

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 & Scharp, 2018; Oh & Fuligni, 2010; Tannenbaum, 2005). 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:

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

RQ2: Are Hmong Students' perceptions of success in college associated with a.) FCP b.) Cultural Identity?

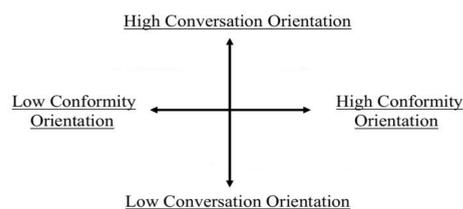


Figure 1: Family Communication Pattern Scale

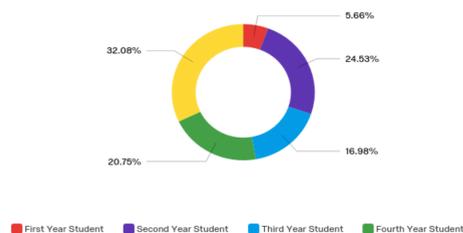


Figure 2: Demographics

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 Malgaday Bicultural Scale (CRM-BS) was used to analyze a student's strength with cultural identity (host culture vs. original culture). We asked open-ended questions to analyze what 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, $\alpha = .87$, $M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.03$.

Samples of questions that we 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 Malgaday 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), $\alpha = 80.82$, $M = 180.64$, $SD = 4.75$, and for Host Culture (HC), $\alpha = .74$, $M = 178.09$, $SD = 3.80$.

Sample questions used to measure Original Culture:

- How much do you enjoy speaking Hmong?
- How important will it be to you 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 speaking English?
- How important will it be to you 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.

RESULTS

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, $r = -.31$, $p < .05$. An individual 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.

	Themes	N
1	Joy	25
2	Monetary Value	12
3	Self-Actualization	2
4	Future Aspirations	9

Table 1: Coding/frequencies for defining general success

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 own strengths and weakness, 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, $r = .41$, $p < .01$ (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.

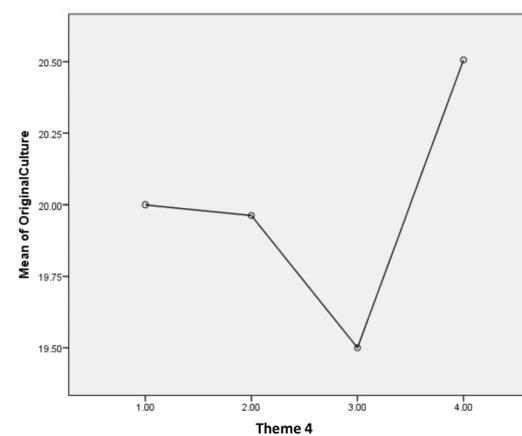


Figure 3: General Success, Theme 4, by Original Culture



	Themes	N
1	To Give Back to their Communities	6
2	Actions taken needed to complete College	28
3	Building network and Relationships	7
4	Future Personal Aspirations	6

Table 2: Coding/frequencies for defining success in college

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although there were no significant correlations found between perception of success in life and FCPs and OC, data from the open-ended questions provides 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 their education. This involved getting good grades, obtaining their degree and being actively involved in classes. This shows that Hmong students tend to prioritize educational goals over other aspects of academics, such as relationships and extra-curricular activities/involvement, and are more focused in the present. This reflects a mentality focused on what it takes now, to get where I want to be tomorrow. Responses from general success in life indicates that "happiness" was the most important in terms of defining success. Although monetary aspects comes in second in how Hmong students define success, most responses indicated that money is not the absolute solution to happiness, and not the definitive measurement of what success means to them.

Future studies

- Researchers could examine Hmong student's perceptions of success and the influence by parental generations.
- Research could also control for self-efficacy as it relates to Hmong students' conceptualizations of success.
- Hmong student's perceptions of success and generational influence could be examined for a more nuanced understanding of how these are associated.

Limitations

- Our study focused on Midwestern Universities but could be open to more Universities outside the Midwest to collect more information.

		Correlations		
		FCP	OriginalCulture	HostCulture
FCP	Pearson Correlation	1	.373*	.235
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006	.090
	N	53	53	53
OriginalCulture	Pearson Correlation	.373*	1	.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006		.857
	N	53	53	53
HostCulture	Pearson Correlation	.235	.025	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.090	.857	
	N	53	53	53

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Pearson Correlation for FCP, OC, and HC

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