

THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND CULTURAL
IDENTITY OF SECOND GENERATION LAO AND
HMONG AMERICAN MEN IN CALIFORNIA'S
CENTRAL VALLEY

by

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Abstract

Education is the foundation of success for second-generation Southeast Asians and is the greatest factor for higher wages (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). The second-generation of most immigrant groups are reported to have higher educational, life aspirations and attainment than their parents (Phommasa, 2016). In California's Central Valley (hereafter "Central Valley"), the educational trend for second-generation Lao and Hmong American men do not reflect those findings of higher educational aspirations or attainment. This qualitative study explored the educational experiences and cultural identity of 28 second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in the Central Valley. Five main themes emerged, which are: a) *the Telemachus Effect*, b) *racism*, c) *environment during the formative years*, d) *educational experiences*, and e) *American born identity*. The researcher found that all of the five emergent themes have several subthemes, such as: (1) the Orestes Effect (siblings/peers), (2) whiteness/ being whitewashed and Asian tension, (3) neighborhood and crime, and trauma, (4) ESL & GATE, lost & leaving school and completing & returning to school, and (5) cultural preservation, cultural rejection, masculinity & gender role expectations, and gender role expectations of a spouse. This study concluded with a need for future academic research and practice.

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Kremen School of Education and Human Development
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DEDICATION

To Pathana Phannaphob, wise husband and skilled in negotiations, father of The Almighty Dala Ava and Super Santhee Marley Phannaphob, California State University, Fresno Graduate, Proud Lao refugee of the 1.5 generation and American citizen.

In our eyes, you are the measure of a man. Like a 1965 Pontiac GTO, you are classic and timeless.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education is the foundation of success for second-generation Southeast Asians and is the greatest factor for higher wages (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). The second-generation of most immigrant groups are reported to have higher educational, life aspirations and attainment than their parents (Phommasa, 2016). However, Southeast Asian Americans have lower rates of education attainment when compared to the Asian population and total population. According to the Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (SEARAC, 2013), 21.3% of Vietnamese, 12.4% of Hmong, 11.8% of Cambodian, and 8.2% of Laotian Americans had a bachelor's degree compared to 19.2% of the total population and 31.9% of Asian respondents. There were 593,486 *Asian alone* men who earned a bachelor's degree compared to 747,882 *Asian alone* women who earned the same post-secondary degree (United States Census Bureau, 2016). In California's Central Valley (hereafter "Central Valley"), the educational trend for second-generation Lao and Hmong American men do not reflect those findings of higher educational aspirations or attainment.

In 2012, the Pew Research Center published "The Rise of the Asian Americans," which highlighted Asian Americans' successes in earning income, highly educated and rapidly growing racial population in the United States. The report also revealed that more than half of Asian American adults ages 25 to 64 had a bachelor's degree (Pew Research Center, 2012). The numbers for this report were mostly aggregated data and when findings were separated, the numbers for Southeast Asians were lower (Pew Research Center, 2012; Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, 2013). The report serves to perpetuate the model minority myth—the falsehood that all Asians are successful without needing

outside assistance or support—that continues to blanket the Southeast Asian population.

The Asian American and Pacific Islander (“AAPI”) population is not a standardized group; rather, AAPI encompasses many groups who vary in language, culture, education, and length of residence in the United States. Some of the Asian ethnic groups, such as Chinese and Japanese, have been in the United States for several generations. Early immigrants from Asia did not see themselves as “Asians,” and kept their communities separate. It was not until the late 1960s and the advent of the Asian-American movement that the term *Asian American* was created. According to Espiritu (2011), “the pan-Asian concept, originally imposed by non-Asians, became a symbol of pride and a rallying point for mass mobilization.” Rejecting the label “Yellow” and “Oriental,” college students proclaimed “Asian American” – a pan-Asian concept enabling solidarity with fellow Asian Americans. Through Asian panethnicity, Asian Americans can succeed in fighting the racism and exclusion they all encountered (Espiritu, 2011).

Asian American is an umbrella term that covers several distinct cultures; Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, Hmong, Cambodian, and Laotian (Chung, 2008). This single categorization represents more than 30 unique ethnic groups in the U.S. who varied in religion, language, values, immigration history, and customs (Moua, 2011). Hoeffel, Rastogi, Kim and Shahi (2012) found that (1) California had the largest numeric growth of people reporting Asian alone-or-in-combination, increasing from 4.2 million in 2000 to 5.6 million, and (2) there are approximately 247,595 Hmong and 191,200 Lao people in the U.S. in 2010. The largest concentration of Southeast Asians (SEAs) live in California. For many, they either resettled to California as part of the U.S. government refugee policy, or were part of the secondary migration process who moved to be

closer to family or community. For the purpose of this study, Southeast Asian Americans included Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese – refugees who resettled to the United States after the Vietnam War.

Statement of the Problem

Social isolation, academic tracking, economic poverty, stress to fit in socially and parental pressures are some of the issues Southeast Asian students face (Truong, 2015). The majority of the AAPI ethnic groups demonstrated numerically lower on a California achievement test than the aggregated group, and White Americans significantly outperform nine AAPI ethnic groups including Vietnamese Americans, Cambodian Americans, and Lao Americans (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, 2013). There is a need for more research that addresses the specific problems of post-secondary educational experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in the Central Valley. The second-generation educational attainment is higher for Vietnamese and lower for Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians, when compared to African Americans. The differences between Cambodians and Laotians are not statistically significant, but the differences with respect to Hmong and Vietnamese are (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). At California State University, Fresno, Southeast Asian students in the Central Valley trail behind their White and Hispanic peers (Gong, Kubo, & Takahashi, 2014). This study examined second-generation Lao and Hmong American men because they have not attained or acquired the same levels of education as other groups in America due to bias, stereotypes, networking access, intergenerational conflicts, social isolation, shifting family structure, poverty, mistrust of the educational system due to poor academic support, adversarial cultures, or lack of personal drive.

Background

A person who enters the United States after the age of 13 is considered *First Generation* and immigrants and or refugees who have entered the United States under the age of 13 and were born outside of the United States are 1.5 generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). There were two waves of refugee resettlement from Southeast Asia to the U.S. Refugees who resettled to the U.S. in 1975 were the most educated or came from the more privilege class in Laos. The first wave of refugees managed to attain higher levels of occupations in America compared to the second-wave refugees (Museus & Vue, 2013). Refugees who resettled to the U.S. in the 1980s were predominately less educated and came from agricultural backgrounds. Many Hmong and Lao refugees were part of the second-wave of migration, and many suffered directly from the effects of the war, political turmoil, and trauma (Han, 2005; Museus & Vue, 2013). Once they arrived in America, Southeast Asian parents saw a chance for social upward mobility through their children (Fuji, 2012).

As a result of war trauma and maladjustment to life in America, refugees from Southeast Asia were largely dependent on public assistance and government support (Han, 2005; Museus & Vue, 2013). There are similarities between the first generation of Southeast Asian refugees “with Holocaust survivors, in terms of war-trauma”; however, little is known about the mental health of their children who arrived at an early age or those born in the U.S. (Han, 2005, p. 28).

Immigrants and refugees who arrived in the U.S. under the age of 13 and born outside of the U.S. are considered 1.5 generation. Sociologist Ruben Rumbaut coined the term “1.5 Generation” as immigrants who were “stuck in-between” cultures. They are an “Americanized” group who straddle between two cultural identities – they are not quite first generation but not quite second

generation citizens (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The 1.5 generation of Southeast Asian Americans may have a greater ease with the English language and therefore are able to better assimilate with the mainstream culture.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to lead the work in this study includes the assembling of two models. The first lens to view this study is based on critical legal race scholar Kimberle Crenshaw's explanation of the blind spot of gender and race, intersectionality. The second frame is based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture and social capital. Cultural and social capital theory and the theory of intersectionality complement the theoretical framework for this study to better understand the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in Central Valley.

Intersectionality is the exploration to reveal the complex factors and processes that shape human lives; this theory has been written by Black and feminist activists, as well as Latina, post-colonial, queer and Indigenous scholars. Crenshaw's initial purpose for intersectionality was to scrutinize "the applicability of black feminism to anti-discrimination law" (p. 2), and the consequence of overlapping discrimination of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1991). Currently, intersectionality includes the complexity to recognize how people can experience privilege and oppressions at the same time; scholars, policymakers and researchers must reflect on their own social and power positions to work towards social justice (Crenshaw, 1991).

The intersectionality viewpoint asserts that inequities are never the result of a single factor, but rather by the outcomes of crossroads of different social levels and power associations; in other words, intersectionality is a theory of how various types of discrimination intermingle (Crenshaw, 1991). An example of

intersectionality is the capacity to examine a person's social level (e.g., race/ethnicity) when it collides with the person's power association (e.g., religious institution) and through this scope, examine the interdependent forms of privilege and oppression that are created (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality provides a framework to examine issues beyond single identities and enable more effective responses to complex human problems (Crenshaw, 1991).

Bourdieu recognizes three types of capital: (1) economic (material wealth and resources that could turn into cultural and social capital), (2) cultural (linguistic skills, education, forms of knowledge, etc.) and (3) social (relationships and networks based on certain group qualifications) (Dalal, 2016). These theories of power and inequities in society were primarily viewed through education (Dalal, 2016). Habitus is a set of attained temperaments, such as events that could influence a person's attitudes, emotions and cognitive facets; field(s) is where interactions of the dominant groups and the dominated groups occur, the agent is the individual, and capital is the vehicle that allows for mobility (Dalal, 2016). The application of Bourdieu's cultural and social theory was primarily intended for the realm of education.

From the devaluation of educational credentials, curriculum, school rewards of the dominant class and punishments of the lower class, institutions of learning are facilitating, perpetuating and reproducing the central problem of society (Burawoy & Von Holdt, 2011; Dalal, 2016). Bourdieu's culture and social capital theory applies to how people perpetuate success inherited from the previous generation (culture) and the acquisition of status (social). This combined with the lens of intersectionality, addressing the blind spot of gender and race, are used in this study as the theoretical framework to view the challenges of second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men.

Conceptual Model

In order to more precisely capture the framework of this study, the researcher developed a conceptual model that combines the work of both Crenshaw and Bourdieu (see Figure 1). The conceptual model depicts how cultural and social capital influences intersect with gender, race, and class to motivate or limit the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men. More explicitly, the model specifies the fields (home and school) in which the agent (the individual) is armed with Habitus (personal beliefs and experiences); and capital is the vehicle that allows for mobility (Dalal, 2016).

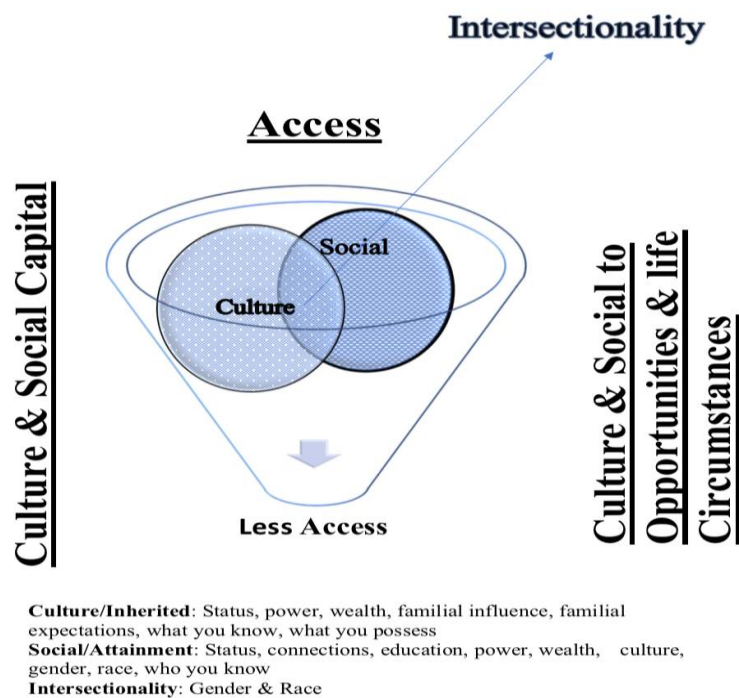


Figure 1. Conceptual model of theoretical framework.

Significance of the Study

Education is a launching pad in which minorities can catapult themselves towards higher economic and social statuses (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). However, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians are inclined to have lower wages and fewer positions in managerial or professional employment than Whites primarily because they have acquired less education. Moreover, as newly arrived refugees, many continue to struggle with the English language.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study attempted to explore the barriers or motivators in the K-12 and post-secondary educational and cultural experiences of second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in Central Valley so that policy makers, educators, and stakeholders are able to address the issues facing this group.

Research Questions

There are two research questions guiding this study. The research questions focus on the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley.

R1Q. What are the educational experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley?

R2Q. What are the cultural experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley?

Summary

Aggregated data used to mask the success for Asian Americans in the United States are contributing to the model minority myth and excludes Southeast Asian students who are struggling in education, and low enrollment in higher

institutions. Aggregated data lumps various Asian groups and generalizes issues that need more attention to specific problems within the Asian American communities. For example, Lao boys are used as examples of juvenile delinquents and Vietnamese students are exemplary and academically superior (Truong, 2015). Desegregated data, research on cultural assimilation, cultural preservation, and informed educational strategies by educators, policymakers, and academics are necessary to accurately identify the educational needs of the historically ignored Lao and Hmong American men in Central Valley.

This research aimed to contribute to current and limited research on second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men, specifically the study of varied educational experiences and dual opposing and complementary cultural identities. Contributing factors such as poverty, wealth, access to social and cultural mobility, educational services, war trauma, intergenerational conflicts, and peers examined as motivations and/or inhibitors to the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men. The researcher aspired to contribute, in abundant and substantial ways, to the corpus of work that advances the improved educational effects and cultural identity for all students across the generations and genders.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the challenges that second-generation Lao and Hmong men in Central Valley. Chapter 2 surveyed the body of literature beginning with: (1) Southeast Asian Diaspora in America, (2) Refugee in Central Valley, (3) The Model Minority Myth, (4) Asian American Identity and Identification (5) Asian American men and Gender and Masculinity, (6) Cultural Identity of the Lao and Hmong American men, (7) Asian American men in higher education, and (8) Factors affecting the motivation of Lao and Hmong American men. Chapter 3 discussed the methodology and description of the qualitative study. Chapter 4 revealed emergent themes in the following order: (1) The

Telemachus Effect, (2) Racism, (3) Environment during the formative years, (4) Educational experiences, and (5) American Born Identity. The topics and emergent themes are viewed with the frames of intersectionality and cultural and social capital theory.

Key Definitions

1.5 Generation—According to sociologist Rueben Rumbaut, immigrants and or refugees who have entered the United States under the age of 13 and were born outside of the United States are labeled 1.5 generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). They are “Americanized,” yet have memories and cultural connections to the homeland. These individuals are a bridge between two cultural identities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Asian American—The term *Asian American* emerged in the late 1960s as a means to politically identify, unify, and reflect an awareness of shared experiences of Asians in the United States (Espiritu, 2011).

Central Valley—The Central Valley is located between the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Ranges with fertile farmlands (Central Valley, n.d.). For the purpose of this study, the Central Valley does not include data from Sacramento.

Cultural Identity—The classification of people or persons (by themselves or by others) in conditions of cultural or subcultural groups (including ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, gender, etc.). In typecasting, this is defined in terms of difference or otherness (Cultural Identity, n.d.).

Cultural and Social Capital Theory—Bourdieu recognizes three types of capital: (1) economic (material wealth and resources that could turn into cultural and social capital), (2) cultural (linguistic skills, education, forms of knowledge, etc.) and (3) social (relationships and networks based on certain group

qualifications); these theories of power and inequities in society were primarily viewed through education (Dalal, 2016).

First Generation—A person who enters the United States from after the age of 13 is considered *First Generation* and immigrants and or refugees who have entered the United States under the age of 13 and were born outside of the United States are 1.5 generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Hmong/Hmong-American—The Hmong people are an ethnic group from Laos. *The Hmong* people migrated from China to Laos in the 1800s and from Laos to the United States in the 1970s (Vue, 2008). The term *Hmong* is used in the plural and singular form. The term “Hmong” or “Hmong-American” refers to all descendants of Hmong ancestry and who are now living in the United States (Yang, 2001).

Intersectionality—Intersectionality, the exploration to reveal the complex factors and processes that shape human lives, have been written by Black and feminist activists, as well as Latina, post-colonial, queer and Indigenous scholars. The theory of intersectionality includes complexity to recognize how people can experience privilege and oppressions at the same time, scholars, policymakers, and researchers must reflect on their own social and power positions to work towards social justice (Crenshaw, 1991).

Lao/Lao Loum (Lowland Lao)/ Lao-American—Laos is a landlocked country bordering Thailand, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Myanmar (Halpern, 1966). The Laos government recognized 65 different ethnic groups (Laos: Population, 2006). The term *Lao* refers to the majority of the people who live in the lowland areas of Laos, except for the Hmong people. The *Lao-Loum* or lowland Lao speak language closer to the Tai dialect, are Buddhists, and make up the majority of the population of the country of Laos (Lee, 2012). The Hmong

migrated from China, lived in the highland, and speak in the Hmong or Iu Mien linguistic language (Lee, 2012; Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2004).

Laos—Laos is a landlocked country, surrounded by Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand with no direct ocean access. During the Vietnam War, the U.S. was involved in a secret war in Laos.

Lumping—Lumping is the single racial classification of several distinct cultures, such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, and Laotian; more than 30 distinct ethnic groups who vary in religion, language, values, immigration history, and customs as Asian American is problematic (Chung 2008; Espiritu, 2011; Moua, 2011).

Model Minority Myth—The model minority myth is a falsehood that all Asians are successful without needing outside assistance or support (Truong, 2015).

Panethnicity—*Panethnicity* as defined by Yen Le Espiritu and David Lopez is “the development of bridging organizations and solidarities among subgroups of ethnic collectivities that are often seen as homogenous by outsiders – is an essential part of ethnic change” (Lopez & Espiritu, 1990, p. 198).

Second-generation—For the purpose of this study, second-generation are individuals born in the U.S. (Truong, 2015).

Secret War in Laos—From 1964 to 1975, the U.S. was involved in another war in Laos. The war was a secret because few American soldiers were involved, members from Congress knew very little about the war, the war was hidden from the American public, and the Central Intelligence Agency recruited Hmong and Lao soldiers to fight the war against the communist Pathet Lao (Warner, 1996).

Southeast Asia—For the purpose of this study, Southeast Asia includes Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and Southeast Asian Americans include

Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese—refugees who resettled to the United States after the Vietnam War.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Hoeffel et al. (2012) found that California had a numeric surge of people reporting Asian alone or in combination. According to Southeast Asian Resource Action Center (2013), California is ranked number 1 as the state with the largest Southeast Asian American populations, with almost one million Southeast Asian Americans. There are approximately 79,331 Laotian-Americans in California (Center for American Progress, 2015). In California's Central Valley, the largest groups of Southeast Asians are the Hmong and Lao-Americans; it is estimated that there are 31,919 Hmong-Americans and 8,009 Lao-Americans (Asian Pacific Legal Center, 2013).

Despite the large number of Southeast Asians in Central Valley, studies have shown Southeast Asian students are facing challenges such as academic and social issues, economic poverty, stress to fit in socially, and parental pressures (Truong, 2015). This qualitative study examined the educational experiences and cultural identity of an overlooked and oftentimes invisible group – the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in Central Valley – because of their gender and ethnicity, and limited access to social mobility. There is need for more scholarly research that addresses the specific problems of post-secondary educational experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation of Lao and Hmong-American men in Central Valley.

During the last 30 years, women in general, have enrolled and completed 4-year degrees at higher rates than men, but also do better academically and have higher educational aspirations (Freeman, 2004). Lao and Hmong American men have not attained or acquired the same levels of education as other people due to bias, stereotypes, networking access, intergenerational conflicts, social isolation,

shifting family structure, poverty, and mistrust of the educational system due to poor academic support (Truong, 2015). The inquiry for this research is fixed within eight bodies of literature: (a) Southeast Asian Refugee and Immigration to America; (b) Refuge in California's Central Valley; (c) The Model Minority; (d) Asian American Identity and Identification; (e) Gender and Masculinity in America; (f) Cultural Identity of Lao and Hmong American Men; (g) Asian American Men in Higher Education; and (h) Factors Affecting Motivation of Lao and Hmong American Men. It is important to gain an understanding of the historical access to education for the Lao and Hmong people in order to fully comprehend the academic challenges for Lao and Hmong American men.

Southeast Asian Diaspora in America

Laos is a landlocked country bordering Thailand, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Myanmar (Halpern, 1966). The Laos government recognized 65 different ethnic groups (Laos: Population, 2006). The term *Lao* refers to the majority of the people who live in the lowland areas of Laos, except for the Hmong people. The *Lao-Loum* or lowland Lao speak a language closer to the Tai dialect, and are Buddhists and make up the majority of the population of the country of Laos (Lee, 2012). The Hmong migrated from China, lived in the highland, and speak in the Hmong or Iu Mien linguistic language (Lee, 2012; Niedzwiecki & Duong, 2004). Unlike the lowland Lao people, who were dominantly Buddhists, the highland Hmong people practiced shamanism. Many Hmong people converted to Christianity during the French colonial era in 1917-1954 (Thao, 2009; Vue, 2008). The Hmong people migrate from country to country, seeking land to farm and to raise livestock; because of their temporal residences, they have a history of oppression from the larger society (Vue, 2008).

A large number of Hmong people fled Laos after the U.S. Secret War, and many remained in Thailand's refugee camps until resettlement to the U.S.

The Secret War in Laos

The recruitment and entanglement of Lao and Hmong soldiers by the American government was part of the U.S. Secret War in Laos. After the end of the U.S. wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia; many Lao and Hmong who were supportive or fought on the side of the U.S. were forced to leave (Thao, 2009; Torres, 2007). The United States strategy to win the Vietnam War was to use B-29s by destroying "the enemy's heartland without the need to invade the enemy homeland with infantry troops" (Hanson, 2017, p. 117). Due to the geography, the war left the country of Laos with 2,092,900 tons of bombs and approximately 25% of the Laos population became refugees (Chanethom, 2010). The war was a secret because few American soldiers were involved and the war was hidden from the American public (Warner, 1996). Central Intelligence Agency recruited Hmong and Lao soldiers to fight the war against the communist Pathet Lao (Warner, 1996). After the last bombing mission in 1973, many Lao and Hmong fled to neighboring Thailand until they were resettled to the U.S., France, Australia, etc. There were three "waves" of refugees from Southeast Asia.

Refugee legislation allowed Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians to move to the United States at a quicker rate because they bypassed the regular immigration process and restrictions, which is often classified into three waves of SEA refugees (Chanethom, 2010; Ngo & Lee, 2007). The second wave of refugees in the 1980s, that fled their country consisted of the less educated and poor group or those from lowlands. The third and most recent wave of SEAs in the mid-1980s to the present were the Hmong people from Thailand's refugee camps (Samreth, 2014; Shek, 2006).

First Generation of Southeast Asians

In the early 1980s, those who had entered the US and were 13 years or older were labeled or categorized as first generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The first generation experienced war trauma and the ability to overcome those experiences were the most challenging (Han, 2005; Potocky, 1996). As a result of war trauma and maladjustment to life in America, this group was largely dependent on public assistance and government support (Han, 2005; Museus & Vue, 2013). There are similarities between the first generation of Southeast Asian refugees with Holocaust survivors in terms of war-trauma and the “mechanisms of this process remains unknown” for their children (Han, 2005, p. 28). As a result of adjusting to life in the U.S., their children face many barriers such as language, cultural gap, intergenerational gap, poverty, and intergenerational war-trauma. Today, 35.1% of Hmong and 31.8% of Laotians were linguistically isolated, and only speak their native language (Niedzwiecki, & Duong, 2004).

The information gathered from personal accounts influenced how Americans viewed immigrants and refugees from Southeast Asia (Herring, 1986). Literature on the Vietnam War are misleading and varying from those who fought in the war and those who wrote about the war after (Herring, 1986). For example, after the U.S. lost the Vietnam War, Hollywood depictions of the Vietnam War were littered with historical inaccuracies and farcical in nature as seen in *Rambo* (Herring, 1986). Southeast Asian refugees and immigrants were entering into a country that were distrustful of them (Herring, 1986). New refugees were anxious to settle in their new country and the mainstream community was also fretful to have refugees become self-sufficient like other members of the community. Schools were held largely responsible for the fast acclimation process of new refugees (Blakely, 1984).

The 1.5 Generation

Immigrants and refugees who entered the United States 13 years old or younger, and who were foreign born are labeled 1.5 generation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The 1.5 generation are an Americanized group of immigrants or refugees who are in between two cultural identities, but who are still held to traditional roles (Pho & Mulvey, 2003). The 1.5 generation Southeast Asians acquired more education, language exposure to English and were employed at higher paying jobs (Chanethom, 2010; Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). Asian men employed in 1999 were employed as custodians, machine workers, postal clerks, cooks, and gardeners (Chanethom, 2010; Sakamoto & Woo, 2007).

Asian Americans are regularly seen as recurrently- than from other racial or ethnic backgrounds- to value hard work and education as avenues to upward social mobility (Song & Glick, 2004). Social mobility is still difficult without the completion of higher education. The data showing the annual earnings of Laotian (\$22,111) and Hmong (\$19,053) Americans are below the national average (\$28,452) (Museus & Vue, 2013).

The rise of residential poverty rates in ethnic groups were factors that can promote self-defeating behaviors, such as government assistance-dependency, drug addiction, and school failure (Museus & Vue, 2013). Research also shows that cultural mechanisms and cultural customs that highlight the importance of education, family, and making sacrifices for family explain superior academic achievement among some ethnic groups (Museus & Vue, 2013). The first and 1.5 generations' acclimation and socioeconomic status directly effects the educational experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation.

Refuge in California's Central Valley

The population estimate for Fresno County is under 1 million people, and approximately 61,500 are Southeast Asian (Hoeffel et al, 2012). California's Central Valley was not designated to be a resettlement site in the 1970s. The Hmong and Lao refugees were drawn to the cities in the Central Valley because of Fresno's rich agricultural opportunities and populous metropolitan area. What started as a process of migration quickly became a chain migration site for the largest concentration of Hmong people outside of Southeast Asia (Vang, 2015). *The Fresno Bee*, the premier local newspaper, printed many articles in the 1980s and 1990s highlighting the issues that the unprepared cities faced as the city's demographics were slowly changing. Fresno and the surrounding cities in the Central Valley offered the newly arrived refugees opportunities to farm and to reunite with previously separated family members in their new home (Pyle, 1987d). The Central Valley's climate and geography –surrounded by the Sierra Nevada – reminded many refugees of Laos (see Figure 2).

Racial segregation grouped Southeast Asian to residences in the lower economic areas of the Central Valley (Bruner, 1996; Doyle, 1990, 1995; Pyle, 1987d). Whites lived on the east side of the tracks where the courthouse was, where all the retail and best neighborhoods were being established; and the Chinese were moved to the other side of the tracks (Castillo, 2016). In 1944, a property deed describing the affluent Fig Garden area specifically excluded

any Negro, Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Armenian, Asiatic or native of the Turkish Empire, or descendent of above named persons, or anyone not of the white or Caucasian race, provided, however, that such a person may be employed by a resident upon said property as a servant for such resident. (Castillo, 2016, p. 4)

Established Central Valley residents also were informed by the local newspaper about the stress of government assistance programs effected by stretched-thin resources for the new immigrants (Dudley, 1987; Sotero, 1989), the kinds of agrarian and non-agrarian jobs available (Pyle, 1987c), how local organizations helped to educate and train new workers (Correa, 1999; Ellis, 1999; Pyle 1987a), how the benefits of government assistance unerringly lead to many choosing not to enter the workforce (Pyle, 1987c), and issues with the SEA youths ranging from gang involvement, acclimating to school, to suicide (Cousart, 1983; Ellis, 2002; Hoagland, 1990).

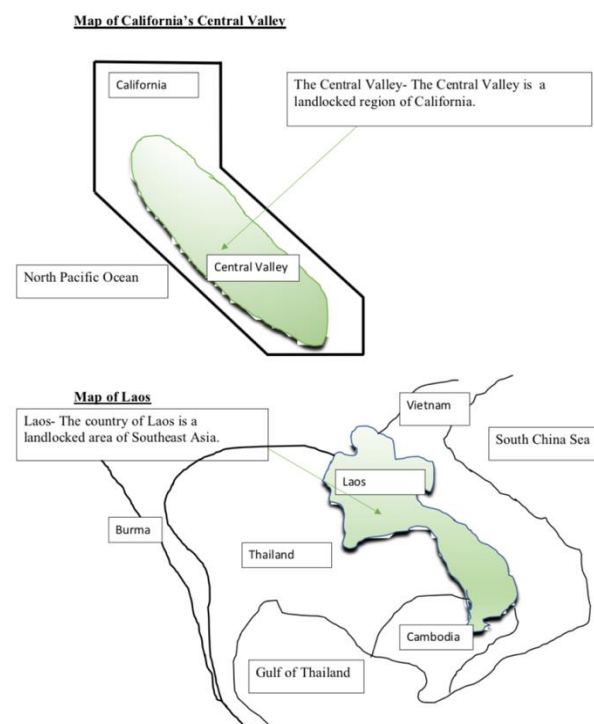


Figure 2. Map of California's Central Valley and the country of Laos.

Asian American Identity and Identification

The Asian American and Pacific Islander (“AAPI”) population is a heterogeneous group; AAPI comprise of many groups who differ in language,

culture, and length of residence in the United States. For example, Chinese and Japanese have been in the United States for several generations since the early 1900s seeking job opportunities in Hawaii and California. The term *Asian American* has evolved from the rejection of racist descriptions such as “Yellow” and “Oriental.” Because of the exclusive and cliché-ridden nature of these two labels, political and social activists imbued the term *Asian American* with political and inclusive embodiment of the panethnic term, Asian American (Espiritu, 2011; Moua 2011).

The political activism of the Asian-American college students of the 1960s inserted themselves into the social movement inspired by the Black Power movement (Espiritu, 2011). As the panethnic origins of the Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Pacific Islander American groups entered into political and social conversation, refugees from Southeast Asia would also expand the term to be included in the Asian American conversation.

Lumping, is the single racial classification of several distinct cultures, such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Indian, and Laotian, which are distinct ethnic groups that vary in religion, language, values, immigration history, and customs as Asian American is problematic (Chung 2008; Espiritu, 2011; Moua, 2011). Efforts to aggregate data in the U.S. Census is promising; for example there is an option to specify the general Asian American label by marking Other Asian that includes Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, and Cambodian (US Census, 2012). For the purpose of this study, Southeast Asia includes Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam; and Southeast Asian Americans include Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese—refugees who resettled to the U.S. after the Vietnam War.

The Model Minority Myth

In the 1960s, *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines printed articles on the subject of Asian American success in schools and society without excessive government assistance as a punitive tool to the other minority groups in America. The Model Minority stereotype became a true embodiment of the modern day American success story (Luong, 2009; Vue, 2008). The myth of the Model Minority is the perception that Asian students excel in academics with little struggle and are able to mainstream with little challenges (Luong, 2009). The Model Minority of Asian Americans has been a political disadvantage because the myth that Asian Americans are all economically successful means that they are often excluded from affirmative action programs created to assist disadvantaged minorities (Fuji, 2012). Just because Asian-American students are pressured to be academically excellent in schools, does not mean that they all do (Rapaido, 2011). Many Americans think that Asians attained a relatively high educational, occupational, and economic statuses without too harsh of a struggle.

The Model Minority Myth is perpetuated today when reports claimed that Asian Americans are leaders in higher education (Pew Research Center, 2012). Asian Americans were reported ahead of most other minority groups, with the exception of White men (Pew Research Center, 2012). More than 61% of Asian American adults ages 25 to 64 had a bachelor's degree (Pew Research Center, 2012). The report served to perpetuate the Model Minority Myth—the falsehood that all Asians are successful without needing outside assistance or support—the myth that continues to blanket—the Southeast-Asian population. The reality of aggregated data is that Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians are inclined to earn lower wages and are not in managerial/professional employment mainly because they have acquired less education than Whites (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007).

The Model Minority Myth is so prevalent for Asian Americans that whether or not the student fulfills the notion does not matter, because the damage is already done. The psychological effect of the myth has influenced the mindset of the student (Rapaido, 2011). Debunking the Model Minority Myth is almost a futile attempt because it is a pervasive belief in America. It is uncertain if the Model Minority Myth has benefitted Asian Americans; this question needs further academic inquest (Gupta, 2011).

Southeast Asian Americans have a similar background to other people of lower economic status or groups in which they have a strong emphasis on academic success (Luong, 2009). Asian American students who are not excelling in academics might need different support from their peers, because not all Asian American students are doing well in school (Luong, 2009). Southeast Asian families were resistant to special academic support systems in schools (Blakely, 1984). Southeast Asian students did not want alternative academic placements if they believed they were being marginalized into groups with other students who were labeled as special needs (Blakely, 1984).

Asian American Gender and Masculinity

Women, in general, are more visible in higher education; during the last 30 years, women not only enroll and complete 4-year degrees at higher rates than men but also do better academically and have higher educational aspirations (Freeman, 2004). Laotian women are assimilating and are experiencing upward social mobility, “Laotian women had more power, socially and economically, in the United States, which influenced the gender dynamics of Laotian American families” (Lee, 2012, p. 19). Recent academic research has largely ignored two groups, black females and Southeast Asian males (Lei, 2003).

This qualitative study examined the educational experiences and cultural identity of an overlooked and oftentimes invisible group because of their gender and ethnicity, the second-generation Lao and Hmong American Men in California's Central Valley. The stereotypes of Asian-American men as a model minority, socially inept, perpetual foreigners, emasculate, and patriarchal are pervasive images that are endorsed by self or others (Wong, 2008). Asian-American men are seen as too meek and not aggressive enough because they exude a worker bee syndrome; to have parity with White men, who have less education and skills, Asian American men need more education and more training (Lavilla, 1998). With factors such as educational attainment, age, and region are taken into account, Southeast-Asian men are apt to earn less money than White men (Takei, Sakamoto & Kim, 2013). Women are enrolling and completing 4-year degrees at higher rates than men but also do better academically and have higher educational aspirations (Freeman, 2004). Compared with White women, in regards to earning money, Southeast-Asian women are not at a disadvantage (Takei, Sakamoto & Kim, 2013).

Asian American Men in Higher Education

Asian-American men are projected to be less likely to have a college degree than Asian-American women (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Fourteen percent of Hmong and 12% of Laotian Americans have earned baccalaureate degrees at numbers lower than the overall national average (28%) of the total US population (Museus, 2013). Eighteen percent of 419 Hmong American men and 16% of 574 Laotian American men earned a bachelor's degree (Takei, Sakamoto & Kim, 2013). Most schools in America are free, and social mobility was dependent by their children's ability to succeed in school; material wealth, status, and a better life was finally attainable (Fuji, 2012). Asian-American families who had recently

come to America saw that in the United States teaching is not a highly respected profession, nor a lucrative one (Fuji, 2012). Asian parents want prestige for their children, and since teachers are not seen as prestigious, that occupation is “not good enough” (Fuji, 2012, p. 40).

Parental influences emphasizing academic achievement and past family sacrifice for the Hmong and Lao people are still unclear (Museus & Vue, 2013). The numbers for first generation Hmong and Lao refugees are simply difficult to find, because this group of SEA came in “the second refugee wave” and data about student enrollment in higher education include first, 1.5, and second-generations (Museus & Vue, 2013).

There were 188 Southeast Asians total (23.9% were Hmong) who attended public universities in Northern California (Luong, 2009); the data for Lao people were not available. In 1990, 52.3% of childhood refugee arrivals, 26.4% total of adult refugees, and 32.9% of U.S.-born peers were enrolled in school, but the survey does not specify at what levels of education these numbers represent (Potocky, 1996). Many of the first arrivals came to the U.S. with essentially no economic assets or well-devised plans for the future (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007).

Factors Affecting Motivation of Lao and Hmong American Men

Fresno State is a federally-designated Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (Gong et al., 2014). Southeast Asian students, who comprise 54.5% of all Asian Pacific-Islander [API] enrolled at Fresno State required English remediation (Gong et al., 2014). Hmong students (62%) are from families with combined incomes of less than \$24,000 a year, ranking them by far the most financially disadvantaged of all racial student groups (Gong et al., 2014). With the numbers illustrating the need to address Southeast-

Asian students' success, there are no existing programs or services currently available on campus to support this student population (Gong et al., 2014). Oftentimes because of the model minority myth, many Americans view Asians as having attained relatively high educational, occupational, and statuses and this perceived ease of having few adjustment led to little or absence of support (Gupta, 2011). At 4-year institutions, there are five themes that influence success. They include parental expectations, parental values, parental sacrifice and responsibility, students' internalization (of parental influences), and intrinsic motivation to succeed in higher education (Museus, 2013). The factors that motivate the second-generation of Southeast-Asian Americans in higher education is personal drive and opportunity. The limitations for success are a combination of self-defeating attitudes, language and cultural barriers. The factors that motivate second-generation Hmong and Lao-Americans in the workforce is socioeconomic upward mobility. The limitations for success are a combination of poor education and limited social networks.

The challenges that second-generation Hmong and Lao-Americans face in regards to cultural identity are multi-fold. Historical tensions followed the Hmong and Lao refugees and the first generation. Because of this historic tension the term *Lao/ Laotian* has been applied to all ethnic groups that came from Laos, despite the fact that there are many different ethnic groups in the country. Cultural identity for second-generation Hmong and Lao-Americans are blurred because ethnic labels from within the groups are denigrating. However, the feelings of optimism and aspirations for personal success are prevalent in the future generation of Hmong and Lao-Americans.

The second-generation of Hmong and Lao-Americans have similar challenges to the first and 1.5 generation. Among the second-generation Lao

Americans, there is racism from inside the culture. The terms “FOB” (“Fresh off the Boat”) and “whitewashed” were commonly used to denigrate co-ethnic “others” as “too ethnic” or “too assimilated” (Pyke & Dang, 2003). FOB is a slur used to describe those who are the newest arrival, speak with heavy non-American accents, and who have not adapted to the mainstream culture. The term whitewashed is used to describe those who have assimilated to the white mainstream and retain a few ethnic practices (Pyke & Dang, 2003). Second-generation Lao and Hmong Americans are acutely aware of how these terms affect their sense of belonging within their community or American society (Shah, 2008).

The first and 1.5 generation of Southeast Asians experienced racism and discrimination from outside of their culture, while the second generation endure racism from within the ethnic culture. Whiteness, internal ethnic group racism, and educational attainment are some of the challenges for second-generation Southeast Asian Americans. Even if second-generation Laotians experience social mobility, alliance, and succeed in becoming “honorary Whites,” they will still be outsiders and perpetual foreigners (Shah, 2008). Hmong and Lao refugees came to America with aspirations and optimism to provide a better life and more opportunities for their children.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used to lead the work in this study includes the complementary union of two models. The first lens is based on Kimberle Crenshaw’s clarification of the blind spot of gender and race, intersectionality. The second lens is based on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of culture and social capital. Cultural and social capital theory and the theory of intersectionality blend the theoretical framework for this study to sympathize and objectively investigate the

educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in the Central Valley.

In order to more accurately summarize the framework of this study, the researcher created a conceptual model that joins the work of both Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991) and Bourdieu (Burawoy, & Von Holdt, 2011, Dalal, 2016) (see Figure 1, p. 7). The conceptual model illustrates how the cultural and social capital influences intersect with gender and race to motivate or limit the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong American men.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

A higher education degree is a launching pad in which minorities can catapult themselves towards higher economic and social statuses (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). Most second-generation people of immigrant groups are reported to have advanced educational attainment and higher life aspirations than their parents (Phommasa, 2016). Recent aggregated data reveal that Asian Americans are the fastest and most successful minority group in the United States. These data serve to perpetuate the Model Minority Myth—the misrepresentation that all Asians are successful without the need for outside assistance. This deceit continues to swathe the invisible Asian-American group, specifically the Southeast Asian population (Pew Research Center, 2012).

The trend for second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley do not reflect those findings. Social isolation, academic tracking, economic poverty, and parental pressures are some of the unseen challenges for Southeast-Asian students (Truong, 2015). There is need for more academic research that examines the specific problems of post-secondary educational experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation of Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley. These men have obtained or developed similar levels of education as other people due to stereotypes, limited networking access, intergenerational conflicts, shifting family structure, poverty, mistrust of the educational system due to poor academic support, adversarial cultures, or lack of personal drive.

The purpose of this study was to explore the academic experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in

California's Central Valley. In doing so, this study may help educators, stakeholders, and the community gain a better understanding of how to support and address the academic needs of future Lao and Hmong-American male college students.

Research Questions

The two research questions explored were:

R1Q. What are the educational experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley?

R2Q. What are the cultural experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley?

Research Design

Qualitative research begins with the theoretical framework that guides the researcher to examine the problems and open-ended questions probe for interpretations rather than for definitive associations of the study participants (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is designed to empower individuals, develop theories, time commitment, flexibility, and objectivity from the researcher (Creswell, 2007). The researcher strove for confidentiality by assigning each participant pseudonyms, editing out identifying life details, personal names, and sent each participant a copy of interview transcripts.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with exploratory questions that addressed educational experiences, cultural identity, family, life aspirations, cultural preservation/rejection, racism, motivators and barriers to education and factors that motivate or limit life choices (Angrosino, 2005; Saldana, 2012). Open coding was the first cycle; the researcher used the computer program *atlasti.com* to look for single words that recur in other interviews, or

similar threads in them. Axial coding is the second cycle that included contrasting and comparing analysis; the researcher looked at how the themes related to each other and formed theories. The researcher then moved to selective coding for an overall explanation of the emergent theories.

The limitations of grounded theory were the amount of time necessary to thoroughly code, researcher's bias and small sample size, coding included data gathered from filed notes, after interview notes, texts, email and clarifying questions after conducting interviews (Angrosino, 2005; Saldana, 2012). The strengths of grounded theory study extrapolates people's experiences generated from data collection from the study and was the most appropriate for this study (Angrosino, 2005; Saldana, 2012).

Participant Sample

Each participant was a second-generation Lao or Hmong-American man who live or have lived in California's Central Valley for at least 5 consecutive years. Participants lived in various Central Valley cities from Merced to Madera. Other requirements for this study included enrollment in a university, membership in a specific student organization, and/or connection to the Central Valley, such as Fresno City College, Fresno State, UCs and Fresno/Clovis secondary schools. Participants attended a K-12 school or enrolled in a post-secondary institution in the Central Valley.

At the time of the interviews, their age ranged between 18 to 39 years old. All of their experiences were self-reported. Their marital status varied from single to married; there were no divorced participants and some participants had zero to four children. Some of the men were single in committed relationships, culturally married, or legally married. Their job titles spanned from searching for employment, business owner, social worker to project manager. The personal

interviews were conducted at various coffee houses, Fresno State library, Fresno City College, and over the phone. The interviews spanned between the months of May to October 2017.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The researcher followed established university procedures and received approval from the California State University, Fresno Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, Institutional Review Board (IRB). Instrumentation was reviewed and approved by the IRB Committee in addition to the researcher's dissertation committee. Next, the researcher sought and was granted approval from the participants. All participants agreed to the audio recording of the interview, received and signed an informed consent form (see Appendix A).

The inquiry for this research is fixed within 10 bodies of literature: (a) History of Education in Laos; (b) Southeast-Asian Refugee and Immigration to America; (c) Refuge in California's Central Valley; (d) History of The Model Minority; (e) Asian-American Identity and Identification; (f) the Model Minority Myth; (g) Gender and Masculinity in America; (h) Cultural Identity of Lao and Hmong-American Men; (i) Asian American Men in Higher Education; and (j) Factors Affecting Motivation of Lao and Hmong American Men.

There is a sparse amount of published academic research study on the topic of the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation of Lao and Hmong-American men. Most research on Lao and/or Hmong-American men address the issues of juvenile delinquency, drug use/abuse, or crime. Each Lao and Hmong-American man was asked questions pertaining to their educational experiences and experiences with cultural identity. Because the research was a qualitative study, questions were open and exploratory in nature. For a sample of the interview questions see Appendix B.

Interviews

This was a qualitative research study on the educational experiences and cultural identity of second generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley. The Lao and Hmong-American men who were interviewed were born in America, went to K-12 school, or attended a post-secondary institution in the Central Valley. They also live/lived in the Central Valley for at least 5 consecutive years. Twenty-eight recorded interviews were conducted. Twenty-seven recorded interviews were successfully transcribed and used for this study.¹ The interview questions were exploratory in nature and covered various topics ranging from the participant's academic and cultural experiences, family, participant's views on education, and personal perspectives on their ethnic culture and the "American" culture. Prior to the interview, the researcher explained the parameters of the study, the types of questions that may be asked, and gave each man time to ask clarifying questions concerning confidentiality and use of the interview responses.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data were collected through audio recordings of face-to-face and phone interviews. Interview recordings were sent to *REV* for transcription service and the researcher edited out sentence fillers such as, "Okay, Yeah, Um, etc." The researcher also included foreign words that were accompanied by descriptions or translations in brackets to improve readability. Through manual coding, transcriptions were open coded, axial coded, and lastly selectively coded. Emergent themes were distinguished and identified. Chapter 4 describes these

¹ The full texts of all transcripts can be viewed here: <https://sites.google.com/clovisusd.k12.ca.us/transcripts>

discovered themes and are categorized, scrutinized, and reported with supported narrative descriptions in an effort to increase validity of the study (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

Limitations in this study involved many factors. The researcher had to reject some willing respondents because they were not born in the U.S. The researcher was unable to encourage as many respondents as she initially projected due to some of their fear of being identified. Other potential participants refused to participate in the study because of the nature of the study, personal feelings of failure, limited confidence of experiences to contribute to the study, their comfort level during a face-to-face interview, unease of the presence recording devices, noise, or other interruptions during the interview. The interview sessions were impeded by sound quality of recording device, conflict of interview times, and miscommunication of meet/interview times. The gender and bias of the researcher may or may not have affected some of the interviews, since the study participants were all men, revealing vulnerable or seemingly embarrassing narratives could be off-putting.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS/OUTCOMES

This study explored the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in the Central Valley. Specifically, this two-fold study investigated their lived experiences with identity as an American-born man and their motivations or barriers to education. The data for this research study were collected from 28 second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in the Central Valley.

The two research questions were:

1. What are the educational experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in the Central Valley?
2. What are the cultural identity experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in the Central Valley?

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach. The Lao and Hmong-American men interviewed were born in America and attended K-12 school(s) or enrolled in a post-secondary institution in the Central Valley. These men lived in the Central Valley for at least 5 consecutive years. Twenty-eight recorded interviews were conducted. Twenty-seven recorded interviews were successfully transcribed and used for this study. One interview is included as “supplemental information” and interview notes are in Appendix C. The interview questions were exploratory in nature. Inquiries ranged from the participant’s academic experiences, intergenerational family relationships, social interactions within and outside of their ethnic groups, their perspectives about cultural identity, cultural preservation, and future aspirations. The researcher adjusted the exploratory questions based on the participants’ responses. Prior to the interview, the researcher explained the parameters of the study, the types of questions that may

be asked, and gave each person time to ask clarifying questions concerning confidentiality and use of the interview responses.

Participants

The researcher created flyers (Appendix D), emailed, and called local Southeast-Asian organizations and associations to attract participants. There was no response to posters and flyers. The participants were selected using convenient sampling that evolved into snowball sampling. The 28 participants interviewed were all male and a natural born U.S. citizen. They were either chosen due to their enrollment in a specific course, university, membership in a specific student organization, and/or connection to the Central Valley. They also live/lived in the Central Valley for at least 5 consecutive years.

At the time of the interviews, the educational experiences of the participants ranged from high school dropout to college doctorate. Their ages ranged from 18 years old to 39 years old. All of their lived experiences were self-reported. Their marital status ranged from single to married. There were no divorced participants and some participants had zero to four children. Their employment titles ranged from unemployed, self-employed, business owner, social worker to project manager. The personal interviews were conducted at coffee houses, Fresno State's library, Fresno City College, and over the phone. The interviews spanned between the months of May 2017 to October 2017. Each table in this study is organized with aggregated data. Pseudonyms were used for each interview participants and demographic information can be found in Table 1 and Table 2.

The educational level and employment status of each interview participant can be found in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 1

Interview Participant Demographic Data: Lao-American Men

Participant	Age	Status	Birth City	# of Years in the Central Valley	Type of Interview
Noah	19	Single	Fresno, Ca.	19	In person
Liam	21	NA	Fresno, Ca.	18	Phone
Mason	18	NA	Houston, Tx.	9	In person
Jacob	18	NA	Fresno, Ca.	18	In person
Ethan	28	Single	Fresno, Ca.	28	In person
James	21	Common Law Wife, 1 child	Fresno, Ca.	21	In person
Alexander	23	Girlfriend	Fresno, Ca.	23	In person
Michael	28	Married	Fresno, Ca.	28	In person
Benjamin	29	Married	Visalia, Ca.	25	Phone
Daniel	30	Girlfriend	Chicago, Il.	25	Phone
*Lao-Thai- American Aiden	19	Girlfriend	Honolulu, Hi.	15	Phone
Logan	28	Engaged	Fresno, Ca.	28	Phone
Matthew	27	Engaged	Fresno, Ca.	27	Phone
Lucas	19	Single	Tucson, Az.	8	In person

Table 2

Interview Participant Demographic Data: Hmong-American Men

Participant	Age	Status/ # of children	Birth City	# of Years in the Central Valley	Type of Interview
Oliver	39	Married	Houston, Tx.	39	Phone
Jayden	19	NA	Fresno, Ca.	19	In person
Joseph	36	Married, 4 children	Denver, Co.	35	In person
Gabriel	23	Engaged	Fresno, Ca.	23	Phone
Samuel *Hmong-Lao-American	19	NA	Fresno, Ca.	19	In person
Carter	39	NA	San Diego, Ca.	17	Phone
Anthony	32	Married, 1 child	Merced, Ca.	32	Phone
Andrew	24	Single	Atwater, Ca.	24	Phone
Levi	36	Single	Denver, Co.	36	Phone
Dylan	22	Single	Fresno, Ca.	22	Phone
Ryan	23	Girlfriend	Turlock, Ca.	23	Phone
Jack	28	NA	Fresno, Ca.	28	Phone
Hunter	26	Single	Stockton, Ca.	17	Phone

Table 3

Level of Education and Employment Status: Lao-American Men

Participant	Approx. # of Years in Post- Secondary Institution	Highest Post-Secondary Degree	Type of Post-Secondary Institution	Employment Status
Noah	2	Associate of Art, in- progress, Kinesiology	Clovis Community college	Looking for employment
Liam	2 (3 years dual enrollment while in high school)	Associate of Art, in- progress, re-enrolled	San Francisco City College	NA
Mason	1 semester	Bachelor of Science, in- progress, Nursing or Kinesiology	CSU, Fresno	Employed
Jacob	1 semester (3 years dual enrollment while in high school)	Bachelor of Science, in- progress, Psychology	CSU, Fresno	NA
Ethan	6	Bachelor of Science, Accounting	Fresno City College CSU, Fresno	Employed
James	NA, dropped out of high school	NA	NA	Employed
Alexander	5	Bachelor of Art, Media Communications and Journalism	CSU, Fresno	Employed
Michael	10	Master of Business Administration	CSU, Fresno University of Phoenix (online)	Employed
Benjamin	1 year 1 semester at Fresno City College	Certificate, Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning [HVAC] Associate of Art, in- progress, Business	Institute of Technology, Clovis Fresno City College (re- enrolled)	Employed
Daniel *Lao-Thai- American	10	Bachelor of Science, Biology	Fresno City College UC, Davis	Employed
Aiden	2 1/2	Associate of Art, in- progress, Communication and Journalism	Clovis Community College Fresno City College,	Employed
Logan	4 1/2	Bachelor of Science, Economics	CSU, Fresno	Employed
Matthew	2	NA	CSU, Fresno	Employed
Lucas	0	NA	NA	NA

Table 4

Level of Education and Employment Status: Hmong-American Men

Participant	Approx. # of Years in Post- Secondary Institution	Highest Post- Secondary Degree	Type of Post-Secondary Institution	Employment Status
Oliver	2	NA	NA	Employed
Jayden	1	Associate of Art, In- progress, Kinesiology	Fresno Community College	Part-time
Joseph	10	Education Doctorate	CSU, Fresno	Employed
Gabriel	1	Associate of Art, Re- enrolled	CSU, Fresno Fresno City College (re-enrolled)	Employed
Samuel *Hmong-Lao- American	2	Bachelor of Science, In-progress, Chemistry	CSU, Fresno	Looking for employment
Carter	0	NA	NA	Employed
Anthony	8	Master of Science, Social Work	CSU, Fresno	Employed
Andrew	6	Bachelor of Science, Civil Engineering	CSU, LA	Employed
Levi	10	Bachelor of Science, Psychology	Merced College, CSU, Stanislaus	Employed
Dylan	4	Bachelor of Science, In-progress, Industrial Technology	CSU, Fresno	Part-time
Ryan	4	Bachelor of Art, In- progress, Liberal Studies	CSU, Fresno	Part-time
Jack	4	Re-enrolled, Computer Engineering	Community College, Sacramento	Employed
Hunter	NA/ dropped out of high school	NA	NA	Employed

Semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant was contacted via email and/or phone text with a request for an interview. Within the email and/or phone text, the participant was provided with the name and contact information for the researcher along with the purpose of the interview. Interview dates were set up with the 28 participants and the interviewer met 11 of them at local coffee houses, the Henry Madden Library at Fresno State and/or Fresno City for a face-to-face interview or for a phone interview. The researcher noticed that interviews conducted with the participants over the phone yielded more in-depth answers and the participants were more willing to explain their stories. Some of the face-to-face interviews were shorter, responses were brief, coordinating a physical interview was problematic, and noise level of face-to-face interviews were challenging. There was more noise control and privacy with phone interviews. The researcher conducted 17 interviews over the phone.

Prior to the start of the interview, each participant was given an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A). Each participant signed the form and verbally consented to be interviewed. The average length of each interview was 25 minutes to 40 minutes. The researcher used a transliterate service called *Rev* to transcribe each interview. Upon receipt of the transcriptions, the researcher verified each copy for errors and coded the interviews to allow anonymity of the participants (see Appendix C). Each transcription was edited for fillers such as “yeah, oh, um, etc.” and foreign words are accompanied by a brief explanation when necessary.

Qualitative Data Analysis

During the data analysis of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher read each transcript multiple times and coded the data. Categories and concepts emerged, which were axial coded into overall themes and subthemes. Five main themes emerged, which are: a) *the Telemachus Effect*, b) *racism*, c) *environment during the formative years*, d) *educational experiences*, and e) *American born identity*.

The researcher found that all of the five emergent themes have several subthemes. The Telemachus Effect had one subtheme, the Orestes Effect (siblings/peers). The second theme of racism had two subthemes: whiteness/being whitewashed and Asian tension. The third theme of environment during the formative years had two subthemes: neighborhood and crime, and trauma. The fourth theme of educational experiences had three subthemes: ESL & GATE, lost & leaving school and completing & returning to school. The fifth theme of identity had four subthemes: cultural preservation, cultural rejection, masculinity & gender role expectations, and gender role expectations of a spouse.

The Telemachus Effect

The first theme that emerged from the data was the Telemachus Effect. The subtheme from the Telemachus Effect was the Orestes Effect (Siblings/Peers). Homer's *Odyssey*, is not just about the titular protagonist Odysseus' perilous journey to Ithaca, shedding his multiple disguises and reclaiming his home, but also a story about his son, Telemachus and his search to find his own identity under the looming shadow of his heroic father. Telemachus is raised hearing and idolizing Odysseus's clever deeds, his daring bravado and his wiliness during the Trojan War to such an extent that even Telemachus himself as an

emerging adult often ponders whether he could ever hope to be worthy of his father.

The Telemachus Effect is the idea that the accomplishments, successes and achievements of the first and 1.5 -generation could be a motivation and a barrier for the next generation. The second-generation may feel that they can either never match or dare to surpass the parents' expectations or use the previous generations' accomplishments as a motivator to persist. The first and 1.5 generation escaped Laos during and after the Secret War, and they had to survive and thrive in a new homeland in America. Their experience and obstacles in Laos, and language barrier and culture clash in America is a recurring narrative that many second-generation are aware of. For example, Jack described how survivor stories were told in his life:

I believe every family, especially that generation that came over, I'm pretty sure every generation that came over, during that time stretched back to their kid that, 'Oh, look how easy you guys have it, because we had to struggle with nothing,' right?'

Jack recognized the material advantages the next generation have compared to the limited resources of the previous generations, and this reminder could be a way to motivate or discourage them.

Tales of how their parents or grandparents were secret recruits during the Secret War, and family history serve as life measurements and lessons for second-generation. Ryan recalled the legendary family patriarch:

Every time our family would come together and eat and stuff, they would always mention him [i.e. his grandfather] and talk about his achievements and everything he did in Laos, and here in America, when they came. It was always kind of pressure to either meet those standards or go above and beyond those standards.

Similarly, Carter's father was a community leader in Laos and continued to be one in America:

Yeah, just people, yes, relatives, just marriage problems or financial problems or things that had to do. Like, for instance, some of these people tend to go apply for certain things in life, my dad would take care of that problem for them.

The pressure or desire to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors is part of the Telemachus Effect. Carter said, “Yes, because my dad was into that. So, I grew up liking politics. That was something I wanted to do, so I’ll say politics, yes.” Not only did Carter internally want to be a community activist, he also felt pressure from his family members to fulfill that role. He stated, “I get that all the time within family. Not my immediate family, but my dad’s side of the family, yes.”

Liam described the previous generations’ struggles and achievements as both a motivator and an inhibitor:

I think it’s a personal thing with me, when I look at them, what they’ve accomplished. I feel bad about it sometimes. But they never tell me themselves, because that takes on, I feel like that takes on an additional energy when parents tell you in that way. It doesn’t really accomplish much. They’re always striving. They’re always telling me to strive to be the best.

The Telemachus Effect is not an exclusive influence of the first or 1.5 generation; this explanation can describe how the triumphs and tribulations of their siblings and peers can motivate or inhibit them.

The Orestes Effect-Siblings/Peers

Orestes was the son of Agamemnon who successfully avenged him by killing his own mother and her lover. In the Odyssey, Orestes is used as an ideal example for Telemachus to aspire and follow. Interview participants compared the accomplishments and failures of their siblings and peers to themselves as motivation or deterrence. Siblings and peers, who grew up with similar experiences during the formative years and share similar cultural traditions

through the educational stages as markers for comparison to themselves. The subtheme of sibling and peers is important to note because the interview participants themselves validate and invalidate their own life experiences with that of their siblings and peers.

The Orestes Effect among peer/siblings is an essential part of understanding the life choices of the participants. The deeds of peers and siblings, who grew up in similar circumstances as the men, were used as motivators and sometimes as cautionary tales. For example, Oliver compared himself to his siblings:

I'd say both of my older brothers ... well, my other brother is locked up... My oldest one, [brother's name], he has his degree, and then [brother's name] has his degree. My sister, she just got her nursing program. She just graduated from there. Everybody pretty much got a degree or something except for me, but I'm on my way there too, I'll get there.

In comparison to his siblings, Oliver is neither the most accomplished nor the least. Oliver showed how the Orestes Effect among his siblings as a measurement of where he sees himself in life. The Orestes Effect among peers is similar with the occurrence between siblings.

Participants and their peers shared comparable home and school environment. Michael said,

I feel lesser than a lot of people. I remember growing up, when we see it compared a lot to other kids, and so-and-so got XYZ award, like why are you only getting this? You know? That's something that I grew up with.

Another participant, Samuel stated, "Cause, if they could do it, then I could do it too." The Orestes Effect among peers/siblings can be portrayed as desirable goals or as cautionary tales. The Telemachus Effect among first and 1.5 generation serve as a goal of almost Olympian and Underworld dimensions.

Racism

The second theme is racism and discrimination. The two subthemes are “Whiteness/Being Whitewashed” and “Asian Tension.” Racism is the belief that one ethnic or cultural group is superior to another group. Discrimination can come from racism as a means to exclude, ignore, or neglect another group based on race, ethnicity, or culture. There was a range of responses when participants were asked about experiences with racism. Some participants described overt and direct racism. For example, on what should have been a happy occasion for Michael was instead marred by a racist encounter:

And then we see this woman and she leans out of her window and she screams like, ‘Go back to Mexico!’ And we were just like looking at each other and everyone there was like, ‘Wow, Cambodian!’ Like we had a couple of Hispanic people with us, but we were in shock. Like, ‘Did that just happen?’ Yeah. Like, did it really happen? That was actually this last month, when we went to [Fresno] County.”

Another interview participant, Grayson, recalled the most recent encounter of racism on a road trip to Southern California, when he and his brother stopped to get gas and “a truck of white guys yell[ed], ‘Fucking Gooks!’” out of their truck. Grayson described one more incident. When he and his brother were in Tennessee, they stopped at a diner for food and remembered the “tense stares” and “eyes that followed” them. He entered and immediately left because of “that feeling.”

Some participants described their racist experiences in school. Mason said, “Probably at school. Say, I’m just walking around and I hear a racial slur like, ‘You Asian,’ or something. I’m just like, ‘Wow, this is 2017. Really?’ That’s probably the only thing I’ve heard. I wasn’t really bothered by it but it just made me think like, ‘People still do this?’”

Another participant, Lucas, remembered getting into physical fights at school.

Lucas said, “Only thing I recall was usually just a lot of fighting with them [other

students]. When I was younger in elementary school, around that time a lot of fighting.” When prompted to explain the motivation behind these fights, Lucas responded with, “That’s ‘cause I’m Asian, that’s it. That’s the reason why they would do it.” Jacob was sometimes the only Asian student at his school:

Racism came in the form, of that I was the only Asian, so anything related to any Asian culture, I would get the spotlight, things like, ‘Oh, it’s Chinese New Year. Jacob, are you bringing anything?’ It was always like that. It didn’t even matter whether I was Laotian or not. It was just you’re an Asian.

Other participants reiterated similar cases of this prejudice. Aiden said, “And so, it kind of sucks hearing someone say something like, ‘Oh, you eat dog,’ or whatever, when it’s like, well, I mean there’s plenty of other Asian cultures out there...” Samuel brought up how Asians are portrayed in the media. He stated, “Just the other day I was watching a video on how Asian men are the least attractive. I saw another video yesterday, about how this model was only interested in Asian men. Kind of weird...” Although other participants did not share a specific occurrence of racism, they acknowledged its presence. Logan said, “Oh, that’s everywhere...” and Levi also said, “I think it’s everywhere. I don’t think there’s a certain country that has it more than the other.”

Some participants explained singular episodes of racism in terms of a childhood event or as a rite of passage. Dylan said, “I wouldn’t say picked on, but I would say made fun of. Just like every typical person out there, when you’re growing up as a teenage boy.” Alexander concurred, “When I was younger but, you know, we were all kids and we’d make racist remarks to one another, but as a young adult now, I’ve never actually gone through something like that.” Jayden also said, “Not that I recall, recently. It might have happened when I was younger. I probably didn’t really notice it. Not that I recall.” Lastly, Carter stated, “I really

don't, growing up in California, we didn't experience it much. Maybe North Carolina for a little bit. Wisconsin."

Some second-generation Lao and Hmong American men reported that they had some or never experienced racism. Liam stated, "Racism. On me? Mm. Not often. I think it's because of my environment where I grew up. My personal neighborhood. I know it's, there's talk of it in the world. Not me." Noah also said to never having a racist encounter, "An actual... I've never had an actual incident. I never avoided it. I just...I don't think... I'm just being myself. Yeah. And it's just somehow, in 19 years I never had [a racist incident or event]." James said, "Say what you will, but I'm American, man. I was born here." Lastly, Ethan explained how he avoids racism, "Generally I'm shy, so I don't talk to a lot of people, so I don't, there's very few chances for me to run into those situations, so I can't really answer that question because I don't think I talk enough." Participants who reported encounters with racism also commented on their emotional responses to it. However, for other participants who reported limited or nonexistent occurrences of bigotry, they brushed it off or were nonchalant about it. The gamut of racist clashes and discrimination varied from each man. A subtheme of racism is Whiteness/being Whitewashed.

Whiteness/Being Whitewashed

The first subtheme for the theme racism/discrimination is *Whiteness* and *being Whitewashed*. Whiteness and "being Whitewashed" are terms that go beyond just assimilating into the mainstream culture, but being Whitewashed as a quality that distanced them from the ethnic culture. While some people may use the term White or being Whitewashed in a derogatory way, the participants in this study used the term as an explanation for their isolation or disconnect from their ethnic group. Michael described his inability to speak proper Lao as:

It's really Whitewashed, I guess. I'm kinda trying to explain that my syntax is more of American syntax, so when I do, like, speak it to the elders, it's kind of ... I look dumb to them. I know I'm not a dumb person, but I just look dumb or sound dumb to them.

Aiden said he feels Whitewashed when he talked about his friends:

I feel more, little Whitewashed, just because I can have friends ... Most of the friends, I know are really fluent in Lao, and they're talking about types of food they're open to, and I'm like, I only know like certain foods like [*larb*-a minced meat salad] and whatever.

Samuel explained how he thinks others perceive him as different, "Just because I feel like people see me differently. I feel like they think I'm Whitewashed."

Jayden thought about his own ethnic identity and those of his potential children.

He said, "They're going to be very Americanized. I'm already Whitewashed as they say. I wouldn't make them do all these traditions." Participants in this study used the terms White and being Whitewashed to describe their sense of disconnect within their ethnic groups. This divide within their own ethnic group is a prevalent characteristic among the Lao and Hmong-American men.

When participants discussed their inner circle or their close friends, some talked about how they made deeper connections with people outside of their ethnic groups. Samuel described that the majority of his high school friends as, "A lot of my friends aren't really Asian." When the researcher asked who he did hang out with, Samuel said, "A lot of Mexicans, because where I grew up, I went to school with a lot of Mexicans." Jacob stated, "Within the culture, I've never really socialized within my culture, so I don't have any experiences, no." Another participant, Michael, described being in culture shock when he moved between schools. He went from a predominately Hispanic and African-American populated school to a more heavily Asian populated school:

I don't have a particular group that I'm gonna hang out with, but like with my elementary experience, I went to [elementary school in Fresno], so it was predominately like Hispanic and African-American students there. I

went to school there and that's who I grew up with, and then I went to middle school, and it was predominantly Cambodian, Lao, and so that was kind... For me, that was more culture shock.

Jayden described a similar perspective when he questioned social groups solely based on race:

In high school, there was this group of Asians and Hmongs that were hanging out together. I was hanging out with my friends from elementary. They [the Asian and Hmong kids] wanted me to hang out with them because I'm Hmong. I'm like, 'Why do I have to hang out, just because I'm Hmong? I don't know you guys personally.'

The extra-curricular school activities that the participants joined may have further detached them from their ethnic groups. For example, Ryan played football in high school. He said, "I was one of the only Hmong boys on the team, the town, I grew up in, was mostly White or Hispanic." Dylan played volleyball. He stated that his choice to play volleyball added to the ethnic group separation in high school:

I do feel like that sometimes, to be honest, 'cause growing up, I was playing volleyball. I was one of the only Hmong kids, that's not traditional like them. So, it was hard for me to approach some of them, because they're so tradition, they're not like super tradition, but they're very Hmong...

Choosing to join clubs or teams that were outside of the ethnic cultural norms lead some to feelings of detachment. That disentanglement from their ethnic group leads to the next subtheme, Asian Tension.

Asian Tension

The second subtheme is Asian Tension. Asian Tension is inner ethnic or cultural tension. The feeling that one is "not Asian enough" or the perception that one is "excluded" from the ethnic community. Asian Tension can occur when a person has membership outside of the ethnic group or when person feels

disqualified from their ethnic community. This type of xenophobia can occur in the family and community. In his family, Carter described Asian Tension as:

Like, if you go to, say, a family event where it has to do with educational or has to do with trouble graduating, or something like that, and if you show up, and they know your past, or they know that you didn't do this, or do that, then yes, you feel it out there. It's not as direct, but you feel it.

Jack described his feelings of rejection within the Hmong culture:

I never grew up being accepted by the Hmong people, and it wasn't until my senior year in high school, that I actually broke apart from, opening myself to the other groups, to actually opening myself up to my own, my own people, but ever since then, yeah, I've felt like that...

James remembered the specific childhood embarrassment that solidified his perception in his community. While he attempted to speak with an older Lao man, he misspoke:

I feel like I'm the elephant in the room. I never really learned how to speak formal Lao. Addressing people and whatnot, I feel like if, [I] try to speak Lao, but I might be disrespectful, but I think I got paranoid since that one time, I don't know who I was talking to, but they were way older than me. I addressed them as "*ai*" because growing up, I learned, older people I should call them [*"ai"*=a prefix/salutation to men and translates to "older brother"]. He was way older than me, and I guess I was supposed to call him [*"loong"* or *"paw"*=a more appropriate address to older men], so that was a big no-no for me.

Alexander shared the same sentiment about speaking to the older generation, he said, "If they're like, you know, the older generation or something like that, then yeah. Especially they try to talk to me, I'm like, 'Oh shit.'" Participants in this study recognized that language barrier is a contributor to Asian Tension. Liam said, "I feel a little bit disconnected, because I don't speak the language. And every time I go to a temple or a cultural gathering, I can't speak the language, and it feels [like] a disconnect." On the other hand, Mason explained that knowing your ethnic language can also exasperate a cultural misconnection. He is fluent in Lao and he described a time when the elders spoke negatively about him,

I just go into a room and then there'll be those old Lao people, and they'll talk about this and that, and I'm just kind of standing there, like, 'I understand what you guys are saying,' but I don't want to say it out loud.

Asian tension can come from external and internal sources. When he was in college, Andrew described his experience with Asian Tension:

When I was in LA, the city that I was in, is typically Chinese people, and so you go there and they look at you, like, 'Oh, why are you here? You're ... You don't speak our language.' And stuff like that, and then I'm just here thinking, 'Oh, I understand this is a city of Chinese people, but we do live in America.' So, they give you that look, and it's just like, 'Oh, okay. Whatever.'

An internal source of Asian Tension is how the person sees him or herself in their ethnic group. Gabriel said, "I would probably say, I'm probably not Asian enough." Another example of an internal source of Asian Tension can be from their own family. For instance, Samuel's parents are from different ethnic Lao groups and this has affected how Samuel sees himself. Samuel strongly feels connected with the Hmong side [his mom] of his ethnicity more than his Lao side [his dad]. He talked about growing up within this divisive atmosphere. He said, "My grandma would always tell her, [a saying in Hmong] and that means, 'Lao [people] don't know how to save money.' And so, we always use that line whenever my dad buys expensive things." Samuel described Asian Tension as, "awkward" when he enters a group of other Asians. Jack's parents are from different clans within the Hmong culture. He explained that even in his upbringing, his parents could not agree on which type of Hmong he would speak. Jack recalled his parents' disagreements:

And so, my mom is *Green* and my dad is *White*, and so they would both always disagree about how to say something correctly, even though they sound so similar, and so they would usually not try to teach other each other's language to me because they would get angry at it, like 'Why are you teaching him *Green* [Hmong]? You need to stop teaching him *Green* [Hmong]....

In social groups, Anthony recognized Asian Tension within his school environment:

When I was growing up, I didn't recognize it, but when I got to junior high and high school, I started seeing it and I didn't really like it. I know that some of the Asians actually were even bullies. Me and my friend, we take care of ourselves and push back.

Other interview participants felt comfortable in their own ethnic groups.

Matthew described his comfort level as, "Usually, your own ethnic culture. Because you can relate to them." Levi explained that his comfort level comes from his relationship with his family: "I feel connected to the Hmong community through my family." Lucas felt most connected during community events. He said, "I feel welcome, it's pretty fun though. Every year ... I never miss the year..." Daniel also said, "If I were to go into a room where it's all White people and I was the only Asian, I think that would be more uncomfortable in that situation." Logan's confidence would depend on who he knew, not necessarily on the ethnic group:

Yeah, I'd feel comfortable walking through a room full of Asians, but if ... unless they're like ... I won't feel comfortable if they're Asians I don't know. If they're Asians I do know, I'm comfortable. I just can't walk into a random party of people I don't know.

Interview participants do not necessarily feel an instant kinship or connection to those of the same ethnic group. The level of their comfort depends on familiarity of the crowd, not just on ethnic group membership.

Environment During the Formative Years

The third emergent theme of this study is the environment during the formative years of the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men. The home and school environment or neighborhood during the formative years refers to how their home, family dynamics, school and educational experiences shaped

and formed their life opinions. The home and school influence is important to consider as environment shapes the cultural identity development, and impacts the emotional growth and development of the child in the adult (Piaget, 2008). One reason this is important is because as children and adolescents are thinking, emotions and reasoning is shaped by our environment (Piaget, 2008). The theme of home and school environment or neighborhood during the formative years are described in overlapping narratives from their home, family, school, social groups, and history with crime and trauma.

The socioeconomic status of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men were varied. When the first and 1.5 generation came to America, their choices for employment were limited. The first and 1.5 generation were mostly below the poverty line, the second-generation financial environment leaned toward fluctuations of wealth and poverty. For example, in Jack's childhood he and his family experienced an unstable financial status. Jack talked about those times and what he would have done differently:

Yeah, I personally feel like that would have probably helped me changed and made better decisions if they would have told me. Because I didn't see the impact I was making. I just thought like, "Oh, I need gas for now. I'm just going to pump it and I'm going to go, and then totally forget about it the whole day, what I just took from them.

Jack described working for his parents at the family gas station, but only so he could take what he wanted from it. Matthew's parents began their own family business, but unlike Jack's parents, Matthew's parents expected their sons to work there, if they were not in school. Matthew credited his parents for how they kept their children out of trouble, "No. Our parents, yeah, they worked hard for us to not be able to worry about that stuff." While Jack and Matthew saw their parents working and providing them with financial support, Hunter and James did not.

James did not realize his family's poverty level until he started to see the stark economic and cultural differences in his friends' homes:

None of us really have our own room...I think freshman year, I realized that when I see people having friends coming over and...I used to go over to their house, and it's like a totally different house. I don't see like statues of Buddha everywhere, and I don't see their shoes out, hanging out in the front house, of course.

Hunter did not recall seeing his parents work at all. He simply stated, "I don't really remember. When I was old enough to remember, they didn't really do much." Participants were self-aware of how their poverty level, wealth and how their financial environment influenced their family structures. Some participants described how the physical location of their homes and schools influenced them. Participants who grew up in a nuclear family shared how their parents warned them away from bad influences. In some cases, their parents physically moved away to a better neighborhood. For example, Logan said,

In school, we were cool. We'd talk here and there, see how it's going, but they lived in a different part in the neighborhood, so I really don't go over there, and then the friends who lived near me and went to the same school, I was hanging out with them and, surprisingly, they were good.

Daniel's childhood home was in the vicinity of better schools:

We didn't live in the best of neighborhoods, but I was around 5 years old and my parents moved into a nicer neighborhood and so I was ... Then I also got into another school, elementary school, that was one of those G.A.T.E. [Gifted and Talented Education] schools.

One participant's parents moved their family out of the state. Michael's parents moved across the country:

Yeah and it was a little different too, 'cause I grew up with, like for instance, with my mom's family, there wasn't too many positive male role models for me growing up, on my mom's side of the family, and my dad's side of the family, they were back in Laos or back in New York or Tennessee. So, I didn't really grow up too much, 'cause with my mom's family, they were really involved in gangs.

If their parents were not able to move them out of the neighborhoods, their parents advised them to avoid groups that they deemed as bad influences. Matthew recalled, “They would tell you like, ‘Don’t hang out with so-and-so. I heard this about so-and-so.’ And then just, ‘Keep your grades up.’ And then they would reward us, so.” In other cases, the strategy of living in a “good neighborhood” was not enough to deter Levi’s siblings from joining gangs and his sister dropped out of school. He said, “I don’t think it was the neighborhood. We lived in a fairly good neighborhood at that time, and I think it was just friends, you know.” The differing ways that the participants parents’ tried to shield them were both effective and ineffective.

Responses from the interview participants about their environment during the formative years from home life to school life tend to overlap each other. Jack described how his home and family experiences intersect with his school and friends’ experiences:

My parents, they stress ‘You just have to be with your own people,’ right, with Asians. ‘You should not go and associate with other people because you don’t know if you can trust them, because you don’t look like them. They might not trust you.’ And so, my brother, my older brother, being the eldest he felt like it was right to listen to my parents all the way, right?

For Jack, the line between home and school experiences were often blurred. Jack was not the only participant who carried the influences of home and school together. Anthony saw how his older brother valued his friends’ influences over his family:

As I was growing up I noticed that they were more like his family. His extended family because back then, we were raised up, it was just the Hmong community. It can also have all those people that doesn’t really are healthy relationship or provide you positive support.

Loyalty amongst friends often pulled them away from family. James described the bond and loyalty among his friends as:

I felt like to connect with them, I need to see where they're coming from because I guess, I don't really connect with them that much even though we're Lao, and we basically came from the same 'hood, you know? That kind of made me do what they did, go where they go. It put me in a real bad place at that time. I couldn't figure out what I wanted, who I am. I didn't even know myself at that time. I went through like all sorts of phases with them... They exposed me to gangs, drugs, money. At that time, I never knew at the young age, I could make money, you know, like selling the stuff they would give me. Just hanging around ... At that time, I don't know where my mind was at that place. It was not with me. Who I am today is me, but in high school, it just ... You're going through the teenage phase. You don't really know who you are. I did all sorts of crazy things.

The distinction between being with a group of friends and being in a gang were unclear for some of the participants. When Benjamin was in school, most of the people he knew were in a gang, "Yeah. They were about, at least a good 80% of my friends, from when I was a kid, were in gangs, or are in gangs, and only a few chose not to be." When asked what was the allure, he explained how a gang of friends could become a gang:

Probably because, getting picked on, and, you know, they were saying 'Hey, you got ...' Typical gang behavior, and 'You gotta ... Hey, you. Come, hang out with us. We will have your back,' and then, all these clubs turn into gangs, right?

Another interview participant, Joseph, saw how his group of break dancing friends morphed into a group of car thieves. Even though Joseph himself was not directly involved with stealing cars, he did learn other things from them. He shared how that is possible:

My wife's brother was one of my friends growing up and he was into stealing cars. They teach you that stuff so you learn how to do all that stuff... But I never stole a [inaudible] car, but I have watched people do it and I have seen people do other stuff.

Oliver echoed Joseph's narrative of avoiding full membership into a gang, but still be able to hang out with them. He said, "When I was in high school it was pretty much ... I was around the wrong people, people who just wanted to play." If some

of the participants saw their friends as misfits and did not have a negative effect on them, other Lao and Hmong American men felt the opposite. Alexander expressed frustration at how some people admired those in a gang:

You know what's funny? I feel like people who are like, [not] as nice as I, and not in rude way as possible, but I feel like those gang members and stuff, for some reason, I feel like they get more respect out of the community than for somebody like me. Like, I'm not trying to toot my own horn but I feel like I've accomplished a lot in life but for some reason, those kind of people get more attention than I feel like I deserve. But I think and sure it is just because it's not what my mom wanted...I don't know, I just feel like they kind of receive more attention than I would. I don't know, that sounds dumb but I just personally feel that way.

Some reasons why some participants did not join a gang were mainly because they personally felt that gang activity was immature and they wanted a better future for themselves. Dylan said, "But I think it's stupid. I see them as dumb kids, and then I dunno. Just the things they do, the way how they talk like that, it just doesn't suit me." Benjamin agreed: "I've had some friends that get locked up. I had some friends that, you know, were doing drive-bys and doing drugs, but had no future, and I think, I just wanted a future." The influence of friends and family frequently intermixed with the environment during the formative years do have a lasting effect. The concept of family could include friends. The definition of "family" in most Asian cultures extends beyond the "nuclear" definition, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents were not considered as extended family.

In some of the participant's lives, they were raised with extended families that took the place of their nuclear families. For example, Aiden was raised by his aunt and uncle:

Younger, I always felt like I was just their nephew, but as time goes on and because I actually live with my aunt and uncle now, they treat me like I'm

their son, which I'm really grateful for. So, now, I feel like I am part of the, I guess like nuclear family they have.

Oliver was also raised by his aunt and uncle, "Yeah, I pretty much grew up with my aunt and uncle." Families of divorce are another type of home structure that the participants shared. Lucas said,

I think I was two years old around that time. And he took me over here, then I stayed here for ... then the summer I would be at my mom's house, during the summer and the winter I'd be at mom's house then the rest of the year I would be over here with my dad and my aunt. Until the age of 16, I moved back with my mom and about two, two and a half years later I came back to Fresno.

Hunter's nuclear family broke up due to extended family disagreements and he lived with his sister:

Oh, yeah that's because family issues. My dad, uncles, my brother and my cousins, they were having like ... not quite issues, I guess. My sister, she married and she lives in Fresno, and then she came up and took us to Fresno.

Benjamin described his parents' divorce and blended family upbringing: "My parents got divorced, and my mom had my half-brother. I'm the oldest son for her, but I'm the youngest for my dad...Well, I went to Orange County, then I actually graduated Riverside." The home and school environment of some of the participants included growing up in various households and some also experienced tragedy and trauma.

The Environment of Crime and Trauma.

The subtheme environment of crime and trauma was present in the participants' interviews, and some shared their life experiences. Few of the participants were either arrested or committed petty crimes. For example, Carter was arrested as a youth. He said, "Criminal wise, I've been arrested once. When I was 14 or 15 for, what did we do, we broke into a car to steal a car stereo." When he became an adult, that record was cleared. Around the same age of 13 and 14,

Joseph's crime did not result in a juvenile record, but he did earn a life-long experience. He said, "No. No record. They let me go. My dad whooped me after that." When asked, what happened, Joseph said,

It was the dumbest thing. It was a mechanical pencil...It was from like a grocery store. I needed it for supplies so I stole it...They caught me. I was with my mom. She was so embarrassed. I just remember my mom being so embarrassed.

For Joseph, this incident was so ingrained in his youth that it deterred him from other poor choices. Yet, his decision to steal was a means of needing supplies for school. While these participants described the influences from friends, other participants experienced violence and trauma from their parents.

A recurring subtheme from the participants' interview was of violence and trauma during their formative years and as adults. Some participants described how their nuclear family structure was fractured for reasons such as domestic violence, incarcerations, gun violence, family illness, and war trauma.

Two participants shared their story of domestic violence. In this study, all the victims of domestic violence were women and all perpetrators were men. Due to his personal experience, Michael explained why he works with victims of domestic violence: "Working with victims of domestic violence, it's kind of a big, big thing for me. I actually lost my mom in 2015 due to domestic violence."

Michael's father had shot his mother. A second participant, Oliver explained why his father was released from prison:

Yeah, my dad got out. He stayed with us for a while and he has a girlfriend now...No, the thing is, my aunt ... it's complicated, it happened when I was small, so my dad shot my mom when I was young, and my dad was put away for about six years, and I grew up with my aunt, and my uncle pretty much since then.

Aiden's dad was incarcerated, but he did not know the exact reason why his dad was in prison:

No, he didn't. He actually ... About four years ago, he was incarcerated...I was around, but I don't know exactly what it was for. I just know that he just was in trouble with the law...I've always kind of grown up with my grandma, my aunts and uncle.

Sometimes, the environment of violence and trauma occurred in the surrounding neighborhood or at school. For example, Levi described the almost weekly encounters in his neighborhood:

Fortunately, I should say, I grew up in an area where it was all either, there were gang members, either, there was a drive by every weekend or almost every single day, and you heard about one guy getting shot, one guy getting killed, and I didn't want that. I had goals, and I wanted to reach those goals.

During middle school, one of Gabriel's friend's brought a gun to school:

It's actually back in my middle school years the Hmong kids and the Hispanic kids, they were having a little bit of trouble with each other, so they met up at the back of school and then the guy I knew, he actually brought a gun -And then he shot it on the ground and then police came and all that and he got caught and stuff. But now I heard he's doing a little bit better now.

After this gun incident, Gabriel made a choice to separate from this group. Other participants had to cope with death in their family.

Ethan talked about how he felt distant from his family. He said, "Okay, one sister lives in San Diego. The other one just moved to LA, and my other sister died...Yeah, we just didn't hang out a lot because she left the house when I was a lot younger." Jayden lost his mother due to a drunk driver. He said, "Back in my freshman year which was 2013, there was a car accident and she passed away due to a drunk driving." Jayden said,

In high school I kind of lost it. After my mom's car accident, I went to go live with my sister. She at the time, she had a fiancée that was White as you say. We didn't really speak Hmong that much. I kind of lost my roots during my four years of high school.

During his senior year in high school, Liam's father was diagnosed with cancer and although his father eventually recovered from it, the timing of his father's diagnosis made a lasting impact on him:

Well, at the end of high school I was kind of depressed and I was like, 'Eh, no.' My pops had, like a cancer. At that time, I was just like really stressed. I wasn't even ...I think a big barrier for me is lack of motivation. I'm seeing that right now, like that'd be a big barrier.

The lasting effects of war violence and trauma shaped the family structure. Levi described how the violence of the Laos Secret War affected his family's life in America:

The first two, of course, the Hmong history was that we crossed Mekong River after the Vietnam War, we ran across the Mekong River to get to the camps, and so as my dad was crossing the river with my brother and sister, something happened, and they, unfortunately, they drowned. My younger brother was a twin. Unfortunately, shortly after being born, the other twin didn't make it.

Participants described the home, family, school, and friends' environment during their formative years with stories of poverty, changing family dynamics, interactions within their ethnic groups and the dominant American culture, educational experiences, and friends as influential. Family support was discussed often by several participants, indicating the level of importance that the family had in the person's development.

Educational Experience

The fourth theme is the educational experience of the second-generation of the Lao and Hmong American men. Most young Americans spend the majority of their time at school. For at least 5 days a week, 9 months of the year, for about 13 years, most young Americans are socializing, engaging, learning, and physically are in school. The process of classifying students during their educational experiences had lasting effects on the Lao and Hmong-American men in this

study. Their stories ranged from thriving to failing in school. The two subthemes of educational experiences are lost & wandering in school and completing and returning to school.

All participants in this study had a K-12 experience and some described how they were academically labeled. The academic classification during K-12 years revealed how the participants see themselves as learners and how their K-12 world can determine their post-secondary aspirations, or lack thereof. Jack was labeled as a Gifted and Talented (GATE) student and chose to enroll in “regular” classes because his counselor would not let him graduate from high school earlier:

My counselor didn’t want to give it to me and I remember because I still blame her for not letting me graduate early...I was an honor’s student and a GATE student all through junior high and high school, but my last year I chose to be dumb and [inaudible]. Regular English classes, they were honor’s classes.

When asked what were the differences for him, honors and GATE classes, versus general population classes, Joseph said,

General population classes was nothing to compared to honor’s one. It seemed like you just showed up and you got an A. In honor’s class, they actually had you write every day and they taught you syntax, format, and how to write proper paragraphs...

Joseph also compared his experience in regular classes to his wife’s high school experience. He said that the writing skills he acquired in the honor’s classes helped him in college and he notes that the weaknesses of regular English classes with an anecdote of his wife’s regular high school English classes:

And it worked. For instance, my wife, she took regular English and they never taught that. When I went to take the regular English class, they never taught that. It was just like you showed up and I slept in the back of the class. I literally slept in the back of the class.

Joseph described a relatively enriched high school life that was accentuated with a desirable academic label.

Other interview participants described their academic struggles and their most challenging times were in English classes. Daniel was relieved to be labeled as a GATE student. His academic environment of honor's classes grouped students with like minds:

Until middle school and high school, then I went to [middle school in Fresno] and [high school in Fresno] where it was a nice environment because there was also a lot of smart kids there, but then there's also a lot of kids who school isn't their top priority. There's more gangs and so forth out there at [high school in Fresno].

English placement tests taken in schools determined what level of English classes students were allowed to take. At the time that most of the interview participants were in the K-12 and post-secondary institutions, the results of English Placement tests were also used to categorize what college English classes participants could be enrolled. Ethan described the English placement test that would determine his college English class. He said, "When I took the [English] test I did bad on it, because just stupid things, like what is a noun? Person, place, or thing?" When he received his English Placement test results, he realized, "I just didn't realize I was this bad at English comprehension." Ethan said his lack of English grammar understanding is a reason why he took so long to complete his college degree.

Hunter's high school English experience was so frustrating that it discouraged him from trying to improve his writing:

It's because having to write yes/no, your nouns, or your verbs before your nouns, what word is a verb, which word is an adjective. That is what I'm struggling with. That's why I lost interest in writing and taking these English.

Remedial English classes like ESL were designed to support struggling English learners, unfortunately, this was not always the result. One participant learned how to avoid taking remedial English classes by lying. Grayson recalled negative

experiences with the ESL (English Language Learner) testing procedures and he referred to them as “those classes.” He passed the ESL classes, only to be re-tested the next year. He felt, “It’s better to lie on the ESL survey” and say that English was his first language than suffer through the hassle and embarrassment of being tested or designated as an ESL student.

The experience of academic labeling in K-12 had long lasting impressions on the interview participants in post-secondary institutions. Participants who were classified as GATE in their K-12 years were more confident in their college classes. Those participants who struggled in any level of their English classes and even in remedial English classes had more difficulties staying in school and even expressed a lack of pursuit for further education.

Lost & Wandering in School

The first subtheme of educational experience is lost and wandering in school. Lao and Hmong-American men who left school share a common theme of feeling a sense of being lost. James is the youngest of seven children and the only one to be born in America. His story of lacking direction in K-12 is something that he currently struggles with today:

I was never taught to have goals for myself. I was just taught to go to school. Taught to go to school and become a doctor, I guess. To this day, I still can’t figure it out. I blame myself for not ever trying to figure out what I want to do.

At the time of this interview, James talked about joining the army as a way to provide a better life for his [common law] wife and daughter. But before he can join the army, he needs to provide proof of high school completion. James dropped out of high school and he attributes his lack of goals as a barrier to moving forward with his plans:

See, I got to tackle my short-term goal first because I dropped out of high school. I don't carry any GEDs. I got a lot of bills and stuff. I can't just leave it here- ... and I got a family as well. It took me a while, like maybe two or three years to think this through, and I finally came to a conclusion that yeah, this is what I want to do, and they'll benefit my family of course and probably help me better my life, and mold me to a better man, growing up without any father, and only having brothers to show me the way of manlihood.

As a father and provider, James has several goals for himself that he hopes could be beneficial to his young family. At the moment, James would like to complete his high school diploma and then join the army, but he sees his current financial responsibilities as barriers. For Hunter, his strife in English classes were enough for him to be discouraged about school:

I don't really have a hard time. English is what I'm having a hard time with especially, or writing. I struggle with writing all throughout my whole high school year. That may be the reason why I'm not really looking forward to going back to school anymore.

Hunter was 2 months shy of his high school graduation. He simply stated, "I took like a year off of school, and then ... I actually dropped out of high school. Yeah, like two months before I graduated I dropped out." When asked why he dropped out, Hunter said, "I didn't have the motivation to go to school anymore." It is rare to collect information from students who leave educational institutions because they are hesitant to share their reasons and because data collecting from this particular group is difficult. For some interview participants who struggled to graduate from high school, few did enroll in college. Their reasons for leaving college included explanations about feeling lost in the system, unsupported financially, lack of familial understanding, and other unexpected circumstances.

The subtheme of lost and wandering in school occurs in college too. Lao and Hmong-American men in this study expressed a need for career guidance, work experience, or academic support and counseling. For some of the

participants who began their college careers but did not complete a degree attributed a variety of reasons such as, their lack of a clear goal, little or minimal parental support, unrealistic expectations, or participant's own personal interests. For instance, Oliver went to college for 2 years, could not find a major that interested him at the time, so he left college and found a fulltime job. When pressed for further clarification about his attitude towards completing college, he said he valued living in the moment over the seemingly monotonous pursuit of a degree:

The thing is, life is not a written script, where you do this and this ... you're young, you don't think, and you do stuff. Now that you're older, you think, yeah, I could have gone to school and really concentrated on school and not lived life. I see ... me, maybe I played a little bit too much or did this, you know, but I lived my life. I went out, I had fun, I lived my life. I look at it as, yeah, at the end of it all everything is ... I am where I am, happy. As long as I'm happy, you know?

The pursuit of happiness and choosing to live in the moment was more fulfilling to Oliver than attending school to please others. Another participant experienced a similar disenchantment with selecting the right college major. Jack described his confusion best when he tries to unravel how he got lost in college:

It's every single one of my relatives, family member, anyone within my family circle. They've always felt, 'Be a doctor, or become a lawyer, or something within those fields,' that always we talked about, and I feel like ... I feel like it's something that I never really knew what the purpose was, and like I say, now that I look back at it, if I really wanted to become a computer engineer or certain doctor in a certain field, I would really need to have a certain passion in it and want to come back and help the community out within that field, but back then it was more so ... I think the family just wanted it because you had the name and the status, and people would respect you more, and so that's how, me personally, I grew up.

Gabriel chose a college major that he thought would lead to a job in the automotive career. He said, "I could go into the automotive field, but then Fresno State didn't offer any automotives." When his initial major was not offered at

Fresno State, he chose a second major, computer engineering. He did not understand how challenging the field of computer engineering can be, “I went to Fresno State and then I picked the computer engineering field, but it was a little bit too much that I couldn’t handle, so yeah.” Gabriel was mistaken about his first and second college majors, coupled with loneliness, he felt like college was a gloomy experience:

So, I felt kind of lonely and lost so I didn’t really try that much, and I ended up getting a .43 [low Grade Point Average] something GPA for both semesters. And I ended up getting kicked out of Fresno State. They told me I should to a community college to start over and learn a little bit more then transfer back. So, I thought about doing that, but then I was like I’m going to give myself a break and I just, you know.

During his break from college, he thought about why college was so tough for him. He thought his high school experience was easy and from his point of view, his last year in high school lacked academic rigor. When asked how his high school experience was different compared to his first year of college, Gabriel said, “Yeah senior got a lot easier, we didn’t really do much ‘cause if you already got all your credits then you don’t really have to do much or try as much.”

Gabriel described the difficulty of finding a job after he left college. He was able to earn some money babysitting his sister’s children. He eventually found full time employment in 2014. Gabriel also said that he was the first son to go to college. His older brothers had dropped out of college:

At first, because I was the first son to go to college, all this pressure was on me because my two older brothers dropped out of high school. So, they’ve just been working and stuff. So, when I was the first one to go there was a lot of pressure on me, and when I failed, I kind of broke down a little at the time.

Gabriel felt the parental pressures, lack of guidance as contributions to his overall sense of feeling lost and wandering in college. Another participant sacrificed his college goals in order to help the family.

Matthew's family restaurant was demanding more and more of his time. In order to help launch and maintain the success of the family business, Matthew had to leave college. He said, "Because I took a break, for a semester, to help our family because they were getting really busy. And then we started upgrading a lot, so then I just never went back to finish. I just didn't have the time." When asked if Matthew would like to return to college, his response was mixed. He did have a desire to earn his degree, but he also has future business plans that would prevent him from returning to college. Some interview participants did not express interest in pursuing a college degree at all.

A few interview participants who did not ponder the pursuits of a college degree either had a job that sustained their lifestyle or are financially supported by family. Lucas did not have pressing familial or financial responsibilities. He also did not express a clear life goal. When asked why he did not enroll in college, Lucas said, "Don't really know, I didn't know what I was going to do at home after I graduated." When pressed further about what his educational barriers were, he said, "Don't really know what would keep me. Probably just public transportation that would probably keep me away from it." Carter said the same thing about college. When asked why he did not enroll in college after high school, Carter said, "No, thought about it, never went." When further pressed about why he did not want to go to college, Carter said,

Why not college? Well growing up, we have 13 siblings. But it was more mom. My dad had a couple of wives. He had three at the time, I think. One, two, three. Yep. Three at the time. Those were living with my mom at the time. So, I just felt like after finishing high school I just wanted to travel. Just go places, you know, so I went many places, lived in different areas, parts of the country. I mean, I think I was searching for a father figure at the time, I don't know, but just school was not an option at the time.

The reasons why these participants left school have common themes of being lost in college, lack of personal desire to pursue college, or opportunities in careers that did not require a college degree. For other participants who are currently in college or who have completed college, they shared some of their reasons why some people could not. For example, Levi's brother had obligations as a married man as a reason for leaving college:

Some of them got married and started a family, so obviously, you can't rely on public assistance all your life, so they obviously, they're going to have go out and support their family and significant other, and I think that's a good ... I think people have different walks of life. I just chose a different one.

Levi described how he meticulously and carefully researched his college major before committing to completing his degree:

I wanted to be a vet, but then that quickly changed because I went to the counselor, and we looked at all the prerequisite classes, and I was like, this is too much work, so I was like, no. I want to change it, so I went undecided for a few years until I think it was time for me to transfer from Merced College to CSU Stanislaus, and then I chose psychology because I was already in the education field. I was trying to become an academic counselor, so I just went into psychology.

Other participants who are currently enrolled in college or have completed their degree offered other explanations for why some people do not pursue or complete college. The need to financially support or demands to heavily contribute money and other obligations were listed as deterrents for college. Joseph:

Money. I think a lot of them, especially once they parent's start working, they have to get financial aid, they have to work to pay for college. Some of them, they don't want to do that so they ... Then they start working themselves right out of high school so what happens is they see the dollars and they stop pursuing education because they got the quick dollar. Like a lot of my friends, they right after high school, a lot of them wanted to start college. Then they started working and they just wanted the quick money.

Even with the help of financial aid or grants, some students leave school for the promise of more money. Jayden lists a few reasons why some of his friends left college. One left and needed to repay the school loan. He said,

My [high school] senior friends, when I was a junior, he had a hard time keeping up with his assignments. He was getting financial aid. Then financial aid dropped him. He had to pay all his fees back. Now he's just working full time at a grocery store.

One left for a fulltime job in another state because college was too challenging.

He said, "I know one of my friends, he had to move to Minnesota for a job opening there. Others, I'd say it was too challenging for them." In the Central Valley, the options for employment are limited. Logan said,

I have a friend who, right after high school, he said that, 'I'm not going to go to college.' He was like, 'School is not for me,' so what he did is he just went to learn how to be a dealer, and now he works at the casino. Sometimes, living in Fresno, you don't have too much options to work at really like higher places unless you go to school more. If people decide to stop going to school right after high school, then your educational level would determine where you are ... you're at in life. Unless you work really hard, you could make a lot of money, but if you just trying to [inaudible] education for something, then, in Fresno, you won't go far. If you have the opportunity to go out to work in like San Francisco or LA where cost of living is higher, but the opportunity is better out there, then I'm pretty sure people, like guys my age would have a better opportunity, too.

Although money is the dominant reason for why some people do not pursue or complete college, other barriers to college are personal motivation and drive.

Anthony said, "I think it's self-motivation, setting goals for themselves, and self-esteem." Another participant, Alexander, said,

I think just the lack of drive. I know it gets hard, a lot of the times it does get hard and you just want to give up. A lot of times I think financial reasons, I think that's probably like top three reasons.

Taking breaks from school is another reason why some people do not return to complete it. Mason stated, “I think one reason is that people take a year off, and when they do that they never go back. That’s all I can think of.”

Other thoughts about limitations to school is the lack of degree value. Samuel pointed out, “getting a degree doesn’t really guarantee you a job. And I feel like going to school isn’t really the only option after high school.” Jacob also said,

I believe that there’s been a lot more recent ideas about college saying people don’t necessarily need to finish college to get to the career that they want to. They can take different ways by just working their way to the top and such.

The perspectives of the participants were intriguing because many of them were in the college progress and their insights to the limitations of others could be applied back to them. There were many justifications for why people quit school. To some of the participants, there can be more reasons to abandon the arduous task of completing school than to persist.

Educational Persistence, Support & Alternatives to College

The second subtheme of educational experience is persistence, support, and alternatives to completing college. The participants in this study discussed the importance of persistence, support, and alternates to completing college.

Interview participants talked about their own persistence and the desire to contribute to the community. Daniel said,

What kept me in there, aside from myself just maybe competitive drive to just always want to succeed in myself. Outside of that could be for family. I want to make money to be successful in life and to also, if I can inspire others too and show them that I can get whatever I try to accomplish, then they could also do it.

Aiden's college major was an area that he was both interested in and saw how he could enrich the lives of others:

That was like the whole communication aspect because everyone has a different story, everyone culture's different, and so that's what I really like to take part in because I like to make everything more personal. That's what I find more interesting.

Both of these responses addressed a personal investment and future contributions to others. Persistence and grit were a powerful force in self-motivation.

In the face of initial program rejection and a cancer diagnosis for his wife, Joseph persevered with the support of his employer. He described the timing of beginning his doctoral degree as imperfect, but that did not stop him:

I think at the time, I really didn't think I was even ready to be in the doctoral program. But it's just that drive to ... Because I wanted to do something that I wanted to do. It's something for myself. It was not for anybody else. It's for me. There was that and I think the timing I felt was right. Actually, it wasn't right. I was going to wait for another year, but my director, he encouraged me to apply so I [inaudible] because I was going to wait a year before I applied because I think at the time we had just had ... My wife's mom had just found out she had cancer so we were kind of holding back and I was kind of like, 'I don't know if I should...'

Another participant, Logan, experienced a breakup of a serious relationship:

I stayed in college, yeah, and then, when we broke up, then I took a step back and was like, "Should I go now?" because I really didn't have anything holding me down or another person saying something, that I can't go. Yeah, sophomore year was pretty hectic. I think now it's probably my toughest year because I wasn't able to concentrate as much, but then I just gave it time and then it got better. I got more focused in school.

Persistence, perseverance, and grit were the internal factors that helped these participants complete their educational goals. Participants in this study mentioned the alternates to completing their educational goals. For example, the pressure to enter a 4-year college could be overwhelming and the pressure to decide on a

major in a limited amount of time were some of the reasons why some participants left college.

A few participants chose community college or vocational school as their initial step after high school. Dylan's older brother and sister both chose to start at a community college. Participants in this study challenged the idea that the only route after high school was a 4-year institution and suggested other practical pathways. Dylan said,

Like all my brothers and sister, when they went to City, they were thinking it's because they weren't smart enough, but then they're really smart. It's just maybe you just ... I don't know, didn't know what you want to do.

Dylan himself chose to go to Fresno State after high school, but he also had a strong idea for his college major and future career. He suggested, "If you're not too sure, you should just go to City, and then just try out different things, so that way you don't waste your money, and City's a lot cheaper than university and states." Benjamin advocated for Lao men to look into vocational schools. He advised for more Lao men to enroll in high-leveled and high-skilled vocational schools. Employment in these high-demand careers would challenge the prejudice of Lao men:

I just don't see a lot of Lao men doing more high-skilled jobs. I know of some, but when people think that you're Lao, a lot of ... I don't know if it's associated with being third world or not very bright. Or even wrapped up in drugs and gangs. I think that's the biggest obstacle is, people tend to think that, oh, you're Lao. A lot of stereotype is drugs and gangs, or drugs, or stuff like that.

Participants pointed out the importance of personal persistence, perseverance and grit; they also discussed the need for external support. Support from external sources can take many forms, such as financial support and emotional support.

For example, Dylan mentioned how different his parents demonstrated their support:

My dad was more ... he didn't really support, but he was saying, 'Go to college, 'cause then after you finish school you get a lot of money.' And then my mom is like, she would help me, but not a lot, because she has never got that experience. So, she just keep supporting me, giving me money, or ... I don't know. So many things that I can't even name.

Mason's parents also showed their support in different ways. While Mason's mother was more overtly supportive of his dreams, his father was more critical. He said, "My mom was more supportive, but my dad was like, 'You're not gonna do this [pursue a musical career] for your whole life, right?', but it's something I've always like to do." Mason did see that his father's doubt stemmed from a fear that Mason would not be able to financially support himself:

I'd say a little mix of both because my dad always wanted me to be a normal kid and get a job. He doesn't want that to conflict. He doesn't want me to be dependent because I'm 18 and I need to start doing stuff for myself."

Where Ryan was determined to pursue his dream, some participants went through a few college majors before following their own dreams.

Ryan described his parents' reactions to his changing college major from criminology to education as initially skeptical, but eventually encouraging. He said, "At first they were a little iffy, because I was already halfway through with my degree, but they warmed up to it later." Another participant, Andrew, chose a college major without telling his parents. His first began as an art major and finally decided on becoming a civil engineer, all without his parents' knowledge.

When Andrew told his dad, their faith in him was all he needed:

Along that, I talked to my dad and he asked me if I was sure and I told him, 'Yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure about it. That's something I want to do.' And then he just gave me the thumbs up, he said, 'Okay, if that's what you want to do then whatever makes you happy then you do it.'

How parents reacted and responded to the participants' dreams helped them devise practical plans for achieving their educational ambitions.

In this study, the pressure that second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men endured was multifaceted. The second generation are viewed as lucky and advantageous. The first and 1.5 Lao and Hmong generation were the last group of people with direct ties to Laos. They were born on foreign soil, and the American born generation respected their sacrifices. Benjamin said, "Always respect the elders, because of the struggles." The breadth of life experiences of the first and 1.5 generation's span two continents. Mason said, "Probably just life lessons, mostly. I kind of want to pass on the language thing, teaching on my own. I don't want them to be growing up not knowing where they're from, where our parents or me are from." American born Lao and Hmong-American men saw themselves in varying levels of being Lao or Hmong and American.

American Born Identity

The fifth theme is identity. Identity is the affinity or the degree of connectedness the Lao and Hmong-American men who were born in America feel towards their ethnicity. The subthemes for identity are cultural preservation, cultural rejection, masculinity, and gender role expectations. When asked which ethnic label they primarily preferred, most of the participants identified themselves as American. Lucas, Noah and James felt, "More American", Oliver and Matthew identified as "Asian American." When participants were further questioned if they have been asked to specify what kind of "Asian" they were, their responses varied from vague to specific. Ethan explained, "Because they're like "Oh where is that?" Or "I don't know where that is." They just don't know what Laos is, so I just don't want to explain it. That's mainly the reason." Their responses depends on the sincerity of the person and the participants' willingness to share.

Most of the participants recalled that questions about their ethnicity occurred more often in their childhood and less when they were older. The men in this study revealed that they were often mislabeled as to what kind of Asian they are. Joseph said, "... Well for me, because I'm light-skinned compared to most Hmong men, they think I'm Vietnamese or Thai or Chinese, so I get that a lot." Jayden has also been mislabeled, "When I was younger in elementary most of the kids see me as the typical Chinese or Japanese. They didn't know what Hmong was." And Noah said, "I say I'm Lao, they think I'm Filipino. But I say I'm Lao."

Many of the participants have traveled to Laos. Even when both parents are Lao, the people in Laos see the Lao Americans as "other." Matthew explained his experience when he traveled with his family:

But they [the Lao citizens], they kind of knew. They could see. Just how, the way we dress and stuff. So, they would talk to us in Lao, because they really don't know English, except for the higher class. They were, they got schooling.

The theme of identity for Lao and Hmong Americans was a complicated issue because American citizenship is an idea, but being Lao or Hmong is an ethnicity.

American culture and being American was complicated to define. Liam said,

...I don't like feeling disconnected from my culture because that's where I'm from, that's who I am, you know. I'm slowly losing it. It's like I kind of don't want to. It's almost inevitable, if I'm in this culture, because this culture is creating a separate mindset or whatever. Where I live somewhere else, it creates a different kind of mindset and that's where culture arises from. A set amount of people thinking the same way, that's what a culture arises from. It's like I'm trying to force myself to be Laotian. I am Laotian.

The responses to questions about cultural identity and what makes them American were fascinating; because all of the comments related to the definition of being American described ideas and feelings, not physical descriptions of being an American. Samuel said, "That is kind of weird. I just think it's what you're

surrounded with it [Americanism]...” Samuel identified himself as half Hmong and half Lao, he explained that if he was completely ignorant about his cultural roots, he would feel more American, “I think I would just have to lose all of my cultural identity. Because if I don’t have a cultural identity then, I think I would feel more American.” Daniel identified himself as half Thai and half Lao,

Catholic and American:

I wouldn’t say it was hard, but I guess it did lead to, in terms of identity, it was a little confusing because not [only] am I half Thai, but then also we’re Catholic. I just remember the first time I went to Lao New Year I was 17 because I was talking to, I have some Lao friends that encouraged me to go, and I was like, ‘Oh, I’ve never been.’

Participants in this study described how they balanced between the two cultures. When asked about how they identified themselves, many of the participants chose a label with an added explanation. For example, Ethan said, “No. I live more American than anything. I’ll do the ceremonies and stuff for my family, that’s it...” Andrew said, “I would consider myself more Americanized than I am Hmong just because we were born and raised in America, and so you tend to keep more of that American tradition than Hmong.”

Second-generation Lao and Hmong Americans verbalized how their parents or others would use their natural born citizenship status as a reminder of their potential. For example, Carter recalled the feeling of his American born status as a litany to fulfill his extended family’s expectations. He said, “Uncles, aunts, not necessarily my parents, but two uncles, aunts, and others that thought we could have done better than what we were doing.” Parents would often make these comparisons to instill gratefulness in their children. Jacob said,

I won’t go get a carwash for my car, and then he’ll be like, ‘You know, I had to work for my car to the last penny and everything.’ In regards to his life in Laos, it’ll be random sometimes, but he’ll say, ‘You know, you guys are lucky, you guys have the shoes on your feet. Coz back in my day, we

didn't have shoes. You guys have your laptops and phones and things to play with. We used to just go with a stick and go and roll the tires around the village, and that was fun.' I really liked his stories, although sometimes it comes at the wrong times, when least want them.

Another participant shared how his parents expected him to know everything about America. Daniel said, "I remember, my dad would say those kinds of things and he's like, "Don't they teach you that in school?" No, Dad, they don't teach us these things at school." Noah's mom had the same expectation, "My mom says that, because she wasn't born here, but I don't really get that. It's just from her though."

The pressure to know everything about America from their parents also came from their foreign born older siblings. Jayden said, "Most of them were from Thailand. I just want to say two of my brothers and one of my sisters were born here." Hunter's siblings were also born in Thailand, "No, the last four of us are born in America. The rest are Thailand." James was the youngest of seven and the only one to be born in America. He said "I mean they would rub that to my face a lot, so I guess." He felt that his older siblings held him to impossible standards,

I felt like I was treated like I had higher expectation since I was born in America ... I heard that plenty of times like saying, you know, I have all this opportunity and just, there shouldn't be any reason I can't succeed them and you know, become better than them.

Like their parents, older siblings used the American born label as a motivational tool. James said,

It kind of motivated me, but like there's some things that I can't do that to their expectation, and it kind of bring my motivation down a little bit, that I didn't live up to their expectation, and being the only in the family born in America.

Participants used the terms like "Americanized, American society, being an American" as a way to explain culture conflicts. For example, Matthew said,

“Some people do. Nowadays, we’re more, like Americanized. It just depends on the parents, I think.” Americanized participants also picked out a favorite or preferred parent based on which one was more Americanized. Logan preferred to speak with mom over his dad, “My mom is more understanding than my dad because, my dad, he doesn’t really speak that much English. He can’t comprehend some things, but my mom totally understands, so that’s why I go to my mom more.” Participants were able to communicate better with the parent who understood the American culture more and spoke English best. Noah said, “Yeah, I told them about kinesiology and being like a sports’ therapist at a high school. But that’s all I talked to my dad about though.” When asked why he was particular about what he talked about with his dad, Noah said, “Because my mom understands more, basically. My dad is harder to communicate with.” Jayden felt that it was sometimes easier to omit information:

Many times. I was trying to tell him on Monday that I was going to this orientation, but I didn’t know how to explain it to him that it was an orientation for incoming freshman. I just said, ‘I’m going to work from 4-8 today.’

To compound the language barrier, the participants also had expectations to fulfill cultural roles.

Some participants chose to speak to their fathers over their mother for the same reason. Joseph’s father was able to assimilate to the American culture and therefore able to relate better to him. Joseph said, “My dad came here when he was 20....My dad was able to absorb a little bit of the American culture and see some of the good aspects and the bad of it.” Levi also preferred going to his dad with problems or concerns because of his open-mindedness:

I think my dad was a little bit more open minded, although I feared my dad more than I did my mom, but I think ... I think my dad was just he was the one that everyone went to, so I think I would rather go to my dad than my mom.

Participants felt some expectations to conform to cultural roles and some have rejected them. Joseph described how he felt about rules:

They expected you to act a certain way, talk a certain way, behave a certain way, know certain traditions, certain customs, speak to people properly when you meet them, greet them certain ways. Now, no I don't. I don't feel that way.

Jacob noticed how his parents have changed their expectations:

Throughout my life that's true, yes. They have been trying to get me to do traditional roles, as I am the oldest and I'm the one who's paving the way for my siblings. However, recently they've been more, not lax, but they've been more understanding of whatever I do. They've been backing off.

The ability to adjust to changing norms was characteristic of the future generation. Mason said, "In a sense, yes, but since we're in America now, there's more freedom. I think my parents try to incorporate both of those things together. I think they did really well." Participants in this study expressed more freedom to decide whether or not they want to conform to cultural expectations. Language barriers and choice has led some participants to preserve some parts of their culture while discarding less desired ones.

Cultural Preservation

The first subtheme of identity is cultural preservation. Cultural preservation are customs and traditions that the participants feel worthy of saving and passing down to future generations. The amount of cultural knowledge that a participant is able to protect depends on how much the participant himself knows. The best source for cultural preservation would be their parents. Anthony said:

I'm going to try to pass on as much as possible. I'm going to have my dad to pass on some of the history to him [inaudible]. Since I got married, I've gotten more involved with the culture and the mission that we're doing. My understanding is actually more than what I used to know when I was younger.

Problems with cultural preservation occurred when there is poor communication between them and their parents. Jack said:

I didn't know it because I'm like, 'Okay, their parents are teaching them; how come my parents can't teach me that?' Then, as I went through college, that's when I started looking into it and I started taking Asian-American classes, and really learning about my history, and learning about where we came from, and who we are, and why did we get sent here, anyway. The resources for historical knowledge is more readily available today than there was before.

Each succeeding generation can decide how much to value these cultural artifacts. Jacob said:

I feel like in my case the only way I can preserve my ethnic traditions and culture would be to inherit family heirlooms. If I have a child, teach my child the Laotian language, although it would be hard because America, we're a melting pot of ethnicities.

Gabriel said, "Yeah, I'll teach them about our roots and stuff, but if they want to follow the tradition, it's really up to them." The choice to keep or discard a traditional value is an American quality. Dylan said:

Well, first of all, I'll teach them their background, their language, their culture, [inaudible]. 'Cause I know a lot of Hmong people out there, they disagree about their culture, and religion, tradition, and all that. I mean, I kinda do, but then at the same time, I respect that, so I'll teach in that way too, like the way how I was raised. Yeah. You don't have to be this kind of person, but like how your parents want you to be, but just strive for better.

The knowledge of cultural foods and recipes was a major component for Lao and Hmong Americans. Liam said, "I can cook, but not my parent's recipes yet. I hope they don't die because, they don't die early, because I really want to keep their recipes. One thing I want to preserve." Michael said the same thing, "For sure, food." Another tradition that was more controversial was the tradition of the dowry.

Dowry, otherwise known as a "bride price," is a monetary amount that, traditionally the groom's family offered to the bride's family. This can be viewed

as insulting and some participants felt the same. For example, Oliver explained his changing view of the practice of the dowry:

When I was growing up I thought it was stupid, but as you grow older, you start to realize that it's not that you're paying for your wife, it's that your wife's coming to your family... When they help, and when you marry her, don't think you're marrying her, because it's for you, it's for the whole family and your friends. They put in that money and it gives her value. When you get things for free, you don't value that at all.

For him and for his community, the dowry represented the family's support, acceptance and recognition that this wife was not only worthy of becoming part of the family, but also that his family was honoring her too. Oliver has had to explain to a coworker that the dowry practice is a sign of respect:

I finally realized that when I was speaking to my Mexican coworkers. They have a son that's dating a Hmong girl, and they want to get married. I tell them you have to do all of that, but I keep telling them, you guys have to do it the way the Hmong's do it, where you do the [dowry] and everybody comes and helps. And you have to realize, it's not just you or your family, it's everybody that helps you getting your wife. And once you get your wife, she has value. It's not where you're just in love and you get married.

Cultural preservation was a choice that these men valued, and with the things that they valued, some men in this study also rejected.

Cultural Rejection

The second subtheme is cultural rejection. Cultural rejection is the participants resistance or refusal to maintain the cultures customs, beliefs, and traditions that they feel are unfair, passé, or invaluable. Andrew said:

The thing is with the Hmong cultural and tradition, everything is long, you go from funerals to weddings to just getting married in general, it takes a long time. The thing I would want to get rid of is the amount of time it takes in order to do it, you know?

Levi would like to change how the Hmong community's perception about moving away from the family. Levi said:

I think a lot of times, in the Hmong community, they don't want their children to move far away, or they don't want their children to travel, but the thing is, it's a big, big world out there, and you need to see it.

Jack believed that some of the first and 1.5 generation's desires to reclaim Laos need to be abandoned:

I don't know how you would consider this, but the way that the old people sort of thing, they feel like they want to go back to the old, old, the old world; they want to have their own country and so on.

Other old ways of thinking were beliefs in cultural superstitions.

Superstitions are practices and beliefs that people should or should not do to incur good/bad luck. From the Hmong culture, Oliver said,

The only thing is, I would probably leave out ... some things are just too superstitious. I have my aunt that's really superstitious, and she's like, 'Oh, you've got to do this and you have to do that.' Certain things that are just like, really? That's way too much. You know what I mean right? When they say you have to go cut the leaves and do this and get on your knees and pray in front of the stove... I would leave that out.

From the Lao culture, Benjamin said, "I would say, a lot of the superstition...I've heard something like don't sweep at night. I don't know if it's true or not, but I've heard it somewhere and I don't understand why." Cultural superstitions seem to be a way to control behavior and in the American culture of independence and autonomy, these rules are losing their place in the participants' modern lives.

Unlike the comments in support of the dowry, these men did not think that this practice should continue. Dylan said, "I will probably say the bride price. Yeah. I don't like that." When asked to defend why they do not agree with the dowry tradition, the price negotiation process and actual monetary value was the issue. Carter said,

The steps you need to do in order to get married in a Hmong wedding...I think the average now, because there's not a set number, I think it's around \$5,000. Depending on your education. So, let's just say, someone has a doctorate or Ph.D or something and, of course, the price increases.

When asked how are those couples who refused to participate in the dowry were treated in the community, Carter said, “They’re accepted, I don’t think they’re respected, but they’re accepted...Right, I mean, if you can’t provide a dowry it’s like a slap in the face to the parents.” Matthew thought that it was more of an insult to the parents and not to the younger couples. He said, “I mean, nowadays, you, people really don’t do that. Had it been back then they would, just to help out the other family... Nowadays, we’re more like Americanized. It just depends on the parents, I think.” The dowry topic and the attempt of placing a monetary value of brides lead to the next cultural rejection item, the double standard of men and women in the Lao and Hmong culture.

The double standards for men and women in the Lao and Hmong community varied from how participants were able to go out more than their sisters to how their wives were raised. Jack recalled how his sisters were treated versus how he was, “I got more privileged than the girls...They would be called on the most to do all the work, like washing dishes or cleaning or vacuuming. The boys would just be sitting there minding their own business.” The men in this study were right in the middle of a cultural transformation, where they did recognize the unfairness but can still see the reasons behind the gender inequity.

Oliver:

I would kind of change some things, not as harsh, not as strict as the way they’re treated. They’re human beings, you have to treat them like human beings. But then again, you’ve got to let them realize there are things they can’t do and the men can do, you see? They have to know [inaudible]. I’m pretty sure they do too, they’re [treated] like kids though. They’re treated that way, it’s just how life is, how gender is treated.

Participants in this study listed many things from their culture that they valued and rejected. But as they decided what to keep and what to discard, they were also altering their traditions. Traditional gender roles in the Lao and Hmong

culture were rigid and to alter, adjust, modify, or disregard them was a conscious choice to changing the culture. Some interview participants were clear on how they will raise their daughter(s). Joseph:

I get a lot of, 'You guys need to have more kids. You need to keep having kids until you have a boy. Who's going to carry on your family name? Who's going to carry on your genes.' To them, I'm just like, 'I got four kids. They're going to carry something on. I don't care if they're girls.' I feel like I'm happy with who they are. I don't care whether they're boys or girls.

Joseph's view of changing traditional gender roles was shared by many of the participants. Aiden says, "I think just the, that kind of like the gender roles. I wouldn't really pass that on." Gabriel also said,

I would totally get rid of the gender status, like how women should always be the ones to cook and clean, but then the husbands should be the ones to do this and that, I would totally get rid of that. I don't believe in that.

Anthony said, "I think probably some of the stigma... The males are predominant to women. I don't want to pass onto my son. I want him seeing each person on equal level terms and accept them for who they are." How the interview participants planned to raise their daughters was direct and clear; but what were their expectations for their partners?

Interview participants cited their parents' marriage as an example for their views on marriage and partnerships. Daniel:

I think, and it just could be my upbringing, but I feel like we were kind of rigid in terms of our beliefs. I think it's always nice to be more open to other ideas and be more adaptive [to gender roles].

Logan stated that his view on marriage was influenced by his parents. He described their relationship as more equal than the stereotype:

It's usually the husband, and then the wife is the one always cooking, cleaning, taking care of the kids and stuff like that...I think, my parents, they both like ... It should be equal. I think in their own part, they're equal. My mom handles all the financial stuff and then, my dad, he just goes out

and just work and then make money, and then my mom handles it. They always have that equal, so I think they just kind of like balance each other out.

Cultural necessity, conflicting work schedules or financial reasons created more space for their mothers and wives to redefine some of the gender roles. Their expectations for their wife/partner reflected the more American ideals of equality. Aiden said, “I would prefer it to be like an equal type of relationship where we both work, just handle each other’s [problems]. And Gabriel said, “Just expect her to do her part to help out in the relationship, help each other out when one is down and one has to pick up the other, help push the other to do better.” As the men were choosing to preserve and reject some traditions, this mentality could also be applied to their wives.

Many of the men actually described their wives as “more traditional” than them. Joseph described how his wife navigated between the cultural roles:

If she chooses to be traditional, that’s fine. Which she does carry a lot of that with her just because of the way she was raised. She knows. She’s very respectful to my parents. She’ll cook and clean for them and everything. She’s a lot more traditional than I am, but I don’t expect that.

Matthew also noted that his wife was more religious than he was, “She goes to the temple more than I do. Yeah. I just go during New Year’s-time, and just when the grandparents tell [me to].” Men in this study also felt more free to court and marry outside of their ethnicity.

The liberty to choose and marry outside of their ethnic culture brought up another interesting component of cultural preservation, such as, which culture and whose values will be dominant? If participants were in the midst of compromising between which ethnic value will supersede the other, there was no doubt of the omnipresent American culture. Alexander, who identified as Lao American, predicted how he will navigate his life with his long-term girlfriend. He hoped

that he and his girlfriend have a harmonious relationship while respecting their own ethnic values:

She's Hmong and I know that can be, like, and her family's like super religious and my mom's like, religious. I think if we were to like bear a child, I would want him or her to have, like a little bit of both worlds, but I just want them to like, I don't want them to grow up and be a like, so consumed by the Western culture to where they don't even eat papaya salad or like our home foods that we grew up with.

Michael vacillated between how much of his wife's Cambodian culture will be retained with how much of his Lao culture:

I think she'll preserve that [religion] and I think with the language, she's actually fluent in Cambodian ... so, that's the only thing her mom speaks. She will probably wanna preserve that too, but I just remember, my growing up, is that my parents would tell me, 'We're in America. Learn English. Like that's what's gonna get you these jobs and these opportunities.' And so my parents, they did speak to us in Lao, but they kind of picked up on English too. Even my grandma speaks English. You know? She understands us when we speak to her and she'll respond back in Lao to us.

Benjamin is Lao and his wife is Mien. He talked about the cultural adjustment they both went through in their marriage and still go through today:

It took me a while to get used to. She's really Americanized though. It's easy when we're together, alone, but if I ask questions when they do such certain ceremonies, or I'm trying to understand why they're doing it or what they're doing.

Ryan and his girlfriend practiced different religions. They not only have ethnic differences, but also a religious one. Ryan said, "Her family is a little more Americanized; they are Mormon. They still do some traditional Hmong things. But she's pretty Americanized." If some participants had more clarity on their cultural identity, then the definition of what exactly makes a Lao or Hmong man remains obscured.

Manhood & Masculinity

The last and third subtheme of identity is how to define a Lao or Hmong American man. Manhood signifies the end of boyhood and the start of being an adult man. Noah said, “I do, but it’s a part of growing up. Everybody, every boy has to turn into a man obviously.” When asked what are the duties of a man, Noah said,

I’ve obviously got to adapt to taking care of my litter sister and everything around the house. It’s just the man-duties I’ve got to do... Taking out the trash. Mowing the lawn. Looking after my sister. And then just the little things to help out.

Noah’s list was not ethnic specific to the definition of manhood. For some of the Lao and Hmong-American men in this study, manhood was difficult to define.

Some participants defined manhood as the ability to be not only financially stable, but also have enough money to help out the extended family. Alexander said, “Just for me to be successful and help out the family, you know.” Samuel also defined manhood in monetary terms, “Yeah definitely. I think being a man you have to ... you have to be the provider in the family. And I felt I can’t do that without getting a job.” Ryan’s journey to manhood involved several components; he said, “...but for me it’s always been finish school and then for a year or two get a good job that I can support myself and my whole family in the future, before I even start thinking about getting married.” Manhood was a clear end to their adolescent, and the beginning of adulthood. The definition for masculinity were qualities or actions that can only be performed by men.

Since his parents only had sons, Jack and his brothers did all of the household chores that were usually delegated to daughters and sisters:

A lot of my friends have sisters, and they end up in the role of the female in every family, where they have to wash dishes, they have to take care of this

and that, they have to do the womanly things, that I never even considered as womanly. I just thought that they were just chores that we had to do.

Some second-generation Lao and Hmong men in this study had difficulty with the clearly defining requirements for masculinity. James said, “I can’t even put that in words. I don’t even know what it means. I don’t even know what having a dad is.” Like James, Jayden was also the youngest in his family and he described how his birth order has affected what he learned about manhood:

Growing up, I was the baby in the family. They didn’t really teach me anything. They just babied me a lot. My mom was still giving me bottled milk when I was like four years old. It wasn’t until I hit middle school or high school they taught me what it’s like to be a man in a Hmong.

Jayden was able to get more clarity about the specific roles of a Hmong man, later in his life. Other participants in this study were able to describe the distinctive tasks that were strictly for men only.

In the Hmong culture, ceremonies that required animal slaughter were men only activities. Joseph said,

I get criticized, because I don’t always show up at family functions to do what they want, like Hmong men are traditionally supposed to wake up at like 5 or 4 in the morning, go slaughter a cow or pig, and bring it back.

Jayden was taught the same male only responsibility, “It’s either for when someone’s sick or an occasion, we cut pigs. We bring a pig from the farm and cut it. My brothers and dad, they’ll teach me how to cut the pig.” Like the Hmong culture, there were duties that were expected of Lao men, too.

In the Lao culture, one such male tradition during a funeral was to become a “temporary monk.” Lucas said, “The boys side of the family, they have to become monks. So, I had to shave all my hair, [inaudible] eyebrows like ‘Ah, no I don’t want to shave my eyebrows but I have to.’” Funerals were not the only time boys are temporary monks; they were also encouraged to enter the monastery several other times in their life. The boys were taught to read sacred scripts and

lead traditional ceremonies. The access to monasteries and willingness in America to participate in these obligatory isolation is disappearing. The achievements of higher education, attaining full time employment, and the maturity to support family were considered part of adulthood. Ceremonies that required butchering animals were also considered male only and the duty of leading cultural rituals lied solely in the realm of a man's world.

The majority of the participants felt strongly about preserving the language. Daniel would like to teach his potential children their language, "I would say language. I think for me, since I'm not so proficient in language, I think language is probably the most important part of communicating in a culture." Some participants recognized their own diminishing language proficiency. Alexander said,

Like a lot of times and it sucks because like a lot of times, I'll forget like the most simplest word, like the other day my mom she asked me if this was like pig meat and I was like, what is that. I was like, oh my goodness, how could I forget something like that? It's crazy.

Hunter wanted to teach his daughter proper Lao because he wanted to protect her from misspeaking. He said, "I'll try a little harder to put her to school for it. I don't want her learning broken Lao like I did." Hunter pointed out that in his family, he saw the diminishing ethnic language ability in his nephews and nieces:

For example, my nephew and nieces, if we speak Hmong to them, they understand very well, but they just can't speak it back, 'cause they were never really taught by their parents. They never really speak it, so that's why they don't know much.

A command knowledge of your ethnic language was intrinsic to your cultural expertise. Andrew feared the loss of language and culture:

As a new generations grows and grows in the Hmong culture and tradition loses, I'm hoping to pass that along because the Hmong language is dying and it's sad to say that you being Hmong or you being Laos or Thai

whatever, like you not being able to speak your own language, read, write, \or communicate it in, and that's the sad part...

The line between religion, culture and traditional ceremonies in both the Lao and Hmong culture were so blurred that it was difficult to separate. Dylan said,

I think there's more acceptance, 'cause the new generation like every year everything evolves. So sometimes, I get it, some old ... not old people, but the traditional people, they really want their kids to be very tradition. But for me as a newer generation, it's okay to change your religion. But I mean, you could practice your old tradition, but is there some things in your religion say that forbids you to do it, then it's okay not to do. But at the same time, you just got to respect that.

Ethan explained the ambiguity of religion and culture, "...I don't want to say they're religious, because they do the Asian, I don't know how you'd explain it. They do Asian ceremonies, but I don't think that would count as religious or not." For example, in the Lao culture house warming ceremonies include religious rites. Aiden said,

I really like a tradition where like say if you were to buy a new house, I guess the Buddhists would come over or the monks, and they would come over and like start the rituals and chants, and they would come over and I guess like splash water in our rooms and all that. That's what I really like.

Monks were not always required to be present at the housewarming ceremonies, but their presence formalized the event. However, a male presence was certainly a requirement. As the oldest son, Mason explained that as the oldest son, his responsibility was to lead the traditional ceremony at the temple and at home. He said, "I think, for example going to the Buddhist temple [to give blessings]. Yeah blessings. I think that was one, probably. Doing traditional ceremonies at home, you're kind of required to be there."

The freedom of being American and the privilege of choice in this country was both empowering and debilitating as a Lao and Hmong-American man. The further he was removed from practicing the native language and a minimal

involvement with cultural groups all contributed to the inability to lead those landmark milestones. Gabriel expressed a desire to learn how to conduct those culturally significant rituals:

I try to, I want to start learning more about the tradition stuff, like those wedding songs and stuff like that. I want to get into it more because I believe a lot of our generation, they're being too modern, Americanized, so they're start to lose all that stuff.

Even though he recognized how American he was, he also saw the conflicting ideology of both cultures. He said, "I feel like I'm more like a modern type of guy. I still want to hold onto some traditions, but then you don't want to hold onto all the old ones, you know?" For some participants who were currently learning how to lead the rituals, the fear was that the day when they would have to perform it.

Aiden was learning how to lead the traditional Lao rituals:

I don't know if I can describe this right, but I have been trying to been open up to the, I guess like leading the rituals whenever everybody would come over, like we would...With the ceremonies. Yeah. That's something that they kind of pushed me to learn.

He dreads the day when all eyes will be on him, "Right now, I'm super nervous or confused. I really don't know how to do it...No. I wouldn't say I'm fluent. I know enough to get around. I have conversations with my grandma or if any of my friends are Lao." The momentous act a Lao or Hmong man can perform to signify manhood and define masculinity was the ability to lead a cultural ceremony and perform a ritualistic tradition. However, as another interview participant explained, the choice was on them. Ryan said,

I would definitely pass down the knowledge of everything that I've learned from my parents, just to keep it alive and don't let it fade. But then I would let my kids choose if they want to practice Shamanism, Mormonism, Catholicism. I would let them choose and just pass down that same knowledge I learned from my parents and grandparents.

As many Lao and Hmong people abandoned their native religions, converted to other belief systems or simply chose to have no preference to spirituality, the need to practice these ceremonies diminished. Hunter said,

I'll probably have someone teach them about it, but I really look at my children's lives as if it is theirs because, it is their life. What if they choose to do that? But, if they choose to do something ... If they want to learn about shamanism, I will support them to help them to learn about it.

Each participant who was asked if a person could be Hmong and still hold on to their cultural beliefs, had a similar answer—yes, because they have the American freedom of choice. Dylan said, “Yeah. I think you could. I mean, it's a free world right now, or America is free.”

Summary of Results

The participant semi-structured interviews uncovered many common themes across the 28 second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men who live or have lived in California's Central Valley. All participants have lived in the Central Valley for at least 5 consecutive years and had attended K-12 or a post-secondary educational institution. All male participants were born in the US, were 18 years old or older and all of their parents or grandparents escaped the Secret War from Laos. The interview participants' level of socio-economics varied in their childhood to their current status from below the poverty line to middle-class business owners. Although their personal journeys varied, similar themes did arise from the interviews.

The five overall themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis were: a) *the Telemachus Effect*, b) *racism*, c) *environment during the formative years*, d) *educational experiences*, and e) *identity*. Table 5 summarizes the findings from the semi-structured interviews and qualitative data analysis.

Table 5

Summary of Findings

RQ #1 What are the educational experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley?

Environment During the Formative Years

- 1) Home & School
- 2) Home & School Neighborhood
- 3) Social Groups & The Gang, Crime & Trauma

Educational Experiences

- 1) English Language Acquisition
 - 2) Lost & Wandering in School, Self-Reported Reasons for Leaving and/or Further School Non-Pursuit
 - 3) Completing School and Future Aspirations
-

RQ #2 What are the cultural identity experiences of the second-generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley?

Identity

- 1) The Telemachus Effect, The Orestes Effect
 - 1) Racism, Whiteness, Being Whitewashed, Asian Tension
 - 2) Identity, Cultural Preservation, Cultural Ambivalence/Rejection, Masculinity, Gender Role Expectations
-

The second-generation of Lao and Hmong-American men grew up in homes with coexisting and conflicting cultures. Lao and Hmong-American men in this study described many qualifications that comprise of their ethnicity, but no one man was able to pinpoint a single necessity. When asked what makes a person Lao, Liam said, "The only thing I think about is the bloodline. But the question is what makes me Lao? I don't know." Daniel described most of their experiences best when he said that his childhood was a mix of varying parental education and American assimilation:

They're [his parents] similar cultures, but they're also different and their education levels are different and also their personalities are very different. I would say that they both preached traditional values. One thing constant was respect. They always taught me to be respectful and to be polite. I

would say that my mom's more on the traditional side being that my dad was a little more American, a little more, lack of a better word, modern.

The participants shared differing cultural expectations. For example, Carter felt very little obligation to fulfill those restrictions. He said, "Honestly, I've never liked it and I've never really participated in that role." While Carter felt nonconformity, Jacob felt cultural ambivalence and a disconnection. An authentic Lao or Hmong ceremony had ritual and beliefs. In order to successfully execute this pageantry, a Lao or Hmong man must have a command of their language, the knowledge of the rituals and personal desire to preserve them. Jacob said,

I do know how to say it because my parents drilled it into me to repeat after them, so I know the prayers, the whole *Namo Tassa [start of a Theravada Buddhist chant]*. Yeah, all those things. I do know it, however I don't know what I'm saying. I wish I did. I feel like if I did know what I was saying or why I was saying it, maybe I could've been a little more appreciative of Buddhism, but because it was blabber to me I might've just felt disconnected with the religion.

Jacob's opinion on the preservation of religion contrasted with Matthew's.

Matthew believed that he would preserve his family's religion, he said, "Just, in our religion, just to be fortunate and have good karma, because you know. Just, when you're good to others, you'll get that back. Just don't be like, so negative and just how our religion is brought up." Whether the men in this study identified easier with a cultural label of being Lao, Hmong, American, or a combination of these identities, their effective ability to verbalize genuine and authentic emotions were still problematic. Gabriel said,

I think a lot of us Hmong men, my generation, they're still kind of stubborn. I don't know about other people, but my group of friends, we're really open with each other, we encourage everyone to go to school. A lot of my college friends and my friends, they're all in college and they've all graduated college already. So I'm kind of like, one of the last ones. So I think that input, they've been pushing me too. But then, seeing how some other friends of mine are, they are very stubborn and they're like, oh, if they don't make it, they just make it work, they just keep working.

Within his comfort zone and inner circle, Gabriel felt safe and supported. In the dominant American culture, for many men the normalizing of expressing true vulnerability was still discouraged. Samuel said, “I think that’s just how society is. A lot of males aren’t really open about talking about their feelings and emotions.” What will Gabriel, Samuel, and other Lao and Hmong-American men do when they need access to the dominant culture of power outside of their limited network of friends?

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION/SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

There is a scarcity of academic research that addresses the particular problems of post-secondary educational experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation of Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley. Prescribed academic pathways, economic poverty, peer pressure and intergenerational conflicts are some of the issues for Southeast Asian students (Truong, 2015). The second-generation educational attainment is higher for Vietnamese and lower for Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians, when compared to African Americans; the differences between Cambodians and Laotians are not statistically significant, but the differences with respect to Hmong and Vietnamese are (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). Compounded with the trend of the last 30 years, women not only enrolled and completed 4-year degrees at higher rates than men, but also do better academically and have higher educational aspirations (Freeman, 2004).

After the abandonment of the US troops in 1975, Lao and Hmong recruits who fought for the Americans were targeted and punished from the newly found Communist Laotian party, *Pathet Lao* (Lee, 2012; Luong, 2009). The Lao and Hmong diaspora in America was rife with historically racist policies, poverty, lack of resources, and mutual mistrust by the US government and new refugees (Espiritu, 2011). Refugees who came to the U.S. after 1975 of Hmong and Lao refugees were the group that faced the harshest levels of poverty, lowest levels of education and racial strife in the U.S. and who suffered more directly from the effects of the war, political turmoil, and trauma (Han, 2005; Museus, 2013).

Asian Americans are reported in the highest income, best-educated and fastest growing racial group in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men are lumped with the blanket term of Asian American. In the 1960s, *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines printed articles on the subject of Asian American success in schools and society without excessive government assistance as a punitive tool to the other minority groups in America; the momentum of this belief stereotype as the Model Minority, an idealistic and unrealistic fable of the modern day American success story (Luong, 2009; Vue, 2008). Second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men have not attained or acquired the same levels of education as other people due to bias, stereotypes, networking access, intergenerational conflicts, social isolation, shifting family structure, poverty, mistrust of the educational system due to poor academic support, adversarial cultures, or lack of personal drive.

Current Study

The theoretical framework used to guide this study includes the overlapping of two models; Kimberle Crenshaw's explanation of the blind spot of gender and race, intersectionality and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of culture and social capital. The intent of Bourdieu's cultural and social theory was primarily for the realm of education. Currently, the theory of intersectionality includes the complexity to recognize how people can experience privilege and oppressions at the same time; scholars, policymakers and researchers must reflect on their own social and power positions to work towards social justice (Crenshaw, 1991).

Cultural and social capital theory and the theory of intersectionality allowed for a rich analysis of the participants' interviews. The blended parameters is used to better comprehend the educational experiences and cultural identity of second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in the Central Valley. Bourdieu's culture and social capital theory applies to how one group perpetuate success inherited from the previous group (culture), the acquisition of status (social),

combined with the lens of intersectionality, directs focus to the blind spot of gender and race, are used in this study as the theoretical framework to view the challenges of second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with exploratory questions that addressed educational experiences, cultural identity, motivators and barriers to education, and factors that motivate or limit life choices (Angrosino, 2005; Saldana, 2012). Open coding was the first cycle; axial coding is the second cycle of that included contrasting and comparing analysis. The researcher then moved to selective coding for an overall explanation of the emergent theories. Each participant was chosen because he is a second-generation Lao or Hmong-American man who live or have lived in California's Central Valley for at least 5 consecutive years.

Participants attended a K-12 school or enrolled in a post-secondary institution in the Central Valley. At the time of the interviews, their age ranged between 18 to 39 years old. All of their experiences were self-reported. The personal interviews were conducted at various coffee houses, Fresno State library, Fresno City College, and over the phone. The interviews spanned between the months of May to October 2017. Due to limitations such as convenience sampling and small participant size, results may not be generalized and should be interpreted cautiously.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The following summary and discussion of findings contain results of the study from 28 second generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley. The researcher found that all participants experienced various levels of socio-economics during their formative years and into adulthood, that all participants' family dynamics were a blend of ethnic and cultural traditions along

with values and influences from the mainstream culture. Five main themes emerged, which are: a) *the Telemachus Effect*, [subtheme the Orestes Effect b) *racism*, [subthemes whiteness/ being whitewashed, Asian tension c) *environment during the formative years [crime & trauma]*, d) *educational experiences [lost & wandering in school, educational persistence, support and alternatives to college]* and e) *American born identity [cultural preservation, cultural rejection, manhood & masculinity]*.

Research Question 1- Educational Experiences

1. What are the educational experiences of second generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley?

The emergent themes that addressed their educational experiences from this study were: The Telemachus Effect, Racism, Environment During the Formative Years, and Identity. The research asked the 28 interview participants similar questions, in one-on-one interviews, to determine what their educational experiences were. Because of the exploratory of the semi-structured interview questions about what their educational experiences were, here are the types of questions that were asked:

- 1) *Do you know your parent's education level?*
- 2) *What did your parents do for a living?*
- 3) *Are your parents still alive?*
- 4) *What is your current employment?*
- 5) *Describe your high school experience.*
- 6) *Did you go to college?*
- 7) *What was your major in college?*
- 8) *If you could re-do college, what would you change?*
- 9) *How many of your siblings have college degrees?*

Research Question 2- Cultural Experiences

2. What are the cultural experiences of second generation Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley?

The emergent themes that addressed their cultural experiences from this study were: The Telemachus Effect, Racism, Environment During the Formative Years and Identity. Some examples of the semi-structured interview questions were exploratory and some questions needed to be adjusted during the interviews. Some of the questions asked about their cultural experiences were:

- 1) *What brought you and your family to the Central Valley?*
- 2) *What is your response when/if people ask about your culture or ethnicity?*
- 3) *Do you know your parent's immigration story/history?*
- 4) *Are you married? Do you have children?*
- 5) *How many brothers and sisters do you have?*
- 6) *How many of your brothers and sisters were born in America?*
- 7) *Do you think your parents raised the boys differently from the girls?*
- 8) *Because you were born in America, did your parents have higher expectations of you?*
- 9) *Have you encountered or experienced racism in your life?*
- 10) *Have you encountered or experienced racism from within your own ethnic group?*
- 11) *What cultural beliefs, practices, or traditions would you preserve for future generations?*
- 12) *What cultural beliefs, practices, or traditions would you disregard for future generations?*

Implications for Future Practice

The data and statistics for the Lao and Hmong American men do not reflect the potential achievements for these second or third generation group. The numbers are based on the first and 1.5 generation. Southeast Asians are a relatively recent group to the United States, their native-born population may be construed as the second generation because there has not been sufficient time for any third generation to be represented in the age group (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). The third and future generation of Lao and Hmong-Americans have different attitudes toward mainstream America and they view resources as their right as Americans, unlike the previous generations. There is ingenuity and individualism based in American values that can be combined or blended with the communal collective traditions of their ethnic culture. These two philosophies do not have to conflict, they can complement each other. The researcher suggests the following for future practice: (1) Supplemental Instruction Model for Educational Support; (2) Creating employment experience and opportunities, like community service, internships along with degrees; (3) Mentor and Networking for Workforce Support; and (4) Internships and Skilled Trade Experiences/ Support.

Future Research

There is a need for more recent and in depth, nationwide data and research for second or third generation Lao and Hmong-American men in America (Texas, Minnesota, or other heavily populated areas). The Southeast Asian Americans in current research are indisputably second-generation because they are too young to be third generation particularly since immigration from Southeast Asia is recent (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). The scarcity of research on the second-generation of men leads to the necessary study of second generation Lao and Hmong-American women in the Central Valley (or nation) to add to the body of current literature.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were time, participant willingness to express themselves or talk about their successes and failures, participants' unwillingness to discuss illegal means of money, and embarrassment because of expected cultural norms. Other limitations such as convenience sampling and small sample size results may not be generalizable and should be interpreted with caution. Another limitation was the researcher's gender, researcher's interpretations of responses/data, confusing questions/misleading questions/unintentional insensitivity, and interviewees' mistrust of the researcher's intent. All data and experiences were self-reported.

Conclusions

The five main emergent themes from this study were: a) *the Telemachus Effect*, [the Orestes Effect] b) *racism*, [subthemes whiteness/ being whitewashed, Asian tension c) *environment during the formative years [crime & trauma]*, d) *educational experiences [lost & wandering in school, educational persistence, support and alternatives to college]* and e) *American born identity [cultural preservation, cultural rejection, manhood & masculinity]*. The second generation of Lao and Hmong American men in California's Central Valley do have aspirations and life goals that are shaped by their cultural history, their environment during the formative years, by their social circles and by their educational attainment and research that indicates that children of immigrants tend to have higher educational aspirations (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). Their American born identity advocates individualism, personal pursuits of happiness and of life fulfillment are sometimes at odds with the communal parent and sometimes their ethnic cultural traditions.

Second generation Southeast-Asian Americans are a relatively small portion of the overall Asian American racial category, but they clearly represent socioeconomic diversity including several that tend to be disadvantaged, they are not a homogenous group (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007). Some second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in this study, were able to recognize and nurture support from outside of their families, but support from their nuclear family is an affective motivational factor. The aspirations of Lao American students are highly influenced by their parents and they also place a high value on the advice of extended family members (Phommasa, 2016). Some of them have made connections and used their networking skills to their advantage. Through their schools, friends or employment, these men have either pushed themselves out of their comfort zones or stayed buried under the weight and pressure of their environment.

The first and 1.5 generation's successes' were due to who they were related to and some of the interviewees felt that the previous generation's achievements' overshadowed them and also inspired them. The men in this study have the chance to launch themselves out of the shadow of previous generations or peers if they choose to further their education. If some of the participants' families were limited because of a strict culture, the need for family connections' to advancement and/or the exclusion for education, the second generations and future generations of Lao and Hmong Americans could be freed from them. Their American-born identity and freedom to choose allows for the future generations to decide how to *be* Lao and Hmong American. Liam epitomized the American optimism and cultural respect best when he described his dichotomous and simultaneously harmonious cultural identity. He said,

The first time, ever. When I went to Laos, I was thinking to myself, community of my motherland. I'm gonna see where my parents were brought up. I was gonna see the culture that's within me. But when I went, I realized the culture that I was born in, which was the American culture, I realized I had Lao skin, but I was an American kid. And I really felt that when I was in Laos. So it was really interesting. I was really blessed to have gone there, and have my parents take me.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Study on the Educational Experiences and Cultural Identity of Second Generation Lao and Hmong-American Men in California's Central Valley

You are being asked to take part in a research study of the educational goals and cultural identity of second generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley. You have been selected due to your enrollment in a specific course, enrollment in a university, membership in a specific student organization, and/or connection to the Central Valley. Please read over this form carefully. If you have any questions, please ask them before participating in the interview.

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic experiences and cultural identity of the second-generation Lao and Hmong-American men in California's Central Valley. In doing so, this study may help educators, stakeholders, and the community gain a better understanding of how to support and address the academic needs of future Lao and Hmong-American men college students.

If you agree to take part in this study, I will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your academic and cultural experiences, your family, views on education, and personal perspectives on your ethnic culture and your "American" culture. The interview will take between 30 minutes to an hour to complete. With your permission, I would also like to audio-record the interview.

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. If you find yourself uncomfortable with any of the interview questions, you may choose not to answer it.

There are no benefits to you. However, your participation in this study will greatly assist in contributing to the fields of Southeast Asian studies, education, and anthropology. Because your participation and your time is greatly valued, you will be compensated with a \$5 gift card to Starbucks.

In participating in an interview, all of your responses will remain **confidential**.

The records of this study will be kept private. Should there be a need to publically report any research information, any information that could possibly identify you will be removed. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. The transcription process will take approximately one month.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your enrollment in the course, your enrollment in your school, or your membership within your student organization. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions, the researcher is Chai Phannaphob. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Chai Phannaphob at cphannaphob@mail.fresnostate.edu.

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

Study on the Educational Goals of Second Generation Lao and Hmong-American Men College Students in California's Central Valley

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed)

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Question #1 What brought you and your family to the Central Valley?

Interview Question #2 What is your response when/if people ask about your culture or ethnicity?

Interview Question #3 Do you know your parent's immigration story/history?

Interview Question #4 Do you consider yourself to be religious?

Interview Question #5 Are you married? Do you have children?

Interview Question #6 How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Interview Question #6 How many of your brothers and sisters were born in America?

Interview Question #6 Do you think your parents raised the boys differently from the girls?

Interview Question #9 Because you were born in America, did your parents have higher expectations of you?

Interview Question #10 Do you know your parent's education level?

Interview Question #11 What did your parents do for a living?

Interview Question #12 Are your parents still alive?

Interview Question #13 What is your current employment?

Interview Question #14 Describe your high school experience.

Interview Question #15 Did you go to college?

Interview Question #16 What was your major in college?

Interview Question #17 What does your spouse/partner do?

Interview Question #18 If you could re-do college, what would you change?

Interview Question #19 Do you have many people who are dependent upon you?

Interview Question #20 How many of your siblings have college degrees?

Interview Question #21 Have you encountered or experienced racism in your life?

Interview Question #22 Have you encountered or experienced racism from within your own ethnic group?

Interview Question #23 Have you ever traveled outside of the US? Where and why did you choose to go there?

Interview Question #24 Do you have any interest in visiting Laos/Southeast Asia?

Interview Question #25 Would you visit Laos/Southeast Asia as a historian or as a tourist?

Interview Question #26 What cultural beliefs, practices, or traditions would you preserve for future generations?

Interview Question #27 What cultural beliefs, practices, or traditions would you disregard for future generations?

APPENDIX C: SUPPLEMENTAL INTERVIEW LAO AMERICAN MAN

Grayson-Dissertation Interview Notes 07/06/17

8:37PM

After the audio-recording portion of the interview, the participant said the following:

“When you’re home, you don’t notice [i.e. your own poverty], but when you do experience school life, you see it. You notice it.”

“You look at where you live.”

“The military now is softer. More PC [i.e. Politically Correct].”

Grayson was in the military from September 2002-2017.

“Mindset change” in the military, “You don’t see people as people.”

Grayson recalls the most recent encounter of racism in a road trip in Southern California, when he and his brother stopped to get gas. He recalls a truck of white guys yelling out of their truck s at them, “Fucking Gooks!”

Another incident that the Grayson felt racial tension was when he was in Tennessee and they stopped in a diner for food and remembers the “tense stares” and “eyes that followed” him. He entered and immediately left because of “that feeling.”

Grayson has two siblings. His brother is the oldest, then his sister, then him. He is the youngest of 3.

His older brother, is unmarried and has one daughter. He is also not involved in his life, was not very involved (that he recalls) in his childhood.

His older sister has health problems and a child with health problems that keep her from being actively involved in the care of their ailing mother.

Grayson recalls growing up in his family with the environment of “The Good Enough” mentality. Dreams and aspirations were for “others” and whatever accomplishments that the children reach were “good enough.” “Above minimum was seen as ‘success.’”

Grayson recalls negative experiences with the ESL (English Language Learner) /testing procedures- “...those classes.”

He passed the ESL classes, only to be re-tested the next year. He felt, “It’s better to lie on the ESL survey” and say that English was your first language than suffer through the hassle and embarrassment of being tested or designated as an ESL student.

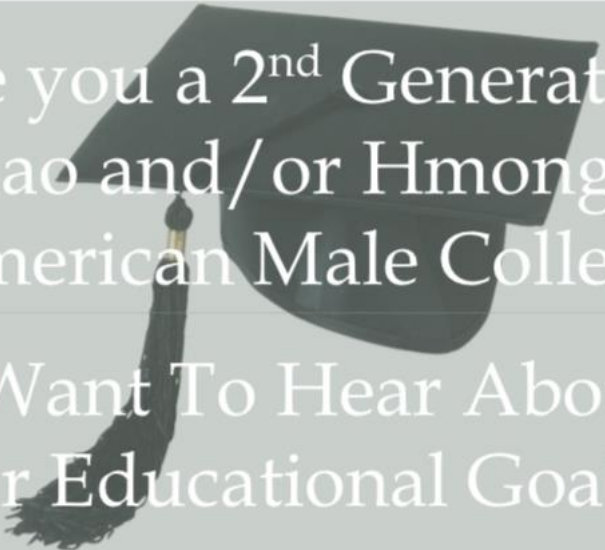
Grayson remembers that his older sister was the family translator, which his parents took full advantage of and allowed his parents to heavily depend on her rather than learn English for themselves. Parents weren’t motivated to conquer the language.

Grayson feels that the future generation should, “at the very least [preserve] the language. The language should be maintained.”

“A lot of the kids are ‘Americanized.’”

Grayson opinion on Buddhism: “Do what I’ve learned out of respect [for the culture, elders].”

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT RESEARCH FLYER



Are you a 2nd Generation
Lao and/or Hmong-
American Male College
I Want To Hear About
Your Educational Goals...

Seeking participants who are:

- Currently enrolled in a community college, undergraduate or graduate program
- Can participate in a 30-60 minute interview

Doctoral student Ms. Chai Phannaphob is conducting a research study exploring the educational goals, and unique experiences and perspectives of 2nd Lao and Hmong-American males in the higher education system.

For more information, please contact:
cphannaphob@mail.fresnostate.edu