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Barriers that Impact Hmong Students in Post-Secondary Education

By

Francois Vang, B.S.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members

Dr. Pa Der Vang, Ph.D., LICSW (Chair)
Darcy Nelson, MSW, LICSW
Bridget Bordelon, M.Ed., EL Teacher

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Hmong families generally understand that education is the key to their survival and success in the United States. The literature review in this study suggests that cultural barriers and adjusting to the U.S. are strong indicators of why Hmong students do not succeed academically. This research examines the personal history and risk factors that affect Hmong students in post-secondary education from the students' perspectives. Ten interviews were conducted with Hmong college students on what they perceive to be the high risk factors that impact Hmong students in post-secondary education. A basic content analysis was performed to code and analyze the data, and emerging themes were recorded.

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Introduction

Most Hmong came to the United States after the Vietnam War in 1975. Several Hmong immigrants also came to the U.S. as a result of the closure of refugee camps in Thailand (Grigoleit, 2006; Su et al., 2005). The last wave of Hmong immigration from Thailand occurred in 2004 (Vang, 2013). It has been a challenging journey for the Hmong to settle into a different culture. After 40 years, the Hmong population still remains as one the most impoverished Southeast Asian groups in the United States (American Community Survey [ACS], 2009). Thousands of Hmong families continue to experience the shock of adapting to an entirely new culture. Today, there are approximately 260, 000 Hmong individuals who live in the United States according to the 2010 U.S. Census.

Financial survival, social acceptance, and mental well-being are the key factors to successful acculturation (Crevier, 2002). Acculturation can be described as the process in which members of a particular group adopt the beliefs and behaviors of their new country or host culture (Vang, 2013). The Hmong community values education and employment as its main avenues for higher chances of succeeding in the United States. Therefore, many Hmong parents are hopeful that their children gain a good education and find good jobs in order to help support the family (Thao, 2003). Maintaining family and clan relationships are highly valued in the Hmong culture; it is not surprising that many Hmong individuals relocate to be nearer to their families (Crevier, 2002; Thao, 2003). However, Hmong families are more likely to struggle because their families are often large and make little money (Vang, 2013). The literature review in this study focuses on some of the major cultural barriers that exist among Hmong students in post-secondary education. These challenges include poverty, adjusting to the U.S., cultural identity, gender roles, language, and racial prejudice (Vang, 2013).

A comprehensive description of the study will be given based on the research design, materials, and interview process with participants in order to evaluate the data. Lastly, this paper will conclude with a discussion on the findings and its potential implications. Despite a plethora of studies that look at college barriers for Hmong students, there is limited research examining the cultural barriers on Hmong students in post-secondary education. The purpose of this study is to examine the main barriers impacting Hmong students in post-secondary education.

Social workers have always been concerned with the welfare of new immigrants throughout American history. Social workers are called upon to address students' needs while also addressing the source of student troubles within the school. The Priority for the Poor and Vulnerable states, "social workers strive to ensure to equal opportunity and meaningful participation for all" (Social Work for Social Justice: Ten Principles). Social workers are responsible and committed to advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs.

Review of the Literature

Hmong have made significant adjustments since they arrived in the United States. They have exhibited higher socioeconomic status due to language acquisition, new role identities, and better lifestyles (Vang, 2013). Although current educational trends found an increase of college degrees among the Hmong population, there are still many Hmong students who struggle academically because of poverty, the inexperience to the freedoms of college, differences in cultural expectations, and difficulty with language (Crevier, 2002; Thao, 2003; Xiong & Lee, 2011).

The Impact of Poverty on Hmong Students

More than 200,000 Hmong people in the United States are impoverished due to financial hardships (Vang, 2013). Hmong students are considered “at risk students;” they are faced with barriers including financial stress, delinquency, cultural differences, or language barriers (Crevier, 2002; Su, 2005). Furthermore, Hmong students who do not succeed in college are more likely to suffer from negative psychological adjustment, relationship problems, and have dysfunctional families. Su (2005) mentioned that Hmong students blame themselves when they cannot fulfill the dream or expectations of their parents and therefore engage in gang involvement, teen pregnancy, suicide, and/or domestic violence.

There are a few Hmong students who have found obstacles and negative life experiences to be a source of motivation to do well in school (Xiong & Lee, 2011). These students, who are dedicated to their education, are filled with hope to begin their academic careers at colleges and universities across the nation. They are committed to pursuing their academic experience in higher education for better financial stability, so they can help their family members (Xiong & Lee, 2011).

First Generation College Students

Hmong students today who have the opportunity to go to college are usually first generation college students. In other words, they are the first, or one of the first in their families to either enter or enroll in a post-secondary education degree (Crevier, 2002; Xiong & Lee, 2011). First-generation students often do not understand the important steps to prepare for higher education. They are not well-informed regarding the following components: applying for college financial aid, completing basic admissions procedures, and making connections between career goals and educational requirements (Vargas, 2004). Additionally, these students are more

likely to live at home and travel to school, enroll at two-year institutions, and register for remedial classes (Folger et al., 2004). Williams and Butler (2010) have demonstrated that first generation students deal with conflict loyalties between the college they attend and their friends and family. As a result, Hmong college students are more likely to drop out of college in their first year.

Conflicts in Hmong Families

Cultural Identity. Differences in cultural values, traditions, and lifestyles between parents and their children can lead to major family conflicts in the Hmong family (Xiong & Lee, 2011; Su, 2005). For example, Hmong parents who do not speak English insist that their children communicate in their native language and keep up Hmong traditions. It is important to take a closer look at generational status in order to identify these differences. Hmong parents are first-generation immigrants who came to the U.S. as young adults and may not be as acculturated as their children or the second-generation (Vang, 2013). Later generations develop new ideas and beliefs that Hmong parents do not tolerate. Therefore, family conflicts tend to arise due to cultural identity; later generations of Hmong immigrants are more likely to identify themselves as Hmong-Americans rather than only Hmong. Next, second and third generation immigrants are less likely to be fluent in their native language; they do not have the ability to read, speak, and write in Hmong. In addition, Hmong children today are more likely to wait until they are older to get married and also have fewer children. Finally, later generations exhibit higher socioeconomic status than the first generation immigrants (Crevier, 2002; Vang, 2013; Su, 2005). Consequently, Hmong children see the world differently from their parents.

Family Expectations. Hmong children are raised and expected to respect their families, their clan, and the Hmong community (Crevier, 2002; Thao, 2003; Vang, 2013; Xiong & Lee,

2011). It is very challenging for Hmong students to find the right balance between their culture of origin and U.S. culture. The social values and norms reflected on campus may not reflect Hmong students' family, social, and educational expectations. Since Hmong parents are not familiar with the education system in the U.S., children do not receive the proper guidance in both personal and career development (Xiong & Lee, 2011; Su, 2005; Thao, 2003). As a result, Hmong college students get confused and lack the ability to adapt their values and attitudes to their newly introduced college culture.

Gender Roles. Hmong female students are more likely to struggle academically and emotionally than Hmong male students (Crevier, 2002; Lee, 2009 Vang, 2013). Hmong follow a patriarchal society in which Hmong girls are expected to cook and clean around the house. Girls also take the role of caregiver to their younger siblings. In traditional Hmong families, daughters are expected to marry in their teenage years to fulfill their household responsibilities (Crevier, 2002). The situation is quite different for Hmong male students; they have more pressure from their family to go to school and excel in their college years. They are expected to achieve the highest degree possible and must find a good career (e.g., to become doctors, lawyers, etc.) to support the entire family, including parents, wife, and children (Crevier, 2002). The cultural demands of the Hmong culture make it difficult for students to transition between Hmong and American cultures. These obstacles Hmong students are confronted with typically lead to poor study habits, lack of money, lack of motivation, lack of direction on career goals, and poor time management (Xiong & Lee, 2011).

Racial Prejudice

Many educators in the U.S. are not properly trained to be sensitive to different minority students, their educational needs, socioeconomic background, and home environment issues.

Hmong students are less likely to be motivated going to school because teachers fail to embrace their students' ideas, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses (Crevier, 2002; Thao, 2003; Vang, 2013). Hmong students are more likely to remain quiet in the classroom because of their Southeast Asian accent when they speak in English. Hmong children are also not socialized to voice their opinion without it being solicited. Most of these students also struggle in English writing and reading (Crevier, 2002). Thao's (2003) investigations on empowering Hmong students indicated that Hmong immigrant students continue to experience harmful schooling practices. Hmong students who are exposed to the school tracking system are faced with racism and stereotypes. Many schools fail to incorporate students' culture into their curriculum. As a consequence, immigrant students are too often labeled with learning disabilities (Thao, 2003). Lastly, school personnel perceives Hmong students to have a strong educational background (e.g., performing well on standardized tests) like other Asian-American students. The stereotyping of Asian Americans sets Hmong students up as the specific target of jealousy in the mainstream society (Xiong & Lee, 2011). It is important not to forget that there are subgroups of Asian American who do not perform well academically; these include Hmong students.

Research Question

It is clear that cultural barriers and adjusting to the U.S. are strong indicators of why Hmong college students do not succeed academically. In order to better support the well-being of the Hmong community, this research was developed based on a social work perspective using the "Multidimensional Framework." The purpose of this study is to expand the literature on the cultural barriers that Hmong students experience in post-secondary education. Therefore, the research question for this study is: what are the barriers that impact Hmong students in post-secondary education?

Conceptual Framework

Multidimensional Framework

Ashford and LeCroy (2009) indicated that the Multidimensional Framework reflects on the person's total functioning. Human beings are evaluated based on four dimensions: the biophysical dimension, social dimension, psychological dimension, and physical hazards. The biophysical dimension is represented by an individual's physical growth and development—it involves human cells, organs, and other physiological aspects (Nurcombe and Gallagher, 1986). The social dimension emphasizes human relationships; social workers concentrate their full attention on the interactions that occur between families, communities, and other support systems (Ashford & LeCroy, 2009). The third dimension contributes to the integration of the individual's mental process; the psychological dimension represents people's cognitive development, communication, attitudes and emotions, and self-identity (Staw, 2003). Lastly, physical hazards are considered factors or hazards that affect the individual's physical safety; they are unsafe conditions (e.g., loud noise, fire, etc.) within the external or internal environment that can cause injury, illness and death (Ashford & LeCroy, 2009).

The Multidimensional Framework is used in this study to analyze and explain the different barriers that contribute to Hmong students in post-secondary education. This model involves the researcher being able to assess the main aspects of the participant (Hmong student)'s life and experience. The Hmong are an Asian ethnic group (biophysical dimension) who first migrated to South Central China over 4,000 years ago (Crevier, 2002). In the early 19th centuries, the Hmong relocated in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos (social dimension). Thousands of Hmong families were persecuted as a result of the Vietnam War in 1975 and other political events in Laos (physical hazards). According to the literature review, Hmong college

students have the tendency to struggle academically because of poverty (social dimension), the inexperience of the freedoms of college (social dimension), differences in cultural expectations (social dimension), and difficulty with language (psychological dimension) (Crevier, 2002; Thao, 2003; Xiong & Lee, 2011). In order to deliver effective services to Hmong college students, other providers such as educators and social workers are strongly encouraged to explore and understand Hmong history, culture, acculturation and the value placed on family and community (Tatman, 2011).

Methods

This study focuses on barriers that impact Hmong students in post-secondary education based on a social work perspective. The researcher predicted that the factors such as poverty, being a first generation student, conflicts in Hmong families, and racial prejudices would be revealed by participants as the main barriers that Hmong students experience in post-secondary education. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding on the participants' lives and personal experiences (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2014). Results are provided to inform future researchers, social workers, and other professionals who are interested in understanding the barriers that Hmong students experience in post-secondary education. The researcher started to recruit participants as soon as the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received.

Sample

Ten Hmong students (five male students and five female students) between the ages of 19 and 21 who were currently enrolled in their college courses were recruited to participate in this study. The University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was selected as the main school for recruiting participants due to its public location, history, and involvement within the Hmong community as

demonstrated by the Hmong Studies Consortium, which provides critical Hmong studies; the Luce Foundation, which provides grants/scholarships to Hmong students; the Asian American Studies Program, which provides Hmong language as a course; the Immigration History Research Center and Archives (IHRC), which focuses on Hmong history; and many other programs. Hmong students who attend the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities have a better representation of the Hmong community in Minnesota. One of the research compliance supervisors at the Institutional Review Board from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was contacted via email with a cover letter (Appendix A) for approval. To screen each participant for eligibility, participants were asked to show their student ID to demonstrate that they were attending the University of Minnesota. Next, participants identified themselves as first-generation college students (being the first person or one of the first in their family to go to college). Lastly, the researcher spoke in Hmong during the initial greeting and engaged in small talk with each participant as an ice breaker.

Consent and Confidentiality

Ethical considerations were met before the interview was conducted. The list of questions from the interview and the IRB consent form was revised and approved by the research chair committee (Professor Pa Der Vang) and the IRB. Participants signed the consent form before they could participate in this qualitative study. A blank copy of the consent form (Appendix C) was provided to all participants. The interview questions mainly focused on the personal history and risk factors of Hmong students in post-secondary education (Appendix D). Confidentiality was implemented by the researcher based on the following action: no identifying information was included in the final analysis and oral presentation. All recordings and transcripts were kept on a USB file in a locked drawer and destroyed on June 1, 2015.

Risks and Benefits of Participants

Each interviewee was encouraged to identify his or her personal challenge and past experiences as they relate to cultural barriers and adjusting to the U.S. Participants were informed about the potential risk of emotional distress during the interview process. In order to minimize this risk, participants were reminded that they could stop the interview at any time. In addition, all participants were given a sheet of information with resources (Appendix B). There were no incentives for subjects who participated in the study.

Data Collection

A series of open-ended questions was given to the participants. These personal interviews lasted between 15 to 20 minutes long and were recorded for transcription purposes. Interview questions focused on the topic of Hmong students in higher education. The questionnaire reflected on the following aspects: participant demographics (e.g., question#1); Hmong students' motivation to go to school (e.g. question #2); perception of academic achievement and personal challenges/experiences (e.g., questions #3, #4, #5 and #6); actions that can be done to prevent Hmong students from academic failure (e.g., questions #7, #8, and #9); and role identity (e.g., questions #10, #11, and #12). The guided questions from the interview are in Appendix D.

This qualitative study was designed to expand the literature on the cultural barriers Hmong students experience in post-secondary education. For this reason, a Hmong student (researcher's acquaintance) from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities was contacted in person to inform other students about the study. This method is mainly known as snowball sampling which is described as a non-probability sampling technique for data collection. Monette and DeJong (2014) mentioned that “the technique is especially useful for sampling sub-

cultures where the members routinely interact with one another (p. 147).” The researcher’s acquaintance stated the following: “I have a friend of my mine who has to complete his 682 research project to graduate with his Masters of Social Work degree from the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University; he is conducting a research on the barriers that impact Hmong college students. It would be great if you can help because it is an important topic for the Hmong community; your views and beliefs will make a huge difference. All you need to do is to participate in the study.” Those who were interested to participate in the study received the researcher’s first name, email, and phone number. They were encouraged to contact the researcher for more details. Participants identified themselves as Hmong individuals and first generation college students.

Setting

The researcher and each participant mutually agreed upon the location for the interview to be conducted. To avoid any distractions, each interview occurred in a safe and private setting such as school library, study room, behind a closed door, etc.

Analysis Technique

The researcher used a password protected iPhone 5 to record the entire interview. Each recording was deleted after the data was transcribed. The researcher transcribed each interview into a 2010 Word Document. To analyze the data, “open-coding” was used to identify the main concepts from the interview by transcribing each sentence. This method can be explained as “the unrestricted coding to produce concepts and dimensions that seem to fit the data fairly well” (Monette, et al., 2011, p. 438). In other words, the researcher reviewed the transcript sentence by sentence to identify the main concepts. Next, the researcher used focused coding or “content analysis” to identify similar thoughts and concepts to develop themes. This qualitative coding

strategy was used to interpret the information. Content analysis is described as a systematic technique for analyzing and understanding collections of text in an effort to identify themes (Monette, 2014).

Lastly, a partner reliability check was performed to ensure reliability of the research. A fellow student took the same data that the primary researcher had (interview questions and transcript) and went through the same content analysis and coding process. The partner identified similar themes which demonstrated that the coding was reliable. The data was kept on a flash drive and locked inside a cabinet at home.

Findings

The researcher wanted to focus on the personal history and high-risk factors that contributed to Hmong students' inability to succeed in post-secondary education from a social work perspective. The following topics that emerged in the analysis of data included: 1) Family Expectations; 2) Gender Roles; 3) Cultural Identity; 4) Racial Prejudice; 5) Learning Environment; 6) Language; 7) Financial Struggles; 8) Academic Perception; and 9) Separation or Divorce in the Family. Specific quotes from the participants' responses were selected to match the themes.

Family Expectations

The first theme reflected the expectations that family members or parents have for their children in Hmong culture. The following quotes are examples of this theme.

Participant 1 stated, *“A lot of the time you know we got this or even like, even from a young age I think a lot of Hmong students kind of hear this outburst of, our parents, this expectation of saying, oh, become a doctor or lawyer you know, something that makes money. Be something*

that makes money, and I can definitely understand the need for that kind of you know coming from a low income family” (p. 4, line 131-135).

Participant 3 stated, *“You’re still expected to balance everything at home as well and I think sometimes that can kinda cause an issue whether it’s a little emotional kind of stress not being able to balance everything or emotional stress of just feeling like you know our parents don’t necessarily understand what it’s like to go to college, so they can’t sympathize with us when you know we are, have a lot to do at school but we’re also trying to balance things at home so...”*(p.1, line 21-23).

Researcher: *Do you ever feel like that it... what is it... a challenge for you? Just cause you know, sometimes you know we have to go back home and be there for our family members. Does it ever get on the way?*

Participant 3 stated, *“My first few years of college I lived on campus so I have roommates near the University and my last two years my mom asked me to go home and help with the family because I’m the fifth of seven but my three oldest sisters all moved out of states, so then I kinda shifted into that older daughter role, so when I went home I definitely noticed a transition just you know it wasn’t easy just to focus on school and definitely, the responsibility to taking care of the family or just helping out with the family a little more, definitely affected not in a bad way but, it influenced and definitely changed the dynamic of how I was able to focus on school”* (p.2, line 75-81).

Researcher: *So, how does your family view your achievement?*

Participant 3 indicated, *“My dad’s expectation is literally to get a Ph.D. so for him in particular, a Bachelor degree is expected and it’s not like he is not proud but it’s not necessarily something,*

a big celebration to him and he always jokes you know, you don't get a big graduation party until you get your Ph.D., so they are proud of me, they are very proud but at the same time with my dad in particular there is still the expectation of, it's almost like oh you are half there because you got your bachelors but don't forget about the other degrees" (p. 5, line 148-153).

Participant 4 pointed out, *"...some of the smallest issues were definitely like responsibilities at home and trying to balance that with my responsibilities at school and then working and time management I think that was something I had to learn to do because it was if you're not at home and you're not at school then there is like a miscommunication, a misunderstand of you and your parents or least for me there was a lot of misunderstanding as to why you are not at home, whereas if I am not at school what am I doing and how does extracurricular activities benefit education and so because I feel like my parents didn't go through the experience of going to college and or just going to school, that was definitely something they did not understand"* (p.1, line 41-49).

Researcher: *And in terms of family structure, how is that going for you?*

Participant 4 stated, *"So, I'm the oldest daughter and so I think that really plays into perspectives and some of the experiences I've had, so it was always are you going to come home and watch the kids or are you going to come home to cook or you gotta come home and I don't know why you're not why you're not home not watching these other stuffs... So, we have a really odd family structure. I'm like the secondary mom I guess and so I took care of the kids and helped my mom and if there is anything else I can do the errands. I don't know, like I feel like the structure of family it varies from families to families so with our specific one, I've taken on a very responsible kind of dependent role so that's kind of prohibited me from doing independent things*

like living on campus or renting like an apartment with friends so, that's probably been the most that is affected, as an obstacle that's probably been the hardest" (p.2, line 80-94).

Researcher: *Yeah, so how does your family value your achievement?*

Participant 4 stated, *"My parents. Yeah, my parents are all about education and I think it wasn't really an option not to go school, it was always like you're gonna school, it does not matter how get, it doesn't matter how you get there you gotta keep your grades up, academic was always everything I, I feel like they were very proud of what I have accomplished but they definitely expect more, like more education, the more education you get the better so why not continue to go if you have the opportunity to go, I feel like that's kinda the mindset around education" (p. 4, line 227-232).*

Participant 5 stated, *"They definitely have high expectation for me, they kind of want me to, even after graduation they want me to go get my Doctorate in whatever they don't really care, at least it's a Ph.D"(p.4, line 110-111).*

Participant 6 stated, *"I think I was growing up it definitely played a big factor however in post-secondary education, not as much because I am privileged enough because I don't live with my family even though I just live 20 minutes away, well my parents just live 20 minutes in Brooklyn Park , I guess living here is different so I don't necessarily have that role of like doing thing that pertain to a Hmong daughter like yes I still am, yes there nights and weekends where you know I still have to go home and prepare for like shaman, like religions thing but otherwise for me I experience that, like family structure barriers" (p.1, line 34-40).*

Participant 7 stated, *"Ok do I want to stick with engineering or do I want to figure out—is a...I want to do something else?" And my dad and my mom they—I guess using their roles as parents they wanted to advise me on what they thought would be best for me but in terms of what they*

thought was best was just job security and starting high salary out of college. So that's why they pressured me to stay inside engineering but I didn't really like it so I think it was really hard for me to change my major just because I knew that they wouldn't accept it and at the same time when I did tell them they didn't really accept or at the time they didn't really consider my reasons valid so they just kept their roles of trying to look out what was best for me but at the same time I don't think they entirely knew what was best because they didn't understand what you could do with certain college degrees or what it's really like to be in college because my mom she didn't go to college but my dad did and he has an understanding of that hard work that's required of you from college but he's not" (p.2, line 38-49).

Researcher: *How is your family impacting you?*

Participant 7 mentioned, *"...it's definitely difficult just because like some mornings where I don't have morning classes, I can't really sleep in, get enough rest because my younger siblings they wake up, they're loud, they go to school during the weekdays and sometimes like being at home my parents ask me to look after my siblings even though I might have my own stuff to do so it's like during the weekend I might want to like come to school on campus and study in the library but I can't because my parents are going somewhere and they need someone to look after my younger siblings" (p.2, line 70-76).*

Researcher: *What works for you? Just in terms of learning environment?*

Participant 7 stated, *"It would be nice if Hmong parents weren't so I guess judgmental about what you want to do, it seems like they are really scared of bad things happen later on, that's why they wanted pressured me to pursue something they thought that would be good for me, and it would be nice if they were a little bit nice if they, and were open and more understanding they*

don't get upset too fast and they try to think like you know how are you going to use this in your future life instead of just saying you shouldn't do this because it's bad for you" (p. 2, line 117-123).

Participant 8 stated, *"Some barriers are the balance you have to keep between school and everything you do at home with your family cause my dad is very traditional so I kinda have to plan for that before I focus on my school work before but it's not too much, it's just comes out of nowhere so you gotta plan just act your feet, being quick on your feet so..." (p.1, line 11-14).*

Researcher: *What is it that you value in higher education as a Hmong student?*

Participant 8 reported, *"To be honest with you, like I don't anything to it, I don't really value about it I was just told to go to college so it's just apply to college after high school and just go there, and yeah" (p.1, line 16-17).*

Participant 9 stated, *"I've kinda come to the realization that I don't really know what I want to do, my whole reason for coming to college is because of my parents making like, advocating for higher education and me also realizing that my family, my parents probably know better than I do" (p.2, line 47-50).*

Researcher: *So what kind of environment would be supportive for you as a Hmong student to be successful?*

Participant 9 stated, *"I feel like if I go home there is always duties you have to do as a son and stuff like that, like there are not bad things anything like that it's just that it add more to the stress and sometimes at home they don't understand what you are going through because there are not college students like you, like as much they want to understand as much as they want to*

help sometimes they just don't understand because they haven't been in my shoes" (p.3, line 90-96).

Participant 10 stated, *"I think for me personally, the only barrier I have is my parents wanting to focus on education instead of doing other things that I would consider fun or a normal college student would do, being, also being from a traditional family" (p.1, line 23-26).*

Researcher: *So what about family structure so when you think back of, when you reflect back on your family do you feel like it's been a challenge?*

Participant 10 stated, *"Yeah yeah I think that family is one of the bigger issues just because you're expected to put your family first and with that I won't be able to do some things on weekends cause I have to prioritize my priorities, and family is always first whether it's part of the culture just, me being myself I, I guess that would be a barrier" (p.2, line 32-35).*

Most of the participants felt obligated to either attain a Ph.D. in college or obtain a high paying job in the workforce to meet their parents' expectations. The pressure to succeed in school usually came from the participant's father's point of view. Emotional distress was marked by those who felt their parents did not have a good understanding of the challenges that college demands. Another expectation included the participants' responsibility to take care of their family members such as watching over their younger siblings, cooking, and cleaning at home. Those who identified as being the oldest son or daughter experienced more expectations from their family members. A few participants mentioned they struggled in school mainly because they prioritized their family first, especially those who came from a low income family.

Gender Roles

The second theme that emerged from the transcripts was the gender roles of participants.

The following quotes are examples of this theme.

According to participant 1, *“There is a lot of bias kind of use towards the male, towards the male kind of gender and identity, because women have this stigma in them or on them within the community where you know they have to look at house wife, you know they have to do all these things that are very traditional and kind of holds kind of this idea or this identify of this Hmong woman and so I think that contradicts and conflicts a lot with... growing culture here”* (p.2, line 45-49).

Researcher: *You kinda mentioned about the... kind of like the stigma, the role and everything. Anything else you would like to add to that?*

Participant 1 stated, *“Although I believe that there are a lot of implications that are upon, upon the women you know in the Hmong community I also believe that there is also a lot of, responsibilities upon men, the men cause, into societies so how this kinda relates to post-secondary education is that you know in a lot of ways, as human beings we’re supposed to learn responsibilities but in the Hmong culture... gender role in general it just creates a lot of stress on the, on the foundation for identity of being Hmong, but at the same time, it’s, it’s, how do you say this? It restricts the individual kind of from you know, pursuing education because of the things they might take care of as a son or a daughter. Or family?”* (p.2, line 57-67).

Participant 2 stated, *“Especially being Hmong yeah, kinda the down of... especially you know women I think often times you feel you don’t have the other power to do it or unable to do it because of your status as woman, I think overtime that definitely has... ultimately you have to*

pass that or in the process of that we can pass that. Being a woman can be an obstacle because sometimes you just get frustrated too, a man thing because you think that men can only do it (p.1, line 34-38).

Researcher: *Yeah you kinda touched a little bit on that when you talked about the gender roles... being a Hmong woman. Say more about that?*

Participant 2 indicated, *"It's been a prominent thing for the females to have a bigger and larger roles within our family too, yeah and I guess from an outside perspective a more cultural outside perspective for a Hmong person it's kinda perceived like we in order for us to be successful we need to a male head, like even my mom emphasis that sometimes too"* (p.2, line 70-73).

Participant 3 stated, *"...whether it's a Hmong female who has to balance the gender roles of still taking care of the family and the home and coming to school whether a male who has to deal with a male gender role and just being present you know for certain events and things like that, I know that sometimes that overlaps with school work"* (p.1, line 22-27).

Participant 4 stated, *"Well, I think my family is still very like patriarchal and my brothers don't do very much, especially now that my brother is married, I think I've taken more of like a secondary provider for my family. In terms of like gender roles, it's definitely cooking and cleaning and maintaining the household, those are some of the responsibilities I identifies as like not essential, but I understand that that's what my parents expect of me and so that's what I have been taken on"* (p.2, 104-109).

Participant 5 stated, *"You know when, my parents are both immigrants and I guess in our youth they kinda treated the daughters differently and they kinda valued the sons more because they had higher expectations for the sons, they are gonna go to college they are gonna get a good job,*

but you know as we grew older you know they didn't go to college, only a few of them did, and you know they started to have more expectations in the daughters” (p.1, line 34-38).

Participant 6 stated, *“It used to, it was why I wanted to run away like to move away from my family so much because my parents are more traditional they don't, they see the importance of education and the importance of going to school but they expect you to be like a super woman, do everything all at once and to be able to have so many things on your loads because I like to always that, being a Hmong daughter it comes with the whole package so for me in particular, it was really hard to balance because in high school I was full of honors, I took AP classes, PSEO full time for four years, it's just really hard the fact that my parents did not understand that, it really affected my family structure even now like it's not just me going through the same thing but my siblings are going through the same thing too, I guess it is a barrier, so I would it is a barrier, yeah” (p.2, line 42-50).*

Participant 7 stated, *“I think like to answer that I think it's a lot of the expectations of being the, especially being the oldest boy in my family, my, I think my parents they really wanted me to do engineering not just because of it pays, job security, but also it's prestigious to them and also to people they know, so they wanted me to kinda to rise up to meet their, I guess like standard of getting a good reputation among the Hmong community and it was stressful because I didn't really like, to me like I didn't, I haven't been tune with the Hmong community cause I grew up in the suburbs so it did not matter too much to me, but it did matter for my parents and for the first year and half I really wanted to make my parents proud and happy so I stuck with it but it wasn't going well with grades with my interests, and I was just like not liking it at all so that's why I eventually changed, at first they were really upset that I didn't do it for various reasons, but I think the key thing is the expectations just because they want me to kinda be a leader eventually.*

My dad often says that he wants me to exceed him in some ways and like for example, tomorrow there is a THAO kwv (younger brother) meeting and even like they don't know who I am or like I don't know how I could help my dad wants me to go just to like show face and also like to potentially say something or help during their meeting" (p.3, line 83-97).

Researcher: *How do you see yourself in terms of your academic accomplishment?*

Participant 7 stated, *"I really wanted to be, play the role of the faithful son, it was just like try to do what my parents wanted me to do but also try to stick to what I wanted to do at the same time but those two things weren't the same thing back then and because of it I didn't like the class I was in I skipped some classes and I ended up failing some classes that ruined my GPA" (p.6, line 182-186).*

Participant 8 stated, *"I am the first male to be in college so like everybody, like all of my families even my aunties, my uncles, they really proud of me, and like but, they're not, like there is something I see, they're not proud of my sister or like my cousin who are female and that's, I don't know that's just, I feel like a self-pity cause even though my parents and my relatives give me praise they don't give the females praise, and that's even though like I am not a female myself like that, still my sisters are still a part of me so like I feel like the praise in like put down, that the girls get so" (p.2, line 98-104).*

Participant 9 stated, *"I guess, it's pretty much known at the kinda Hmong culture, it's a patriarchal community so really the benefits if you are a boy you kinda get the benefits of it, like you don't deal with the backlash that females receive so I can't really much speak much on like how females feel about it like since I have never been in their shoes but I can definitely say that since as a Hmong male growing up here, and seeing the patriarchal community and stuff like*

that I do realize, I do realize the backlash that female receive and I feel like that's kinda, that's a reason why we should pursue higher education and coach it as individuals so we can realize look past beyond that and yeah, that is a barrier in higher education because even like I don't know, for some reasons there is just seem to be like higher pressure, like bigger pressure, females when they go out to college because that's just how it was back then in the days like, were were not used to seen successful like women, Hmong female out there so it's a new thing for the Hmong community but it's also a good thing so" (p.2, line 55-65).

Participants claimed different responsibilities based on their gender roles. The Hmong community was described as a patriarchal society in which men in general are given more show of support in education than are women. This created emotional distress as revealed by male participants because they felt obligated to go to school, whereas female participants felt excluded since they did not receive much attention to pursue a college education. Respondents in this study also indicated Hmong parents are more likely to encourage their sons to be independent outside the family home, whereas daughters are expected to maintain the household. The following conflicts such as lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and wanting to leave their home were identified among participants. Lastly, male participants admitted that Hmong female students were less recognized and they dealt with bigger challenges. For example, women have to find a balance between their school work and chores at home, whereas men do not hold that responsibility since their status allows them to only focus on school.

Cultural Identity

The third theme which was identified by the researcher and his colleague concentrated on the cultural identity of participants. The following quotes illustrate this theme.

Participant 1 stated, *“...for incoming you know immigrants, immigrants that are Hmong, I think that holds a very big dynamic, that gap in trying to catch up kind of with the rest of the growing world, or like the growing Western world. And so, it just, it creates a lot of stress on that, the individuals or that individual themselves. And so they are less likely and just in lot of cases there are less likely to even pursue like not post-secondary education but you know kind of go through undergrad, and carry out”* (p.2, 37-42).

Researcher: *Oh I see... What about family? The family structure? How does it impact the individual's being?*

Participant 1 stated, *“...we're not just completely Hmong. We're kind of Hmong-Americans so, I think all and all, although we didn't go through every, what was it? Or you know the, less of things yet, I think that it definitely impacts the, I think it is a push and pull factor where with this idea of identity, or being completely Hmong or Hmong-American within the Hmong community, so that is one struggle that kind of intertwine with each of these I believe, yea”* (p.2, line 49-54).

Researcher: *You kinda mentioned about the, kind of like the stigma, the role and everything so which really touches on... generally. Anything else you would like to add to that?*

Participant 1 indicated, *“... in the Hmong culture sometimes it becomes a ultimatum of whether or not we pursue education and being viewed as the Western like this Western perception or whether you kind of stay Hmong which is traditional you know... hmm... perceive as non-educated kind of individual perception”* (p.2, line 61-63).

Participant 4 stated, *“...when I am at school the primary culture is the Western, it's a very Western culture unless I am around other Hmong people I can kind of connect but then about the Hmong culture, so at school it's primarily Western and then when I go home that's where I can*

erase myself in the Hmong culture but I, with the education I've done I feel like I can incorporate that into my Hmong home life, I can bring in some of the different ways of engagement people, you know techniques and methods I've learned in school to better build relationship in my family, I don't I feel I am trying to integrate both world but there is still kind of separate so I feel like I am very active in the Western culture and I still, but I still take on kind of, traditional expectations and roles too" (p.5, 215-223).

Participant 5 stated, *"I'm more active in the Hmong culture I think, because I'm going to school and I do some work in the community but then, and I don't we don't really practice Hmong traditions anymore at my house or in my home just because it's a little bit time consuming and it does cost a lot sometimes and you know, it's like not at the top of my priorities anymore for some reasons, but it should be yeah. So I am kind of, I feel like they have higher expectations for the sons to learn about this than the daughters so that's I almost don't care" (p.3, line 102-107).*

Participant 6 stated, *"I would definitely consider myself an activist always fighting for equality not just in like the American culture but Hmong culture as well because Hmong women face a lot of discrimination. You were not viewed as equally even though it's a modern society it's—we're slowly progressing towards that but you know just fighting for equality rights you know, ending domestic violence and you know putting people in their place because of their ignorance even as a Hmong individual about the Hmong culture. I think that's something that really makes me active in the Hmong culture and just learning general about peb lis hmoob keev kws, peb hmoob kab lis kev cais (Hmong's traditions and Hmong's ways and belief), our Hmong traditions, you know I think that's something that really makes me active especially now as a college student I'm more curious about my roots and where I come from and why we are the way we are today" (p.5, line 157-166).*

Participant 7 stated, *“I want to improve but that will take time and I like the part about Hmong culture about like family, just because when my family used to live in St. Paul we moved to the suburbs and it was always nice during the summer, “Peb ua neeb thiab like ua plig” (we engage in healing ritual and soul-calling) like that kind of stuff, just getting to see your relatives and like getting sense of family you can trust them and like you guys have a deeper bond and just like being Hmong and treating each other like that, but overall, I just think my American culture is just more dominant and I’m ok with it right now but like it’s not something, I want to stay this way and I kinda want it to be about even”*(p.4, line 164-171).

Participant 9 stated, *“I feel like, I feel like there are a couple of obstacles but usually that’s just minor obstacles probably dealing with self-identity, and kinda like self-reflection maybe you have your parents kinda, especially, they are, especially if you are the first generation they come from Laos or Thailand and stuff like that. So there is just that clash of I guess ideas and perspective so I mean”* (p.1, line 19-22).

Researcher: *OK, today to what extent do you consider yourself in both the American culture and Hmong culture?*

Participant 9 stated: *“I have been 19 years old I have been doing this for nineteen years so it’s like, it’s not really Hmong culture or American culture anymore it’s just kinda my culture, so it’s like I can’t distinguish between the two anymore, only if you look at my parents and then my American friends’ parents or whatever then you can probably distinguish between the two but then just from my perspective if go home that’s not really Hmong culture, like if I just come to school it’s not really American culture because I have been so exposed to both of them where I kinda learned to like put the two together in a way”* (p.4, line 124-130).

Participant 10 stated, *“I wasn’t really connected with my culture with the Hmong community here, so that was probably the biggest thing but after that I started to get more immerse with the community on campus because I just needed some, people my age to talk to, to connect, outside of the University setting I think I have a fairly decent like feel about it”* (p.1, line 14-18).

Participants felt it was important to be familiar with the American culture to succeed in college. Although traditional Hmong practices were perceived as important values, they believed it was not necessary to engage in those practices to identify themselves as Hmong. The majority of participants were active in both cultures as indicated by their ability to switch from one culture to the other. Participants reported feeling closer to Hmong culture whenever they were around Hmong people or when they were at home. They mainly behaved as Americans in the school setting. Those who identified as Hmong-American expressed more confidence and had a better sense of direction at school. Although education was not perceived as a priority in Hmong culture, they exhibited more appreciation towards the Hmong culture due to its collective perspective. Participants were able to recognize the differences in cultural values between their parents’ generation and their own. They also admitted that Hmong women face more challenges than Hmong men regardless of which society, Hmong or American, they live in.

Racial Prejudice

The fourth theme concentrated on participants’ personal experiences and perceptions of racial prejudice. The following quotes illustrate this theme.

Participant 1 stated, *“well, I think that a lot of hmm. There is a lot of obstacles with the racial, with the racial kind of stigmas that are out there, just as well as the, how would you say it, there is”* (p.1, line 22-23).

Researcher: *So, have you ever felt that there was a time maybe, when you were discriminated during your post-secondary education, and if so please describe briefly?*

Participant 1 reported, *“...sorry I just think that there is lot discrimination within... regardless of where you go kind of being a person of color euh... more so, just because in America or like in the U.S. you know people of color or not necessarily the majority are not indeed... are not deem... how do you say.. are not considered ... like the higher upper class of... Caucasian people are but you know what I believe that there is always discrimination as long... and this kinda goes with the epidemic of racism and everything but euh... I, I just have seen discrimination and experienced myself”* (p.3, line 71-76).

Participant 2 stated, *“Yeah, more so “isolated” kind of, but I think that comes naturally to people who aren’t familiar with working with students of diversity or students of color, especially coming from an inner city school I was constantly surrounded by Hmong students, people who were familiar and similar financial background, family background, and then coming into a predominant white institution I feel like that isolation and that difference kind of poses a barrier because it wasn’t something I was used to, I was always used to be around other people just like me in terms of my skin, my background, and I think that was probably the only time I kind of felt kind of like that discrimination, isolation for me was when I would enter courses and classes, white students wouldn’t... you know white students would gravitate towards white students and color students would gravitate towards color students”* (p.2, line 91-98).

Participant 4 stated, *“I feel like they [Hmong Parents] still have that mentality that education is the access to opportunity, but I feel that there is lot of things that prohibit that form being an accurate statement and going through the system and knowing some of these things that prohibit*

people of color from getting employed or that people of color sometimes have a lower chance of getting employment than the dominant culture here, and so I think it's a challenge" (p.5, line 232-237).

Participant 5 stated, *"Some barriers would be that we're mainly identify as an ethnic minority and some may view that as advantage because we have more scholarships that are available to us and stuffs, we're able to financially to... I don't know how to word this, I would say that some view it as an advantage because we don't have any financial barriers, because we are provided financial aid, but then again we are still considered as ethnic minorities, and just having that label kinda, kind of hurts" (p.1, line 15-20).*

Researcher: *So, have you ever felt that there was a time when you were discriminated in your post-secondary education, and if so do you have any examples?*

Participant 5 stated, *"Oh yeah, I wouldn't say that it's because they see as "Asian," I don't know why but maybe I feel like whenever I am in a classroom it's just me and a bunch of other American people, and it's kind of hard to communicate with them, because they might feel I am from another country or I don't maybe I am intimating to them I don't, so it's usually me who initiate the conversation and stuff like that" (p.2, 52-56).*

Participant 6 stated, *"Yeah and in terms of American culture, again being an activist you know for equality, because we face so much discrimination as the color of our skin is not white and we're not clearly white, again you know educating people, putting them in their place and just letting out the facts to them, just letting them know that although the color of my skin may definitely have an impact on the way you view me I am not different from you you know" (p.5, line 166-170).*

Participant 8 stated, *“Well, I haven’t had any major discrimination against me, like there is minor ones but like that’s just an everyday, that’s just, everybody has to discriminate each other to like see how people are just to see if people are dangerous or not, it’s kinda part of our human nature, you can do that”* (p.2, line 41-44).

Participant 9 stated, *“Ok, yeah definitely like every you go regardless like directly, here in it or like settle actions and stuff like just because you are a minority you will see it you will feel it like but at times, it’s just don’t really think about it or at least I don’t because I feel like we’ve kinda come beyond that. Discrimination happens all the time, it’s history, and it’s still going to be the future so like instead of focusing on what’s happening”* (p.3, line 70-74).

Participant 10 stated, *“I feel I have been kind, kinda out casting, but it’s kinda similar to that but just because I am a different ethnicity I think that kinda makes people more worry if they want to talk to me or not”* (p.2, line 44-46).

Most participants did not feel comfortable identifying a specific situation which was related to racial prejudice. However, they acknowledged this issue affected them on a daily basis. Some participants felt isolated in the academic setting; they did not feel welcome in their classroom whenever they were the only person of color. They felt obligated to engage in conversation with students of the dominant culture to avoid any conflict. Some participants believed in their potential to succeed academically, but they felt they had less privilege than white counterparts due to their skin color. Participants were motivated to go to college due to their parents’ expectations; however, they were discouraged by the lack of employment people of color experience in the workforce. Some participants exhibited emotional distress as a result of

being labeled an ethnic minority; they mentioned they felt offended because their ethnicity was linked with low socioeconomic status.

Learning Environment

Participants discussed the learning environment as another factor which impacted their academic performance. The following quotations illustrate this theme.

Participant 1 stated, *“I guess for me personally, I don’t really like to be around people whenever, whenever I have to focus on academics, euh... because sometimes there are topics, and sometimes you know the noise level gets out of control and euh... with kind of me just experiencing my academic career with my family throughout high school you know during the first 18 years of my life, I just realized that I just always had to separate myself from my family”* (p.3, line 94-99).

Participant 3 stated, *“Honestly I would say, being involved with organizations like a multicultural centered, multicultural center for different academic for AXON’s advocate on campus, programs like that that’s specifically were to, provided to most formal multicultural students help them transition... those organizations, they’ve, a lot of them have also that support, having that community really helped them bond to school and feel like they had community with school and I even hear people going like said if they didn’t have that community they wouldn’t have continued on with school so yeah”* (p.3, line 113-116).

Participant 4 stated, *“Well, when I first started I was enrolled in post-secondary opportunity enrolment so like PSL, so I was junior and high school when I started so “transportation” was a really big thing, I was lucky that my parents lived close to the University so I took the bus all the time but as I got used to that”* (p.1, line 32-35).

Researcher: *What types of environment would be supportive for you as a Hmong student to be academically successful?*

Participant 4 stated, *“I am a person who studies well when it’s quiet and I like to, I don’t really listen to music and if I listen to music it’s very low and like studying academic setting I guess I think right now, like personally when I study that’s kind of how I do it or like I write papers and anything like it’s, I get really distracted when there is other noise or if there is a lot of noise it needs to be like not something I can hear specifically so that I focus on it, and so it’s, even if it’s like a continuous buzz it has to be really quiet so that I can focus on anything, so and like in classroom and stuff like that I’ve learned that I work better like in a discussion base sort of setting for classrooms so if we are doing small group stuff or if we are having class discussion about something and we’re sitting in a circle or we are engaging with people that’s how I learn best, sitting down listening to the teacher talk about something like two hours that’s not something I can resonate with, I’ve tried that multiple times it’s just doesn’t work for me and it’s really challenging to stay focus and that way, I am focused but I feel like I am not learning the maximum of capacity I can”* (p.4, 151-163).

Participant 7 stated, *“It is because at the house that we live in now it’s not big enough to suit everybody. So when I first came to college I didn’t want to stay at home just because I knew that it was going to be loud cause my younger siblings they’re still like ten and under so I knew that I couldn’t study at home”* (p.60-63).

Researcher: *So in terms of academic activities what are some of the academic activities you would like to see to have at school and at home to be successful?*

Participant 7 stated, *“I think at home, it would be, it would be nice if like I guess I had more space to do homework. I have to, although my brother live in an apartment I still have to share*

room with like his stuffs so then it gets a little cram, and I guess there is not enough space just to do like do what I need to do at home but at school there is definitely like a lot of study areas and a lot of resources I haven't taken advantage of" (p.4, line 133-137).

Participant 8 stated, *"Environment that would support me would be, just an environment where I would have a mentor so like someone who could like answer your questions for you and that's mostly, I'm person who like to ask questions if I don't understand something so as long as there is a mentor or someone who knows a little bit about the subject who could help, give ideas of how am I supposed to solve this or how are we supposed to approach the topic so yeah" (p.2, line 55-59).*

Participant 9 stated, *"it's stuffer being at home and like commuting, doing homework at home, like I don't know how people do it I can't do that that's why I am on campus so I just leave back home every few here and there so definitely, the environment is as bad as it sounds, it's a way from family duty, while focusing on college like that" (p.3, line 94-96).*

Participant 10 stated, *"I like, in terms of like classroom size I like them fairly big but at the same kinda small so like about 30 to 40 people max and then other, after I would like a variety of students, so not just Caucasian but also a mix of international, a mix of African American, I like a mixture of classroom, I think that helps me learn best cause then I know that I am not the only person that's a different ethnicity and then outside I really having a culture group to lean on if I don't have the variety to go with it" (p.2, line 57-62).*

Researcher: *What about off campus, on campus? Do you see any difference living on campus?*

Participant 10 stated, *"I think living on campus would be beneficial in that if I am like I can just go straight there so I don't have to waste my time traveling, commuting back and forth going home and then coming back cause right now I am commuting and it takes about, it takes about*

two hours of my day coming here and going back home and I think if I was just to, live on campus I think I could that time to do more studying or like improve on academics or just explore the campus a little bit more” (p.2, line 64-69).

The majority of participants indicated they were distracted by the noises they encountered at home. Finding a quiet area was identified as a big challenge. They indicated they did not have a space to do their homework because they had to share their room with other siblings. Transportation was another conflict which contributed to students' lack of commitment for school. A few participants were frustrated because they indicated they had to commute between their home and school. The academic setting was also recognized as an important aspect to do well in college. Participants felt it was important to develop their social network through the connection of student multicultural clubs or organizations on campus as a way to stay motivated. Being around students of different cultural backgrounds helped participants to be more engaged in their classroom. The class-size also had an impact on participants' academic performance. For example, one participant indicated he struggled academically because the number of students in his classroom was too large, since it included 30 to 40 people. The teaching methods instructors utilized also played an important role in the participants' ability to learn. A few participants felt they learned better from group discussions than listening to the lectures. Lastly, one participant mentioned he did not have a sense of direction (e.g., lack of ideas, guidance, etc.) in college because of the lack of mentorship. He wanted “someone” or a role model he could go to whenever he was struggling with school work or dealing with personal issues.

Language

The next theme being identified from the transcripts was the language barrier that participants experience in both the American and Hmong culture. The following quotes describe this theme.

Participant 3 stated, *“I think a little bit sometimes language barriers, not as much anymore I think because maybe like we’re little older, I feel like people have, I think most individuals had an issues when they were younger but I feel my generation particularly, or my peers most of them were born here or they were brought here very young so that’s a minor barriers I see it”* (p.1, line 16-20).

Researcher: *So what kind of collaboration do Hmong parents, and teachers, anyone, faculty members within the school system need to engage in order to empower Hmong students academically?*

Participant 3 stated, *“I think, what kind of collaborations? I feel like, there is a little of presence, I know we do have Hmong faculty members on campus but it might be nice to have specific programs directed toward Hmong parents that, or maybe the programs that are already in place, I wonder if they have Hmong translators available to help parents, because I feel like there are a lot that help parents you know try to understand students or for example we have on campus tours where parents would come with their children before the children decide I like this University but if your parent can’t speak the English language or if it’s not their first language you know a lot of my parents just came by themselves so they would come with a sibling or you know an uncle but I think it’s important for parents to physically walk through the same environment with their children and to visually see and experience a little bit of what their children are going through, and I think maybe that’s just a little collaboration, you know might*

just start with having translators available you know for multicultural students and your parents so that they don't feel limited and feel like oh there is an option for parents but I don't fall in that category because I am a Hmong parent, I am not a white parent or an English speaking parent" (p.4, line 122-135).

Participant 4 stated, *"I think some of the vocabulary that our exposure to it didn't start as early as people whose primarily language is English and so that kinda limits what we were exposed to and where, when we started to learn English and I think that's where I am at is that ok like I didn't, I probably did not understand chemistry as other people because my parents did not use that kind of vocabulary around me so I couldn't explain rain, what precipitation or I couldn't, or you know the weather was just raining or snowing there is no in between until you got to school and you learn oh, there is all these other words to explain this phenomenon like you never would have been able to, you didn't go to school or you were only raised with a Hmong language"* (p.2, line 65-73).

Participant 5 stated, *"You know, that has been one of the biggest problems I have been facing, even now because I don't speak well, cause throughout my youth I just, there was a high demand for you to be proficient in English, and that's why you know I have kinda abandoned the Hmong language. And you know I have spoke with my parents but they started to speak more English because I started to understand less Hmong, and I think I am kinda losing my Hmong traditions and culture and, I don't know I don't have a language with Americans or English speakers, but more with my Hmong community"* (p.1, line 25-31).

Participant 6 stated, *"There's a lot of Hmong students where I don't really get to speak Hmong with a lot of other Hmong peers and individuals. It might be for others particularly not for me simply because English is a language that I basically know the back of my hand. To me it would*

be more of like the Hmong language because yes I was born in America and yes I live in America now... the dominant language although not official is English and to go to school and learn English and speak English with other people, interact daily in English with other, I think it has really impacted the inner Hmong in me, even though like I am Hmong Leeg there is a lot of Hmong Daw in this world, so you don't get to really speak like your exact native tongue, like yes I can speak I can get to speak with Hmong people but not exactly like my native tongue, so for me what I struggle most as a language barrier would be speaking Hmong with others because although there are a big population of us, Hmong people here it's not as big as you think it is" (p.1, line 21-32).

Researcher: *What kind of supportive system do we need to have, cause I've been listening to you and I can have that sense, I can feel that sense, very strongly, even though you are living on campus here, your heart is still at home, so?*

Participant 6 stated, *"I feel like for me I was always busy and I didn't care at all, but I think that's, that may be what you know, family, Hmong families may lack because even because of the language barrier, because obviously my parents are not educated you know they don't speak full English, yes they can understand bits of pieces but it's definitely a language barrier"* (p.4, line 137-140).

Researcher: *So, you've mentioned that "my parents don't really understand the culture of school", you know the education, I mean in some levels, but how can we, what it is that we need to do to create like that bridge between faculties, schools, and families?*

Participant 6 stated, *"I think teaching families English definitely helps, and not just that but like having like classes where families and you know their children can bond together really matters,*

especially as faculty or a staff, you know educating parents that you know your child is important, that, the fact that they are in higher education, you know it's for them too, something that would say to be more understanding, to learn how to be a better support system if not just assist the support system, in general yeah I think that would be nice, yeah" (p.4, line 148-153).

Participant 7 stated, *"...although I was born in Thailand I grew up primarily in the U.S. so I don't have problems with like speaking English fluently or writing or speaking it either, but it's not so much like me but it's like my family so like at times like when I'm at home like I'll have to interpret stuff or I'll have to explain things that are pretty simple straight forward to me but may not make much sense because—I'll put on an example: so sometimes when I'm at home my parents they ask me a lot about technology. My mom will like ask me to email something and like she can ask like a whole bunch of questions about it but then like she just doesn't understand it and it makes it complicated because like she thinks I may not be like telling her everything or that keeping things away from her, which I'm not, it's just she doesn't understand the subject. Moving on"* (p.1, line 26-34).

Participant 9 stated, *"I am always consistently like talking in Hmong so my Hmong vocabulary is obviously gonna be better than my English one... it's kinda something that I might be slaking on where I can just improve by reading more or speaking more English at school whatever like that yeah"* (p.2, line 34-38).

Most of participants indicated that since they were born and raised in the U.S., they felt more comfortable with the English language than speaking Hmong. Three participants exhibited some resentment toward their own cultural identity because they could not speak Hmong properly or engage in discussion with their Hmong peers and family members. The

communication between participants and their parents was also identified as a barrier for academic support. They felt their parents were excluded from the academic setting because of the lack of programs, services, or educational support for parental involvement. For example, one participant stated there were no Hmong translators available to help her parents understand the college environment during campus tours. As a result of this, parents were less likely to provide emotional support toward their children. Conversely, a few participants admitted they were not familiar with some of the vocabulary they were exposed to in college since English was not their first language. One participant indicated he could not write and speak well in English because he was more exposed to the Hmong language on a daily basis. Lastly, the different dialects of the unified Hmong ethnic minority also created some emotional distress for a few participants. For instance, one participant who identified herself as Hmong Leeg [Hmong Green] felt she was judged by the way she speaks. Therefore, she felt isolated from other Hmong Daw [Hmong White] students.

Financial Struggles

The seventh theme identified from the transcripts reflected on the financial barriers participants experience in post-secondary education. The following quotes illustrate this theme. Participant 1 stated, *“I wanna say money, but that doesn’t sound right... kind of the... It’s not poverty either, sorry I can’t think of it at least for right now...euh... just kinda the different classes or the class gaps, of kind of you know people coming from less fortunate families or coming from more fortunate families I think that that kind of holds a different dynamic and so it creates some obstacles, different obstacles for reaching higher education”* (p.1, line 25-27).

Participant 2 stated, *“I think other obstacles include finances just because getting a degree is not a cheap process. I think finances definitely play a big role in that”* (p.1, line 38-39).

Participant 4 stated, *“So my parents don’t make very much and, so and all of my financial aid provides, pay for my tuition, my books, and any other fees and I haven’t looked in campus so I like, without being on campus it’s cots much lower so all of it has been through financial aid and I have work study too, so I work but, it’s mostly just as extra cash”* (p.3, line 131-134).

Participant 6 stated, *“...college is expensive, education is really expensive but really precious, so I didn’t get any scholarship, I didn’t apply to any scholarship therefore to receive them but whatever I received was from financial aid from the government, honestly I took out loans, I am currently taking a loan at the moment, my education is paid for but the way that I live I am unfortunately have to work hard for it, I work about 20 to 25 hours a week, and considering that I am a full time college student attending the University of Minnesota. It’s a great challenge you know there are some days I don’t want to work, I don’t want to do anything but you have to think, you have to make money you need to pay for rent, because I pay for rent right now... my parents always taunt and tease and say oh when you are done with school all you’re going to be doing is paying loans for the rest of your life! Yeah, that may be true and I have always feared that too”* (p. 3, line 75-89).

Participant 7 stated, *“I also knew that dorms and like paying for the food—yeah paying for a meal plan on campus is also pretty expensive. So first year and a half, I thought that, “Ok, it’s probably going to be best for me to stay on campus just because of those two factors of not being able to study at home and also be distracted by my family.” And it was good and bad in the sense that it was really expensive to the point that like my sophomore year my student account—I*

couldn't pay it off so I had to go like back home and then like finish paying it off before I got back to school and that was purely based off like on me not wanting to stay home because of the fact that my family's too large for our house" (p.2, line 63-76).

Participant 9 stated, *"Like, I feel like I can't really think of anything concrete right now, but financial is always an issue. That's always what is holding a lot of Hmong students in fact because they don't have the money to do things like that so I feel like that is one way that we can definitely empower many other students who go to this college like whether it'd be through scholarships, grants, yeah just kinda I feel like right now it might not be the biggest issues but it's one of the more significant issues that makes an impact on why people are decided not to go to college" (p.4, line 116-121).*

Most participants indicated they came from low-income families. They mentioned their parents could not afford to pay for their college education. Participants were also discouraged to pursue a college degree because they felt it was too expensive. Several of them indicated they were able to attend college through financial aid, loans, work-study, and other scholarships. Financial distress was marked by those who lived outside of their parents' house. They reported it was difficult to pay for their own rent, school tuition, books, and basic needs.

Academic Perception

The next theme that emerged from the transcripts was the academic perception of participants based on academic achievement. The following quotes illustrate this theme.

Participant 1 stated, *"In terms of my achievements, I wouldn't say I am completely satisfied I always think that there is room for improvement but I wouldn't say that I, euh... I am not content because kinda seeing how far I've come, the work I've put into it, and just seeing how much I've*

learned over the years I am content with what I've learned but again, I am just not satisfied it's like, it's like this... can't enjoy it" (p.6, line 183-186).

Participant 2 stated, *" I think I have crossed a lot of obstacles to get to where I am at today just the process of completing high school, went through the whole application process in college and just really experiencing that flip from a more inner city life, although the University is in the city to an urban area I feel like the environment is different from what I grew up in and that really, just going through those obstacles and that process I am proud of where I am at today, the things I have accomplished so far, the young 20 year old woman, yeah I feel very proud but at the same time I feel like the journey is done yet, just because I am proud of where I am at, that does not mean I am going to be content to stay where I am at" (p.5, line 193-203).*

Participant 6 stated, *"It's hard being a student here because not a lot of people make it. You know we're a top research based university. One of the universities included in the big ten but we're not in the top ten, it really shows that this university is very well known. I think it's—it could be prestigious. I feel like you know it is a university base and our classes are more rigorous and it is entirely really really challenging" (p.6, line 196-200).*

Participant 8 stated, *"I can do a lot, a lot better, it's just I am in the area where I have to learn more than what's, what we are assigned to read cause in high school like I didn't learn as much even though I was a straight A student, like I didn't, I wasn't exposed to all of the materials we're supposed to, so I have to do a little of catching up that's why I said before, I have a lot to improve on so" (p.3, line 107-110).*

Participant 9 stated, *"...there is so much more out there like if you think about just the Hmong community there is a lot of us who have Ph.Ds. and Masters and stuffs like that but then but*

those are just kinda like titles, I don't want a title I want something that can impact others, like inspire others who are in whatever that may be want others to kind of want more because of me, because like I see all the people, Hmong people with like titles of Doctors and stuff and I am just like who is that to, who is that person? They may have attained that title but then I am like if I were in their position I would be like I could be doing so much more cause you have such a higher like value basically because of your academic assets, like many people look up to you even if they don't know you, they hear the title doctor or professor or something like that they automatically oh, this guy is smart, this guy is going to be a leader. So I am just like I want him, if not, I don't know how to explain it, but I feel like that's kinda the misconception that we are all so focused on just the name and like the FAM we get from achieving those statuses yeah. I feel like we are so just status oriented that we kinda forget about what we are actually supposed to do as a community” (p.4, line 144-150).

Participant 10 stated, *“I feel like good, but I think I could done better in my earlier years, I think if I actually started thinking about where I wanted to end up I could have been there, like be at that spot right now but because I didn't think about that earlier I am kinda stuck where it's gonna be an extra year so that's, I guess you can say I am disappointed with myself but there is always, move back and do better” (p.3, line 96-100).*

Participants did not feel satisfied about their academic achievement. This preoccupation of wanting to enhance or further their college education led to anxiety for participants in this study. The urban setting was also perceived as an obstacle. They did not feel prepared to step into a bigger environment than what they were used to from previous experiences such as attending a small high school, lack of preparation for college, living outside of the Twin Cities, etc. The reputation of the school also impacted the confidence of participants to do well

academically. For example, one participant stated she did not feel competent enough to attend the University of Minnesota because she perceived it as a prestigious school institution. Lastly, participants were discouraged to obtain a college degree because they did not want to be recognized for their educational status. Instead, they wanted to make use of their privilege as educated students to make a difference in the Hmong community.

Separation or Divorce in the Family

The last theme that emerged from the transcripts discussed by participants was the parental separation or divorce in their family. The following quotes are examples of this theme.

Participant 2 stated, *“I actually have... kinda have a non-traditional Hmong family structure, my mom played kinda the role of the head of the family vs. my dad. He passed when I was fifteen so I guess... it makes it even more untraditional but I guess some cultural barriers I face from that is, I guess within my mom’s and even my dad’s side of the family in terms of cousins and uncles I feel like hmm the deep value because she no longer has a husband and I no longer have a dad, so I think that has kinda been playing a role as a barrier”* (p.2, line 54-59).

Participant 4 stated, *“Well right now my parents, my mom got remarried so right now I have a lot of younger siblings... There has been a lot of conflict where they are very energetic and I want to play but at the time oh I have to do my homework so that’s used to be a really big struggle for me”* (p.4, line 178-186).

Participant #8: *“My parents they divorce when I was in middle school, so the family thing, the structure, it does come like into play with it and I think that’s like one of the major factors that’s like enduring me on my performance in school cause I would have to worry about my parents like if, where, if my mom is ok cause I live with my dad and I gotta make sure that my dad is ok*

too cause he is working and has to take care of us too, so I think that family structure is like something that endures me for my performance in school” (p.1, line 27-32).

Parental separation or divorce played a major role in participants’ ability to succeed academically. Three respondents felt they struggled emotionally while attending college because their family expectations to pursue a college education were shaped by these factors. Participants from divorced or separated families had to develop new roles and responsibilities. For example, one respondent in this study stated she was responsible to watch over her younger step-siblings since her mother remarried. Another respondent stated that since her father passed away, all decisions in her family were made by her father’s side of the family (e.g., uncles, male cousins, etc.).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the personal history, barriers, and supportive factors of Hmong students who are currently enrolled in higher education. The findings were consistent with some information found within the literature. New themes were also identified as additional data to provide a better understanding on this topic. This section reviews how this study’s findings compared to the literature regarding the barriers that impact Hmong students in post-secondary education. Limitations, future research, and implications are also discussed.

Crevier (2002) indicated Hmong male students have more pressure from their family to go to school and excel in their college years. They are expected to achieve the highest degree possible and must find a good career (e.g., to become doctors, lawyers, etc.) to support the entire family, including parents, wife, and children. The results in this study indicated that although Hmong male students receive more support from their family members to go to school than Hmong female students, both genders exhibit the same amount of emotional distress which is

revealed by their lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and wanting to leave their home. Hmong male students struggle academically because they “feel obligated” to go to school, whereas Hmong female students struggle academically because they “feel excluded” since they do not receive much attention to pursue a college education.

According to this study, Hmong students have the ability to move easily from their culture of origin to the American culture. The literature supports this theme and reveals that later generations of Hmong immigrants are more likely to identify themselves as Hmong-Americans rather than only Hmong (Crevier, 2002; Vang, 2013; and Su, 2005). One of the questions being asked during the interview was: “Today, to what extent do you consider yourself active in both the American culture and the Hmong culture (see Appendix D)?” The majority of participants responded they identified as bi-cultural with both the American and Hmong culture. Those who identify themselves as Hmong-American are more likely to succeed academically.

Participants in this study indicated they do not speak accurately in their native language because of their devotion to higher education. The communication between Hmong students and their parents becomes a big challenge. Therefore, it is difficult for them to connect with Hmong culture. As being discussed in the literature review, differences in cultural values, traditions, and lifestyles between parents and their children can lead to major family conflicts in the Hmong culture (Xiong & Lee, 2011; and Su, 2005). On the other hand, those who are more exposed to the Hmong culture tend to struggle academically because they do not write, read, and speak well in English.

Findings revealed that Hmong students usually recognize they come from low-income families. Vang (2003) supports this theme by stating that the Hmong population is one of the

most impoverished Southeast Asian groups in the United States. They are able to attend college through financial aid, loans, work-study, and other scholarships. Several Hmong families understand the hardship and experience of acculturation as a consequence of poverty. Education and employment are valued in the Hmong community. Financial struggles typically motivate students to do well in school. Xiong & Lee (2011) also stated, Hmong students are willing to try their best to graduate from college so that they can help their family members.

Participants in the study indicated they continue to experience racial and ethnic conflict in the academic setting. They are isolated from the dominant culture and feel the pressure to always engage in conversation with their white peers. Many participants did not feel comfortable sharing about a specific situation which was related to racial prejudice; a finding that was supported by the literature (Crevier, 2002). Hmong students are less likely to be motivated to go to school because school systems fail to embrace their students' ideas, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses (Crevier, 2002; Thao, 2003; Vang, 2013).

The researcher was able to expand the literature on the cultural barriers that Hmong students experience in post-secondary education by identifying additional themes. Hmong students' perception on academic setting also plays a factor in their academic performance. They are more likely to struggle academically if they cannot adapt to their new environment (e.g., moving in to the big inner city, being intimidated by the school's reputation, etc.). The perception of getting a college degree between Hmong students and their parents also differs tremendously. For this reason, family conflicts are more likely to arise in Hmong families these days. Hmong students are also more likely to struggle academically due to their home environment (e.g., noise, limited space, etc.), transportation (e.g., taking the bus, traveling back and forth between their home and school), lack of involvement in extracurricular activities, large

class-size (e.g., 30 to 40 people), teaching methods instructors use in their classroom, and lack of mentorship. Finally, Hmong students who come from divorced or separated families struggle in their education because they develop new roles and responsibilities. New family expectations occur as a result of these major changes which leave students at high risk for academic failure.

Limitations

The primary limitation in this study is the low number of participants and the short time frame of the research project being. It is not possible to generalize the findings of this study due to the small sample size. Another limitation was the difficulty in recruiting students at the post-secondary education level because of their busy schedule. Hmong college students who feel exhausted and overwhelmed might not want to participate in these kinds of studies because of the lack of motivation or time to do so. In addition, those who work part time or full time while going to college may prioritize their jobs instead. This qualitative study also lacks diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. All participants are of Hmong background. This study should not just be limited to the Hmong population. Previous studies on Southeast Asian groups have also been similar to the Hmong culture. Asian families share similarities in their traditional values and cultural emphases; for example, filial relationships with family members are among the highest priorities within the Asian culture (Kwak, 2001). Young Asian Americans usually feel a lot of pressure from their parents' expectations, especially with education and achievement.

Future Research

This study needs to expand its number of participants above ten to make this research more accurate. In other words, more participants are needed to improve the validity of this research. A period longer than nine months may be required to reach this goal. Future incentives could be implemented as a way to increase the participants' motivation to participate

in this study. Finally, it would also be interesting to look at different Southeast Asian groups or other ethnic groups who have gone through similar experiences.

Implications for Culture

Although the findings imply that family members and parents are not supportive toward their children, it is important to note that this view is only based on Hmong students' perspectives. Future research needs to explore the contributions of supportive Hmong parents and family members. Hmong parents may think they are being supportive while their children do not perceive that to be the case. Results also indicated Hmong students who identify as Hmong-American express more confidence and have a better sense of direction in college. This, however, does not determine the success of Hmong families in the United States. Many Hmong students who have the opportunity to go to college may not necessarily identify as Hmong American due to the age difference, immigration status, and other relevant factors. Another implication is to provide more awareness around the issue of racial prejudice. Hmong students admit they are being discriminated by the dominant culture, but this does not appear to bother them because they have adopted new coping skills to remain strong in the academic setting. Lastly, separation and divorce in families are becoming more common in the Hmong community. Today, many Hmong are struggling on how to adjust to these major changes. They have developed new cultural values, beliefs, and practices which are similar to the Western culture.

Implications for Academic Setting

Educational programs must be created to educate Hmong parents to better prepare and support their children for college. Ethnic minority groups are perceived as an "invisible" population in the classroom setting. Therefore, educators must pay more attention to this issue.

We must also change and improve our teaching methods to better serve multicultural underprivileged students. Students of different cultural backgrounds must be acknowledged for their uniqueness. For example, courses taught on Hmong history, language and other related aspects should be offered as pre-requisites for Hmong college students. This can help these students get in touch with their inner selves and potentially reduce family conflicts. Colleges and universities need to provide assistance to Hmong students not just because of their low socioeconomic status, but to also acknowledge their academic effort and special talent. Financial aid, loans, work-study, and other scholarships remain crucial for Hmong students to attend college. Several students appear not to be prepared for college academically, emotionally, and physically. Therefore, high school institutions need to better guide their students toward post-secondary education.

Conclusion

This qualitative study suggests that Hmong students in post-secondary education are challenged by the following social factors: 1) Family Expectations; 2) Gender Roles; 3) Cultural Identity; 4) Racial Prejudice; 5) Learning Environment; 6) Language; 7) Financial Struggle; 8) Academic Perception; and 9) Separation or divorce in the family.

It would be beneficial to continue this study in order to understand the evolving differences and similarities between the different generations in the Hmong community. Future research should also include a larger pool of participants from various age groups and diverse family backgrounds. Although it has been 40 years that Hmong have been living in the United States, they are still encountering many challenges in post-secondary education primarily due to internal (cultural barriers) and external (academic setting) conflicts. Acculturation is a continuous process in which individuals and families adopt different strategies at different times,

and must deal with different life issues; thus, it is imperative that social workers and other professionals be knowledgeable about the current literature on how to effectively serve this population.

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Appendix A

Letter of Approval for Recruitment

October 17, 2014
Research Compliance Supervisor, IRB
Human Research Protection Program
D528 May Memorial Building
420 Delaware Street SE,
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Dear Mr. Perkey,

My name is Francois Vang and I am a graduate student from the School of Social Work at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University. I am writing to you today, because I wanted to inform you of a research project (GRSW 682: Clinical Research Project) I am planning to conduct. This study involves Hmong college students who are currently attending the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. The purpose of this study is to examine the personal history, barriers, and supportive factors of Hmong students who are currently enrolled in higher education. I am very excited to complete this research project before I can graduate with my Master degree in Social Work anticipated in May 2015.

I decided to select the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities as the main school to recruit Hmong college students due to its public location, history, and involvement within the Hmong community. I was told by my Chair, Dr. Pa Der Vang, to contact you first and get your approval before I can engage in data collection. Please reply to this letter via email by indicating one of the following options:

- 1) Yes, I allow the researcher (Francois Vang) to recruit Hmong college students from the University of Minnesota. (Please provide reasons)
- 2) No, I do not allow the researcher (Francois Vang) to recruit Hmong college students from the University of Minnesota. (Please provide reasons).

I am prepared to bring excitement, relevance, and rigor to the Hmong community by expanding the research on this topic. Thank you so much for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions and would like to be provided with more information on my research project, please feel free to contact me at vang4563@stthomas.edu or call me directly at 612-559-9092. You may also contact Dr. Pa Der Vang at 651-690-8647 with any questions or concerns. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Francois Vang
Master of Social Work Student
The University of St. Thomas/St. Catherine University

Appendix B

List of Resources

The Minnesota Family Strength Project Research Report

The Minnesota Family Strength Project Research Report was conducted by several nonprofit organizations who wanted to better understand what makes families strong across cultures. The project involved creating a scientific baseline profile of Minnesota family strengths, seeking to identify correlations with physical/mental health and health care utilization. The purpose was to better understand the unique ways in which families function successfully in our society, as well as to have a better picture of what families need and where they turn for help.

Educational Resources

(<http://www.uwec.edu/ASC/resources/upload/HmongStu.pdf>)

Awareness Points for Interacting with Hmong/Southeast Asian Students

(From <http://www.learnabouthmong.org/> and from “Attrition of Hmong Students in Teacher Education Programs” by Root, Rudawski, Taylor, and Rochon in *Bilingual Research Journal*, 27:1 Spring 2003)

At the end of the Vietnam War, the Hmong people came to the United States from the mountains of Laos. Some reports say that nearly a third of the Laotian Hmong died in combat or from starvation and disease caused by the war. More died in Thailand in refugee camps before resettling throughout the world, with more than 80,000 coming to the United States beginning in the late 1970's. A 2000 census shows that about 75,000 Hmong live in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Yang, Vang, Xiong, Lee, Moua, Cha (Chang), Lo (Lor), Thao, and Her are the eight most common Hmong clan names.

Hmong Studies Journal**The Hmong and Higher Education**

(Compiled by Mark E. Pfeifer, PhD)

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Appendix C

CONSENT FORM
ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY
GRSW 682 RESEARCH PROJECT

Barriers that Impact Hmong Students in Post-Secondary Education

I am conducting a study which involves Hmong college students and would like to invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a college student and also, have exposure to the Hmong culture and traditions. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this research.

This study is being conducted by: Francois Vang, a graduate student from St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas, School of Social Work and supervised by Dr. Pa Der Vang from the School of Social Work at the St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the personal history, barriers, and supportive factors of Hmong students who are currently enrolled in higher education.

Procedures:

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following: you will be asked to answer a series of questions based on barriers Hmong students face in higher education, your opinions on supportive factors, and your personal history/experience. This interview will be between 30-45 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The only risk involved in this study is the potential emotional distress due to talking about sensitive subjects. Some questions might retrigger a negative event that you have encountered in your life (e.g., family expectation, racism at school, etc.). Participants will be reminded that they can stop the interview at any time. In addition, all participants will be given a sheet of information with resources. There are no direct benefits as a result of participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report published, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include: a tape recording with an iPhone and transcripts of the interview which will be kept on a USB drive in a locked file in my desk. These items will be destroyed after I complete

this study on June 1, 2015. Only Dr. Pa Der Vang and the researcher will have access to these items.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Please note, that you can stop the interview at any time. If you wish to make any changes, you will have until *April 21, 2015 at midnight*. Please contact the researcher by phone or email if you decide to make any changes. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Additional Information

If I gain any information during the course of the interview that may impact your decision to continue with the interview, I will inform you right away.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Francois Vang. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-559-9092 or Dr. Pa Der Vang at 651-690-8647. You may also contact John Schmitt, PhD, chair of the St. Catherine University IRB 651.690.7739 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I understand that if I choose to participate, my voice and answers will be tape recorded and used for research purposes. I consent to participate in the study and to have my responses tape-recorded.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Print Name of Study Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

GRSW 682**Interview Questionnaire**

- 1) What is your age and your gender?
- 2) Considering being Hmong, what is it that you value in higher education?
- 3) What do you perceive to be the obstacles in obtaining a higher education?
- 4) What are some cultural barriers you, as a Hmong student, face in post-secondary education? (e.g., 1) language issues; 2) family structure; 3) role adjustment; and 4) gender roles)
- 5) Have you ever felt there was time when you were discriminated during your post-secondary education? And if so, please describe in brief details.
- 6) How are you able to afford for college?
- 7) What kind of environment would be supportive for you, as a Hmong student, to be academically successful?
- 8) What kind of academic activities would you like to see to have at school and at home?
- 9) What kinds of collaboration do Hmong parents, teachers and administrators need to engage in to empower Hmong students academically?
- 10) Today, to what extent do you consider yourself active in both the American Culture and the Hmong culture?
- 11) How does your family view your achievement?
- 12) How do you see yourself today, in terms of your academic accomplishment?