

Jeremy Vuong

Professor Emerson

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### The Multiple Stories to an Identity

Who are you? The universal question that is impossible to answer at most times. The answer usually comes much later in life than most answers you generally try to find. So, what is the answer to this elusive question? It is simple. I am me. I am the stories that I carry with me from the moment I can remember to the present time, and I continue to develop these stories as time goes on so when that special time arrives, the experiences and events I have had become who I am. Why multiple stories and not just one to key in onto your overall identity? I do not think that anyone is capable of telling their life story in a single narrative. A person's life is too rich and plentiful to only have one central story arc. A person's identity usually consists of multiple layers or, as Galen Strawson would phrase psychologist Erik Erikson in his essay, "I am not a story", "various selves... make up our composite Self." Because of this, I believe that narratives have the power to answer the impossible inquiry. In my life, the multiple narratives that I carry with me shape my identity and without them, I would be as **dull** as a razor after a year of consecutive use. I believe that narratives, through the act of sharing, cannot only teach others but teach yourself about your experiences and form your unique identity.

Multiple narratives give depth to a person's identity when it comes to retelling their life story. Especially in my life, I feel like my identity consists of many layers that unfold to reveal

itself when appropriate. The reason being is because my upbringing consisted of Vietnamese culture while not being exposed to American culture as much. This was because my parents had immigrated to the United States from Vietnam shortly before I was born, so I was not exposed to a substantial amount of American culture until we moved to Maine in 2011 where the community was predominantly white. Because of the blend of both cultures, my personality would be consisted of, as Strawson would put it, “multiple selves” that I would switch out when the situation calls for it. Strawson questions one of the authors in his article, Somerset W. Maugham, as he says “I recognize that I am made up of several persons and that the person that at the moment has the upper hand will inevitably give place to another. But which is the real one? All of them or none?” In my opinion, I believe that all of those “people” are real because depending on the situation, you can unravel more layers of your identity to show your friends than you would compare to another group of peers. In my case, when I am with my parents, the more layers I close up to seclude how I truly feel to them because of my upbringing.

Narratives can shape not only your identity through your past experiences but shape the identity of whomever you share these experiences with. In my life, I was brought up by my Vietnamese parents, teaching me the values and morals that any child from Vietnam would know. This upbringing was due to the way my parents lived their lives in Vietnam. It makes



sense that they only taught me the lessons that they knew. In Alexis Torres’ [interview](#) with her aunt, her aunt talks about moving to the United States from Portugal when she was only twelve years old. In the beginning, she only adapted what she was taught about her Portuguese culture into her life at that point in time. Just like my

parents, her past experiences shaped her identity and that was then passed on to the next generation. My identity would not be what it is today without the influence of my parents' narratives. The addition of another culture makes my identity even more unique than it already is.

To understand who you are is a difficult task to begin with, but with the help of sharing narratives, you can come to understand who you really are. For most of my life, it was always about the **grades** and **academics** from the time I walked to the point when my family moved from *California* to **Maine**. When I was in junior high, my parents would finally introduce the idea that it was okay to not be the smartest, but the kindest. I took this to heart from that point on and became very altruistic to everybody I came into contact with. It seemed great in the beginning until I noticed that I was also sacrificing my happiness for the sake of others. I did not think much of it at first until it became overwhelming. I just wanted everybody to become [Happier](#) while I was sacrificing my well-being. Ed Sheeran's song "Happier", resonated really well for me in the sense that I was somewhat fine in putting other's contentment before mine. The instrumentals emphasize this even more. As Sheeran sings, you can hear the pain that he is in, and he sounds like he is on the brink of crying towards the end of the song, yet he is still holding on to the little bit of happiness he has left because it was sacrificed for the person he loves. When I first heard this, it felt like I was the one who wrote the song. I was always the person to make sure you smiled before I do. I was not aware of this until I had to tell a friend why I was not feeling happy. By recounting my experiences, I was able to come to terms with a part of my identity: the altruistic piece. According to Julie Beck, in her article "Life Stories", "storytelling... is a way of making sense of the world around us." Analyzing this, I made sense of myself by

telling **my** story to others. I would not have realized that my happiness was being given up for others' happiness if it were not for storytelling.

Narratives. Stories. These are the key pieces that everybody needs in order to come to terms with themselves. Notice the plural of these pieces? It was not an accident. Each and every person's life story is way too elaborate to be able to tell it in one narrative. Each layer needs to be unraveled in order to get the full sense of who they are. Their story deserves a whole saga to be able to show why this person is as unique as they are now. Not only that, their experiences will shape who they become in the future too. Just like Torres' aunt said in the interview, "We become what we live." We become the people that our past experiences shape us to be.

Works Cited

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## Multimodal Statement

I will put a picture from when I was young, showing the Vietnamese culture I was exposed to. This is to show the combination of the two cultures that make up my identity. This will be in the section of my essay that talks about my parents' influence on my identity. I am incorporating the instrumentals from "Happier" and I will use Alexis' interview in my essay. With the song, the instrumentals really move and shake your emotions when you can see how Sheeran really feels about this exchange of emotions. This will be incorporated in the section where I talk about how storytelling is an effective way to understand yourself. With Alexis' interview, my identity was already pre-shaped when my parents immigrated to the US from Vietnam. Because of that, I didn't get the typical upbringing a typical American child would get. This would be in the same paragraph where I put my picture of myself. I also used different fonts for emphasis on certain words. Examples include my move from California to Maine and some other words that I thought would look more appealing than just bolding them. This will be effective because it will give the paper a little bit of pop while also being engaging for the reader. Also, not part of the multimodal statement but I wanted to include it. I hope you understood the pun in my title because I talk about multiple layers to personality in my essay and when I say "Multiple Stories", I mean multiple narratives but also "stories" as in "levels" in a building. Just wanted to say that.