s (2003) model, social factors (such as, peer influence) and institutional factors (such as, student services) directly relates to students' achievement and retention. In other words, social factors connect to institutional factors (Swail et al., 2003). For instance, institutional agents in this study (such as, staff, teachers, and faculty) consistently offer academic services (such as, providing academic advising and professional development opportunities) and link students to institutional resources (Swail et al., 2003). However, findings from Swail et al. and other scholars largely pertain to higher education students and lack the K-12 perspective. Findings from this dissertation offer a more holistic perspective that contributes to an in-depth understanding of first-generation Vietnamese American youth throughout the educational pipeline.

Yet, partly due to culture and traditional parenting styles, some Vietnamese American parents considered extracurricular involvement to be a distraction to school; thus, they limited their children's participation in extracurricular activities. This finding highlights the tension with culture and raises questions about issues of Vietnamese American students' capacities to participate in engagement, as well as how immigrant families understood the benefits of extracurricular participation.

Ability to navigate different worlds. Despite facing an array of barriers at home and in schools, first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study were able to successfully maneuver through the K-16 educational pipeline using a diverse support network to do so. Across participants' narratives, students were at risk due to language and poverty. Nonetheless, all first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study overcame barriers by identifying and accessing available support services and resources. For instance, first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study sought help from peers, support staff, and faculty when navigating the college application and financial aid process. These youth also explored and utilized multiple resources at school and online (such as, informational workshops and online college forums) to aid their pursuit of higher education. In this way, first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study had the ability to identify the necessary forms of support for student success and develop a varied support network to meet their needs.

First-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study also had the ability to balance and negotiate values, standards, beliefs, norms, expectations, and social behaviors from two different worlds (Vietnamese and American cultures). For example, on one hand, Tammy and Kate were expected to be quiet and submissive at home. On the other hand, they chose to be proactive and outspoken in schools. Although challenging, all participants were able to straddle and move between dissimilar cultures as they navigated the K-16 educational pipeline. This is consistent with similar studies (Choi et al., 2008; E. Kim, 2002; Supple et al., 2010; Zhou & Bankston, 2000a) whose findings report that Vietnamese American children growing up in America often face bicultural conflicts between the Vietnamese and American culture.

The abovementioned finding also relates to Yosso's (2005) framework, which suggests minority students have navigational capital that is advantageous in helping them succeed in schools. As indicated by Yosso (2005), students of color possess skills for navigating different institutions that are not sensitive to their needs. These first-generation Vietnamese American students had the ability to convert their navigational capital into educational success. Across participants' stories, navigational capital assisted youth in creating and accumulating a wealth of support, such as assistance from peers and adults outside of their families. In addition to being able to advocate for themselves within schools and colleges, first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study further exhibited a wide range of navigational strategies. For instance, Tony and Robert were able to navigate through discriminatory and oppressive situations.

Conclusions

First-generation Vietnamese American youth navigated the K-16 educational pipeline as active agents with a wealth of capital and resiliency. Possessing a great deal of cultural values, a diverse support network, and intrinsic motivation, these resilient youth competed against life's obstacles with determination and deemed education as a means to future success. However, as stated by Ngan, first-generation Vietnamese American students are the "forgotten and invisible minority" on numerous campuses because they journey through the American educational system often under-assisted or unaided. Clearly, first-generation Vietnamese American students necessitate and deserve greater attention from schools and colleges who now and then may not be receptive to their unique needs.

Echoing Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory, students in this study arrived at school with aspirational, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. As students from low-income families, first-generation Vietnamese American youth aspired for a better future and endeavored to escape poverty. Their families instilled in them the belief that education and hard work could transform and shape their lives. Accordingly, these strong cultural values helped motivate students' efforts to pursue higher education. Like other marginalized students of color, first-generation Vietnamese American youth relied on their social capital (contacts with peers and adults in and out of school) and navigational capital (ability to identify and access available resources) to develop a varied support network. Thus, it is speculated that social capital facilitated navigation. For instance, participants in this study called upon their peers and mentors to navigate student and academic services. These youth were able to create and tap into a diverse system composed of friends, nuclear and extended family, institutional agents, and community members for assistance in battling specific challenges. In essence, family, friends, and mentors were sources of support and resilience for first-generation Vietnamese American youth as they navigated K-12 schools and higher education institutions. Combined, the cultural capital first-generation Vietnamese American students bring to school facilitated their educational outcomes.

However, findings in this study also suggest that familial capital was not absolute. Oftentimes, family shaped students' values and attitudes about education; yet, family also constrained them. For example, participants from unstable families reported limited support and emotional constraints. Hence, the family structure plays a key role in the youth's experiences and the support they obtain at home.

In regards to Yosso's (2005) idea around language, which suggests that students come to school with linguistic capital, findings in this study suggests a new layer to this issue because first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study actually arrived to school without adequate English language proficiency. This finding indicates that children do not come to school with multilingualism, but rather acquire multiple language registers as they interact with various audiences. In addition, findings from this narrative inquiry further suggest that second language acquisition often corresponds with first language attrition. Thus, the role of language in student success is an area that definitely needs greater consideration and focus of schools.

Findings from this study also resonate with Swail et al.'s (2003) geometric model of student persistence and achievement. Based on Swail et al.'s (2003) framework, the dynamics between cognitive, social, and institutional factors contribute to the overall student experience. That is, a balance between these three factors provides the foundation for student development and persistence. As evident across participants' narratives, instability among these forces places students at risk of becoming uninterested and disengaged in schools. Together, cognitive, social, and institutional factors enhance students' ability to persevere and triumph in face of barriers.

First-generation Vietnamese American youth were active agents of their own educational outcomes and future. As effective, active learners, these youth were engaged at both K-12 and college levels and this engagement facilitated their learning and success. For first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study, being proactive meant that they had to rise above challenges, seek support in times of need, and advocate for their own success. These students knew that being proactive is the difference between success

and failure. Accordingly, first-generation Vietnamese American students accepted full ownership of their educational career.

At the K-12 level, first-generation Vietnamese American students were active, engaged, and determined to get into college. These students recognized that they were at a disadvantage due to their first-generation status. Without sufficient knowledge of the college application process, first-generation Vietnamese American youth actively connected with peers, counselors, and faculty for information and advice about higher education. Those in this study also took advantage of extracurricular activities, as well as attended available academic and informational resources (such as, peer tutoring, college workshops, and academic advising/counseling) to increase their personal and intellectual growth. Unlike other students with a college-going tradition, first-generation Vietnamese American youth had to rely on themselves to identify and access support services to enhance their preparation for higher education.

At the college level, first-generation Vietnamese American students continued to be active and engaged by developing meaningful social connections with faculty. In many cases, their supportive faculty gradually became their mentors and role models. For these youth, positive faculty–student relations facilitated the high school to college transition and helped foster a constructive learning climate. As described by participants in this study, strong personal connections to faculty resulted in higher levels of academic and social engagement in college. Thus, as active agents, first-generation Vietnamese American youth were able to establish powerful relationships, broaden their support network, and took control of their own destiny.

In general, first-generation Vietnamese American youth are a heterogeneous group with unique personal histories who demonstrated incredible resilience despite daunting barriers. Given limited social and institutional support, these youth had to travel the educational journey with restricted access to resources and services. Despite their constant financial struggles, these poverty-stricken youth were optimistic and used their low-income status to motivate their climb out of escape poverty. Indeed, there were numerous cognitive, social, and institutional challenges that hindered the journey to success of first-generation Vietnamese American youth. However, when supported by schools and higher education institutions (via peers, teachers, faculty members, and student/academic services), youth in this study were resilient and possessed great strengths and assets that assisted them in overcoming insurmountable odds for failure. With a wealth of cultural capital (including aspirational, familial, social, and resistant capital), these active agents were able to create a varied support network and successfully traversed the K-16 educational pipeline. In many cases, one form of capital (such as, social capital) interacts and facilitates another form of capital (such as, navigational capital). While first-generation Vietnamese students were able to manage and navigate the American educational system under-assisted or unaided, their journey was not without tears and sweat. Thus, it is in fact the duty of schools and colleges to address and meet their distinct needs to ease their educational journey.

Implications

Vietnamese Americans are often stereotypically seen as the model minority (Chen & Yoo, 2009; Taylor & Stern, 1997); however, findings in this inquiry suggest that this marginalized, disadvantaged population is more like other underrepresented groups and

are an “forgotten and invisible minority” (as stated by Ngan) on many school grounds. In fact, many first-generation Vietnamese American youth are students from underprivileged backgrounds who continue to face adversity and barriers as they navigate the K-16 educational pipeline. In essence, their struggles continue to go unnoticed and their needs overlooked in many schools and colleges. Accordingly, this section will offer an analysis of five implications derived from the research findings: (a) increase parental and family engagement, (b) broaden support network, (c) provide greater language support, (d) facilitate K-16 transition, and (e) increase academic and financial support.

Parental and Family Engagement

While Yosso (2005) framework indicates that family is critical to student success, participants’ stories illustrate the double-edge sword of family. On one hand, students in this study looked to their families for support and thrived when their families supported and engaged them. In this case, family is broadly defined as nuclear and extended family members including siblings, parents, and grandparents. On the other hand, unhealthy family structures with different demands and expectations also negatively impacted youth’s development and stunted their successes. Thus, family is deemed as both a support and an obstacle. This finding suggests that the idea that family is a component of cultural capital is not absolute, but rather nuanced. In this way, family is not always an element of cultural capital. Given the critical role of familial capital (Yosso, 2005), educational institutions must work with parents and families of color as equal partners to increase engagement and participation in their children’s education.

Across participants’ stories, first-generation Vietnamese American youth disclosed that their parents and families were their first educators. However, all of the

students in this study did not arrive at school prepared and equipped for educational success. First-generation Vietnamese American youth face serious obstacles (such as, language and cultural barriers) from their elementary through college years. While many Vietnamese American parents and families wanted to help their children, they were unable to assist and advocate for them in school due to their lack of English proficiency and limited educational backgrounds.

According to participants in this study, parents and families were sources of motivation because they instilled a sense of social mobility through education; and thus, contributed to students' drive for success. Yet, many educational institutions continue to struggle with establishing authentic and effective relationships with parents and families of color. Often, minority parents and families do not know how or why to participate in their children's education. They do not completely comprehend the powerful influence their involvement has on students' educational achievement. Further, immigrant/refugee parents and families may not be aware of the available opportunities for involvement in school. Hence, schools must do more to engage minority parents and families as partners in education. Findings from this inquiry confirm that enhancing parental and family engagement in education is key to increasing student success.

Support Network

Schools and colleges must find ways to help first-generation Vietnamese American students connect with others and engage in extracurricular activities to expand their social support network. Findings in this study indicate that first-generation Vietnamese American youth often felt under-assisted at home and overlooked in schools. All participants in this study had to seek help and guidance from peers and adults outside

of their families, because their families lacked knowledge of the American education system and were unable to assist them in their educational journey. Yet, overprotective Vietnamese American parents with traditional mindsets discouraged and limited their children's participation in extracurricular activities for fear that their involvement would jeopardize their academic success. However, for first-generation Vietnamese American youth in this study, their social engagement extended their support network and contributed to their sense of belonging and integration in schools. In this way, students' social engagement facilitated first-generation Vietnamese American youth's persistence and educational success. Thus, in addition to providing a plethora of opportunities for extracurricular participation, schools must also engage and help families understand the value and advantages of student involvement.

Findings in this narrative inquiry suggest that first-generation Vietnamese American students rely on a social engagement and a broad support network consisting of families, friends, support staff, and faculty to achieve educational success. Evidence from this study also suggests that engagement in extracurricular and community-based activities provided first-generation Vietnamese American youth a channel for personal growth, as well as offered accessibility to other peers, adults, and support services. For this reason, educational institutions must help parents and families understand the many benefits of social engagement and support it. Further, schools and colleges must also offer varied opportunities to expand and strengthen students' connections with peers and adults to increase support for first-generation Vietnamese American students.

Language Support

Findings in this study suggest that schools and colleges must look at supports for ELLs. Schools cannot assume that students come to school with linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Regardless of whether first-generation Vietnamese American students in this study were born in America or Vietnam, all came to school lacking the English proficiency necessary for academic success because they learned and only spoke Vietnamese at home. Like other minority and immigrant ELLs, first-generation Vietnamese American students struggled in school due to the language barrier. These youth were not equipped with the language skills needed to attain success across subject areas. For these ELLs, their struggles were intensified without effective language supports. For instance, participants felt that many teachers and faculty were underprepared and lacked effective strategies to work with ELLs, minority students, and first-generation students. In essence, many support staff and faculty also failed to understand and meet the needs of this disadvantaged population. Therefore, schools and colleges must provide effective language support programs and train their staff to better understand the experiences of Vietnamese American ELLs. With a better understanding of the plethora of problems these youth face, schools and colleges must then focus on developing targeted programs centered on second language acquisition. Further, classes containing ELLs must also be taught by ESL certified educators to help this underserved student population overcome their language barrier and triumph over their struggles.

Evidence from this inquiry also suggests that educational institutions must focus on first language retention as they help ELLs with second language acquisition. As youth in this study assimilated linguistically and acquired English fluency, most gradually lost

their Vietnamese language due to limited usage and exposure. In consequence, these youth struggled speaking in their native tongue when communicating with their parents and family members. Since youth's linguistic asset connects them to their families, this finding suggests that the barrier to communication between parents and child is detrimental to students' familial capital (Yosso, 2005). In order to maintain and enhance the cultural and linguistic capital Vietnamese American students bring to school, schools must provide native language support. Schools must not pull Vietnamese American students apart from their heritage/culture as they help students gain English proficiency. Thus, it is vital that schools provide dual language supports and programs that facilitate literacy development in students' native language as they learn a second language.

K-16 Transition

Findings in this study indicate that educational institutions must help ease of K-16 transition for first-generation Vietnamese American students. As the first in their families to go to college, first-generation Vietnamese American lacked understanding of the college process and struggled making the K-16 transition, especially from high school to college. Further, overburden or unapproachable counselors, support staff, and school administrators were often unable to provide the personalized advisement first-generation Vietnamese American youth needed for college access. These findings imply that support staff and school officials must have adequate time to build connections with students at a more personal level to help them focus on their academic, social, and emotional development. At the K-12 level, schools must also provide different avenues for students to receive college admissions and financial aid counseling. Thus, it is the responsibility of K-12 schools, particularly high schools, to craft services that offer

information regarding the college process, deadline information, and workshops to meet students' needs.

At the postsecondary level, colleges must educate their staff and faculty about the unique personal experiences and backgrounds of Vietnamese American youth, as understanding of their special strengths and challenges is key to meeting their specific needs. Although highly motivated and determined to succeed, evidence implies that first-generation Vietnamese American youth are underprepared for college life due to their lack of familiarity with higher education. Moreover, many also struggled to balance time and set priorities between multiple obligations at school and home. Nonetheless, students in this study believed that the personal connection and mentorship from college faculty and staff engaged and motivated them to persevere in face of obstacles, as well as helped develop their emotional, cognitive, and social maturity throughout their college academic careers. Based on these findings, colleges must train and encourage their staff and faculty to understand and establish a strong rapport with students, especially with first-generation and minority youth. The recognition that first-generation Vietnamese American youth have similar challenges as other first-generation students of color is paramount to addressing their special needs. Further, to facilitate students' transition to college, higher education institutions must provide services to help college youth manage time and adjust to the demands of college life. While positive faculty-student relationships and effective college transition programs are vital in ensuring and promoting the educational success for every student, it is especially true for underrepresented first-generation Vietnamese American students.

Academic and Financial Support

Findings also revealed that first-generation Vietnamese American students need additional financial support due to their low-income status. Similar to other marginalized and poverty-stricken students, many first-generation Vietnamese American youth lacked knowledge and access to a wide range of available services and resources for which they are eligible. Some services include scholarships/financial aid, fellowships/internships, work-study programs, college and career centers, and academic advising. Data suggest that a lack of familiarity with these support services restricted the path to success for Vietnamese American youth. Thus, schools and colleges have the responsibility to offer and advertise sources of financial support services to ease the process for first-generation and low-income youth.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

First-generation Vietnamese American youth are a significant but often underserved population. These students are not always easily identified on school grounds and the community at large. While some efforts have been made to target first-generation and low-income students, these programs and initiatives are often aimed at broader groups of disadvantaged students. Therefore, to specifically provide support for first-generation Vietnamese American youth, targeted policies and practices must be implemented. K-12 and higher education leaders must raise awareness of first-generation Vietnamese American youth through collective efforts focused at improving K-16 transition services and greater academic success. Accordingly, this section will provide a discussion of possible applications for policy, practice, and future research to facilitate

greater participation, engagement, and educational achievement for first-generation Vietnamese American youth.

Recommendations for Policy

Findings in this study suggest a pressing need for educational leaders and policymakers to ensure that America's schools and colleges are addressing the needs of all students, particularly first-generation and minority students. From a policy perspective, three recommendations for policy to assist first-generation Vietnamese American students include: (a) the need for disaggregation of data among Asian subgroups, (b) the need for additional funding, and (c) the need for greater accountability.

Data disaggregation. While not a direct finding in this study, disaggregation of data to reveal academic and other issues is a foundational first step for understanding the disparity in performance and needs of Asian American subgroups. This understanding is necessary to remove hurdles and advocate for underrepresented and marginalized Asian American student subpopulations. Recognizing variations within Asian American subgroups will allow schools and colleges to understand the students they serve, as well as help inform institutional decisions and resource allocations to ensure youth's K-16 success.

Many students in this study felt overlooked and underserved in schools. Oftentimes, aggregate student performance data fail to reflect the barriers facing first-generation and students of color who come to school with gaps in achievement. As the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requires disaggregated data among large subgroups of racial/ethnic groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), policymakers also need to set up requirements to break up data for individual Asian subpopulations to unmask the gaps

in achievement among Asian subgroups. Presently, the U.S. Department of Education mandates that states and school districts report aggregated data for all Asian students. Yet, the “Asian” race classification consists of many ethnicities. Data speaks volumes in education. Disaggregation of student data (such as, test/assessment scores and student demographics) would help identify and expose the unique needs and challenges of the Vietnamese American student population. Schools and colleges must utilize disaggregated data about Vietnamese American youth to increase awareness, disseminate information, and drive institutional actions.

Funding. Additional funding is necessary for a host of services and supports that findings from this indicate would benefit Vietnamese students and their families. Therefore, state and federal legislation should increase funding for minority students and their families under NCLB. Increased funding for qualified support staff (such as, academic/mental health counselors, school psychologists, school psychiatrists, school social workers, school-community liaisons, and bilingual aides) would help Vietnamese American youth overcome personal and institutional barriers to success (Swail et al., 2003). For instance, funding to decrease student-to-school counselor ratios at the K-12 level (an area of great need for students in this study) could establish or expand counseling/advising services to first-generation and minority youth. This additional support would also allow counselors more time to develop personal relationships with students and provide the necessary personalized attention first-generation Vietnamese American students need as they traverse the American educational system. The benefits resulting from establishing connections with staff would also help build students’ social capital (Yosso, 2005). In addition, school-community liaisons and bilingual aides might

be funded to facilitate parental and family communication with schools, as well as greater involvement in their children's education. In essence, funds used for support staff would greatly contribute to a safe and welcoming environment for Vietnamese American youth and their families.

Funding must be provided to raise mental health awareness and train school professionals to recognize, diagnose, treat/intervene, destigmatize, counsel, or provide referral to services or resources to address cases of mental issues at home. Hiring experienced mental health counselors, school psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers would increase the availability and range of mental health services available in schools. School officials must be trained to recognize early warning signs of mental health concerns (such as, social withdrawal, stress, anxiety, and depression) to help students and their families deal with difficult or stressful life events. Mental health services and supports are especially important for Vietnamese American youth and their families, who are likely to be refugees suffering from political persecution and consequences of war. Further, all school personnel must understand that any student, regardless of academic performance, can experience emotional and mental disorders. Knowledge of students' experiences would help educational institutions meet their needs and inform what improvements are necessary to support their emotional, psychological, and academic development.

Additional funding for outreach, language supports, and after-school or supplemental programs would help increase parental/family and student engagement. For example, funding for the establishment of parent outreach programs or information resource centers that offer parenting classes and informational classes would help

improve parenting skills and educate parents on ways to be involved and engaged in schools. Parent outreach must also include elements of mental health awareness, preventive measures, available resources, and intervention methods. Funding for the expansion of ESL supports and dual-language programs (also known as dual-language immersion) would allow Vietnamese American ELLs develop academic proficiency in both English and their native language, helping strengthen students' linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). At the K-12 level, bilingualism would help maximize students' academic and linguistic performance. At the college level, knowing a second language would help broaden youth's career options and network. Taking into account the linguistic differences of minority students and their families, these language support services would also help to improve communication between Vietnamese American youth and their parents with limited English proficiency.

Further, funding to invest in K-12 teachers and college faculty members, so that they are better prepared to assist and provide second-language support, is key to ensuring educational success for ELLs, particularly for Vietnamese American English learners. For instance, K-12 educational institutions should offer opportunities for, or compensate faculty to become a certified ESL educator. Funding for professional development training to staff and faculty, so that they are better equipped to work with ELLs, would further facilitate ELL students' speaking, writing, reading, and comprehension of the English language. Therefore, it is essential that funding be made available for educators at both the K-12 and college levels to develop mastery, sensitivity, and cultural awareness in working with Vietnamese American students.

Additionally, funding for creation and awareness of extended and supplemental services focused on the specific needs of first-generation Vietnamese American youth (such as, after-school tutoring services and college preparation workshops) would facilitate students' K-16 transition. Financial incentives could be awarded to schools and districts that put into practice high quality programs or services that address the unique needs of minority parents and students. In general, encouraging policies to increase funding to raise student and parental/family engagement is vital to enhancing the achievement of Vietnamese American youth. Although states have made major budget cuts to education, educational institutions must be creative and innovative to reinvest in and support our greatest asset: our students.

Accountability. To promote minority student and parent engagement, schools and colleges must be mandated to annually develop improvement plans, as well as publicize and evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts. For instance, educational institutions' strategic plans should include specific improvement plans and steps based on inputs from minority students and their families to ensure effective institutional support (Swail et al., 2003). Schools and colleges must also be transparent in their efforts by publicizing the details of their strategic plans focused on supporting students and families of color with the community at large. The sharing of information with stakeholders will not only increase transparency, but also accountability for the implication of student and parent engagement policies and plans. To measure the effectiveness of school and district efforts, data and feedback can be collected from parents and families. Results of the evaluation at both the K-12 and higher education levels must also be reviewed and assessed annually to revise student and parent engagement plans so that issues related to

Vietnamese American youth (such as, opportunity, access, language, and poverty) are addressed. Evaluation results must also be publicized to ensure transparency and accountability.

Recommendations for Practice

To better serve first-generation Vietnamese American youth, effective institutional practices must focus on a common and cohesive mission related to supporting student academic success. Such efforts must be implemented at both the K-12 and college levels to strengthen schools and colleges' capacity to meet the needs of students and families of color. From a practice perspective, three recommendations for practice to improve the educational success of first-generation Vietnamese American students include: (a) increasing parent and family engagement, (b) promoting student engagement, (c) having diverse school boards, and (d) ensuring collaboration across the K-16 spectrum.

Parent and family engagement. Findings in this inquiry suggest a need to engage Vietnamese American parents and families. To enhance minority students' familial capital (Yosso, 2005), schools and colleges must provide subgroup-specific information to educate parents and families about education pathways, high school graduation requirements, college prerequisites, and postsecondary opportunities. Further, parents and families must also understand the value of their involvement, as well as when and how to advocate for their children. These targeted informational programs, meetings, and workshops must be advertised through a variety of avenues and in the target language. It is vital that the language and formats of correspondence are understandable to parents and families. Some forms of communication to disperse and broadcast information to

parents and families would include, but not be limited to, flyers/letters sent home with students, school bulletins, school websites/marquee, radio announcements, and parent newsletters/notifications. To ensure accessibility for immigrant/refugee parents and families with limited English proficiency, bilingual translators would be made available at all workshops and meetings. Additionally, parent and family attendance would increase if childcare were offered for younger siblings by schools. During these meetings, schools must also afford opportunities for parents to pose questions and discuss child-related issues. Recordings or videotapes of these discussions, training programs, workshops, and informational meetings would be made available for those who were unable to attend.

Educational institutions must value the opinions of their parents and families. Hence, schools and colleges must elicit parent feedback whenever possible. Meaningful parent surveys and evaluations, in both English and Vietnamese, would help enlist greater involvement and support of Vietnamese American parents and families in the educational process. Moreover, parent input would also provide schools with valuable insights on institutional actions. Collecting parent/family input would be conducted via multiple methods, such as, phone calls, electronic surveys, mailed forms, or in-person at parent meetings. To maximize the response rate, parent surveys must be available online and in paper format to ensure accessibility for all families (even those who are not computer literate, or those do not have computers or Internet service). As equal partners and important allies, parents can help educators support student success.

Bilingual aides, school-community liaisons, and bicultural assistants must also be provided to enhance communication and strengthen partnerships between Vietnamese

American families, schools, and the larger community. As mentioned above, increased funding for support personnel would increase social support (Swail et al., 2003; Yosso, 2005) for students and families of color. In addition to providing interpretative and translation services for families with limited English proficiency, these individuals would also perform bicultural/bilingual instructional duties, as well as follow-up activities (such as, student welfare and attendance concerns) to assist immigrant/refugee parents or family members experiencing cultural or linguistic barriers. Their services would help Vietnamese American parents and community members better understand the school system, educational procedures, and child-related concerns/issues.

Student engagement. To increase student engagement, institutional actions must help acclimate and connect first-generation Vietnamese American students to the school environment and culture through exposure to extracurricular activities, positive social experiences (Swail et al., 2003), and use of support services. Further, application of approaches to oral history to capture students' stories would help create a sense of pride in Vietnamese American students. Some examples of student support resources and programs would include alumni programs, school outreach centers, clubs, counseling/guidance centers, student affairs, admissions/financial aid offices, and student health services. Specifically, at the high school level, students in this study needed more admissions counseling and opportunities for social networking. At the college level, participants wanted access to cultural clubs and connection to role models and mentors.

While some abovementioned support services are already in place, many students in this study were not aware of available resources and services. Thus, opportunities for engagement must be publicized via email, phone calls, text messages, school bulletins,

daily announcements, and student newsletters. It is the responsibility of schools and colleges to assist students in developing necessary personal and social skills needed to attain both academic and social goals. Further, first-generation Vietnamese American youth should also be encouraged and advised to take on leadership positions in student organizations and student government to hone their leadership skills. By increasing Vietnamese American youth's engagement in student organizations, sports, music, academic/non-academic clubs, and campus/community events, schools and colleges would be able to ensure students' emotional and social well-being, as well as expand their social support network.

To reduce barriers to student involvement in extracurricular activities, support services, and extended/supplemental programs, schools and colleges must take into consideration the needs of characteristics of first-generation Vietnamese American students (such as, students' lack of information, inconvenient hours due to work and/or family obligations, and their inability to pay due to financial hardship) and offer flexible services accordingly. Overall, educational institutions should create a welcoming environment, a place of learning where students feel safe to interact, understood, respected, and appreciated.

Diverse school boards. The local Board of Education is an essential link to educational institutions. School boards are responsible for making decisions about school programs to ensure student success. The roles of school board members are to address students' needs and serve their communities. Therefore, having a diverse Board of Education is important in shaping policy and practice to ensure equality of opportunity for all students, particularly students of color.

As K-12 schools and colleges across the nation become more diverse, school boards must be representative of the communities and student populations they serve. When addressing the diversity of school boards, multiple factors (such as, race, ethnicity, gender, and age) must be considered. The strength of having a diverse Board of Education comes from ensuring breadth of perspectives, as well as leadership that improves minority student and parent engagement. Diverse perspectives will not only help focus resources, but also offer ways to leverage those resources to benefit all students. From this perspective, the inclusion of varied viewpoints can sharpen thinking and result in innovative options for actions.

Collaboration across the K-16 spectrum. Findings in this inquiry suggest a need for K-16 collaboration to increase first-generation youth's readiness and success in higher education. Better alignment between K-12 education and postsecondary education is critical to facilitate first-generation Vietnamese American students' successful K-16 navigation (Yosso, 2005). To normalize the idea of college for first-generation youth, schools must train K-12 teachers to know the college requirements so they can help students prepare for college. This understanding would further help K-12 teachers align their instruction and standards with higher education expectations, to ensure that students are equipped with necessary skills for college-level work. Additionally, colleges and universities must collaborate with feeder schools to support programs and services, such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), to increase the number of minority and low SES students in postsecondary education. At the same time, colleges must also train staff and faculty of first-generation and minority students' collegiate struggles. An understanding of the challenges these youth face

would help staff and faculty relate to students, as well as encourage them to be sensitive to their students' needs. Thus, K-16 partnership would help reduce institutional barriers (Swail et al., 2003) and increase access to higher education for first-generation Vietnamese American youth.

In general, to build and strengthen positive relationships with first-generation Vietnamese American students, schools and colleges must identify existing and provide new opportunities for staff, teachers, and faculty members to work collaboratively on supporting and educating students. Some strategies to secure and increase staff, teachers, and faculty contribution include ongoing professional development to impart knowledge of issues affecting this specific student population, workshops to provide new insights to those with differing backgrounds, and opportunities for staff, teachers, and faculty across disciplines to engage in constructive discussion regarding the strengths and needs of first-generation Vietnamese American youth. Collaboratively, staff, teachers, and faculty members would serve as key allies, mentors, role models, and change agents for generating opportunities, access, and networks for first-generation Vietnamese American students.

Recommendations for Future Research

Literature reviewed on this topic uncovered a significant gap in research on Vietnamese Americans, particularly first-generation Vietnamese Americans. This narrative inquiry adds to that body of knowledge; however, understanding of this underrepresented population is incomplete and must be expanded. First-generation Vietnamese American students must no longer be invisible on school campuses.

Further research on the needs and strengths of Vietnamese Americans and their children must provide a foundation for institutional actions and policies that will serve this marginalized, underrepresented population. In addition to making greater efforts in identifying first-generation Vietnamese American youth in schools and colleges, further investigations should be conducted to examine the needs of Vietnamese American youth in diverse settings (such as, at the elementary, middle, high school, community college, or 4-year college levels, as well as at public or private institutions) or with different student populations (such as, individuals with varying birth order or those who are low-performing or at-risk). As previously mentioned, due to time constraints and limitations in design of the study, the participant sample was limited to a small, targeted group. Thus, conclusions from this narrative inquiry are limited and not generalizable to other groups of students.

Future research would benefit from selecting participants from varying subsets of the population or the use of a larger participant sample. For instance, it is important to acknowledge that almost all participants in this study (6 out of 7, excluding myself, to be exact) were firstborn. Due to participants' birth order, I speculated in Chapter 3 that their identity may influence their sense of responsibility, which may in turn shape their motivation and resilience to succeed. However, there is no way to know this with this study. Thus, it would be interesting to conduct further research to explore and compare levels of determination and resilience of firstborn versus non-firstborn individuals. Birth order research involving first-generation Vietnamese American youth may unmask typical characteristics and life choices associated with birth position.

Another limitation of this study is that participants were asked to retrospectively recall and reconstruct what they think their K-16 educational challenges and successes were. While this approach is instructive, it is also limited. In essence, this is a cross-sectional study that does not fully capture the forgotten moments. Thus, longitudinal research may help further validate Vietnamese American students' experiences as they navigate K-16 educational systems. Exploring Vietnamese American youth's experiences over an extended period of time may be beneficial in seeing their experiences and discovering how students develop relations, how schools integrate families of color, as well as illuminating the factors/variables and relationships not possible due to time and resources constraints of this narrative inquiry. Although first-generation Vietnamese Americans have unique experiences and face special challenges, many of the approaches that might be beneficial in addressing their needs may also be advantageous to meet the needs of other marginalized student populations (and vice-versa). Therefore, research over time with Vietnamese American students at both the K-12 and college levels may offer greater insights and a much broader perspective of students' experiences to inform, support, or challenge local, state, and federal policy and practice.

Further, comparative qualitative research to explore how Vietnamese Americans differ from other subgroups could help illuminate the similarities and differences in experiences among different student populations. Some of the findings in this study seem to align with what is known about other traditional underrepresented groups, such as the idea of language as a growing wedge between culture, family, and the individual. However, I speculate that this relationship is not entirely clear and bears some investigation. One idea that might be worth examining is whether the experiences of

language, family, and culture are the same for this targeted group as for other traditional underrepresented first-generation subpopulations. It would be fascinating to explore the issue of language and whether there is a difference in experiences across underrepresented groups. Thus, a comparison of lived experience of Vietnamese American students and other immigrant/refugee subgroups (such as, other East and Southeast Asian American subgroups) could be powerful for gaining insights and understanding of the subjective experience, actions, and motivations of individuals from varied subgroups.

Moreover, varied data evaluation and analysis approaches would allow further investigation of the variation in experiences of Vietnamese Americans from different immigration waves. On one hand, qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, will help explore and discover themes about the distinct Vietnamese American experience to interpret and understand their social interactions. On the other hand, quantitative techniques, such as looking at evaluative indicators (numbers and statistics) and systematic empirical investigations, will look at the causal relationships to student achievement and help make predictions for educational outcomes. For instance, future quantitative research could seek to examine to what extent demographic factors (years in the United States, years of education in country of origin, parents' educational level, and family income level) predict the academic performance (GPA) of immigrant/refugee first-generation Vietnamese American students. These predictive indicators may especially be helpful in developing new educational initiatives and outreach programs.

In pursuit of a more just and equitable society, future research on Vietnamese Americans will expand public understanding of the complexities and inequities experienced by this marginalized subgroup. Harmful misconceptions about Vietnamese Americans may be banished by facts produced through research. Educational research, both quantitative and qualitative, may be effective at discarding what is fiction and adopting what is fact. In general, further research is key in assisting Vietnamese American youth to attain higher levels of education, and thereby, a better chance to achieve the American Dream.

Conclusion

First-generation Vietnamese American youth are a remarkably motivated and resilient group of individuals. Many students in this study had a disadvantaged upbringing characterized by poverty and family instability, as well as faced many cultural barriers and language-based problems. Yet, with a diverse support network, these students were able to prevail over seemingly insurmountable odds. These students were incredibly determined to escape poverty and used their challenges and low-income status to build their reservoir of determination and resilience. Clearly, First-generation Vietnamese American students in this inquiry managed to overcome barriers and thrive despite challenges.

K-16 educational success for Vietnamese American youth is multifaceted. Many students have a set of attributes, along with the fortitude and emotional strength, to persevere beyond overwhelming obstacles and their troubled backgrounds. However, these youth continue to face emotional, psychological, cognitive, social, and institutional barriers that hamper their abilities to succeed. These barriers limit their ability to

navigate through the American educational system that is not largely focused on their needs.

First-generation Vietnamese American youth have to navigate and balance two different worlds. Moreover, these students attend schools and institutions that are not prepared or equipped to serve their needs. Without a system tailored to their unique experiences and challenges, first-generation Vietnamese American students lack assistance in their navigation towards high school and college graduation. Thus, it is the obligation of educators and school officials to ensure access and smooth K-16 transition for all, particularly for minority and underserved youth. The theory of community cultural wealth and the geometric model of student persistence and achievement must be utilized to develop effective policies that address the specific needs of Vietnamese American youth, as well as provide educational services and educational resources that enhance their strengths and attributes. Programs and practices must be established to provide assistance and support to this disadvantaged population. Further research to explore the experiences of this understudied student population, perhaps with low-performing youth, a larger sample, or with participants from different immigration waves, is integral to effective policy development and implementation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INITIAL CONTACT LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Appendix A

Initial Contact Letter to Potential Participants (VASS Program Mentors)

Dear _____,

My name is Betty Ta and I am currently a doctoral student. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research regarding the experiences of Vietnamese American students who are the first in their families to go to college.

I would like to conduct two (2) interviews (about 1 to 1.5-hours per interview) with you. This qualitative study will focus on understanding the factors of support and barriers to the success first-generation (first in their families to go to college) Vietnamese American students face as they navigate the K-16 educational pipeline.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to participate in my study. If you are interested in participating or have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at XXXXXXXX@gmail.com.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Betty Ta

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Appendix B

Follow-up Letter to Potential Participants (VASS Program Mentors)

Dear _____,

My name is Betty Ta and I am currently a doctoral student. I recently contacted you to inquire whether you would be willing to participate in my research regarding the K-16 experiences of Vietnamese American students who are the first in their families to go to college. A copy of the original email is attached below for your reference. I am writing to follow-up with you about your willingness to participate in my study.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to participate in my study. If you wish to participate or have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at XXXXXXXX@gmail.com.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Betty Ta

.....

Attachment:

Initial Contact Letter to Potential Participants (VASS Program Mentors) (Appendix A)

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Appendix C

Informed Consent Letter

Dear _____,

As a doctoral student from California State University, Long Beach, I am inviting you to participate in a Doctoral Project on *Narrative Inquiry: K-16 Educational Experiences and Stories of First-Generation Vietnamese American College Students*. Your involvement will prove invaluable.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to understand the stories and K-16 educational experiences of first generation Vietnamese American college students.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will do the following things:

- Participate in two (2) in-depth one-on-one interviews (each approximately 1 to 1.5-hours in length). The objective of the initial interview is to explore your K-12 educational experiences while the second interview will seek to understand your higher education/college experiences. The interview will be held in a private location at a mutually agreeable date and time.
- Each interview will be audio recorded only with permission (not mandatory) from you (both on the consent form and verbally at the start of the interview). A professional transcriptionist will transcribe narrative responses (verbatim) after signing the Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement.
- I will take personal/handwritten notes whether or not you agree to be audio recorded.
- You will be asked to review my preliminary findings of your interviews following the second interview and respond with your thoughts regarding my interpretations and analysis (via email). If you choose to provide feedback, this process should take 30-45 minutes (approximately 10 minutes to read and 20 to 35 minutes to respond).

Potential Risks and Discomfort

While no research is entirely risk-free, this study poses minimal risk to you. The most likely risk is that the interview would lead you to recall frustrating or distressing memories about difficult challenges and obstacles. Therefore, you might experience some level of emotional discomfort due to recalling/retelling of personal events and stories. In addition, were those stories and/or comments be linked to you, it could strain personal and/or professional relationships.

I address these concerns in several ways. First, I am prepared to direct you to sources of free and low-cost counseling/support services should the interview lead you to recall difficult memories about your past experiences and stories. Second, all interviews will be

held in a one-on-one situation in a private location. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and/or password-protected computers at my private residence. All interviews will be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to review preliminary findings of your interviews for factual errors and flag those which you feel may put you at any risk. In addition, a pseudonym will be assigned to you throughout this process. I also encourage you to communicate with me via your personal rather than school/work email account.

Potential Benefits to Subjects and/or to Society

You will benefit from the opportunity to explore and reflect on your experiences and stories as a first-generation (first in your families to go to college) Vietnamese American college student. This process can provide you with the opportunity to discuss your successes and/or challenges. As a first-generation Vietnamese American myself, I expect the interviews to be more of a conversation where I may provide some level of validation of your experiences and perceptions.

Further, as findings are analyzed, presented, and/or published, I expect to share them with you. I anticipate that linking findings to the literature and the knowledge that the findings are invaluable will further validate both the struggles and successes you often experience.

In addition, you will be able to help expose the unique needs and/or challenges of this often underrepresented and underserved population. Should educational leaders become more sensitive to the issues faced by first-generation Vietnamese American students, or even choose to take action as a result of these findings and other information, it is possible that you might benefit from an improved educational climate, or additional sources of support for first-generation students.

Finally, findings will add to the literature on students of color, Vietnamese Americans in particular, as well as expand current understanding of strengths and reveal possible areas of weakness for improving our existing K-16 educational pipeline. In addition, findings will also help inform policy, practice, and future research by encouraging honest dialogues about the strengths and inequities of the American school system. Stories of support factors and obstacles of first-generation students not only may help expand our understanding of their K-16 experiences, but may also assist policymakers and educational leaders in advocating for more equitable and effective policies (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2008).

Payment for Participation

In exchange for your time, I will compensate you with a \$25 Starbucks gift card. You will receive the \$25 Starbucks gift card at the beginning of your first interview. You would only need to show up to the first interview to receive the gift card. You may skip questions or withdraw at anytime without penalty and still receive the \$25 gift card.

Confidentiality

I will maintain the confidentiality of all data. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. I am addressing confidentiality in several ways:

- To ensure confidentiality, a pseudonym will be assigned to you at the beginning of the study. I ask that you use your pseudonym in all interviews. I encourage you to use a personal email rather than school/work email account for correspondence.
- I alone will have access to both digital and hard copy data. A professional transcriptionist will have access to interview digital data after signing a Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement and the transcriptionist will know the participants only by pseudonyms. I will share some of the transcript data (with a pseudonym) with my dissertation chair.
- All interview data and related materials will use your pseudonym and will be kept completely confidential and secured.
- All consent forms, raw data, and all related materials will be stored in a locked file cabinet at my private residence to maintain confidentiality.
- All electronic/digital data will be kept on a single password-protected computer.
- All consent forms and raw data will be retained for a period of 3 years following completion of the research. After 3 years, I will destroy all data.

Participation and Withdrawal

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which in my opinion warrant doing so.

Identification of Investigators

If you have any questions or concern about the research, please feel free to contact:

- Principal Investigator:
Betty Ta
XXX-XXX-XXXX (Cell)
XXXXXXXX@gmail.com
- Dissertation Chair:
Don Haviland
XXX-XXX-XXXX (Work Number)
XXXXXXXX@csulb.edu

Rights of Research Subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office of University Research, CSU Long Beach, 1250

Bellflower Blvd., Long Beach, CA 90840; Telephone: (562) 985-5314 or email to ORSP-Compliance@csulb.edu.

Signature of Research Subject

I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject:

Signature of Subject:

Date:

Signature of Research Subject for Audio Recording

I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature of Subject:

Date:

Statement and Signature of Investigator

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of Investigator:

Date:

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Appendix D

Interview Protocol #1

Background Questions

1. May I ask how old you are?
2. Please tell me about your family background and experience *before* emigrating to America.
 - a. How many people are in your family?
 - i. Who are they?
 - ii. What are their education backgrounds in Vietnam?
 - iii. What are their occupations in Vietnam?
3. Please tell me about your journey to America.
 - a. When did you/your family emigrate to America?
 - i. At what age did you come to America?
 - b. How did you/your family emigrate to America?
 - c. Why did you/your family emigrate to America?
 - d. What do you recall from your journey?
4. Please tell me about your family background and experience *after* emigrating to America.
 - a. How many people emigrated with you?
 - i. Who are they?
 - ii. What are their occupations after their arrival in America?
5. Did you or anyone in your household receive any government or financial assistance after arriving in the United States?

(Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):

Housing (Section 8) Program, Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid/Medi-Cal Program, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program)

K-12 Educational Experience Questions

Central Research Question: *What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students at a four-year college or university?*

6. Please tell me about your Elementary School experience.
7. Please tell me about your Middle School experience.
8. Please tell me about your High School experience.

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):

Compare/contrast: Elementary vs. Middle School vs. High School

Barriers to Success

Sub-Research Question #1: What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as hindering or impeding their K-16 educational success?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):

Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, language, other barriers?

9. As you look back, what challenges/obstacles have you faced in elementary, middle, or high school after emigrating to America?
 - a. Can you give me some examples?
 - b. What made them obstacle?
 - c. How did you respond?

Support Factors

Sub-Research Question #2: What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as supporting or assisting their K-16 educational success?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):

Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, resistance), other assistance?

10. As you look back, what has helped/assisted you to succeed in school at the K-12 level?
 - a. Can you give me some examples?
11. What abilities/skills helped you succeed at the K-12 level?
 - a. Can you share an example or a time of how these abilities/skills helped at the K-12 level?
12. Was there a specific time or event when something or someone helped you at the K-12 level?
 - a. What exactly happened?
13. What/Who motivated you to succeed in elementary, middle, and/or high school?
 - a. Can you give me some examples?
14. What was the single most important factor in helping you overcome challenges/obstacles at the K-12 level?
 - a. How did it help you succeed in school?
15. What other resources or opportunities helped you to navigate and stay in elementary, middle, and high school?
 - a. How did they help you succeed in school?

Suggestions on how to improve the K-16 educational experience

Prompts/Probes (to get participants' input for Chapter 5):

Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional?

16. What advice would you offer other students who are (minorities, first in their families to go to college, living in poverty) experiencing similar challenges as you have?
17. What advice would you give to elementary, middle, and high schools to improve the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Snowball Sample Question

19. Do you know of anyone else who might be interested in participating in this study?
20. Would you be willing to contact them and ask permission to give me their first name and telephone number or email so that I may contact them and give them more information about this study?
21. Would you be willing to pass my contact information on to others so that those who are interested can contact me?

Thank you for your time!

I look forward to meeting with you again to hear about your experiences and stories.

You can contact me at any time to share information, refine, or clarify points made in our interviews, or ask questions.

Interview Protocol #2

Begin with a recap from first interview:

During the last interview, you highlighted the following barriers and support factors...

Do you want to share any additional information, refine, or clarify points made in our previous interview?

Background Questions

1. What/who aspires you to go to college?
2. When/how did you know you wanted to go to college?
3. Can you tell me about your experience with the college identification process?
 - a. How many colleges did you look at?
 - b. How did you know which ones to look at?
 - c. What was easy about the college identification process?
 - d. What was difficult about the college identification process?
4. Can you tell me about your experience with the college application and admissions process?
 - a. What were the college applications like?
 - i. Was the process hard or easy to navigate? Why?
 - ii. Can you provide an example?
 - b. How did you become aware of the college requirements/prerequisites?
 - c. How did you learn about the deadlines for application and for financial aid?
 - d. Can you provide an example of the challenges you faced during the college admissions process?
(Prompts/Probes: Language Barriers, Prerequisites, Personal Statement, Application Forms)
 - e. What factors supported the process?
 - i. Can you provide an example?
5. Can you tell me about your college decision process?
 - a. How did you decide which college to attend?
(Prompts/Probes: College Website, Campus Visit, Financial aid package, cost, specific programs, family influence...)
 - b. What roles did your parents play in your decision?
 - i. What about your peers/friends?
 - c. What roles did your counselors play in this process?
 - i. How about your teachers and school administrators?
 - d. What was easy about the college decision process?
 - e. What was difficult about the college decision process?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):

Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, teacher/administrator support, counselors/guidance

support, language barriers, prerequisites, personal statement, application forms, college recruiters?

Higher Educational Experience Questions

Central Research Question: What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first-generation Vietnamese American college students at a four-year college or university?

6. Please tell me about your college experience.
 - a. What did you do?
 - b. Where did you live?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):
Social vs. Academic Activities

7. How did you get involved in the Mentorship Program?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):
Compare/contrast: K-12 vs. Higher Education

Barriers to Success

Sub-Research Question #1: What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as hindering or impeding their K-16 educational success?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):
Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, language, other barriers?

8. What challenges/obstacles have you faced or are facing in college?
 - a. Can you give me some examples?
 - b. What made them obstacle?
 - c. How did you respond?

Support Factors

Sub-Research Question #2: What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as supporting or assisting their K-16 educational success?

Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):
Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, resistance), other assistance?

9. What has helped/assisted you to succeed in college?

- a. Can you give me some examples?
- 10. What abilities/skills helped you succeed in college?
 - a. Can you share an example or a time of how these abilities/skills helped at the college level?
- 11. Describe a specific time or event when something or someone helped you in college.
 - a. What exactly happened?
 - b. What difference did it make?
- 12. What/Who motivated you to succeed in college?
 - a. Can you give me some examples?
- 13. What was the single most important factor in helping you overcome challenges/obstacles at the college level?
 - a. How did it help you succeed in college?
- 14. What other resources or opportunities helped you to navigate and stay in college?
 - a. How did they help you succeed in college?

Suggestions on how to improve the K-16 educational experience

Prompts/Probes (to get participants' input for Chapter 5):

Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional?

- 15. What advice would you offer other students who are (minorities, first in their families to go to college, living in poverty) experiencing similar challenges as you have?
- 16. What advice would you give to colleges/universities to improve the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American college students?
- 17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Snowball Sample Question

- 18. Do you know of anyone else who might be interested in participating in this study?
- 19. Would you be willing to contact them and ask permission to give me their first name and telephone number or email so that I may contact them and give them more information about this study?
- 20. Would you be willing to pass my contact information on to others so that those who are interested can contact me?

Thank you for your time!

You will be receiving an email from me within in the near future detailing my preliminary findings of your interviews. This one to two page document will include your challenges/obstacles and support factors as you navigate the K-16 educational pipeline and I would welcome your responses/feedback in reviewing preliminary findings of your interviews. You could read and respond in writing. If you choose to provide

feedback, this process should take 30-45 minutes (approximately 10 minutes to read and 20 to 35 minutes to respond).

You can contact me at any time to share information, refine, or clarify points made in our interviews, or ask questions.

APPENDIX E
RESEARCH RELATED TO PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

Appendix E

Research Related to Protocol Questions

Research Questions	Protocol Questions	Related Topics Addressed	Sample of Relevant Literature
<p>Rapport Building</p> <p>Background/ Context Setting Questions</p> <p>(Protocol #1)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May I ask how old you are? 2. Please tell me about your family background and experience <i>before</i> emigrating to America. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How many people are in your family? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Who are they? ii. What are their education backgrounds in Vietnam? iii. What are their occupations in Vietnam? 3. Please tell me about your journey to America. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. When did you/your family emigrate to America? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. At what age did you come to America? b. How did you/your family emigrate to America? c. Why did you/your family emigrate to America? d. What do you recall from your journey? 4. Please tell me about your family background and experience <i>after</i> emigrating to America. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How many people emigrated with you? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Who are they? ii. What are their occupations after their arrival in America? 5. Did you or anyone in your household receive any government or financial assistance after arriving in 	<p>Research Methods</p>	<p>Chase, S. E. (2005)</p> <p>Clandinin, D. J. (2013)</p> <p>Creswell, J. W. (2008)</p> <p>Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy, P. (2011)</p>

	<p>the United States?</p> <p><i>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</i> Housing (Section 8) Program, Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid/Medical Program, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program.</p>		
<p>Rapport Building</p> <p>Background/ Context Setting Questions</p> <p>(Protocol #2)</p>	<p>Do you want to share any additional information, refine, or clarify points made in our previous interview?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What/who inspires you to go to college? 2. When/how did you know you wanted to go to college? 3. Can you tell me about your experience with the college identification process? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How many colleges did you look at? b. How did you know which ones to look at? c. What was easy about the college identification process? d. What was difficult about the college identification process? 4. Can you tell me about your experience with the college application and admissions process? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What were the college applications like? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Was the process hard or easy to navigate? Why? ii. Can you provide an example? b. How did you become aware of the college requirements/prerequisites? c. How did you learn about the deadlines for application and for financial aid? d. Can you provide an example of the 	<p>Research Methods</p>	<p>Chase, S. E. (2005)</p> <p>Clandinin, D. J. (2013)</p> <p>Creswell, J. W. (2008)</p> <p>Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy, P. (2011)</p>

	<p>challenges you faced during the college admissions process? <i>(Prompts/Probes: Language Barriers, Prerequisites, Personal Statement, Application Forms)</i></p> <p>e. What factors supported the process? i. Can you provide an example?</p> <p>5. Can you tell me about your college decision process? a. How did you decide which college to attend? <i>(Prompts/Probes: College Website, Campus Visit, Financial aid package, cost, specific programs, family influence...)</i> b. What roles did your parents play in your decision? i. What about your peers/friends? c. What roles did your counselors play in this process? i. How about your teachers and school administrators? d. What was easy about the college decision process? e. What was difficult about the college decision process?</p> <p><i>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</i> Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, teacher/administrator support, counselors/guidance support, language barriers, prerequisites, personal statement, application forms, college recruiters?</p>		
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<p>Central Research Question:</p> <p>What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first generation Vietnamese American college students at a four-year college or university?</p> <p>K-12 Level</p>	<p>6. Please tell me about your Elementary School experience.</p> <p>7. Please tell me about your Middle School experience.</p> <p>8. Please tell me about your High School experience.</p> <p><u>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</u> Compare/contrast: Elementary vs. Middle School vs. High School</p>	<p>K-12 Story /Narrative</p>	<p>Yosso, T. (2005)</p> <p>Swail, W., (2013)</p> <p>Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)</p>
<p>Central Research Question:</p> <p>What are the K-16 educational experiences of successful first generation Vietnamese American college students at a four-year college or university?</p> <p>College Level</p>	<p>6. Please tell me about your college experience.</p> <p>a. What did you do?</p> <p>b. Where did you live?</p> <p><u>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</u> Social vs. Academic Activities</p> <p>7. How did you get involved in the Mentorship Program?</p> <p><u>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</u> Compare/contrast: K-12 vs. Higher Education</p>	<p>College Story /Narrative</p>	<p>Yosso, T. (2005)</p> <p>Swail, W., (2013)</p> <p>Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)</p>
<p>Sub-Question #1:</p> <p>What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as hindering or impeding their K-16 educational success?</p>	<p><u>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</u></p> <p>Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, language, other barriers?</p>	<p>K-16 Story/ Narrative on barriers to success</p>	<p>Yosso, T. (2005)</p> <p>Swail, W., (2013)</p> <p>Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)</p> <p>Brown, Schale, & Nilsson</p>

			(2010) Portes & Rumbaut (1996) Robbins (2004) Zhou & Bankston (1998)
Sub-Question #1: K-12 Level	9. As you look back, what challenges/obstacles have you faced in elementary, middle, or high school after emigrating to America? a. Can you give me some examples? b. What made them obstacle? c. How did you respond?	K-12 Story/ Narrative on barriers to success	Yosso, T. (2005) Swail, W., (2013) Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)
Sub-Question #1: College Level	8. What challenges/obstacles have you faced or are facing in college? a. Can you give me some examples? b. What made them obstacle? c. How did you respond?	College Story/ Narrative on barriers to success	Yosso, T. (2005) Swail, W., (2013) Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)
Sub-Question #2: What cognitive, social, and institutional factors do first-generation Vietnamese American college students describe as supporting or assisting their K-16 educational	<u>Prompts/Probes (to be used when appropriate and as time allows):</u> Personal/cognitive, social/cultural, institutional, financial, academic advising, family, friends, community, forms of capital (aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, resistance), other assistance?	K-16 Story/ Narrative on support factors	Yosso, T. (2005) Swail, W., (2013) Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003) Lee

success?			(1991) Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore (1991) Zhou & Bankston, (1998)
Sub-Question #2: K-12 Level	<p>10. As you look back, what has helped/assisted you to succeed in school at the K-12 level? a. Can you give me some examples?</p> <p>11. What abilities/skills helped you succeed at the K-12 level? a. Can you share an example or a time of how these abilities/skills helped at the K-12 level?</p> <p>12. Was there a specific time or event when something or someone helped you at the K-12 level? a. What exactly happened?</p> <p>13. What/Who motivated you to succeed in elementary, middle, and/or high school? a. Can you give me some examples?</p> <p>14. What was the single most important factor in helping you overcome challenges/obstacles at the K-12 level? a. How did it help you succeed in school?</p> <p>15. What other resources or opportunities helped you to navigate and stay in elementary, middle, and high school? a. How did they help you succeed in school?</p>	K-12 Story/ Narrative on support factors	Yosso, T. (2005) Swail, W., (2013) Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)

<p>Sub-Question #2: College Level</p>	<p>9. What has helped/assisted you to succeed in college? a. Can you give me some examples?</p> <p>10. What abilities/skills helped you succeed in college? a. Can you share an example or a time of how these abilities/skills helped at the college level?</p> <p>11. Describe a specific time or event when something or someone helped you in college. a. What exactly happened? b. What difference did it make?</p> <p>12. What/Who motivated you to succeed in college? a. Can you give me some examples?</p> <p>13. What was the single most important factor in helping you overcome challenges/obstacles at the college level? a. How did it help you succeed in college?</p> <p>14. What other resources or opportunities helped you to navigate and stay in college? a. How did they help you succeed in college?</p>	<p>College Story/ Narrative on support factors</p>	<p>Yosso, T. (2005)</p> <p>Swail, W., (2013)</p> <p>Swail, W., Redd, K., & Perna, L. (2003)</p>
<p>Participant Suggestions: K-12 Level</p>	<p>16. What advice would you offer other students who are (minorities, first in their families to go to college, living in poverty) experiencing similar challenges as you have?</p> <p>17. What advice would you give to elementary, middle, and high schools to improve the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American students?</p> <p>18. Is there anything else you would</p>	<p>Research Methods</p>	<p>Chase, S. E. (2005)</p> <p>Clandinin, D. J. (2013)</p> <p>Creswell, J. W. (2008)</p> <p>Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy,</p>

	like to add?		P. (2011)
Participant Suggestions: College Level	<p>15. What advice would you offer other students who are (minorities, first in their families to go to college, living in poverty) experiencing similar challenges as you have?</p> <p>16. What advice would you give to colleges/universities to improve the educational experiences of first-generation Vietnamese American college students?</p> <p>17. Is there anything else you would like to add?</p>	Research Methods	<p>Chase, S. E. (2005)</p> <p>Clandinin, D. J. (2013)</p> <p>Creswell, J. W. (2008)</p> <p>Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy, P. (2011)</p>
Snowball Sample Question	<p>Do you know of anyone else who might be interested in participating in this study?</p> <p>Would you be willing to contact them and ask permission to give me their first name and telephone number or email so that I may contact them and give them more information about this study?</p> <p>Would you be willing to pass my contact information on to others so that those who are interested can contact me?</p>	Research Methods	<p>Chase, S. E. (2005)</p> <p>Clandinin, D. J. (2013)</p> <p>Creswell, J. W. (2008)</p> <p>Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Leavy, P. (2011)</p>

APPENDIX F
TRANSCRIPTIONIST CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Appendix F

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____ (transcriptionist), agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Betty Ta related to her research study titled *Narrative Inquiry: K-16 Educational Experiences and Stories of First-Generation Vietnamese American College Students*. Further, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Betty Ta.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's Name (Printed): _____

Transcriber's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

FREE AND LOW COST COUNSELING/SUPPORT SERVICES

Appendix G

Free & Low Cost Counseling/Support Services in Orange County

CARE Counseling Center (Anaheim)

1614 E. 17th Street Suite D1
Santa Ana, CA 92705
(714) 836-9900
www.carecounseling.net

CARE Counseling Center (Santa Ana)

631 S. Brookhurst Ave. #205
Anaheim, CA 92805
(714) 836-9900
www.carecounseling.net

Center for Healing

26041 Cape Drive, Suite 250F
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
(949) 348-1717
www.psyceu.info/index.html

Center for Individual and Family Therapy

840 Town & Country Road
Orange 92868
(714) 558-9266
(866) 222-2438

F.A.C.E.S. (Fullerton)

505 E. Commonwealth Ave Ste 200
Fullerton, California 92832
(714) 879-9616

F.A.C.E.S. (Santa Ana)

1651 E. 4th Street, Suite 128
Santa Ana, CA 92701
(714) 879-9616

Families & Communities Together (FaCT)

P.O. Box 6838
Orange, 92863
(714) 704-8777

Friendly Center

147 W. Rose Ave
Orange, California 92867
(714) 771-5300

Gary Center

341 Hillcrest St.
La Habra, CA
(562) 691-3263 x0

Human Options Counseling Center (Corbin Family Resource Center)

2215 W. McFadden Ave., Ste. G
Santa Ana, 92704
(714) 480-3737
(562) 594-9492

Human Options Counseling Center (Minnie Street Family Resource Center)

1300 E. McFadden Ave., Room 13
Santa Ana, 92705
(714) 972-5775
(949) 757-3635

Mental Health Association of Orange County (Garden Grove)

12755 Brookhurst St., Suite 116
Garden Grove 92840
(714) 638-8277

Mental Health Association of Orange County (Orange)

822 Town & Country Road
Orange 92868
(714) 547-7559

Share Our Selves (S.O.S.)

1550 Superior Ave.
Costa Mesa, CA 92627
(949) 270-2100

The Center OC

11605 N. Spurgeon St,
Santa Ana, California 92701
(714) 953-5428

Turning Point Center for Families

1370 N. Brea Blvd, Ste 245
Fullerton, California 92835
(714) 547-8111

Vietnamese Community of OC INC.

14541 Brookhurst St., Suites C 9-10
Westminster, CA 92683
(714) 640-3424

APPENDIX H
MATRICES OF BARRIERS AND SUPPORT FACTORS

Appendix H

Matrices of Barriers and Support Factors

TABLE 2. Profiles of Participants and Barriers

Factors	Barriers/Challenges	Self	Jackie	Kate	Tammy	Ngan	Robert	Larry	Tony
Cultural/ Social Factors	Refugee/Immigrant Status	X				X			
	Low-Socioeconomic Status	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Single-Parent Household		X				X		X
	Roles of Gender/ Birth Order	X		X	X	X	X	X	
	Family/Work Obligations	X	X			X	X		X
	Peer Pressure/Bullying			X	X	X			X
	Lack of Family/Parental Support		X		X	X	X		X
	Discrimination/Racism	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
	Social Isolation			X	X	X			X
	Stress, Depressive Symptoms, and Mental Health	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cognitive Factors	Intergenerational Conflicts/Gap		X	X	X	X	X		X
	Low Self-Esteem		X		X		X	X	
	Language Barrier	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Inadequate knowledge and skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Time-Management		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

TABLE 2. Continued

Factors	Barriers/Challenges	Self	Jackie	Kate	Tammy	Ngan	Robert	Larry	Tony
Institutional Factors	Lack of Faculty/Counselor/Staff Support			X	X	X	X		X
	Lack of Community Support				X			X	X
	Lack of Administration Support		X		X	X	X	X	
	Lack of Role Models/Mentors				X		X		X
	Lack of Institutional Resources/Programs/Workshops	X		X		X			
	Exclusion of Minority Students from the School Curriculum and Culture/Lack of Minority Representation	X		X			X	X	

TABLE 3. Profiles of Participants and Support Factors

Factors	Factors of Support	Self	Jackie	Kate	Tammy	Ngan	Robert	Larry	Tony
Cultural/ Social Factors	Family/Parental Contribution	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Peer/Friend Support		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Strong Ethnic Identity	X		X	X	X			
	High Cultural Values/ Expectations	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Education as a Means for Upward Social Mobility	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Attitude Towards Learning and School	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	High Self-Motivation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cognitive Factors	Extracurricular Activities/Sports/Clubs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	English Language Ability					X			X
	Vietnamese Language Ability	X		X	X	X		X	
	Strong Work Ethic and Critical Thinking Ability	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Institutional Factors	Organization & Prioritize	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Financial Assistance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Community Support	X	X	X		X	X		
	Administration Support		X	X					X
	Faculty/Counselor/Staff Support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Role Models/Mentors	X	X	X		X		X	X
	Institutional Resources/Programs/ Workshops/Websites	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

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