Hmong Students in Higher Education

ANALYZING PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS, FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

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INTRODUCTION

Hmong Students in American colleges are consistently learning how to navigate the obstacles of higher education. Hmong Students may experience additional challenges common to those shared by students who have low socioeconomic status, belong to ethnic minorities and/or are first generation college students (Xiong & Lam, 2013). Previous research has shown that the quality of relationship and communication between the students with their parents, and cultural identity are influential factors that affect the experiences of first generation students in higher education (Hall & Schap, 2018; Oh & Fulgini, 2010; Tannenbaum, 2000). Little attention has been given to how these factors—family communication patterns and cultural identity—may be associated, nor have Hmong students been asked to participate in a definition of what success on the university level means to them.

Our study served to answer the following two research questions:

RQ 1: Are Hmong students’ perceptions of success in life in general associated with a) Family Communication Patterns (FCP) b) Cultural Identity?

RQ 2: Are Hmong Students’ perceptions of success in college associated with a) FCP b) Cultural Identity?

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

For our study, we surveyed Hmong students in higher education across a variety of Midwestern universities to identify what success means to them and what factors have contributed or taken away from their experiences in higher education. To measure family communication patterns, we used the Revised Family Communication Patterns Scale by Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990). The Cortes, Rogler, and Malagayad Bicultural Scale (CRM-BS) was used to analyze a student’s strength with cultural identity (host culture versus original culture). We asked open-ended questions about how a Hmong student’s perception of success in general and success in college would be, and identified key themes throughout the responses we received.

To measure these variables, participants answered questions to measure FCP and Original Culture/Host Culture. FCP proved to be reliable, α = .87. M = 4.13, SD = 1.03. Samples of questions used to measure the orientation of FCP included:

- I can talk to my family about conflicts that arise at school.
- My family tries to avoid confrontations with each other rather than discussing the issues.
- When I have conversations with my family, everyone’s thoughts and opinions are heard.

To measure Cultural Identity, we used a series of survey questions from the Cortes, Rogler, and Malagayad Bicultural Scale (CRM-BS) to measure how participants identified with their original culture (Hmong culture) vs. Host culture (American culture). The CRM-BS reliability results, for Original Culture (OC), α = .80.82, M = 180.64, SD = 4.75, and for Host Culture (HC), α = .74, M = 178.09, SD = 3.80.

Sample questions used to measure Original Culture:
- How much do you enjoy speaking Hmong?
- How important will it be for your children to have Hmong friends?
- How proud are you of being Hmong?

Sample questions that measured Host Culture:
- How much do you enjoy mainstream American TV programs?
- How much do you enjoy English?
- How important will it be for your children to have mainstream American friends?

To code our data results from our open-ended question, we coded each response into themes, and the initial analysis resulted in twenty-five different responses for variable 1: General success in life, and twenty-six different responses for variable 2: Success in college. Using Constant Comparative method and based in Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), we were able to collapse the categories until we ended up with four themes for variable 1 and variable 2.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although there were no significant correlations found between perception of success in life and FCP and OC, data from the open-ended questions provide foundational knowledge about how Hmong students define success in academics and in life. Examining the themes that were most frequently recurring, in definitions of general success, happiness was most often defined as success, with monetary goals and values coming in second. When it comes to collegiate success, the most frequent theme was theme 2, doing what needs to be done to complete the college. The next most frequent recurring, in definitions of general success, happiness was most often included: Being financially stable, happiness, being content with life, happy with job, and having the ability to give back to their communities.

RQ1: Are Hmong students’ perceptions of success in life in general associated with a) Family Communication Patterns (FCP) b) Cultural Identity?

We found that for our first research question, there was no significance in correlation between perception of General life success, FCP, and Cultural Identity. However for RQ 2, a Pearson correlation revealed that there was a significant correlation between Hmong students’ perception of success in college, and original culture, r = .31, p < .05. A single samples T-test revealed no significant difference between groups (themes).

From our open-ended questions asking about how Hmong students define academic success, as well as success in general, we found that there were many recurring themes. Using the constant comparison method, we were able to collapse these into four themes for each variable.

Variable 1: Defining general success. Sample responses in this theme included: Being financially stable, happiness, being content with life, happy with job, and having the ability to give back to their communities.

Variable 2: Defining success in college. These broke down into two categories, distinguishing future vs. present goals contributing to success at the collegiate level, then further breaking into two more subcategories and coded shown in figure 4. Sample responses included: Receiving good grades, finding yourself, understanding strengths and weaknesses, making close friends, networking, and growing as a person.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS:

A Pearson correlation test showed no correlation between FCP and Host Culture, but we found that there was a significant correlation between Original Culture (OC) and FCP r = .41, p < .04 (See Table 3). Further examination revealed that those who provided answers fitting in theme 4 scored higher on OC. Theme four consisted of responses pertaining to future aspirations, such as positively contributing back to communities, and making a strong impact on people, shown in figure 3.

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SOURCES


