

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HMONG STUDENTS AT SACRAMENTO STATE
UNIVERSITY

A Project

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by

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Division of Social Work

Abstract
of
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF HMONG STUDENTS AT SACRAMENTO STATE
UNIVERSITY

by
Xeng Thao

This research project examines the academic attainment and achievement disparity in higher education among Hmong students. The purpose of this project is to identify the disparity and attribute to factors that impact the unequal attainment rates of college degrees between the two genders at California State University, Sacramento. Theories such as ecological, resilience, and self-determination aids the study in understanding how education can be used as an empowerment tool for Hmong women who come from a traditionally patriarchal society. Out of the 326 Hmong students who graduated from Summer 2012 to Spring 2014 at the studied university, Hmong females graduated nearly twice (61.7%) compared to Hmong males at 38.3%.

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Date

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Chapter 1

The Problem

In Southeast Asia, academic attainment for the Hmong people was almost nonexistent due to the discrimination by the royal Lao government against the minority groups such as the Hmong (Lee & Chang, 2012). Since the migration of the Hmong to North America beginning in late 1975 (Vang, 2010), like all Americans, the Hmong began going to school to get educated and pursue higher education. This new opportunity has been the driving force to post-secondary educational successes and has systematically changed the lifestyle of Hmong families and individuals (Lee, Chang, Yang, et al., 2015). However, not all Hmong individuals, whether native or foreign born, were interested or attempted to obtain it. This Master's Project examined the academic disparities of individuals within the Hmong population, the struggles of the model minority myth, and how gender roles impact academic achievement and attainment of Hmong.

Background of the Problem

Prior to the mid 1970's, most Hmong people were residing in the rural mountainous areas of Laos (Lee, Chang, Yang, Lo, & Thao, 2015; Vang, 2010). Hmong families made a living out of farming and education was little known (Lee & Green, 2008). During this time, the opportunity to attain an education was very limited and not easily accessible because the Lao government did not develop a school system in Hmong communities (Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim, 2013). If a family had enough money to send a child to school in the city, they would automatically send the male to school (Peng,

2007). Due to strong cultural norms and limited family resources, boys' education was favored and often girls were kept at home to attend to housework and other domestic responsibilities. In the Hmong patriarchal traditional society, women were inferior to men (Peng). Peng states that a couple who could not produce a male offspring were often looked down upon and disrespected by other members of their community. Having a son gave the family prestige, guaranteed survival of the family name, and the respect from other clans and family members.

After the end of the American Secret War (Vietnam War), waves of Hmong refugees escaped out of Laos, then began migrating to various countries around the world including North America and Europe (Vang, 2010). This opened a door of opportunities for many Hmong families, especially Hmong women. For those who arrived in America, the wide availability and accessibility of education allowed equal opportunities for both sexes.

Even though education is accessible and widely available to the Hmong community in America, many Hmong students are struggling to conform to the model minority stereotype. The model minority stereotype suggests that Asian Americans have the ability to be successful without any assistance and they should be the model for all minority groups to follow (Ngo & Lee, 2007). However, research shows that Southeast Asian populations, including the Hmong, had low academic achievement rates compared to other Asians (Yang, 2004). Yang states that the model minority stereotype created high expectations from teachers and school officials. Some teachers overwhelmed students with high expectations to do well and other teachers overlooked struggling

students because of the assumption of the model minority myth.

Hmong students were held to the high expectation that the model minority stereotype created while trying to conform to their cultural norms and duties at home. Hmong students have reported that family obligations and responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of siblings, were stressors that they had along with trying to succeed in school (Lee, 2001; DuongTran, Lee, Khoi, 1996). The overwhelming stressors from school and one's cultural responsibilities can be the cause of students failing in school or dropping out of school.

In the 1980s, an estimated 90% of Hmong females in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area dropped out of high school due to early marriages and early childbearing which were both normative Hmong practices (as cited in Ngo & Lee, 2007). In the Hmong primitive society, the main roles of females were to get married, give birth, and become a homemaker. Fortunately, the rate of high school drop-outs in Hmong males and females has been declining (Xiong, 2012). In the past, Hmong women have not been as successful as men in higher academic attainment. For example, in 1990, only three percent of Hmong females attained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to seven percent of Hmong males (Xiong). This trend significantly reversed in 2014. Specifically, in 2013, the American Community Survey showed that the Hmong population in the United States has made incremental strides in academic attainment and achievement; 17.1% female and 15.4% male age 25 and over attained a bachelor's degree or higher (Pfeifer, 2014). The major reversal started with the 2010 census. In 2010, 14.1% of Hmong males and 15.6% of Hmong females attained a bachelor's degree or

higher.

Statement of the Research Problem

As the second generation of Hmong refugees are assimilating into the American culture and pursuing higher education, data shows that Hmong women are increasing at attaining a higher education compared to Hmong men (Hmong National Development, 2013). This statistical change demonstrates a shift in Hmong cultural norms of males being the breadwinner and females being the homemaker. Hmong females are utilizing the opportunity of attaining higher education to be a part of the professional world and simply to better themselves. Although this progression of Hmong women shows great resiliency and strength within the Hmong community, the disparity in academic achievement between males and females still exists and needs to be addressed.

Study Purpose

This study aims to identify and explore the academic disparity between Hmong males and females. The Hmong population as a whole has struggled in various ways in the past but data has shown that they are overcoming obstacles and striving for success. In particular, Hmong women have transformed and evolved from homemakers to educated professionals. It is inspirational to see Hmong women, who were historically viewed as inferior to men, increasingly attain higher education and hold professional titles along with Hmong men. This increasing gap between Hmong males' and females' academic achievement creates an interesting topic that needs to be addressed. Further research about the plausible factors that contributed to this academic disparity between Hmong males and females is needed.

Theoretical Framework

The theories that were utilized to support the research purposes for this study are the resilience theory, ecological theory, and self-determination theory (as cited by Saleebey, 1996). The use of these theories will create a holistic framework to explore the academic disparities within the Hmong population. Resilience theory and ecological theory go hand-in-hand because resilience theory suggests that resources from an individual's microsystem aid the individual in surpassing risks and obstacles (West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, & Behar-Horenstein, 2010). Self-determination theory is based on the motivational model and it was used to explore student motivations in attaining higher education.

Resilience is the ability to overcome stressors and challenges and successfully progress through adversities (Saleebey, 1996). Studies on resilience have demonstrated that an individual's ability to prosper in the face of hardship is partly reliant on the individual but also on the support structures of that individual's own family and community networks (as cited in West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, et al., 2010). The increasing Hmong population in America have shown resiliency by overcoming oppression and attaining higher education. Moreover, there has been a rise in Hmong women attaining higher education and holding professional titles despite cultural norms and gender roles (Lor, 2013).

The ecological theory can be used as a basis in understanding the Hmong society as a whole and a Hmong family unit. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory hypothesizes that a child's development is enhanced by resources in microsystems in

which he or she is directly involved (e.g., home and school) and linkages across these settings, or the mesosystem (as cited in Ying and Han, 2008). The ecological theory suggests that the individual is impacted by his/her environment (Schrivier, 2011). There are multiple factors in the individual's environment that can directly and indirectly impact the individual. The Hmong society is a collectivist society and family units are usually very close. Ecological theory can help the writer understand the factors that impact an individual's failure or success.

Student motivation is an important factor in being successful and achieving higher education. Karsenti and Thibert (1995) stated that motivation, a force that energizes and directs behavior toward a goal, could certainly be perceived as one of the most important psychological concepts in education. Self-determination theory (SDT) evolved from studies on motivation and empowerment (Brooks & Young, 2011). In 1985, Deci and Ryan first introduced the self-determination theory which proposed that individuals had an innate desire for stimulation and learning from birth (as cited in Koseoglu, 2012). Brooks and Young (2011) state that factors such as self-efficacy, values, goals, interests, and self-determination, all impact an individual's educational experience. Self-determination can be defined as an individual's autonomous choice-making (Brooks & Young). Brooks and Young reported that in the educational setting, student autonomy is connected to intrinsic motivation, which leads to progressive outcomes such as decreased anxiety, daily well-being, and enhanced academic performance.

Social Work Research Justification

Social workers are the leading individuals who directly work with the

underserved minority populations. It is crucial for social workers to be culturally competent and be able to recognize internal adversities within minority populations, such as the Hmong. This research will provide social workers with the knowledge of a minority group that limited research has been completed on. As the Hmong population is increasing, there is still limited printed knowledge about the Hmong population. This research will also provide social workers with the knowledge of influential factors that may impact the success of Hmong students. Being able to recognize that there is an achievement gap in the Hmong community and utilizing this gained knowledge about the Hmong will hopefully aid social workers and educators in finding possible interventions to address and combat this disparity.

Study Limitations

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic gap between Hmong males and females. The writer will only be collecting student graduation data from the University of California, Sacramento. Therefore, the data that will be collected only portrays a small sample of the Hmong community so the findings can only be generalized to the Hmong community in the Sacramento area. An important limitation to recognize is the reliability of the Hmong surnames that will be chosen from the commencement handbooks. There are multiple Hmong surnames that are similar to other ethnicity surnames, such as Lee, Xiong, Yang, and Chang. That is why it is important that the writer takes into consideration the student's first and middle name as well as his/her last name. Since the writer is collecting secondary data, there is a possibility that this data may not be the most accurate representation of the research topic.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

When exploring the college attainment disparities between Hmong males and females, there are multiple factors to consider. Within the literature review, there are themes that are related to the topic: (1) education, (2) gender roles and expectations, (3) parental support, and (4) stressors that deter academic achievement. After completing extensive literature review, there seems to be factors that influence academic achievement and attainment. It is important to first consider the meaning of education and the perception of education in the Hmong community. Gender roles and expectations that are placed on individuals greatly impact an individual's world view and construct the way they act. Parental support or lack of parental support can determine how well an individual does in life. Stressors also impact an individual's life and ability to succeed. In addition to researching on these themes, applying the theoretical framework that was previously discussed, aids writer in better understanding the context.

Education

There are many definitions of education and many people have their own understanding of what is education. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2015), there are three definitions to education: (1) the action or process of teaching someone especially in a school, college, or university, (2) the knowledge, skill, and understanding that you get from attending a school, college, or university, and (3) a field of study that deals with the methods and problems of teaching. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2000) defines education as a

complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context, thus education will look differently throughout the world. Even though education is viewed differently around the world, UNICEF(2000) states that every child has a right to a quality education, which includes five important factors: healthy and well-prepared learners, safe and protective environments, developmentally appropriate content, child-centered teaching approaches and processes, and knowledgeable outcomes that lead learners to becoming positive participations in society.

In 1997, former President Bill Clinton's State of the Union Address focused on education and ensuring that all Americans receive the best education in the world. Clinton (1998) reported that American education should consist of: (1) rigorous national standards, (2) talented and dedicated teachers, (3) school choice and accountability, (4) safe, discipline, and drug free schools, and (5) modernized school buildings. Along with these components, Clinton also wanted students to be able to read at grade-level by third grade, make colleges available for everyone, promote adult education, and connect schools to modern technologies that stimulate learning. Clinton created a new national standard of academic achievement and following presidents continue to improve the national's academic achievement.

After President Bush took the White House, he passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that hoped to provide all students with the opportunity to obtain quality education and excel in core academic subjects (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Bush wanted schools, teachers, and students to be held accountable for the content that was being taught and learned. Through implementing NCLB, students had to take more

tests and schools were rewarded or reprimanded depending on the student's academic scores. Similar to every controversial bill or law, there were supporters and opponents to NCLB. According to Means and Taylor (2010), President Bush presided over the most significant restructuring of U.S. public education since the 1960s.

Our current president, Barack Obama, addressed his administration plan for teacher education reform and improvement in 2011. President Obama's new education plan included: (1) institutional reporting and state accountability, (2) reform financing of students preparing to become teachers, and (3) target support to institutions that prepare high quality teachers from diverse backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). There was this new push to hold teachers accountable and to provide old and new teachers with the support and training they need to be the best teachers in America.

The Model Minority

The perception of Asian Americans as successful, high achievers dated back to the mid-1960s when *New York Times Magazine*, *U.S. News*, and *World Report* publicized the successes of Japanese- and Chinese-Americans even when faced with similar adversities during the civil rights movement (Tran & Birman, 2010). In 1966, William Petersen was the first person who coined the *model minority* term in his article for the *New York Times Magazine* (Xu & Lee, 2013). Shortly after this media coverage, Asian Americans were portrayed as the *model minority* because they were considered the appropriate *model* for minorities to follow to become successful and achieve the *American dream* (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Ngo and Lee stated that the image of Asian American students as model

minorities is supported by much of the academic research on Asian American students. The model minority stereotype suggested that Asian Americans were successful because they were high achievers and hard workers (Tran & Birman). Indeed, statistical data did show that Asian Americans were achieving at a higher level compared to other minority groups. However, this data was aggregated and did not demonstrate the large academic achievement differences among various Asian ethnic groups. The term, Asian Americans is so broad and it represents individuals from various Asian descents and backgrounds.

The model minority stereotype is misleading and damaging to ethnic groups that are extremely disadvantaged but happen to be classified under the rubric of Asian Americans (as cited in Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim, 2013). This stereotype characterizes Asian Americans as being generally successful but proves to be an invalid judgment due to the low socioeconomic statuses of Southeast Asian Americans (Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim). When the model minority image is held to apply to all Asian Americans, teachers, public programs, government agencies, and service organizations may overlook the psychological, social, academic, and economic issues of the Southeast Asian American population. The ecological theory posits that individuals can be directly or indirectly affected by the different levels and systems in their environment. Stereotypes are created at the macro level but descend through the different levels and can directly impact an individual.

Southeast Asian Americans, such as Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian, do not fit into the model minority stereotype. According to Ngo and Lee, Southeast Asian Americans were portrayed as being part of the model minority and were also portrayed as

being high school dropouts, gangsters, and welfare dependent. Unfortunately due to stereotypes, Southeast Asian American students were bound to two extremes. These two contrasting stereotypes allow many struggling Hmong students to fall through the cracks. Data from the U.S. Census (2000) proved that 59% of Hmong Americans ages 25 and over had less than a high school education compared to the overall U.S. population of 19.6% and only 7.4% of Hmong Americans ages 25 and over attained a bachelor's degree or higher (as cited in Ngo & Lee, 2007). These high numbers of low educational attainment and low numbers of higher educational attainment resemble the data of other minorities such as African Americans and Hispanics more than Japanese and Chinese Americans (Yang, 2004).

Fortunately, the numbers of Hmong attaining higher education and earning a bachelor's degree or higher is increasing. According to statistics from the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS), 13.2% of Hmong Americans over 25 have earned a bachelor's degree (as cited in Pfeifer, 2014). Within 13 years, the percentage of Hmong Americans over 25 has increased from 7.4% to 13.2%, a 5.8% increase. Pfeifer (2014) highlighted that not only is the educational attainment of Hmong Americans increasing, there has been a shift in educational attainment by gender. Pfeifer stated that new ACS data shows 17.1% of Hmong women have earned a bachelor's compared to 15.4% of Hmong men. Although the significantly higher proportions (13.2%) of Hmong Americans are graduating with at least a bachelor's degree, they are still below the average of all Americans (18.4%).

Other Minorities' Educational Achievement

Ross, Kena, Rathbun, et al., (2012) stated that in 2010, the percentage of young adult males and female ages 25 to 34 who had earned at least a bachelor's degree was 27% and 35% respectively. Ross and colleagues reported that there is a consistent gap between the higher educational attainment of White males to those of Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Pacific Islander males. There is also increasing data presenting females persisting in attaining higher education compared to their male counterparts.

Ross and colleagues (2012) reported that overall, a lower percentage of male students (46 percent) had attained a postsecondary degree in 2003 to 2004 compared to female students (52 percent). Similar data was found among attainment of a postsecondary degree among females and males (68 percent versus 48 percent). Data of individuals graduating with a bachelor's degree exhibited Whites and Asians graduating at a higher rate than Blacks and Hispanics. However, further research has proven that Southeast Asian Americans' graduation rates are more aligned with the graduation rates of Blacks and Hispanics (Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim). The aggregated data of Asians graduating at a higher rate does not accurately represent Southeast Asian Americans.

Statistics and researchers have repeatedly reported that Southeast Asian Americans are relatively disadvantaged compared to other Asian ethnic groups and Whites (Ngo & Lee, 2007; Yang, 2004; Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim, 2013). Takei, Sakamoto, and Kim (2013) utilized American Community Survey data to explore socioeconomic attainments of six ethnic groups of Southeast Asian Americans: Hmong, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodians, and Laotians. Their findings suggested that

there was a disparity among these Southeast Asian ethnic groups. Filipinos, Vietnamese, and Thai had higher educational attainment than Whites, while Hmong, Cambodians, and Laotians had lower educational attainment than of Whites. Data from this study proved that Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians are the more disadvantaged groups within the Southeast Asian American populations (Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim).

Education in the Hmong Community

In the Hmong community, there seems to be mixed feelings about the importance of academics. On one hand, there is the group of individuals who do not support education attainment and believe that the American education system is corrupt and is trying to remove the Hmong culture from Hmong youths. On the other hand, there is the larger group of individuals who fully support education attainment and believe that education is the key to success in America. Parental and familial support is an important factor to consider while looking at education within the Hmong community because they serve as external motivators for achievement. Data collected from Lo and Lor's (2012) thesis project and another similar study (Lee, Chang, Yang, Lo, & Thao, 2015) demonstrated that Hmong American students have not obtained higher educational degrees until the mid-1990s. Although the Hmong began settling into America in 1975, it took about 20 years for the first wave of Hmong immigrants or Hmong Americans to obtain a college degree. This late attendance of colleges and universities may be due to acculturation issues and cultural differences and values.

Ngo (2013) discusses the importance of Hmong community leaders being more involved and supportive of Hmong youth's education. Research shows that more

traditional Southeast Asian cultures that are not as open to the American culture can become barriers to academic achievement (Ngo). Specifically with the Hmong community, the “value of cooperation over individualism is incompatible with the competitive culture of U.S. schools” (Ngo, 2013, p. 964). Ngo illuminates that this clash between two cultures can hinder immigrant adaption and educational attainment within minority populations. Lee and colleagues (2015) reported that leaders and supporters in the Hmong community served as an influential agent in a Hmong student’s success. If the whole Hmong community promotes education for all individuals and attaining a higher education becomes a cultural norm, individuals will be more likely to pursue and achieve higher education.

For many Hmong students, the idea of *finish high school and get a college degree* is engrained into their minds from their parents or caregivers from a very young age. Hmong people migrated to America to acquire the *American dream* and obtain opportunities for life betterment that was not available back in Southeast Asia. Hmong elders realized that education was the key to success. To become a professional and a contributing citizen, one needed to graduate from high school and earn a college degree. This new and empowering idea of education attainment was desirable from Hmong parents and elders but they lacked the knowledge of the process to attain higher education.

Many first generation Hmong immigrants who came to the United States did not have any education background and if they did, their highest level of completion was probably grade school. Due to this, older Hmong parents and caregivers were unable to

academically support their children by helping them with homework or school projects. For many Hmong students with uneducated parents, they have to depend on their older siblings or cousins for homework help. Again, this represents how the Hmong work in a collectivist approach, relatives helping one another and making it a team approach as opposed to promoting individual achievement.

Ethnic Socialization

As part of the ecological theory, parents play a big role in shaping a child's identity and world view. Although children's views and perceptions can be shaped by numerous systems, their parents or caregivers directly influence their understanding from a very young age. Moua and Lamborn (2010) examined the ethnic socialization of Hmong adolescents who come from immigrant families and the adolescents' perception of ethnic socialization. Moua and Lamborn stated that ethnic socialization is a multifaceted process by which parents transmit information associated with their ethnic background and involves teaching their children about behavioral goals, values, norms, and attitudes that are accepted in their ethnic heritage.

Hmong people came from a "tribal societal background and did not have a written language until after the second half of the twentieth century" (as cited in Takei, Sakamoto, & Kim, p. 200). Because there was not a written language until recently, elders and parents taught their children through verbal stories and stories were passed down from generation to generation. This trend continued after migration to the United States. Parents were continuing to teach their children about their culture informally through learned-experiences, observations, and discussions (Moua & Lamborn).

Moua and Lamborn's study provided ten categories of common ethnic socialization practices: participating in cultural events, sharing history, preparing traditional food, language use, wearing traditional clothes, strengthening family ties, preparation for marriage, participation in religion, encouraging ethnic pride, and expressing high expectations. Hmong adolescents reported that their mothers were mainly responsible for teaching them all they knew about their culture, norms, and values. Ethnic socialization is critical in constructing an individual's role in their family and culture. Due to the various differences between the Hmong culture and the American culture, Hmong adolescents who come from immigrant families often times struggle with relating to one culture or the other. This in effect, impacts the child's performance in different stages of his/her life.

Gender Roles and Cultural Expectations

Gender plays such a vital role in society. Gender roles and expectations shape and form an individual's identity (Peng, 2007). Depending on one's cultural and social norms, gender roles and expectations may look different. The patriarchal Hmong society views males as the dominant breadwinner and females as the domesticated homemaker (Lor, 2013). Peng (2007) stated that traditional gender considerations are that males are smarter, stronger, and more capable, while females are less smart, weaker, and less capable. The traditional roles of Hmong women were limited to household chores, agricultural responsibilities, child bearing, and prepping social events (Lor, 2013). On the other hand, men were expected to financially sustain and support their family. Hmong males are expected to uphold the family and cultural traditions such as

“administering over cultural ceremonies, resolving family disputes, communicating with clan leaders, and meting out justice according to Hmong customs and norms” (as cited in Xiong & Lam, 2012, p. 133). Essentially, the roles and expectations of women were the opposite of the roles and expectations of men.

Cultural values and practices directly impact Hmong students and their educational attainment. Studies show that college students struggle with upholding cultural values and practices while attaining higher education (Xiong & Lam, 2012). Xiong and Lam (2012) discuss cultural barriers to attaining higher education to be pressure of getting married at a young age by elders, opposition of females from pursuing higher education by in-laws, and other family responsibilities that demand time and energy needed to obtain a college degree. However, many Hmong families have adapted modern views and practices, thus the encouragement of attaining higher education is more prominent. Although cultural values and practices can create barriers and extra stressors for students, certain aspects of cultural values may contribute to academic success. Some parents are very supportive of their children attaining higher education. Parents are able to support their children, while they obtain post-secondary education, emotionally and financially; as well as by providing childcare to their children who are also parents.

Stemming from cultural gender norms in Southeast Asia, from a very young age, Hmong girls are expected to act a certain way and be able to do certain things. The role of a young Hmong girl is to learn how to become a good housewife. As early as six years old, girls are taught how to do needlework, cook, clean, take care of younger siblings,

how to garden, and the cultural etiquette (Peng, 2007). Although this gender norm was more common back in Southeast Asia, some Hmong families still have very strict expectations from Hmong daughters. Furthermore, Peng states that a female does not have any social status or respect until she is married. For example, a female who does not get married will bring shame to her family and usually her mother is to be blamed for not raising her correctly.

Early marriage is a cultural practiced that is most popular in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia and in South Asia, early childbearing is always expected after a marriage (Bates, Maselko, & Schuler, 2007). Early teenage marriage has always been a common cultural practice in the Hmong culture. It was a cultural norm for females to get married at a very young age and marriage served as an identity development of Hmong female adolescents (Vang & Bogenschutz, 2014). Although teenage marriage was more common back in Southeast Asia, it is still prevalent after migration to other countries, including the United States.

Similar to many Asian cultures, in the Hmong culture, there are strong social sanctions against pregnancies outside of marriage. Many early marriages occur due to unexpected pregnancies. Because it is not accepted to give birth out of wedlock, individuals are usually *forced* or highly encouraged to get married prior to the childbirth. In the United States, most couples in the Hmong community get married culturally through older paternal officiants and choose not to get married legally through the state. This practice allowed younger individuals to get married within their community without having to deal with legal documents. Marriages conducted in the cultural and traditional

way were legitimate and recognized within the Hmong community. Legalization of marriage by a court of law is not always pursued after being married within the culture (Vang & Bogenschutz, 2014).

A study on Hmong teenage marriage indicated that there was still a high rate of early marriage in the Hmong community. Vang and Bogenschutz (2014) found various factors that were associated to teenage marriage, such as: higher rates of marital abuse, lower income, lower educational attainment, and higher teenage pregnancy. Females who decided to marry later in adulthood were more likely able to graduate high school and attain higher education as compared to females who married during adolescence, who were more likely to drop out of high school or end their education after graduating from high school (Vang & Bogenschutz).

Other research and studies have also concluded that education was an important factor in whether women decide to get married or pregnant at an early age (Bates, Maselko, & Schuler, 2007). Bates, Maselko, and Schuler (2007) stated that women having a secondary-school education are considerably less likely than less educated women to marry during adolescence, and in countries where higher proportions of women have at least some secondary education, the proportion who marry as adolescents are lower. With this in mind, early marriage was probably more prevalent back in Asia because the access to education was limited.

It is important to note the resilience that is shown by Hmong women who are continuing to pursue higher education even when faced with adversities such as racism and sexism. Hmong females are often stuck in multiple roles as a mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-

law, student, and sometimes employee. With so many needs from different parts of their lives, it is almost expected for them to underachieve or become burned out. However, there are still so many success stories of Hmong female beating the odds, achieving at a higher rate, and attaining higher education despite all obstacles.

Female Education and Equality

Although statistics from the US Census show that there has been an incremental increase of females attaining higher education, females still face disadvantages and exclusions within education systems all around the world. People who experience gender and ethnic inequalities are more limited to educational opportunities and career opportunities (Cheung & Chan, 2007). UNICEF (2014) reported that an estimated 31 million girls of primary school age and 34 million girls of lower secondary school age were not enrolled in 2011. Many countries around the world have not reached gender parity. According to UNICEF, education is an intrinsic right and it serves as a *critical lever* to reaching development objectives. Providing females an equal opportunity to quality education can break the cycle of poverty. Trends show that educated females are less likely to marry at a young age, become teenage mothers, and more likely to plan childbirths and support their children in school (UNICEF, 2014).

Gender inequality is quite prevalent in the Hmong society due to the patriarchal system. Peng adds that many of the disadvantages faced by Hmong women are associated with lack of education. Hence, the strongest way to decrease gender inequality is to raise women's educational level. Many Hmong women utilize higher education as a motivation or means to future betterment. The effort to create gender

parity in educational systems has been supported by many organizations and foundations. Before there can be gender parity in education, there needs to be equal treatment of males and females and equal opportunities for all (Cheung & Chan, 2007). Cheung and Chan studied gender inequality in educational settings and reported that culture plays a big role in academic attainment. Depending on one's cultural values and beliefs, s/he may choose not to pursue higher education.

In previous American history, women have also been oppressed and faced inequality. However, as the American society is progressing into post-modernism, women are given the opportunity to attain higher education and become more independent. The opportunity of attaining higher education empowered Hmong women to compete with their male counterparts and create a new identity for themselves. The Hmong culture is constantly changing despite the cultural differences (Lee, 1997) and the increasing rate of Hmong women aspiring and attaining higher education proves that primitive cultures are dynamic and capable of evolving.

Parental Support

Ecological theory suggests that individuals are impacted by their environment and individuals within their environment. Commonly, an infant creates his first relationship with his/her caretaker. The development of this attachment and relationship can determine the child's well-being. In immigrant families, there may be a lack of parental involvement due to acculturation challenges (Ying & Han, 2008). There is very limited research on parental involvement and acculturation among Southeast Asian American families; however, studies have shown that parents with limited English language skills

are less likely to be engaged with their children which may cause intergenerational issues and affect the child's well-being (Ying & Han). According to Ying and Han, immigrant parents' lack of the English language and cultural differences can limit their engagement with their children's school and teachers. If parents are communicative and supportive of their child's education in the home and at his/her school, this provides the child with a higher level of resources that promote his/her well-being.

Hmong parents are typically described as "low in warmth and outward expressions of love, high in behavioral control, and as experiencing a high degree of conflict with their adolescent-aged children" (Supple, McCoy, & Wang, 2011, p. 4). Hmong parents commonly more authoritative and believe they are the only ones who can make decisions for their children. The Hmong culture is more of a collectivist culture and is interdependent; whereas the American culture is individualistic and promotes independence. As the Hmong youth are assimilating into the American culture, there is a clash of expectations (Supple, McCoy, & Wang, 2011). At home, they are expected to help out the family and obey the rules of their parent(s) but at school, they are expected to be independent, make their own decisions, and succeed without the help of others.

Lee and Green (2008) studied the parental involvement and support of Hmong families. According to their study, parental involvement has demonstrated a positive correlation with higher academic achievement and academic attendance. Hmong parents in America are aware that education is the key to success and want their children to attain higher education. They have reported of teaching their children basic knowledge such as the alphabet and counting prior to their first interaction with schools. Parents reported

being more involved in their child's academics in elementary and middle school. The parent's level of involvement consisted of attending school meetings and conferences, taking children to school and picking them up, and monitoring their children's homework. Lee and Green's (2008) research did not show a correlation between level of parent involvement and parents' education level. Contrary to Lee and Green's research, a study completed by Thao (2000) indicated that parental involvement in a child's academic life depended on the parent's education level (as cited in Lee & Green, 2008). Parents with a higher education level were more likely to participate in their children's academic events but parents with a lower education level had a higher value of education.

Ying and Han (2008) studied the acculturation and parental involvement in Southeast Asian American families, Hmong included, and how it affects their children's well-being. They discovered that parental acculturation increased engagement across different levels of a child's life which leads to enhancing the child's well-being and the family dynamics. Parental support and engagement of a child's academic endeavors improved the parent-child relationship and served as a positive link between home and school.

Most studies looked at the academic attainment of adolescents and how parental support played a role in children's achievement. Lor (2008) studied Hmong college students and their experiences in attaining higher education at a university. College students reported that having a strong supportive family contributed to their desire and strength to stay in school and graduate from college (Lor, 2008). In Lor's study, college students identified positive parental support as: encouragement, childcare, financial

assistance, and spiritual and emotional healing. Many students reported that their parents' constant encouragement and reminders the importance of education made an impact in college students putting aside their personal doubts and focusing on school. Among college students heavily relied on their social supports, which consisted of parents, siblings, relatives, teachers and professors, and friends.

Teacher's Motivating Styles

Along with parents, teachers are definitely influential individuals in a student's life. According to the ecological theory, teachers fall within the microsystem because they have direct impact on the individual. Kindergartens through 12th grade students spend the majority of their day at school with their teachers. A classroom can serve as a family unit where the teacher is the parental figure and the students are the children learning and growing from the experiences that the teacher provides. Similar to a child's relationship with his/her parent(s), there needs to be a goodness of fit between the child and the teacher for the child to be able to thrive in the classroom. When a student can positively engage in the classroom with his/her teacher and classmates, it increases their intrinsic motivation to achieve.

Self-determination theory proposes that there are three primary psychological needs that promote intrinsic motivation: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Guiffreda, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). In higher education settings, such as universities and colleges, positive relationships with students' professors or school faculty increases academic achievement. For instance, students may attend college to fulfill their relatedness needs (one of three SDT needs). Students who connected to their professors

or faculty may be *more academically successful* than students who connected more with their peers (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013).

Engagement is vital in all aspects of an individual's life because it means the individual is interested and contributing. In the school setting, engagement "functions as a behavioral pathway by which students' motivational processes contribute to their subsequent learning and development" (as cited in Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004, p. 148). Student engagement can predict their motivation in school. Studies show that a student, who is more engaged, has more academic achievements and finishes school as compared to a student who is disengaged (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, et al., 2004).

Reeve, Jang, Carrell, and their colleagues (2004) studied teacher's motivating styles and how it impacted their student's level of engagement. They discovered that a teacher's motivating and teaching style can affect a student's level of engagement. Utilizing the self-determination theory and applying it to teacher's support and motivating styles, it shows us that teachers' motivating styles run on a continuum from highly controlling to highly autonomy supportive (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, et al., 2004). A teacher who is highly controlling can interfere with a student's self-determination and decrease the student's motivation and engagement; whereas a teacher who is highly autonomy supportive increases the student's motivation and engagement.

Reeve, Jang, Carrell, and colleagues revealed that teachers' autonomy support can be taught and in turn can increase their students' engagement and motivation to achieve. Research has shown that support of autonomous behaviors lead to more intrinsic motivations to achieve (Koseoglu, 2012). With this information, all teachers should be

trained to support their students' autonomy instead of being controlling and demanding in the classroom.

Student Motivation

As previously discussed, student motivation is an influential factor in academic achievement. Student-determination theory suggests that intrinsic motivation is more advantageous to learning than extrinsic motivation (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013). When a student is more engaged and motivated in school, that student has a better chance at achieving more and finishing school. There are three types of motivations: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) extrinsic motivation, and (3) amotivation. Koseoglu (2012) described intrinsic motivation as an internal satisfaction in wanting to do something, extrinsic motivation as doing something out of obligation, and amotivation as an absence of motivation or intent. In 1992, Vallerand and colleagues developed a scale to measure student motivation, the Academic Motivation Scale (Koseoglu, 2012).

Koseoglu's study of student motivation revealed that female students were more intrinsically and extrinsically motivated than male students. Males were found to be more extrinsically motivated or amotivated (Koseoglu). In Koseoglu's study, the male students reported feeling ambivalent about finishing school and the importance of attaining a degree; whereas female students reported of wanting to finish school and earn a degree to better their future and secure a financially-stable job. This difference in motivations may be due to the developmental differences among females and males or the values that they hold about education. This can be a reason why females are increasingly graduating at a higher rate compared to males, because of their increased

motivation to achieve.

Motivation can increase if students are feeling competent, connected, and autonomous. A student's environment is also influential in his/her motivational level. Someone with a stronger support system will feel more motivated as compared to someone with no support system. Students with teachers who promote autonomy will also lead to an increase in motivation. Motivation is very much internal but it is impacted by both internal and external factors.

Stressors that Deter Academic Achievement

While there are factors that contribute to academic achievement such as parental involvement and support, there are factors and stressors that hinder academic achievement. Stressors can be defined as anything in one's life that causes stress. Hmong youth reported stressors such as house chores, pressure to receive good grades, where to live after high school, getting a job, studying, and high expectations from parents (Duong Tran, Lee, & Khoi, 1996). Stressors such as the ones listed can detrimentally impact an individual's academic ability to achieve.

Research has shown that delinquency among boys has also hindered their academic performance (Xiong & Huang, 2011). Xiong and Huang (2011) studied Hmong male and female youths' delinquent behaviors and discovered that young Hmong males' delinquent behaviors were correlated to their lack of commitment. Delinquency is also more prevalent in males rather than females due to the close monitoring of Hmong females. Traditionally, Hmong females are restricted to attending school and going straight home afterwards in order to *protect* them from dangers (Peng, 2007). Hmong

parents give males more freedom to socialize and go out with their friends because they are seen as being more responsible (Peng, 2007).

While studying about Hmong students in higher education and academic support programs at Fresno State University, Xiong and Lee (2011) reported that the majority of Hmong college students provided obstacles that they faced in graduating were: poor study habits, poor time management, lack of time to study, lack of money, lack of motivation, and lack of direction on career goals. College students reported experiencing difficulties academically, culturally, and socially (Lor, 2008).

The demands of being a college student, working to financially support oneself, and keeping up with cultural responsibilities is definitely a juggle for many Hmong college students. As a result, education can become a second priority as college students begin to find their identity (Lor, 2008). Lee (2001) notes how family obligations and responsibilities can greatly impact academic achievement. This could possibly explain a lack of time to study because students are constantly juggling school work and family responsibilities.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Study Objectives

This research study expanded a previous Master's Project completed by two graduate students in the Division of Social Work at California State University, Sacramento, David Lo and Ger Lor (2013). Lo and Lor obtained archival data on Hmong students who graduated from California State University, Sacramento from Spring 1995 to Spring 2012. In addition to the previous data set, this writer added data from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014.

Study Design

The exploratory research design best fits this research topic and was used in this study. The purpose of an exploratory design is to examine a topic or subject that is relatively new or has little study already completed on the topic (Rubin & Babbie, 2013). Currently, there are some research that have introduced the idea that there is an academic disparity among Hmong males and females, but not much research and data has been collected to support it. This study will contribute to the data and knowledge about the academic disparity among Hmong males and females.

Sampling Procedures

This research study utilized archival data of students who graduated from California State University, Sacramento. Data was retrievable from commencement handbooks that are publicly available in the Sacramento State University Library. Writer only utilized secondary data from public records; thus, no human subjects were recruited

to participate in this research.

To specify which graduate is Hmong from the data in the commencement handbooks, writer searched for Hmong surnames. Currently, there are 18 Hmong surnames that are officially recognized in the Hmong culture: Cha/Chang, Chue, Fang, Her/Heu, Hang, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lee/Ly, Lao/Lo/Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao/Thor/Thow, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang. Some surnames have various spellings due to different dialect pronunciations such as Thao, Thor, and Thow but they are all from the same clan. Some common Hmong surnames are also shared with other ethnic groups. For example, the surnames Chang, Lee, Ly, Xiong, and Yang are common in other Asian ethnicities. To decipher if the subject is Hmong, writer referred to the individual's first and middle name. There are common traditional first and middle names that are recognized. Due to acculturation, there are some Hmong individuals who have common American first names. In a situation where the writer could not determine if the individual was Hmong, the writer did not utilize that data.

Data Collection Procedures

Since the data that was used is secondary data, there were no human subjects involved during the data collection procedure. The secondary data that were collected were information of Hmong students who have graduated from California State University, Sacramento. Commencement handbooks are readily available for public use at the Sacramento State University Library. The commencement handbooks were found in the department of special collections and archives of the University Library.

When the writer first attempted to retrieve the commencement handbooks to

begin data collection, there were some challenges in finding them because the collection of commencement handbooks was apparently misplaced. The only available commencement handbook was Spring 2013 because the librarian had a personal copy. The librarian reported that she would attempt to find the collection of handbooks, but in the meantime, the librarian advised the writer to contact the university commencement department. The writer contacted the university commencement department to request the handbooks. The writer also left her information with the librarian and was told she would be contacted immediately once they retrieved the handbooks. A week later, the writer received a message and was able to retrieve the handbooks and begin data collection.

Writer went to the archives center and asked the desk attendant for the commencement handbooks. Writer had to sign in and lock away her personal belongings. As per the rules of the center, the handbooks were unavailable for check out and the writer was only to utilize the handbooks at the tables provided in the center without any personal belongings nearby. These rules ensured the safe-keeping of the commencement handbooks since they were part of a special collection. The writer was able to utilize her laptop to record the data. Writer utilized Microsoft Excel to organize the data that were collected. The writer went through every commencement handbook from Summer 2012 to Spring 2014 and gathered the variables that were discussed in the instrumentation section. Altogether, data collection took two days to complete (three-to-four hour session per day).

After the writer collected all of the data, the writer went through the list to

decipher if the individual was male or female. This was determined based on individual's first and middle name. There are some Hmong first names that can be gender-neutral such as *Choua* and *Lee*. Without a middle name to determine the gender, the writer placed the individual's name in a social media search engine. For most cases, a picture and profile of the individual came up with their previous education listed as California State University, Sacramento. For individuals who were not traceable through social media search engines, writer eliminated their name from the data set to eliminate any discrepancies. Once the data was inputted into Microsoft Excel and all variables were completed, the data set was transferred into IBM SPSS Statistics to be analyzed.

Instrumentation

In this study, the writer used secondary data to record the graduation statuses of Hmong males and females at California State University, Sacramento from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014. The secondary data was collected from the university commencement handbooks. The variables that were collected from the handbooks were: (1) first and last name of the graduate, (2) major of study, (3) undergraduate or graduate student, (4) college department of the graduate, (5) if student graduated with honors, and (6) the semester and year of the commencement. The writer was interested in analyzing gender as a variable in the study; however, the commencement handbooks do not provide graduates' gender. For this reason, the gender variable was created by the writer based on common names. For example, an individual with a common female name such as Mary or Mai was coded as female and an individual with a common male name such as John or Chao was coded as male. These variables helped the writer document the

number of Hmong students who have graduated from Sacramento State University during Summer 2012 to Summer 2014.

Human Subjects Protection

The application for the protection of human subjects was an updated version of previous graduate students who researched on the same topic. David Lo and Ger Lor's Human Subjects Protection application was approved in September 2012 with the approval number: 12-13-003. To get permission to update Lo and Lor's application, writer contacted Lo and received permission to utilize and update their previous application. Permission was granted via e-mail. For proof of permission, the e-mail message was printed out and attached to the application. The Human Subjects Protection application for this research study was updated, completed, and submitted into the Division Social Work Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. The Human Subjects Protection application was reviewed and approved as exempt on May 15, 2014 with the protocol number as 14-15-001.

Data Analysis Plan

The computer programs that were used to complete this exploratory research were Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics. Microsoft Excel was used to record the secondary data collected from the commencement handbooks. Once data was collected, the data of the variables were inputted into SPSS to be analyzed. This research study focused on the number of graduates from California State University and the graduates' gender. The writer analyzed and compared the graduation rate of females and males from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014.

Writer only analyzed the data collected from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014. Writer collected a total of 326 names of graduates from California State University, Sacramento from the aforementioned time periods. Previous graduate students, Lo and Lor, collected 1091 names of students who graduated from Spring 1995 to Spring 2012. Since this study is a continuation of the previous graduate students' study, writer will only be analyzing her data collection and not be utilizing any data collected from previous students.

Chapter 4

Study Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore the academic disparity among Hmong males and females. Writer collected data of Hmong students who graduated from California State University, Sacramento from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014. Statistical tables and charts to demonstrate the increasing gap of academic attainment and success within the Hmong community were displayed and discussed below.

Overall Findings

Data from 326 Hmong students that appeared on the Commencement Handbooks at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014 were enumerated. Out of the 326 students, 61.7% (n = 201) were female and 38.3% (n = 125) were male (see Table 1). Indeed, there is disproportion between female and male Hmong graduates during the reporting period. The number of female graduates is nearly twice that of male graduates.

Table 1

Gender of Graduates

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Female	201	61.7
Male	125	38.3
Total	326	100.0

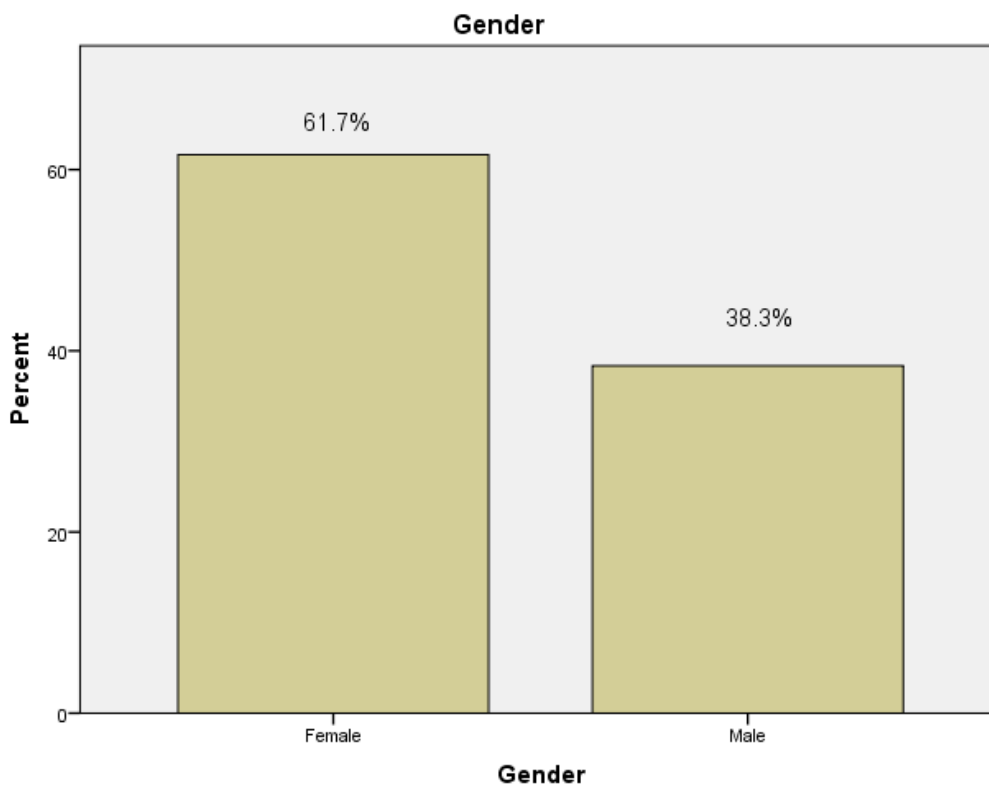


Figure 1. Percentage of graduates by gender.

To show the trends of the graduates by semesters, Table 2 displays this particular output. Among the graduates, eleven (3.4%) graduated in the summer of 2012, forty-three (13.2%) in winter 2013, seventy-five (23%) in spring 2013, fifty-four (16.6%) in summer 2013, 136 (41.7%) in spring 2014, and seven (2.1%) in summer 2014. As shown in Figure 2, Spring 2014 constituted the highest proportion (41.7%) of all graduates. By comparing spring 2013 and 2014, it is speculated that this trend will continue in the upcoming years.

Table 2

Semester and Year of Graduation

Year	Frequency	Percent
Summer 2012	11	3.4
Winter 2013	43	13.2
Spring 2013	75	23.0
Summer 2013	54	16.6
Spring 2014	136	41.7
Summer 2014	7	2.1

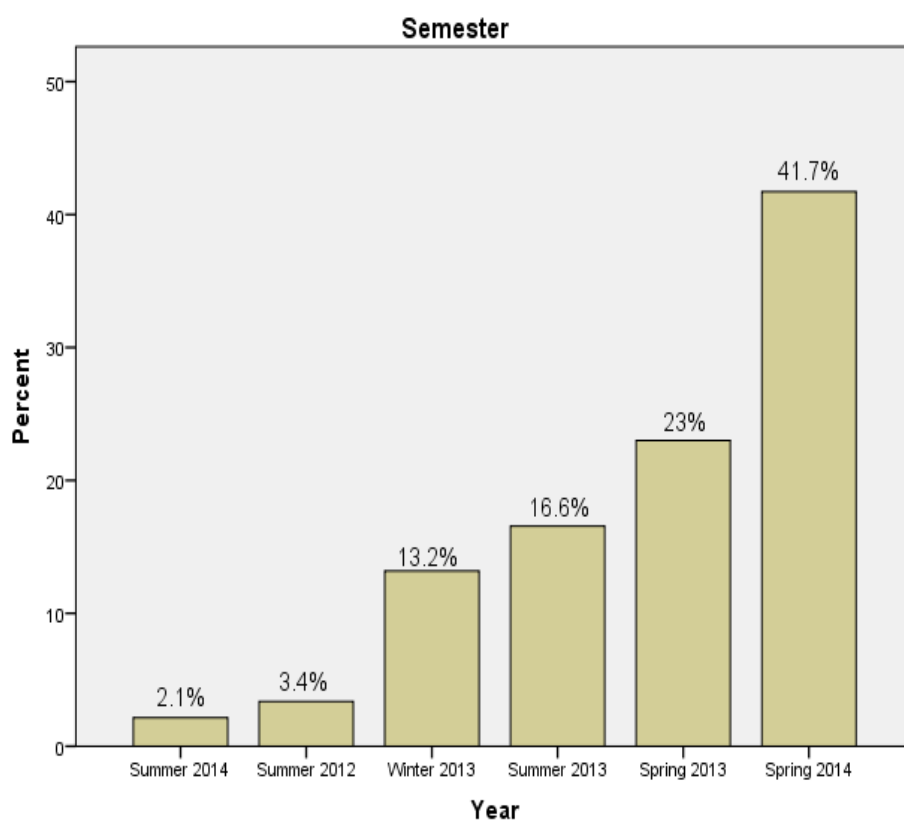
*Figure 2.* Percentage of graduates from each semester.

Table 3 represents the number of graduates and the degrees that they attained. Out of the 326 graduates, 284 (87.1%) graduated with their bachelor's degree, twenty-nine (8.9%) graduated with their master's degree, and thirteen (4%) graduated with credentials. Figure 3 shows that the majority (87.1%) of Hmong graduates attained their bachelor's degree. Table 4 focuses on the degrees attained by females and males. Specifically looking at graduate students who attained their master's degree, over 62% (n= 18) of the students were females. Among the credentialing graduates, ten (76.92%) were female and three (23.08%) were male. These statistics verify that more females are graduating than males and with higher degrees.

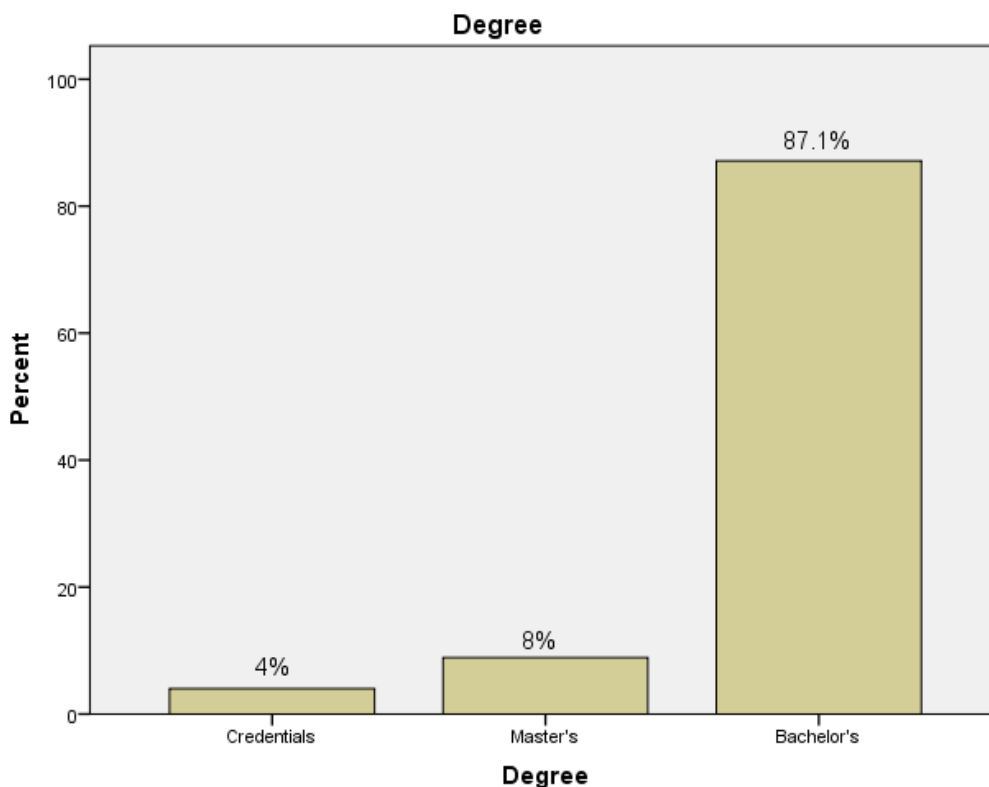


Figure 3. Percentage of degrees attained.

Table 3

Number of Graduates who Graduated with Certain Degrees

	Frequency	Percent
Undergrad	284	87.1
Graduate	29	8.9
Credentials	13	4.0
Total	326	100.0

Table 4

Degrees Attained Separated by Gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Female	Undergrad	173	86.1
	Graduate	18	9.0
	Credentials	10	5.0
	Total	201	100.0
Male	Undergrad	111	88.8
	Graduate	11	8.8
	Credentials	3	2.4
	Total	125	100.0

Students can graduate with honors and receive special notations depending on their overall grade point average (GPA). According to the CSUS catalog, a student who graduated with a GPA of 3.5-3.749 will receive the Cum Laude notation, 3.75-3.899 will receive the Magna Cum Laude notation, and 3.90-4.000 will receive the Summa Cum Laude notation. Individuals with a GPA lower than 3.5 did not graduate with honors. Table 5 represents the total numbers of students who graduated with honors and which

honorary title they received. About nine percent (n= 30) of all the Hmong graduates received honors upon graduation. Table 6 displays the number of individuals who graduated with honors separated by gender. The data proved that there were more females (n=21) who graduated with honors than males (n= 8). There were 21 females who graduated with honors (17 Cum Laude, 1 Magna Cum Laude, and 4 Summa Cum Laude) and there were 9 males who graduated with honors (8 Cum Laude and 1 Summa Cum Laude).

Table 5

Special Notations of Graduates

	Frequency	Percent
None	296	90.8
Cum Laude	25	7.7
Summa Cum Laude	4	1.2
Magna Cum Laude	1	.3
Total	326	100.0

Table 6

Special Notations of Graduates Separated by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	
Female	None	180	89.6
	Cum Laude	17	8.5
	Summa Cum Laude	3	1.5
	Magna Cum Laude	1	.5
	Total	201	100.0
Male	None	116	92.8
	Cum Laude	8	6.4
	Summa Cum Laude	1	.8
	Total	125	100.0

Moving onto looking at which departments the students graduated from, Table 7 shows that there were male graduates from all the departments at CSUS. As for females, there were graduates from all of the departments except for the Engineering and Computer Science department. The most popular department with the most graduates was Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies where sixty-four (31.8%) females and thirty (24%) males graduated. The top three departments that females graduated from were Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (31.8%), Health and Human Services (25.4%), and Education (16.9%). The top three departments that males graduated from were Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (24%), Business Administration (20%) and Health and Human Services (18.4%).

Table 7

Departments of the Graduates Separated by Gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Female	Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies	64	31.8
	Health & Human Services	51	25.4
	Education	34	16.9
	Business Administration	25	12.4
	Arts & Letters	14	7.0
	Natural Sciences & Math	13	6.5
	Total	201	100.0
Male	Social Sciences & Interdisciplinary Studies	30	24.0
	Business Administration	25	20.0
	Health & Human Services	23	18.4
	Natural Sciences & Math	18	14.4
	Engineering & Computer Science	17	13.6
	Education	8	6.4
	Arts & Letters	4	3.2
	Total	125	100.0

Within each department, there are different majors. While looking at the different majors, writer identified the top six majors that individuals graduated from. Table 8 lists

the top six majors of graduates. The highest percentage of female (12.4%) graduates were in Social Work. As for males, 12.8% of graduates were in Engineering. From this statistical data, writer can assume that one out of ten Hmong females graduated in Social Work and one out of ten Hmong males graduated in Engineering. Accountancy and Psychology were two majors that were both in the top five majors that individuals graduated from. From this observation, writer assumes that female graduates are entering professions that revolve around directly helping people and utilizing their interpersonal skills (social workers, educators, psychologists, and etcetera); whereas males are entering professions that are more administrative and numeric (engineers, accountants, and etcetera).

Table 8

Top Six Majors Separated by Gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent
Female	Social Work	25	12.4
	Education	20	10.0
	Psychology	17	8.5
	Accountancy	14	7.0
	Liberal Studies	14	7.0
	Sociology	14	7.0
Male	Engineering	16	12.8
	Biological Science	15	12.0
	Accountancy	10	8.0
	Business Admin	10	8.0
	Economics	9	7.2
	Psychology	9	7.2

Writer was interested in learning which clans had the most graduates so writer identified how many graduates were from each clan. Table 9 shows the number of graduates from each clan and Figure 4 shows the percentages of graduates from each clan descending from highest to lowest. The most graduates (n=54, 16.6%) were from the Xiong/Siong clan and the lowest number of graduates (n=2; .6%) were from the Hang, Khang/Kang, and Kong clans. It is important to note that there were not any graduates at CSUS during the data collection period from the following clans: Fang, Pha, and Kue.

Table 9

Graduates' Surnames

Clans	Frequency	Percent
Xiong/Siong	54	16.6
Vang	50	15.3
Lee/Ly	43	13.2
Yang	39	12.0
Thao/Thor	33	10.1
Moua	25	7.7
Cha/Chang/Cheng	20	6.1
Lao/Lo/Lor	20	6.1
Her	18	5.5
Vue	18	5.5
Kang/Khang	2	.6
Kong	2	.6
Hang	2	.6
Total	326	100.0

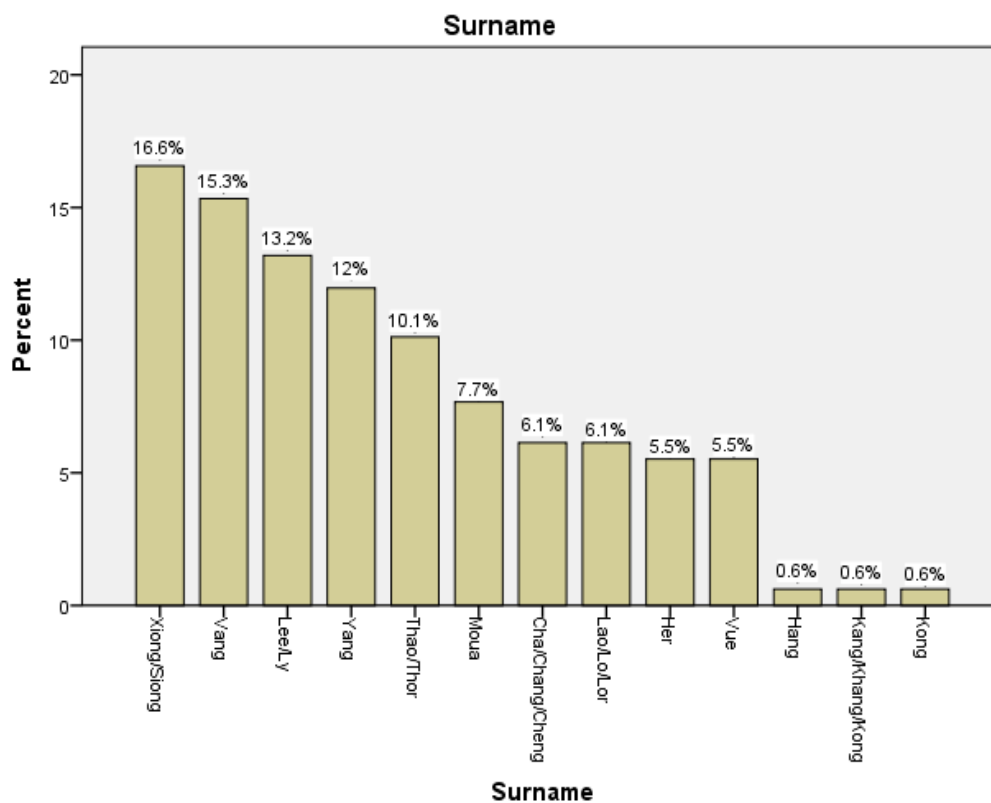


Figure 4. Percentage of particular surnames who graduated.

Table 10 compares the number of graduates from each clan by gender. It was interesting to see that females were graduating at a higher rate compared to males even within their clans. Over 60% of graduates were females within the following clans: Cha/Chang/Cheng, Her, Lao/Lo/Lor, Lee/Ly, Thao/Thor, Vang, Vue, Xiong/Siong, and Yang. The Moua clan was the only clan that had more male ($n=15$) graduates than females ($n=10$). The Hang clan only had two male graduates and the Kang/Khang and Kong clan had two female graduates.

Table 10

Comparison of Female and Male Graduates Separated by Surnames

		Frequency	Percent
Cha/Chang/Cheng	F	15	75.0
	M	5	25.0
	Total	20	100.0
Hang	M	2	100.0
Her	F	11	61.1
	M	7	38.9
	Total	18	100.0
Kang/Khang	F	2	100.0
Kong	F	2	100.0
Lao/Lo/Lor	F	13	65.0
	M	7	35.0
	Total	20	100.0
Lee/Ly	F	26	60.5
	M	17	39.5
	Total	43	100.0
Moua	F	10	40.0
	M	15	60.0
	Total	25	100.0
Thao/Thor	F	20	60.6
	M	13	39.4
	Total	33	100.0
Vang	F	31	62.0
	M	19	38.0
	Total	50	100.0
Vue	F	12	66.7
	M	6	33.3
	Total	18	100.0
Xiong/Siong	F	33	61.1
	M	21	38.9
	Total	54	100.0
Yang	F	26	66.7
	M	13	33.3
	Total	39	100.0

Chapter 5

Summary and Recommendations

In previous times, the Hmong have been a migrating ethnic group in Asia and never had their own home country or a place to call home. After arriving to the United States in the mid-1970s, the Hmong have viewed America as a new opportunity to improve their living conditions and provide future Hmong youth with opportunities that Hmong elders did not have back in Southeast Asia. Similar to many other immigrants who first arrived to the United States, the Hmong had difficulties in assimilating to the American culture due to language barriers and cultural differences. It was especially hard for Hmong females because they were still held to cultural standards and were expected to get married at a young age and quickly have children soon after marriage. However, that practice was not accepted in the American culture and this cultural practice was preventing Hmong girls from finishing high school or pursuing higher education after high school.

As the years passed, significant families and individuals in the Hmong community have adopted more modern views and there was a shift from expecting early marriages and childrearing to the promotion of finishing high school and attending college. Graduating from high school and especially college became a stepping-stone of advancement and attaining higher social status for themselves and the Hmong people. An individual with a higher educational level meant they had more opportunities to be as successful as the dominant culture in America. Hmong females were utilizing education as an empowerment tool to become independent and earn their respect in the Hmong

community. Back in Southeast Asia, females were always the shadows of their husbands or the clan groups and did not have an identity in the community until they were married. Even when married, their identity was always attached to their husband's status and identity in the community. Now in America, Hmong women can go to school and broaden their opportunities.

Literature and studies have shown that there is a trend of Hmong females advancing in education and incrementally achieving and surpassing the successes of Hmong males. The data collected from this study supports that females are graduating college at a higher rate compared to their male counterparts, nearly two to one at Sacramento State. Within two years at CSUS, a total of 326 Hmong students have graduated. Out of the 326 Hmong graduates, 61.7% were female (n= 201) and 38.3% were male (n= 125). A student can graduate with honors if s/he has a grade point average of 3.50 or higher. Twenty-one (6.4%) females graduated with honors while only nine (2.8%) males graduated with honors. Not only were there more female graduates at CSUS and more females who graduated with honors, there were more females who graduated from the Masters programs and with their credentials. There were 29 students who graduated with their masters (18 females and 11 males) and 13 students who graduated with their credentials (10 females and 3 males). These statistics show that at CSUS, Hmong females are demonstrating a higher achievement and academic success rate compared to Hmong males.

This discovered trend is detrimental in the Hmong community. As it is exciting to discover that Hmong females are finally optimizing their opportunities by attending

college and graduating despite disadvantages, it is also important to notice the decline in Hmong men attending college and decline of achievement in such settings. It would be great if both males and females were achieving at a similar rate. Educators and social workers should address this achievement gap and assess what services may be needed in their communities to close the gap.

This particular research topic is dear to the writer's heart because she is the first daughter to graduate, not only with her bachelor's degree, but soon with her master's degree, in her immediate family and the first female to graduate with her master's degree in her extended family. As part of the Hmong community and being raised by traditional Hmong parents, writer has personally experienced how difficult it can be to juggle two very different roles of being a Hmong daughter and a student. Over the years of attending public schools with a large population of Hmong students, writer has seen a decrease of Hmong male's student motivation to do well in school. Hmong males often get easily distracted by their friends or prioritize their social life and status over their academics. Student motivation and prioritization can be two important factors that impact student success.

Implications for Social Work

The Hmong population has been incrementally increasing in various metropolitan and suburban cities in the United States. As this minority population is growing, it is vital for professionals, especially social workers, to be culturally aware of their cultural background, values, and norms. Too often, the Hmong can get looked over or fall between the cracks due to stereotypes and misjudgments such as the model minority

stereotype. With more research and knowledge made available about the Hmong population, social workers can be more equipped to create and implement appropriate services and resources for the Hmong communities across America. It's important to remember that Hmong communities differ throughout America and even throughout states. Social workers should always assess for different needs and never generalize when working with different ethnic groups.

Hopefully this study serves as useful knowledge for social workers, specifically in school settings. With the knowledge of what factors can contribute to student success and what factors deter academic achievement, social workers will be able to create school programs that foster academic growth and success at the micro level. Understanding how stereotypes can negatively impact ethnic minorities, such as the Hmong, can guide social workers to make a change in different systems through macro-level work. This study established and added onto the knowledge base of Hmong American students and provided discretion and directions for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study has added to the research available on Hmong college students, there is still a need for more research to be completed on the Hmong and their educational experiences. So often, researchers discover that there is a deficit or an issue and data is collected to study the issue; however, there lacks research that utilizes a strengths approach to discover how the Hmong, especially Hmong women, are becoming empowered to make a change in their lives and attain higher education. What are the true factors that are impacting their decisions to stay in school and pursue higher education?

What resources are made available specifically for the Hmong population to assist them in excelling in school? There are still so many questions that need to be explored and answered because of the limited knowledge there is on Hmong Americans and their education.

Study Limitations

As mentioned before, there are some limitations in this study that need to be addressed. One of the purposes of this study was to update the data collection of previous graduate students' thesis, who also researched the graduation rates of Hmong students at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). At the time of data collection, writer only collected the data of Hmong graduates from Summer 2012 to Summer 2014. Due to the short time frame of data collection, the sample size was small and limited to one Sacramento University. In causation of the small sample size and non-randomization of the recruitment sample, the data that was collected cannot be generalized to the complete Hmong population. However, similar studies utilizing national numbers from the census and data from various states where the Hmong resides, also demonstrated that Hmong females were achieving and graduating at a higher rate than Hmong males.

While gathering data for this study, writer had to make systematic and subjective decisions whether the name of the graduate was correlated to being male or female based on cultural and gender assumptions. Unfortunately, college departments and commencement handbooks do not publicize the gender of the graduates in their records. Since gender was an important variable in this study, writer had to create the graduates'

gender based on the information that was retrieved about the graduates. Another recognizable limitation was the identification of graduates' surnames. With particular clan names, it can be difficult to decipher if the individual is Hmong or from another ethnic group because certain surnames can belong to other ethnic groups. For example, clan groups such as Lee, Cheng, and Yang are common surnames among other ethnicities. Writer had to refer to the graduate's first and middle names to interpret if the graduate was Hmong. To eliminate any uncertainties, writer did not utilize the names of individuals that writer was unsure.

Due to the limited available resources and time constraint, writer was unable to create and implement a questionnaire seeking more information on the factors that impact an individual's educational experience. It would be ideal to be able to collect qualitative data from both male and female Hmong college students on their educational experience and their motivations to stay in school and graduate. Along with the quantitative data of the graduation rates, writer would be able to better identify why females are increasingly graduating at a much higher rate than males. The completion of this study has inspired writer to continue studying the unique factors that impact the Hmong population.

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