

The Lived Experience of Second-Generation Hmong American Teen Mothers: A
Phenomenological Study

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Dedication

To all the brave, strong, and loving young mothers who push through the daily struggles of motherhood. And to family and friends who stood by their side.

Abstract

Research and literature tend to focus on racial groups other than Asian Americans due to their relatively statistically low teen pregnancy rates. This study aims to contribute to that gap by examining the lived experience of five second-generation Hmong American teen mothers. Using a phenomenological approach, the study found that most participants were culturally but not legally married, thus they are not counted in the statistics on teen marriages. Although participants were still teenagers, they considered themselves adults once they were culturally married and/or became mothers. In addition to carrying the responsibilities associated with the roles of wife and mother, they added another significant role in the Hmong culture—that of daughter-in-law. However, even with these demands, most participants had completed high school and were planning to pursue post-secondary degrees. Findings from the lived experiences of the participants in this study contribute to a more culturally nuanced understanding of teen motherhood and marriage and provide insights into the support that Hmong teen mothers need to be successful.

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Introductions

Teenage pregnancy has long been a part of American history (Child Trends Fact Sheet, 2010). Of countries in the industrialized world, the United States has the highest teenage pregnancy and birth rates (Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook, 2009). Based on the 2010 U.S. Census, the National Vital Statistic Report (Martin et al., 2012) states that there has been a decrease in teen pregnancy among all race groups over time, with a decrease of 10% in 2010. Thus, the current rate of 29.4 birth rates per 1,000 females ages 15-19 is the lowest teen birth rate reported in the United States in 70 years (Office of Adolescent Health, 2014). Teen parents often live in low-income household, and are less likely to have the financial resources and support they need when they have their child. They are more likely to be dependent on public assistance once they have their child (Child Trends Fact Sheet, 2010; Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook, 2009). Based on the National Vital Statistic Report (Martin et al., 2012) and Office of Adolescent Health (2014) Hispanic teens (ages 15-19) have the highest birth rate, followed by African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, White, and finally Asian American/Pacific Islander (Martin et al., 2012).

Teen pregnancy has not only declined continuously for all racial groups, but ethnic groups (Center for Health Statistics, 2007; Office of Adolescent Health, 2014; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2013a). Most of the teens that give births today are age 18 and older, and in 2012, 72% of the teen births that occurred were to teens aged 18-19 and older (Office of Adolescent Health, 2014; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2013b; The National

Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2013a). About 82% of the teen pregnancies were unplanned. Nearly 89% of the teen births occurred outside of marriage and one out of the five births occurred to teens who already had more than one baby (Beers & Hollo, 2009; Mincieli et al., 2007; Office of Adolescent Health, 2014; Children and adolescent, 2004; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2013a). Most of the births to teen mothers, regardless of race and ethnicity, are first births, with 83% of all births to teens in 2012 being first birth (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2013a).

Birth rates are particularly higher among Hispanic (46.3 births per 1,000 female teens) and African American (43.9 births per 1,000 female teens) teens than among Caucasian (20.5 births per 1,000 female teens) teens (Office of Adolescent Health, 2014; Children and adolescent, 2004). Regardless, the Hispanic birth rate had the most dramatic decline in recent rates (Office of Adolescent Health, 2014). In 2007, the Hispanic birth rate was almost three times the birth rate of Caucasians (75.3 compared with 27.2 births per 1,000 teens). In 2012, the gap between both groups closed to just two times the rate in 2012 (46.3 compared with 20.5 per 1,000 teens) (Child Trends, 2013).

Unlike other groups, from 1991 to 2012, the Asian/Pacific Islanders birth rate for teens aged 15-19 declined by 64%, from 27.3 births per 1,000 teens in 1991 to 9.7 births per 1,000 teens in 2012 (Child Trends, 2013; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2013a). Compared to teen birth rate for all teens, the rate was three times the birth rate for Asian/Pacific Islanders in 2012 at 29.4 births per 1,000

teens. The birth rates among Asian/Pacific Islanders are so low that they are often excluded from analysis (Child Trends, 2013).

According to the Daily Planet (Folker, 2012), Minnesota reported that it has one of the lowest teen birth rates in the nation, but the birth rate for Asian teens is three times the national average. Specific research on Asian American/Pacific Islander teen mothers is limited compared to other races, but even more rare are rates for Asian American subgroups, specifically the Hmong. Due to the lack of data, subgroups like the Hmong are not tracked at a national or state level (Folker, 2012).

An additional challenge to understand the scope of the teen marriage and pregnancy situation is that because many Hmong marry culturally but not legally, marriages are not registered officially and therefore those reports most likely underestimate the incidence of Hmong marriages (Hmong National Development, 2013; Xiong, personal communication, April 11, 2013). Further, there has been no large scale study looking at Hmong teen marriages since the early years of Hmong migration to the U.S. (Hmong National Development 2004; Vang & Bogenschutz, 2011).

According to Vang and Bogenschutz (2011), Hmong teenage pregnancy is largely a result of early marriage; the two are inextricably linked. However, most research focuses almost exclusively on early marriages of first-generation Hmong Americans, neglecting a focus on the closely related phenomenon of teen pregnancy and subsequent teen parenthood. This study aimed to address that gap by focusing on the lived experiences of Hmong teen mothers. Teen mothers in this study were second-generation Hmong Americans under age 21 who are currently attending high school. Using a

phenomenological approach, this research explored the following question: What is the lived experience of teen mothers of second-generation Hmong Americans?

Literature Review

It is important to understand a bit of the history and social organization of the Hmong people as a context for the current study. Therefore, the first section of this literature review will describe pertinent aspects of the Hmong culture that relate to the study. Then corresponding literature on teen marriage and teen parenthood will be reviewed.

The Journey of the Hmong People in Minnesota

The Hmong, also known as Miao is a group of people whose origins are not known. They were first mentioned in China's recorded history between the sixth and eleventh centuries BC (Dekun, 1991). After decades of conflicts with the Chinese, the Hmong fled to many of the neighboring countries such as Laos around the mid-1800 (Duffy, 2004). In 1960 while residing in Laos, the Hmong were recruited by the United States Central Intelligent Agency (CIA) into the secret war against the communist Pathet Lao and the communist Viet Minh during the Vietnam War (Duffy, 2004; Leet etc., 2006; Lee & Tapp, 2010). In return for their involvement, the United States government promised to provide assistance to the Hmong if the war was lost (Duffy, 2004). In 1973, the United States withdrew from Laos, leaving the Hmong to fend for themselves in the midst of extreme danger due to threat of the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh to kill all American allies (Duffy, 2004; Lee & Tapp, 2010).

The Hmong followed a significant military leader to refugee camps in Thailand (Duffy, 2004). Eventually they were resettled as refugees in the United States and other countries (Her & Buley-Meissner, 2012).

Hmong Family and Clan Structure

Clans. All Hmong belong to a clan which is a network of relatives that form their social organizational structure. There are 18 Hmong clans, one representing each last name in the community. All members in a clan have the same last name, whether they attain membership through birth or marriage. Marriages between clans build their faith and relationship with one another (Cha, 2010; Thao, 1986). Clan membership serves as a significant identity marker for the Hmong (Cha, 2010; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Moua, 2003).

Families. Keeping with their traditional patriarchal family norms, Hmong men serve as head of the household, making all decisions for their families and for the larger community. Males carry the family line and perform rituals (Cha, 2010; Lee & Napp, 2010). Women must respect all men, not just their husbands and fathers. Elders also have high status so older Hmong men have the final say (Cha, 2010).

Hmong Marriages

In order to understand teenage pregnancy and why it occurs and is widely accepted in the Hmong community, teenage marriage must be understood within the Hmong culture (Lee et al., 2006). Traditionally while the Hmong still lived in Laos, the age of marriage was under the age of 18, but as young as 13 for girls (Donnelly, 1994; Lee et al., 2006; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Moua, 2003). Due to high infant mortality and the need for helping hands in the family and on the farm, early marriage was viewed as

legitimate (Hmong National Development, 2004). The primary goal of marriage was to have children, commonly beginning right after the couple wed (McNall et al., 1994; Thao, 1986).

Marriage is about kinship and bringing clans together. Therefore it is a taboo for a Hmong person to marry someone with the same last name, but acceptable for first cousins with different last names to marry one another (Cha, 2010; Hendricks et al., 1986; Her & Buley-Meissner, 2012; Lee et al., 2006; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Moua, 2003). As a collective group of people, the need to maintain social harmony and save face is very important to the Hmong. Losing face not only affects the individual, but their whole family and clan. This is important to understanding why teen marriage is not heavily discouraged and has become normative, due to fear of disturbing the cultural norms. Losing face is also very important when it comes to understanding marriage, specifically involving the initiation of marriage (Lee et al., 2006).

There are several ways to initiate a marriage in the Hmong culture. The majority of them are very simple. The first way is arranged marriages, often cross-cousin marriages (practice of exogamy). Second is mutual consent, where the couple requests permission to marry and have the approval of both parents (preferred way by Hmong parents); this is considered the honorable way. The third way is bride capture, where the groom and his friends grab and force the girl into his home (Cha, 2010; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Liamputtong, 2002; Moua, 2003; Thao, 1986).

The fourth way is forced marriage, where a man is forced to marry a woman because she is pregnant, was out late with her, or was caught in the act of doing

something inappropriate to the woman (Cha, 2010; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Liamputtong, 2002; Moua, 2003; Vang & Bogenschutz, 2011). The last way is elopement, where the bride and groom run away together (to the groom's house) (Cha, 2010; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Moua, 2003; Thao, 1986). Elopement costs less money and is often initiated by couples whose parents may not approve of their relationship (Thao, 1986).

In elopement, parents of the groom can refuse to accept the bride and not perform the chicken blessing, the traditional welcoming ritual of the bride to the family when the groom brings the bride home, but that can complicate things later on with the bride's family during the wedding (Lee & Tapp, 2010). Once the chicken blessing is performed and the bride enters the house of the man's, there is no going back; this initiates the wedding (Cha, 2010). If the bride's parents try to bring the bride back home, that will complicate the relationship between both families. This goes for the groom's parents if they do not perform the chicken blessing. Any wrong steps by either family can lead to a feud between both families and clans. Individuals and parents may discourage early marriage, but they fear being singled out for causing social disharmony (Lee et al., 2006).

The Hmong people view marriage as a life transition and major milestone in the identity development of Hmong adolescents, specifically for Hmong female adolescents (Liamputtong, 2002; Vang & Bogenschutz, 2011). Marriage is the transition to adulthood, but having children signifies true maturity (Donnelly, 1994). The day a woman leaves her home to become a part of her husband's family, she is no longer part of her father's clan, but now belongs to her husband's clan (Hendricks et al., 1986).

Hmong couples most likely reside with the husband's family, including brothers, their wives, and children for the first few years of their marriage, until they can afford to live on their own (Hillmer, 2010; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Moua, 2003).

Background on Teen Mothers

A number of studies suggest that the negative outcomes of teen mothers and their child(ren) are not because of their age, but because of their disadvantages prior to becoming a mother (Fessler, 2003; Geronimus, 2003; SmithBattle, 2000; Turley, 2003). Hillis et al. (2004) and Pillow (2004) found that many teen mothers reported childhood adversities such as abuse and school disruption. Beers and Hollo (2009) found teen pregnancy to be associated with many interpersonal and environmental factors, such as: a lack of relationship between parents and child, lack of parental monitoring, family and community disorganization and disruption, the characteristic of parents, and not having positive peers. Pregnant teens also reported struggling with their parents' divorce (Hanna, 2001).

Teen mothers' home environments and family relationships, particularly relationships with their parents influence them. According to Holcombe et al. (2009) and the Office of Adolescent Health (2014), teens whose parents were still together when they were 14 years old had a lower likelihood of being a teen mother compared to teens from single parent households. Studies also showed that teens from low-income families are much more likely than their high-income family counterparts to be teen mothers (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003). At the same time, teens who come from families with great communication and parent-teen relationships are much less likely to

be sexually active at a young age and become teen mothers (Beers & Hollo, 2009). The Institute for Children and Poverty (2003) reported that more than half of the teen mothers in their study reported a negative relationship with their parents and stressed the lack of a positive role model within their family. As a result, they sought companionship elsewhere and became sexually active at a young age.

Studies have also shown that adolescents whose mothers gave birth as teens and/or had a high school diploma were more likely to have a child before the age of 20 than those teens whose mothers were older when they gave birth and had more than a high school diploma (Office of Adolescent Health, 2014; Holcombe et al., 2009; Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003). Teens who lived in single parent households and those whose families were of lower socio-economic status were at an increased risk of being a teen mother (Holcombe et al., 2009). Although teen mothers are from various cultural backgrounds, but they are mainly ethnically non-Caucasian (Geronimus, 2003).

Marriage

A majority of teen births occur outside of marriage to teens of all racial and ethnic groups. But for those who do marry, their marriages tend not to last (Holcombe et al., 2009). According to Child Trends (2004), teen marriage is rare in society today and short-lived (Kershaw, 2008). Compared to 1975 when many teens aged 15-19 married, only 2.5% of teens had ever been married in 2002. Only 20% of teen births occur within marriage and marriage is unlikely to occur with younger teens and among those teens that have a child. Teens mothers are unlikely to marry the father of their child(ren), and those who do marry, end up in unstable short-lived marriages (Child Trends, 2004).

About 18% of first time mothers aged 15-19 were married when they had their child, while 27% of 15-19 years old mothers who have at least two children had them within marriage. Only one in fourth births to older teen mothers was within marriage. Only 11.5% of teen mothers aged 15-19 were married when they gave birth, compared with 24.2% of older teens aged 18-19 who were married when they gave birth (Child Trends, 2004). According to Child Trends (2004), teens who marry have higher rates of divorce than older couples; they are two to three times more likely than people age 25 years and older (Kershaw, 2008). One of three teen marriages that occur before the teen mother is 18 year old likely will end in divorce in five years, and within 10 years, almost half of the teen marriages will dissolve (Child Trends, 2004).

Eshbaugh (2008) and Gee et al. (2007) found that African American teens mothers had a lower rate of marriage compared to European-American teen mothers, while Hispanic teen mothers had the highest rate of being married to the father of their child(ren). They also had the highest likelihood of still being with the father after three years. African American teen mothers were less likely than Caucasian teen mothers to cohabit or marry the father of their child after giving birth. Although Eshbaugh (2008) did find that marriage had a negative effect on education attainment, especially for Hispanic teen mothers who had the lowest level of education attainment compared to teen mother who cohabitated or were not married.

Regardless, most teen girls do not do well and are not prepared when it comes to raising a family of their own as teenagers. Although contemporary teens are generally not expected to take on major home responsibilities at young ages, taking on adult

responsibilities and helping raise younger siblings is fairly common for teens in working class and immigrant families (Kershaw, 2008).

Experience as a Mother

Motherhood can be a turning point for teen mothers (SmithBattle, 2005). A study by Hanna (2001) found that the children of teen mothers are the most important feature in their lives. The young teen mothers changed their lives and their lifestyles, and reinvented themselves for their children. Clemmens (2003) reported that for some, being a mother saved their lives and rerouted it away from a life of self-destruction. Their children provided them with a sense of self. They developed a new identity, found new priorities, and wanted to change their lives in positive ways.

Teen mothers in some studies have reported that motherhood reduced their involvement in high-risk delinquency behaviors (Hope et al., 2003; Hunt et al., 2005). They reorganized their lives and priorities around their children (Clemmens, 2003, Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Kendall et al., 2005; SmithBattle, 2000; 2005). But the role of mother can become overwhelming when it is combined with other household duties and chores. Regardless, they have visions for a better future (DeVito, 2010; Hanna, 2001).

Motherhood can also change teen mothers' relationships with their own mothers. Their new role forces them to redefine their relationship with their mother and helps them develop a sense of self-identity (Clemmens, 2003). DeVito (2007) found that teen mothers learned to appreciate their mothers and what it meant to be a mother. Regardless of previous challenges, when teen mothers become pregnant and become a mother, their

conflicts with their mother were set aside as they realized that they now had something in common (DeVito, 2010).

Clemmens (2003) and Rentschler (2003) found that teen mothers were not prepared for the demands of pregnancy and parenthood. They had a limited number of resources and were often very stressed out. DeVito (2007) found that younger teen mothers had more of a negative self-perception of parenting than adult mothers because they did not have the emotional and social maturity, and identity formation. Some participants in DeVito's (2007; 2010) studies still depended on their mothers to provide for, care for, and nurture them as they coped with parenthood. Teen mothers did not take on their role as mother and parent to their children. They depended on their mother and grandmother to be responsible for caring for their children as they sought to satisfy their own needs (DeVito, 2010).

Being a teen mother is not easy. As both teenagers and students still in high school, they had responsibilities as students for homework, participated in school activities, and maintained relationships with their peers. As a result of their pregnancy and birth of their children, their times were now spent caring and providing for their children, and taking them to doctor's appointments (Clemmens, 2003). This resulted in role conflicts as mother and teenager; they struggled with family and school obligations (SmithBattle, 2007). They still wanted to be a teenager, be treated like a teenager, and not carry the responsibilities of being a mother. Whether they wanted to or not, teen mothers were forced to look at their lives differently as a result of motherhood (Clemmens, 2003; SmithBattle, 2006).

Teen mothers often feel frustrated with having to spend their time caring for their children who always require attention (DeVito, 2010; Clemmens, 2003). They find motherhood to be difficult. According to Clemmens (2003), this is due to teen mothers' lack of knowledge in mothering and feelings of uncertainty. After having their child and becoming a parent, teen mothers reported not having anything in common with their friends, and often felt alone, isolated, and abandoned by their friends. Teen mothers' relationships with their friends were effected by their change in identity and addition of responsibilities (Hanna, 2001). Many of their friends did not understand what they were going through, which created a distance and end to their friendship. As a result, they often made friends with other teen mothers who could understand their situations (Clemmens, 2003; DeVito, 2010; Hanna, 2001). In contrast to this, Shanok and Miller (2007) found that grandmothers and female mentors become central to the lives of the teen mothers, while friends become less important. Teen mothers had to change their focus as they were occupied with caring for their children (Clemmens, 2003).

Support

Hanna (2001) found that some teen mothers were abandoned by their families once they knew of the pregnancy. For some, the birth of the child brought about reconciliation. Studies have found that it is usually the mothers of the teen mothers who provide them with consistent support and help with the transition to parenting roles (Beers & Hollo, 2009; Logsdon et al., 2004). Dallas (2004) found that paternal and maternal grandmothers continued to act as the primary parent for the teen mothers, while also providing and caring for the teen mothers' child(ren). The mothers of the teen

mothers provide the teens with both social support and support for them to complete their education as well (Beers & Hollo, 2009). One study found that although teen mothers rely heavily on their parents and family members to help care for their child(ren) while they were in school, it did not always work out for them (SmithBattle, 2005).

Most teen mothers continue to live with their families, mother, or other close family member after having their children out of financial necessity (Beers & Hollo, 2009; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Rentschler, 2003). Teen mothers often receive public assistance and, according to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (1996), in order for the teen mothers to receive public assistance, they must live with a parent or guardian to qualify (Beers & Hollo, 2009; SmithBattle, 2006). They struggle to financially support themselves and their children (Logsdon et al., 2004). Studies show that they are at a higher risk of receiving public assistance and to live in poverty (Holcombe et al., 2009; Terry-Humen et al., 2005). Rarely do the teen mothers receive any financial contribution from the father of their child and as a result, they struggle financially to support themselves and their children (DeVito, 2010; Hanna, 2001; Logsdon et al., 2004).

Clemmens (2001) and Krishnakumar and Black (2003) stated that social support, particularly from teen mothers' proximal environment, was a critical factor in their positive adjustment, providing guidance, social reinforcement, and tangible assistance. According to Beers and Hollo (2009) and DeVito (2007), teen mothers identify their social support and emotional support as coming primarily from their family members, particularly their mothers. Friends were considered part of the social support network,

but not as strong as the support from their mother and the father of their children.

Although according to Gee and Rhodes (2003), mothers often seek support from the father of their children if they do not have a positive relationship with their mothers and their friends no longer provide them with the support they need. Still, teen mothers were often overwhelmed by the hardships they experienced without the support from the father of their child, family, and the community (Edin & Kefalas, 2005; SmithBattle, 2005). They experienced negative public criticism directed at them for being a teen mother and internalized the negative stereotypes of being a teen mother as being deviant (Hanna, 2001).

Relationship with Child(ren)'s Father

Hanna (2001) found that the father of the teen mothers' child did not take on their responsibilities as a father and help with care. Most fathers did not live with the mother and their children (Beers & Hollo, 2009). Kalil et al. (2005) found that lower father involvement was related to teen mothers residing with grandmothers. Fathers may want to be involved with their children, but due to barriers such as lack of money, knowledge of child development, and an unstable relationship with the teen mother or with her family he could not (Beers & Hollo, 2009). If fathers were not able to contribute financially to their children, maternal grandmothers often denied them access (Beers & Hollow, 2009; Hanna, 2001; Krishnakumar & Black, 2003). Moreover, if there was a problematic relationship with their child's grandmother, fathers were less likely to be involved with their children (Krishnakumar & Black, 2003).

On the other hand, if there was still a romantic relationship between the father and teen mother, the father was more likely to be involved with his children (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; Gee et al., 2007; Herzog et al., 2007; Lewin et al., 2011). Gee et al. (2007) found that when fathers had access to their children, they acted as a parent, although many fathers either ended the relationship or did not provide the teen mothers with consistent emotional and financial support (DeVito, 2010).

Education

Teenage pregnancy and birth are significant contributors to the high school dropout rates among teen girls (Minnesota VitalSigns Center for Health Statistics, 2013). Teen mothers were more likely to drop out of high school and to never graduate compared to those who waited later to have children (Hofferth et al., 2001; Holcombe et al., 2009, Levine & Painter, 2003). However, Pillow (2004) found that 60% of the girls who became pregnant and dropped out of school prior to their birth were less likely to finish high school than pregnant teen mothers who remained in school. Comparison of older mothers and teen mothers showed that teen mothers experienced lower educational attainment and occupational achievement (Children and Adolescents, 2004). As a result, teen mothers were more likely to face unemployment as young adults (Minnesota VitalSigns Center for Health Statistics, 2013).

Regardless, recent studies showed that teen mothers viewed their children as a motivation to complete their education, and for some, a reason to pursue a college degree (DeVito, 2007; Hunt et al., 2005; Shanok & Miller, 2007). Motherhood was a turning point in the lives of teen mothers as it motivated teen mothers to achieve academically

(Barr & Simons, 2012; SmithBattle, 2006; SmithBattle, 2007; Spears, 2001). According to Casserly et al. (2001) and Pillow (2004), the rise in aspiration explained the significant number of teen mothers returning to or engaging in school during their pregnancy and after giving birth.

For these teen mothers, having an educational goal contributed to their self-perception of parenting (DeVito, 2007). Teen mothers valued having an education as a way for them to better provide for their future and for their child(ren), although they had no definite plan of action to finish and complete their education (DeVito, 2010). In the study done by Clemmens (2003), teen mothers expressed a need to receive a higher education so that they can better provide for themselves and their children in the future. Their child(ren) was their motivation to continue on.

In contrast, DeVito (2007) found that many of the teen mothers in her study had no plan to achieve or continue their educational goals even though they stated that education was important. SmithBattle (2006; 2007) found that regardless of teen mothers' educational aspiration, educational attainment and achievement may not be fulfilled due to the demands of family, child care responsibilities, and a lack of consistent family and school support. In Barr and Simons' (2012) study, they found that teen mothers no longer expected to earn a college degree after giving birth, even though they did aspire to before birth.

Overall, the literature documents that teen mothers face significant challenges as they struggle to integrate the role of mother into their complex teenage lives. However, what we know about the teen motherhood experience come primarily from studies

involving samples on African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian teen mothers.

Therefore it is important to specifically understand the experiences of Asian American teen mothers. This study aims to contribute to that knowledge gap by examining the lived experiences of teen mothers who are second-generation Hmong American, an Asian American sub-group with unique historic and cultural contexts that shape their lives and thus the experiences of motherhood.

Theoretical Framework

The theory selected to guide this study must consider the impact of community values on the individuals from the Hmong community, because all Hmong people belong to clans that are embedded in extended networks of relatives and organizations (Cha, 2010; Lee & Tapp, 2010; Moua, 2003). The theory must also consider the development of teenagers who are influenced by and derive meanings about their lives through interactions with others in their close and extended networks. Thus symbolic interaction theory was chosen to guide this research on the lived experiences of Hmong second-generation teen mothers.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interaction is rooted in the idea that meanings (symbols) are developed through interactions (communications) with others and that everyone assigns meaning to objects in their lives. Through interaction, humans develop their concept of self and their identity, resulting in their ability to assess and assign value and meaning to things (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Symbolic interaction provides a framework to understand how individuals create symbols and how these symbols influence their behavior. The

actions of individuals toward something is influenced by the meaning the individuals assign to it, which is a result of interaction between people. The culture of individuals has a significant influence on shaping individuals and the value and meanings of things (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

In addition to the assumptions, there are three concepts that are essential to the present study: identities, roles, and interaction.

Identities. Identities are developed and can only be developed through the process of socialization with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, Adams & Marshall, 1996). Identities motivate the actions of individuals and influences the self-meaning in roles. The more salience an identity is, the more motivated the individual will be to perform the role. Roles are shared norms of the individual's social position. They shape how individuals will behave, think, and feel as well as influencing their interactions with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). In this study, the multiple roles of student, wife, mother, and daughter-in-law are essential components of the teen mothers' lived experiences. In addition to roles, the interactions the teen mothers have with others helps them create meaning in their lives, particularly the meanings associated with the multiple roles they play within the family and as a high school student.

Roles. Roles are shared norms of the individual's social position. It indicates how individuals will behave, think, and feel. It influences the interaction with others (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Roles can only be understand in relation to complementary or counter roles. It allows individuals to anticipate future behaviors of other and maintain the norm of their own behaviors for their role. Role is about role taking and role making,

part of the socialization process. Role taking is when individuals align the role behaviors with the role meaning held by others. Role making is creating and modifying the role to be more explicit (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Interaction. It is through the interaction with others that shared symbols (verbal and non-verbal) are created and provide meaning of the self, others, and situations.

Through interaction, a reality is produced through language and communication (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Self as Researcher

I am a 24 year-old second-generation Hmong American woman pursuing my Master's degree. As a young Hmong woman who embraces and is embraced by the Hmong culture, I was allowed access and connection to the teen mothers in this study. I grew up deeply steeped into the cultural practices of the Hmong. Like many Hmong females, I was taught my role and identity as a Hmong woman. I am expected to perform domestic household duties in preparation for my own life one day as a good house wife and daughter-in-law. I am also expected to succeed in school.

In my earlier years, my father limited life outside of home and school to family gatherings. When my parents divorced and my mother became the primary decision-maker about what I could or could not do, I was able to participate in extracurricular activities at school. Eventually I went off to college and lived on campus for all four years. However, when I was home during breaks, I still had the expectation to continue to perform household duties.

As a child, I saw my uncles marry wives who were still in high school. I accepted this because I believed it was the purpose of a Hmong woman's life. In the 90s, it was still common for first generation Hmong American men and women to marry and have children, and not pursued higher education. Marriage is a significant life marker for young Hmong women. Until they married, they are not treated like adults nor do they receive respect and acknowledgement; they are treated like children.

I heard many stories of young Hmong girls getting married young and becoming mothers before they graduated from high school, including my two cousins, one of whom married at age 16 when she was pregnant, and the other who eloped with her boyfriend of six months. It was rare that these women pursued their education after high school. Even though teen marriage was a common occurrence, I struggled to comprehend their reasons for marrying at a young age and becoming a mother, wife, daughter-in-law, and daughter while still dealing with being a teenager.

Interestingly, I was married during the time I was conducting this study. Through this I learned that as a Hmong daughter I am "ib tug ntxhais qhua" (a guest daughter) to my family and through marriage and becoming a "nyab" (daughter-in-law) to my in-laws, that is when I come to my rightful home. My new name is in reference to my husband's name; my given name is no longer used except with my family. I found myself relating to the participants I was interviewing. Although not a mother, I am a wife, a daughter-in-law, and a student. I found myself considering participants' advice about how to be a good wife and daughter-in-law while balancing the demands of school. Still I struggled,

even though my husband and in-laws supported my educational goals fully and did not expect me to do much housework.

Being Hmong allowed me to conduct this study as an insider with knowledge about the Hmong culture. This gave me insight about appropriate questions to ask about participants' experiences and provided a critical lens through which to interpret their responses. I asked general question that allowed participants to talk about their experiences and then probed based on their responses.

Being an insider and a young Hmong woman was also an advantage for recruiting since this is a sensitive topic. It is important to note that I also understood that being an insider might result in bias, which is why I chose interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA) as the method for this study. IPA allows the researcher's interpretation to be integral in the analysis process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Methods

Phenomenology

The present study used a phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers. Phenomenology was a method developed by Edmund Husserl to examine people's experiences in the way they occur and in their own terms (Daly, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009). Through open-ended questions, phenomenological research aims to capture the essence of lived experiences and understand how individuals make sense and/or assign meanings to them.

Unlike teens from other cultural groups, the experiences of Hmong American teen mothers, specifically second-generation Hmong American teen mothers, have rarely been

studied, so little information exists in the scholarly literature. As relatively new Americans, Hmong families and communities socialize their members from one generation to the next in the traditions and practices of their root culture. Teen marriage and teen parenthood are two of those practices that are understood in traditional Hmong culture, but are less understood for second-generation Hmong American teens who have been influenced by their current U.S. context. Therefore, it is essential to utilize a method such as IPA to gather rich and detailed descriptions of the experiences of marriage and motherhood from teen mothers' own voices. IPA is concerned with the detailed examination of human lived experience and "it aims to conduct this examination in a way which as far as possible enables that experience to be expressed in its own terms" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, pp. 32).

Recruitment

Recruiting procedures for this study were approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board: #1302S28102.

Target Sample. Second-generation Hmong American teen mothers were the targeted sample for this study. Second-generation refers to persons who were born in the United States to first-generation immigrants or who immigrated to the United States before the age of seven (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Teen mother refers to current high school students between the ages of 14 and 21. Note: the upper age limit of 21 is the oldest age young people can attend public secondary schools in Minnesota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2009). The goal for this study was to recruit at least six

participants, an appropriate number of participants for a beginning interpretative phenomenology researcher (Smith, 2009).

Recruitment Sites. Participants were recruited from a Saint Paul public school that is the only one that provides child care for the children of teen parents during the school year; this made it an ideal location for recruiting participants for the study (Saint Paul Public Schools and YMCA Child Care, 2012). The school serves 2,077 students from 9th to 12th grade; most students (52.6%) identify as Asian American (Saint Paul Public Schools, 2011). Transportation is provided for the teens and their child(ren) to and from school (Saint Paul Public Schools and YMCA Child Care, 2012).

The social media website Facebook was also used to recruit participants. A flyer providing information about this study and the researcher's contact information was posted on her personal Facebook page and on a Hmong community Facebook page. The flyer was further shared by the researcher's friends via their Facebook pages.

Recruitment Procedures. Primary recruiters for this study were the principal investigator (PI) and a staff member from a local non-profit agency that primarily serves the Southeast Asian community who works with teen parents in the target school. The staff member provided contact information for the Parent Educator working at the target school. The PI then contacted and informed the Parent Educator about the study. An appropriate day and time for recruitment during school hours was planned. This enabled the PI to meet with a small group of teen mothers and inform them about the study. If any teen mothers were interested in participating, the PI obtained their name, phone number, and email address.

One week later, the PI called interested participants to gauge their willingness to participate in the study, and if interested, to schedule an interview. During the call, participants were informed that if they were under the age of 18, they would need parental consent to participate. Of the six participants who provided contact information at the school meeting, only two teen mothers were reached and agreed to participate in the study. Unfortunately, one of the teen mothers scheduled an interview, but didn't show up and was unable to be reached.

Due to the difficulty in recruiting teen mothers for this study through the school, the PI turned to Facebook to recruit participants. This method yielded three interested teens, but only one ended up participating in the study. The PI then turned to her own network, and with the help of an undergraduate student and the non-profit agency staff person, was able to recruit three additional participants. All met the criteria for inclusion in the study

In summary, 14 teen mothers were directly contacted, 8 agreed to participate, and 5 were eventually interviewed. It should be evident that recruitment for this study was very difficult.

One possible reason might be that the focus of this study involved sensitive and private experiences that teen mothers may not have been comfortable sharing. Another challenge was that the teens under age 18 needed permission from their parents to participate. Once they were informed of this, they declined the opportunity to participate.

Participants

All five participants were second-generation Hmong Americans. Four had graduated (class of 2013) at the time of the interview. One participant had just finished her junior year in high school. Four of the participants were age 18 at the time of the interview and one participant was age 17 (Table 1).

Interviews

The interviews took place at a location designated by participants including their homes, a coffee shop, and an ice cream shop. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Prior to the interview, the purpose and nature of the study were explained to the participant. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and told that they could decline to participate or respond to a specific question at any time prior to or during the interview. Once participants understood the purpose of the study, had all their questions and concerns answered, and were still interested in participating, they were asked to sign the consent form. They then were asked to fill out a demographic form (See Appendix A) and then the interview commenced.

Questions used to collect data in phenomenology must be open-ended. This allows participants to share their experiences as much as possible through their thoughts and viewpoints. This also allows the researcher to collect rich detailed descriptions of the lived experiences sought in the study through the voices of the participants.

In this study several open-ended questions were used: Can you tell me what it is like to be a mother? Describe the circumstance in which you married. Describe what it is

like to be married. Refer to the appendix for the full list of questions. See Appendix B for the full list of questions.

All interviews were audio-recorded. When interviews were complete participants were given a \$20 gift card to thank them for their participation in the study.

Transcription

The PI and an undergraduate student researcher, both fluent in Hmong, transcribed the interviews verbatim. The need to be fluent in Hmong was not necessary, but it was very useful when participants occasionally used a few Hmong words to express themselves.

Data Analysis

Although there is not a single prescribed way to analyze data in phenomenological analysis, Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggested six basic steps that beginning IPA researchers can use to analyze their data: (1) reading and re-reading; (2) initial noting; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections across emergent themes; (5) moving to the next case; and (6) looking for patterns across cases. Following is a description of how these steps were used for the purposes of this study.

(1) Reading and re-reading. I immersed myself in the data by listening to the recorded audio of the interview, and reading and re-reading the data. (2) Initial noting. With an open mind, I went through and noted anything of interest and asking questions. As I continued, I added exploratory notes and comments to allow me to understand my participants and how and why they think the way they do. (3) Developing emerging themes. Through the initial noting, I reorganized the data through the notes to turn them

into themes, capturing and reflecting an understanding of the text. The themes not only reflected the participants' words, but also the researcher's interpretation of the text. (4) Searching for connections across emergent themes. I organized the themes chronologically and regrouped them into clusters of related themes that were connected. (5) Moving to the next case. I moved on to the case and repeated the data analysis process. While each time working on a new case, the researcher tried as much as possible to bracket the ideas that emerged from the previous case(s), as to not have an influence from the first case on the second case. (6) Looking for patterns across cases. I created diagrams of each case with themes that came up in each case, which allowed me to search for patterns across cases. From here, I relabeled themes and moved them around to create overarching themes and sub-themes. I then organized overarching themes and sub-themes in an Excel spreadsheet and provided descriptions, notes, and quotes to support the themes and sub-themes.

Trustworthiness

The researcher attempted to enhance the validity of the research with suggestions provided from Smith et al. (2009), who said that IPA is a creative process and not about following a rule book closely. There is a need for flexibility because the criteria for validity may not be suitable for all studies. So from the beginning, the researcher displayed sensitivity to the context in the beginning of the research. She paid close attention to the interview process (e.g., putting participants at ease, showing empathy) (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher was attentive to the participants during the interview and took qualitative research and the necessary skills seriously (Smith et al., 2009). She

was careful in what she asked and chose to probe, making sure all questions pertained to her topic.

In the researcher's effort to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, an audit trail was utilized. The researcher kept detailed notes throughout the research process. The researcher aimed for reflexivity during the analytical processes of the study. She documented her influences, decisions, and actions. This along with the extended amount of time the researcher spent with the data contributed to the trustworthiness of the study. She also consulted with her adviser regularly during data collection and at each step of data analysis.

Results

The aim of this study was to examine the lived experience of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers. Analysis of interview transcripts of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers revealed four overarching themes that describe the complexity of multiple roles they hold: mother, wife/partner, daughter-in-law, teenager, and two overarching themes that focus on kinship influence and the tensions or conflicts they experience among these roles. The themes revolve around the identities of the teen mothers as well as their relationships with family, friends, and the community. They shared their struggles and their experiences as teen mothers as they tried to balance everything around them.

To provide a context for the results, a brief description of each participant is provided. Participants' names have been changed to protect their identity.

Ae: Ae was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school; her husband was 20 years old. They have one child together. She met her husband when she was 12 years old and started dating at age 15. Ae struggled with her parents' divorce and the resulting changes in her life, eventually leading her to decide to live with her then boyfriend and his family when she was 15 years old. They planned to move into an apartment, but because they are not married, everyone was against it. Instead they were told to marry. Ae and her husband were culturally married at age 16; at age 17 she had her child. Ae, her husband, and their child currently live with her husband's family. Ae does not work, while her husband works to support their family. She plans to continue her education. Since the birth of her child, Ae has started to rebuild her relationship with her parents, which ended when her parents divorced.

Blia: Blia was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school; her husband was 20 years old. They have one child together. She met and dated her husband when she was in ninth grade. Blia had strict parents who refused to let her go out often. As a result, she lied to her parents to go out with her boyfriend. Blia was 17 years old when she found out she was pregnant; she did not want to keep the child. In her biological family, only her sisters knew she was pregnant and they wanted her to abort her baby. Conversely, her husband and his family wanted her to keep the baby. As a result, Blia eloped with her husband and was culturally married at age 17 to prevent bringing shame to her family for having a child out of wedlock. Blia, her husband, and their child currently live with her husband's family. Blia recently started a job, but her husband is the main provider for their family. She will be continuing her education at a four-year

university. Since her marriage, Blia has continued to have a distant relationship with her parents as before.

Cee: Cee was 17 years old and had just completed her junior year of high school; her husband was 20 years old. They have one child together. She eloped and married her husband when she was 15 years old because she felt that her parents were too strict and marriage would give her more independence. Cee was both culturally and legally married. She was 16 years old when she had her child. Cee and her husband currently live with her husband's family. Cee does not work because of problems with her husband. Her husband works, but does not give her any money. She is struggling to graduate from high school on time since she does not have the support she needs to care for her child and attend school. Since her marriage, Cee no longer has a relationship with her parents since her husband rarely takes her to see them and does not like her calling them.

Dia: Dia was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school; her husband was 22 years old. They have one child together. She felt ready for marriage, so eloped and culturally married her husband at the age of 15. Dia was 17 years old when she and her husband had their first child. Dia and her husband currently live with her husband's family. She is currently unemployed so her husband is the main provider for their family. She will continue her education at a two-year college. Since her marriage, Dia has a stronger bond with her mother than her father, unlike before when she had a closer relationship with her father than her mother.

Eng: Eng was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school. Eng's relationship is somewhat unique. She and her partner, who she calls her husband, are not married and cannot be culturally married because they have the same last name; their relationship is a taboo in the Hmong culture. Eng is very angry and frustrated about this. They are not legally married for financial reasons. Her husband is 26 years old and they have two children together. Eng was 17 years old when she had her first child; the baby reunited Eng with the baby's father after they had been separated. She had her second child when she was 18 years old. They currently live in their own apartment and both of them work. Eng plans to continue her education at a two-year college.

The Experience of Being a Teenager

Being a teen mother affected the teen mothers' lives as teenagers. Although the teen mothers did not identify themselves as teenagers, because of their age and stage of life, they were still adolescents. But rather it was apparent that their lives were much more complex than those of typical teens; they were primarily focused on their roles of wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Their role models were family members and relatives who were also teen mothers. They spent very little time with their friends and their school experience was affected. The following threads emerged from their narratives: education, social life, role models, and identity.

Education. The educational path of the participants in this study were significantly impacted when they became mothers. Ae, Blia, and Cee missed a lot of school due to their pregnancy, birth, and child care needs. Four of the five teen mothers' husbands would not allow them to participate in extra-curricular activities. Even though

motherhood significantly changed their school experience, these teen mothers were motivated to complete their high school education to better their family's lives. Blia explained:

I feel like it. Since I had him, it kind of motivated me to do better than enough, and just you know, keep trying no matter what and it's just, you know. He's—having a kid is really you know, inspiring and also a great motivation to succeed and not just that but a better life for myself, but to have a better life for him.

Dia expressed a similar response:

I actually—ever since I got married to my husband, I actually did a lot better in school, cause you know, like you're married now so you better like, freaking get ready for your future you know, because you're definitely not single anymore. And now that I have a kid, definitely you have to be more educated to like, have a good job to support your family and stuff like that, yeah.

All of the participants planned to continue their education, except for Cee whose husband wanted her to focus on their child. Dia and Eng will attend community college after graduation, Blia will attend a four year university, and Ae plans to attend the EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) academy. These young women will pursue further education with the full support of their husband, parents, and in-laws: “My husband, he really encourages me to finish school so he can go back to school and pursue what he wants to pursue.” (Eng).

Ae focused on the support from her mother-in-law:

At first I thought that like I just I thought that oh my God right at first, now that I have a baby after high school I might as well just go work you know. I can't go to school yet, because no one is going to watch him, but my mom was like for me to go to school and not to worry about anything in the house, and he'll—she'll watch my baby. You know she'll support me and you know for me to go to school so later me and my husband you know, we could pursue more things in life than they did, so yeah.

Being a mother changed Eng's career choice:

It changed a lot. I mean I grew up wanting to be like you know, people that do makeup and everything, but I figured that you know, it's not going to get me that far with you know, my kids and husband you know...I was thinking about maybe with what I've done already maybe I should like put forth into a career you know.

Social Life. The social life of the teen mothers was very limited. They spent more time with their husband's family than with their friends, who they saw at school but rarely outside of the regular school setting. Ae said, "No, I don't go out with my friends. So my friends is basically my sister-in-laws...I mean I have friends, but no I don't hang out with my friends I only hangout with my sister-in-laws and sisters." Blia shared the social interaction limits imposed by her husband:

My husband, he's really jealous when I'm with guy friends and so I don't—I used to have so much guy friends. Now I have limited down to one or two girls and my husband, you know, he's—he's kind of alright with me going out with one of

my old friends just to catch up on stuff, but otherwise I didn't get to go out and like party, or I didn't get to go out like that.

Motherhood changed the desire to engage in typical teenage behavior like drinking and smoking for Eng:

I can't do the things I used to do you know. It's quite hard, but you know, at the end it's what's good for my kids...I could go out with my friends. I choose not to because I feel as if it's not fair to me, not fair to my kids and not fair for my husband.

A further restriction on these teen mothers' social lives was that they didn't have driver's licenses and needed to rely on their husbands and sometimes their in-laws or used public transportation to get around.

Role Model. Having a child forced these teens to seek role models other than their typical peers. Fortunately, sisters, sisters-in-law and relatives who were also teen mothers and provided role models for them to emulate. Blia for example, talked about her sister-in-law who became pregnant at 17 like Blia but then went on to college:

My sister-in-law. I guess I can relate. I guess she's kind of like my role model. She got pregnant—it's my—yeah, it's my brother's wife...she was pregnant when she was 19 and she, you know, she she has a stable job now and she's able to—and her kids, they're so like—they're so smart and they're so outgoing and you know. I want to be able to have that for my kids. I want to have a stable job. I want to you know, live—you know, I want to live in medium class. I want to

have connections with my kids. She has a great connection with her daughter and her son and that's what I want with my kids, but you know.

In contrast, Cee looked to her sister as her role model because they are facing similar struggles in their lives:

I compare myself to my sister right now cause she's—she's struggling a lot just like me. So I compare myself to her. Cause her husband just recently got locked up so right now she's struggling with like financial problems and she's having to take care of three kids and she's like falling back behind on her pay, like her rent and like I said, just having money problem and I think that—that's me right there, because I'm having to take care of my son by myself.

Emerging adulthood identity. For some, marriage caused participants to think of themselves as adults. But having a child caused a more significant shift in identity.

Ae explained:

Yeah, I mean you can be especially in the Hmong culture. Like you be as young as 14 as long as you are a nyab (daughter-in-law), everyone look at you like you're old so you better be mature, because everyone is going to expect you to be mature and you're—you know, you're older than everyone else, even though you're just—you're so young, but you know because you're a nyab (daughter-in-law).

Cee had similar thoughts:

Um, once I got married, yeah. Yeah, I describe myself as an adult because I have to be more mature to of thinking like about my life down the road. I'll have to

think about what I need—what do I need to make my life successful and like I have to think about what I need—what do I need to make my life successful and like I have to think about getting a job and feeding my child, and making my family, you know healthy.

Blia explained how having a child shifted her identity:

Well, I would say being an adult when I first had my child. I felt like being married you can still go out and have fun. You don't have anybody holding you back. When I did have my baby, I felt more taken aback.

Two participants were still in transition; they did not see themselves as adults because they believed they still had a lot to learn. Eng said:

An adult? No, not really. I still think I'm a kid. I don't that just cause I'm married and I have a kid—I don't think that I know everything and all those stuff. I think I still have a lot to learn actually, yeah.

The Experience of Becoming and Being a Mother

Motherhood was not something the teens in this study had planned. Their pregnancies were unexpected and impacted them in significant ways. For all, it led them to becoming mothers. For the subset of participants who were not yet married at the time of their pregnancy, their pregnancy led to marriage and taking on wife and daughter-in-law roles. The teen mothers in this study shared their joy and self-confidence as a mother. But they also faced new challenges and struggled to balance this new role with other responsibilities. Three sub-themes emerged from the teen mothers' narratives:

experiencing an unplanned pregnancy, taking on the motherhood role, and balancing multiple roles and related responsibilities.

Experiencing an unplanned pregnancy. None of the five teen mothers in this study planned their pregnancy. Even though Ae, Cee, and Dee were already married when they became pregnant and Blia and Eng were not, they all shared similar reactions of sadness, frustration, shocks and disbelief when they found out they were pregnant. Eng shared her reaction when she found out she was pregnant:

I was overwhelmed. I mean, I was at school when I found out I was pregnant... I was overwhelmed. I was shocked. I was really scared. I didn't know where to turn to or where to go for help. I was only 16 when I found out you know, but I gave birth when I was 17.

Blia went for a checkup at the clinic for something else when she found out she was pregnant: "I was so—like words can't explain how, how sad and frustrated I was. I was literally like sobbing to my boyfriend." Even though Ae was already married when she found out she was pregnant, her reaction was similar, "Oh my God here it comes you know. I have to be you know—I'm an adult now, I'm a mom you know, I'm different."

It was difficult for the teen moms to tell their families about their unplanned pregnancy. Blia's parents were shocked when they found out she had eloped with her boyfriend, but they had some idea why it had happened:

They found out—I guess they found out—well I guess my mom found out when she realized all of the side symptoms like why I was sleeping so much and yeah,

and then my dad—I guess, I guess he found out when I got married, because he knows that I wouldn't go off like that.

Eng waited until she was further along in her pregnancy to tell her family:

Well, I didn't tell any of my family members that I was pregnant until I was like six months. You know, cause it was just the thought of like you know, you know like some—anything can happen at any time, like some people you know, can try to like make you abortion the kid—anything you know so I kind of waited you know.

Once they found out that their daughter or sibling was pregnant, the families of the participants in this study had opinions about what they should do. Bliia's family reacted in this way:

My side of the family—it's funny—my side of the family said go get—don't have this baby. Go, my sisters and them, they were like don't have this baby, this and that, but my husband's side of the family said don't worry, have the baby. They were so supportive, but then for my side of the family, they were just like nope, don't have the baby, nope...my side of the family were like nope, don't have him, go abort him, go this and that, and I was so torn, because it's like I didn't know what to do. I I I was so stuck and I was like I don't want to have kids yet, I want to have fun and—but then you know, stuff happens.

But her husband's influence was stronger: "I didn't want this baby at all. I did not want him at all, but my husband, he wanted it—the baby. He wanted me to keep him so I kept him."

Taking on the motherhood role. All of the teen mothers agreed that being a mother was very hard and stressful. This was especially true for Blia and Dia because their babies cried a lot. Within this theme of motherhood, three sub-themes capture the teen mothers' experiences as mothers: meaning, confidence, and challenges.

Meaning. To the teen mothers, the meaning of being a mother was having unconditional love for their child and being dedicated, determined, independent, and patient. Blia explained what motherhood meant to her:

It gives—I feel like it means you know, it means caring, and it means you have a role to play you know. You are not a child anymore, you are—like you're an adult

now. You can't just you know put the focus on yourself. You have someone to care for. You put that one person first priority.

Cee said, "To me, it means that having more responsibilities and learning a lot more and just taking another big step in my life." Eng highlighted the importance of keeping her children healthy as integral to her role as a mother:

I got to make sure that my kids are healthy you know..., they are you know well fed...basically you know I have to be responsible for everybody pretty much...I actually love being a mother. I feel blessed—everything you know.

Confidence. Not all the teen mothers felt confident as a mother, especially when their child(ren) was sick and they did not know what was wrong with them. Blia articulated her lack of confidence this way:

Sometimes. It depends on the situation you know. My son he—he had—let me

seem he had—when he was 10 days old, he was diagnosed with RSV and so that was—that you know, that’s a little cold for us, but to them it’s something big, and so we had to go to the hospital, and that kind of thing threw me off. I wasn’t confidence, because I was just like whoa, he’s just 10 days old. What—and it—I was just so heartbroken, because I I couldn’t—I I didn’t know how to deal with it. So you know, times like that, you know I’m not as confidence.

Cee doubted her ability to be a mother:

Sometimes I do, but other times I feel like I don’t because I feel like I’m not even doing the right thing. My in-laws, they make me feel like I’m not doing the right thing to take care of my child. So I just sometimes—I feel like okay, you know, maybe I’m not right to be a mother yet. The more I am.

Balancing multiple family roles. The teen mothers in this study shared that the role of mother was so time consuming that they didn’t have time for anything else but their children, their husband and his family. Though lives revolved around their child, they were also students pursuing their education. Unfortunately, all the childcare responsibilities fell primarily to them; their husbands did not help much. They expected the mothers to care for their child, along with their other responsibilities. Ae explained her frustration with having to do it all, “Honestly your husband is just there, because they’re the dad, but they don’t help you with general things. Like everything is mostly you, so you have to really be independent.”

The narratives in the following three quotes illustrate the challenges faced by the teen mothers:

You have to plan ahead of time. A lot of time I have to cancel a lot of things I want to do because of my baby. I try to make time for myself, but it doesn't work that way when you have a baby. (Ae)

You have a lot of—like responsibilities you have to take care of so it's really hard for me since I'm young and I'm in school and it's really stressing...I'm actually supposed to go to summer school, but then I couldn't go to summer school...(Cee)

...it's really hard. I mean, being so young, like it's hard because there's so much that you have to like take care of you know. You know, yourself, your kids and the—my husband you know...but I think the only part that is difficult is just trying to shuffle you know, work, school, and time for my kids. Eng)

The Experience of Being a Wife

A commonality across these teen mothers was that they were married at the time they were interviewed for this study. However, their reasons for marriage and the desire to be married varied. For two participants, the motherhood role was added to an already existing role of wife. For two other participants, pregnancy provided the impetus for marriage. And for one participant, marriage could not be made official because their relationship was considered taboo; they had the same last name. Regardless of their path to and desire for marriage, all five teen mothers had to fill the role of wife. The following sections describe six sub-themes that emerged from the teens' narratives: the nature of being married, their relationship with their husband/partner, the influence of their

parents' marriages, their responsibilities of the wife role, the boundaries imposed by marriage, and access to financial resources.

Varied nature of being married. There were several areas of difference in the marriages of the teen mothers in this study. First, they all initiated their marriage the same way. The four teen mothers: Ae, Blia, Cee, and Dia all initiated their marriage through elopement. However, their reasons for getting married were different. Cee and her husband were the only couple who was legally married due to their concern about getting in trouble because they received government assistance. Eng and her husband are not legally married due to financial reasons. Blia explained her reason for not having legalized her marriage:

Well, because back then, because I was still 17, but then I just turned 18 now, and we are thinking about getting married legally. So by August, but yeah, I mean we—I feel like because—I don't know—I feel like it's easier and to do it, the American way (legalize) —it takes a lot of time and it's a lot of money, because you know, to just get legally married, and it's a bit difficult—we both live in public housing, so yeah.

Dia shared her concern about getting a divorce, "I'm not planning to legally like have it on paper, just because I feel like if anything was to happen, it'll be harder to get divorce. Like you're going to have to go to court and all that stuff."

The third difference was that although they married, not all of the study's teen mothers wanted to get married, but did so because of their circumstances. According Ae:

I didn't really wanted to, but I just wanted—we were planning to get a place together and then his parents were like no, you guys should just, you know just get marry, because you've been living with us for two years already.

Blia was pregnant and felt she did not really have a choice due to her fear that having a child out of wedlock would bring shame to her family. She explained:

No, I didn't want to. You know if we had a chance to you know, actually have that, how American tradition has—they don't have to get marry you know. They could just have the relationship with their dad, but nothing attached. Yeah, no I didn't wanted to get marry, but because of my baby and because of the Hmong tradition—how I would make my parents look bad, I had to, but I didn't wanted to get marry.

Cee felt pressure from her family to get married:

I actually got married because like, my family they were giving me a lot of stress and I thought, that, maybe if I take another step in my life, maybe I would've—maybe it'll make me more happy...I thought getting marry was gonna be kinda a way out...

Dia wanted to get married as she explained, "I don't know, I felt fine at the time. I was like oh he's the one you know. Like you're 15 year old, what do you know, you know."

Blia, the teen mother who married because of her pregnancy, said that her parents were shock when they received the phone call telling them that her husband had taken her home. For Ae, since her parents were already divorced and she was already living with

her husband and his family, her cultural wedding was rushed. When asked about her parents' reaction to her marriage she said:

Yeah, they were just like okay, just hurry up and you know, get it over with. So I was just like oh, okay, yeah. I felt like they rushed it for me. Yeah, I mean they were super—I mean they're supportive, but I felt like they rushed me. Because of the whole traditional thing yeah. I mean yeah if it wasn't for that then I—I don't—I wouldn't even like be married as of right now. I would've waited—both of us would've waited.

Like Blia's parents, Cee's parents were also shocked:

My dad was shocked when I told him that I left and I came and got married. He's like what if you came—you came and get married you know, what if you divorce him, what would he say to you, you know? What if he was just like, you know you came and live with me, I didn't come and take you. My dad was really mad and disappointed at me that I would ever do such things like that when he taught me so much, yeah.

Although she thought her parents were sad about her marriage, Dia also felt they were okay with it, mostly because they thought that marriage would stop her from going out a lot.

Challenges from the Husband-Wife Relationship. According to the teen mothers, marriage was hard and almost all their children's fathers were not committed to working on their relationship or helping their wives. Two of the couples struggled with communication; the dynamics of three couples' relationship affected their relationship.

Blia had communication problems with her husband related to their marriage and just being married. Cee and her husband almost divorced due to communication problems. She felt that her husband wasn't there for her, didn't want to talk things over, and accused her of talking to other men. Cee explained:

My relationship with my husband is complicated cause he—there's complicated. It's complicated between me and him because I feel like he give his time—like he has more time to do his things than me. Rather than spend time with me and the family, ever since I gave birth to my son, he haven't really been there for me and we haven't r been like—I don't see that sparks that we had. I mean there are a couple of times where I talked to guys and I had told them that yeah, I'm single because of this—because I do feel like I'm a single mom cause my husband is not there for me when I need him most.

For Ae, Dia and Eng, their relationship dynamics, whether separation, pregnancy, or marriage brought them closer to their husbands. Dia and her husband separated for two months, but that brought them closer. For Eng and her husband, who were separated when Eng found out she was pregnant, having children brought them closer together since their relationship was unstable before they had children. Ae and her husband settled down once they married and stopped having unnecessary arguments. She described marriage commitment:

You have to be super committed, because there's like—I know like when you're a boyfriend, when you know—when you're still dating, and you're just boyfriend and girlfriend, you guys have upside downs, but you know you can always break

it off and go find someone else, but marriage, you can't do that. Like as hard as it get, you have to make it work. You have to, especially when you have kids.

The influence of their parents' marriages. The marriages of the mothers of the teens in this study were influenced by their parents' marriages. Their mothers had all married in their teens, except for Eng's mother who had one child in her late teens and then married later when she was pregnant with Eng, her second child. Blia shared how her parents' relationship created concerns about her own relationship:

I mean I always wanted to get marry, but then seeing their relationship with each other, I didn't—I never wanted the relationship they have...I feel like they're unhappy and you know, when they—they'll argue a lot and they'll blame us kids...I feel like because they're only together because of us kids and they don't want to break us kids up...They would've been divorced if they didn't have any of us and I don't know. I don't want to be arguing the way my parents argue.

All of the teen mothers' parents, except for Dia's parents were divorced or had unstable relationships that created uneasiness and concern about the future of their own marriage. Ae was scared for her own future with her husband:

Yeah, sort of you know, because I was like you know, I'm so scare because what if in the future I want to work things out but my husband don't, and he just—you know what if he leaves. I'm going to be devastated, and especially what if we don't have—what if it's not only my baby right now, what if it's more kids you know. It's going to be super devastating, especially like after how I saw my dad.

Life after the divorce, he was like—I swear I thought he was just going to you know be mentally ill...

Cee did not want her marriage to be like her parents', where her father neglected her mother. Her parents practiced polygamy; her mother was the second wife of three plus a girlfriend.

The responsibilities of the wife role. Growing up, the parents of the teen mothers expected them to perform the traditional gender role of a Hmong daughter, cooking and cleaning. As the teens were taught these tasks, parents made indirect references to them needing to cook and cleaning so they would be good daughters-in-law in the future. The mothers in this study all agreed that being a good wife meant being a good mother and daughter-in-law. As wives, the teen mothers are expected to cook, clean and provide for their husband, child(ren), and in-laws (husband's parents and siblings). Ae explained what her husband expected of her:

He expects food to be on the table when he comes home from work. He expects lunch for tomorrow. If he goes somewhere he needs me to stay home and watch our baby...I'm always the one who stays home and watch my baby.

Blia explained her roles:

Well, you know roles like now being a mom, taking, caring—like I can't put myself as first priority. Now I have to put my son first priority. I have to put my husband first priority and since I'm not in my side of the family anymore, I have to put his side of the family as first priority.

Facing new boundaries. As married women, the teen mothers had boundaries imposed on them by their husbands and/or their in-laws. These boundaries told them what they could or could not do and what was acceptable and not acceptable as married women and mothers. They had to follow and respect the boundaries imposed on them. The teen mothers had to ask for permission to go out of the house. Ae, Blia, Cee, and Dia had to ask for permission from their husbands before they could go out with family and friends. Eng was the only mother who did not need to ask for permission from her husband to go out. Ae, Blia, Cee, and Dia often went out with female relatives of their husband's family or with their husband tagging along. According to Cee:

I can't go out with any of my friends, I'm mostly—when I do go out, it's mostly with my sister-in-laws. Yeah, I have to ask for permission and then my husband, he doesn't come along at all cause—I will never get a chance to go out with them at all cause he thinks it's bad for a daughter-in-law to go out with their friends and the husband is not there.

No matter how much they wanted to go out, it was important for the teen mothers to stay within the boundaries given to them as Ae explained:

There is rules. You have to respect your in-laws. You have to respect your husband... because if you don't then the family look at you wrong... You have to respect your husband especially, and you know if he said that you can't do this then you can't do it because you're a married woman.

This was not easy for the teen mothers as Blia expressed in frustration:

I thought that if I got married, I would have as much freedom compared to living under my parents. That's a lie. That is a lie. I, it's more strict; you, you know I as a wife, I, as a Hmong wife who married traditionally, this sucks. I want to go out with my sisters; that I can't because that's going to make me look bad in front of my in-laws, so I have to go out with him all the time.

Financial resources. As married young adults, the teen mothers and their husbands were financially independent from their families. They were dependent on government assistance such as Food Stamps, MFIP, and medical assistance. In accordance with the Hmong culture, almost all the participants and their husbands lived with their in-laws.

As the couples' income increased, the level of government assistance decreased. Ae shared, "I did receive food, but because that time I was working and my husband was working, they combined our income together so we didn't qualify for food stamp, but right now we have MA (medical assistant)." This was also true for Cee and her husband. Only Blia and Eng worked, otherwise their husbands were the sole providers for their families. All of the teen mothers and their husbands, except Eng and her husband, lived with their husband's family and so they contributed to the bills and helped provide for his family. Money was tight for these couples and had to be carefully budgeted by the teen mothers since some of their husbands chose to spend their money on non-essential things. Cee said, "My husband's paycheck—he gets pay like every week, but then he mostly just spend it on stuff that he needs, like car parts so we don't have money for anything right now."

Unlike all the other teen mothers, Blia's parents received food stamps from the government for their family. Although Blia do not live with her parents, because she was legally dependent on her parents, she and her baby received food stamps and government health insurance through them. She explained.

My parents, they receive food stamps from—because I'm not supposed to be living with them because they live in public housing, but I, but I'm still under my parents' housing and so they—my mom gets food stamp through my son—she gets it because I'm under her.

The Experience of Being a Daughter-in-Law

Narratives from the teen mothers in this study revealed the difficulty of being a daughter-in-law. Their experiences and expectations as daughters-in-law varied depending on the relationships they had with their in-laws and the expectations their in-laws had for them.

Relationship. The relationship the teen mothers had with their in-laws varied widely. Some were closer to their mother-in-law than their father-in-law. Ae described her relationship with her in-laws this way:

They treat me like I am their own daughter, like you know they gave birth to me...They're super supportive and I can never ask for more. I was kind of worried at first because I was like you know, my parents are—they're not together you know. I don't really know anything...They didn't have a problem with that. They were flexible.

Cee's experience was somewhat different. She was closer to her mother-in-law than her father-in-law:

Um, my relationship with my in-laws is really, with my mother-in-law is really good, but then my father-in-law, it's really complicated because he's always on the phone like I said earlier and he's never around to help me with my baby, and then I can never get things done when I'm home with him so it's kinda of annoying.

Expectations. Regardless of their age at marriage, the teen mothers in this study were expected to step up and be mature in their new roles as daughter-in-law. Primary responsibilities were cooking and cleaning for their husband's family. Even though this was challenging for them as young women and new mothers, they tried to live up to their in-laws' expectations Blia explained:

As a daughter-in-law, I'm supposed to, you know, wake up early, cook for my parents-in-laws, cook for the family, clean, you know, do dishes, and stuffs like that, but I don't do that, and I don't so that, and so, I feel like they're kind of—they're laid back. They're—my parents—my in-laws are really laid back so they're cool about it. So there's time when I do that and there's time—well most of the time I don't.

There was a lot of pressure on these teen mothers. They shared that they were afraid of what their in-laws and their husband's relatives would think of them if they were not good daughters-in-law. Cee explained:

I'm worried that I might not do the right things or I'm doing the wrong things...there's a lot of things that you have to do you know, cause you have to worry about. If you don't do it, what would your in-laws think of you, you know.

She continued:

I always try to tell myself that okay, I'm going to do it cause I want them to see me as a good person and I do it because even though—even though I'm tired, sometimes I do it because I have to show them that I want to be a good daughter-in-law for them and not be like those daughter-in-laws. Those bad ones...I feel—well I have to take care of like mostly everybody in the house like—I have to mature, if I have to cook the meals, make sure everything is clean and most of all is taking care of my son. So I—so yeah, taking care of my son and make sure that everybody's get the things they need like cooking, cleaning, yeah.

Blia provided another description of the expectations she felt as a daughter-in-law:

I feel like being a daughter-in-law, I have, you know, we, or I have so much expectations, because you know, want to make myself look good, I want to make my husband look good, and so there is a lot of roles that I play like, you know, like I said, clean and cooking and you know, doing stuff for my parents-in-law to satisfy them.

Family and Community Influences

External family and the Hmong community exerted significant influence on teen mothers' self-acceptance in both positive and negative ways. On one hand, teen marriage

in the Hmong community is a norm so teen mothers feel accepted. However, a fair amount of shame can go along with their new positions as teen wives and mothers.

Relationship with biological parents. Getting married and having a child altered the relationship that the teen mothers had with their parents in both positive and negative ways. The teen mothers' biological parents treated them like guests since they no longer lived with them. Ae's and Dia's relationship with their mothers improved or grew stronger. Ae is able to understand her parents:

Mostly with, well I mean, you know I'm building my relationship with both of them, but I think it's much more stronger with my mom, just because she's more, she's more easier to talk to. My dad, he's kind of hard headed, so it's kind of hard to talk to him yeah. Yeah, like after I had my baby, like everything changed. It's like once you have a kid, all of a sudden you, you know you bond with your mom. It's just so much stronger because you actually know the pain; you actually know why they cry you're married, why they cry when you run away and all that.

Blia and Cee's relationships were negatively impacted. Cee no longer had a bond with her parents since her husband did not take her to see them regularly. It was different for Blia:

I don't know, I feel like we don't have that much of a relationship, but I feel like it has always been that way when I was still living under their roof. So I feel like; I kind of, I kind of got used to it, but like not living under their roof or was a big change, so yeah. I felt like, I felt like, I guess because I don't...I felt like as of

now because I don't live under their roof, I don't need to have a relationship, but then when I was living under their roof I had to have a relationship.

Relationship with the community. The teen mothers in this study experienced different levels of community acceptance of their early marriage, both in the Hmong community and the general community. Cee shared what she heard from the Hmong community:

Yeah, they did talk to me about being married so young. They said that it's going to be really hard. It's going to be a lot of struggle and I'm going to end up being divorced. That's what they always say.

As married women, more is expected of teen mothers from their family and relatives. They are treated like adults and are expected to attend family parties/gatherings and help. Although Ae is a bit disconnected with her relatives she shared, "Yeah, they—they expect more from you. They expect you to be there when there's like events going on and stuff." For other who relied on their husbands for transportation, participation in family parties/gatherings depended on whether or not their husbands wanted to attend. Cee commented:

...my husband—like he don't really get along with my side of the family. He's like really quiet and he always want us to go over there and eat and leave, so my relatives, they always complain to me like why do you guys always come here, eat and don't help us clean and just leave...

The actions of both teen mothers and their husbands affected how they were treated by their relatives. Marrying outside their family, the teen mothers were treated as guest or as

outsiders by their own family and relative. They were no longer connected to their families of origins and were now part of their husband's family after they married and the welcoming ceremony had been performed. Dia shared her thought about this:

I don't know because you know how like when you're married and you go over to Hmong people's house—they're like, so like culturalized. Oh you guys are here, blah, blah blah. I don't want my mom to say that to me. Like I want to feel as that house is still my house.

Dia and Cee were the only teen mothers in this study who felt accepted in the Hmong community because they married young. Dia explained, "I think I feel accepted because there's like—cause Hmong moms, they always get married young and have kids young so I don't feel any difference you know." Even though Cee felt accepted by the Hmong community, she shared that she felt ashamed of how her marriage was initiated:

I do feel like I'm accepted and I do feel like I'm like—there's shame because a lot of Hmong girls do it a lot and it's just that like all their relatives and siblings doesn't seem to like it—think of them, like the good daughter is bad that's why she ran off and get married. So I feel ashamed of that...I feel ashamed so I don't really want—that's why I don't really go around when all my relatives are over because I feel—I'm just embarrassed...

Participants also felt shame because they had run off to get married. Although her relationship with her husband/partner was not accepted and recognized in the Hmong community because they share the same last name and it is a taboo to be with someone of the same last name, Eng felt no shame:

I don't have shame whatsoever, because I know that some people they can't have kids you know...so I'm kind of blessed. I don't feel ashamed, but in the Hmong community, I know that they see it differently. I know they see it as oh you know, she's a bad girl. She never listens to her parents or anything. She never listens to her parents...

With regard to the non-Hmong community, all the mothers, except Eng felt ashamed about being a teen mother. Blia told her friends about her marriage, but not about being a mother because she was ashamed about what they would think of her. Blia did not need to be physically present at school because she was doing post-secondary education, but when she needed to stop by the school, she rushed in and out:

I was like—I was so ashamed to even show off my stomach, like I would wear a big sweater just so people wouldn't see how big I was. Even when I went to go see—when I went to Central to go see my AP coach I wore a big sweater and just you know, went in there and came right out—didn't even go say hi to my friends and even try to communicate or interact with any other students or teachers because I was just so ashamed.

Stating what most of the mothers felt, Dia stated:

I feel kind of shy to say it because you know it's so like weird for [people who are not Hmong]. You know, like they'll be like what, you're only 18 and you already have kids, what you got married when you were 15 years old.

Eng on the other hand feels that her relationship was accepted. She did not feel judged outside of the Hmong community.

Tensions and Conflicts

The teen mothers in this study struggled to balance their multiple roles as a wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Although they did not see themselves as teenagers, they were still in high school so they struggled with obligations such as homework. However their pressure to be a good mother, wife, and daughter-in-law and be responsible to their child(ren), husband, and in-laws took priority over being a good student. The following threads highlight the tensions they felt among their various roles.

The teen mothers described how their role of a mother conflicted with their roles of student and daughter-in-law. With their children as a higher priority than school, they had to care for them and sometimes take them to doctor's appointments; this caused them to miss school. They also had to balance their student responsibilities, such as doing their homework, with caring for their child(ren), taking care of their husbands and cooking and cleaning for their in-laws. Ae, Blia and Cee struggled with the lack of help from their husband. With all of the responsibilities they had, participants' narratives revealed the stress felt due to lack of time for themselves. Ae shared:

It's really hard actually. I didn't expect it to be this hard; I thought it's going to be, I wouldn't say easy, but I thought it was going to be a little bit easier than how it is now. But it's super complicated, like you don't have time for anything, and when you do find time for yourself, you can't do anything, because it's dark, it's night time, and then for example, like homework, as soon as I get home, I watch my baby, and then I cook for my husband, and then after I cook for him, I clean, and then cook for him, cook lunch for him for tomorrow, and then by the time I

get to do my homework, it's like 10 at night, because I have to put my baby to sleep, and then you know, I have to wait until he's asleep, and then have to make sure he won't get up again, and make sure all the bottles and everything are prepared for the night, so it's very complicated.

Blia shared similar challenges in her life:

Another struggle with—he—I mean like I don't mind him depending on me, but then it's like—when I'm taking care—when he's taking care of the baby and I—and it's my turn to take a nap, he wakes me and so that—and I I get frustrated because it's like well, why can't you do it you know. He's not crying. He's not anything and why are you waking me up to make him a bottle when I'm supposed to be sleeping. So that's kind of a struggle.

Discussion

The current study examined the lived experience of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers. The findings of this study highlight their unique challenges. Almost all the participants were culturally but not legally married. Statistically, this puts them in the category of single mothers or cohabitating single mothers. However, within the Hmong community, they are recognized as *married* mothers. Their living arrangements were also different than most teen mothers who continue to reside with and receive support from their biological families, mother, or other close family members (Beers & Hollo, 2009; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Rentschler, 2003; SmithBattle, 2006). These Hmong teen mothers and their husbands resided with their husbands' families and were considered financially independent adults. As part of the Hmong culture, they

achieved adults status once married. This is important to recognize because these young women were still adolescents developmentally and straddled two cultures—the Hmong culture within family and community and mainstream U.S. culture in school. So within their own culture and community they were considered adults, but outside those environments such as in school, they were still considered children.

Teen mothers in this study experienced somewhat mixed messages about marriage and motherhood within and outside the Hmong community. Although generally accepted as a norm within the Hmong community, teen mothers nonetheless talked about feeling shame. In school, some tried to hide their marriage and pregnancy while others didn't feel that peers in school were judging them. These results may reflect the changing norms of the Hmong community as younger generations become more acculturated and may have adopted some of the values and standards of the dominant U.S. culture.

Marriage and motherhood significantly shifted participants' identity foci. Being a teenager and engaging in typical teen-age activities no longer were high priorities. They were now more focused on their roles as mother, wife, and daughter-in-law. Participants felt and were treated as adults. However, as adolescents whose identities were being formed, these teen mothers had many more roles to incorporate and prioritize than typical teenagers who do not need to integrate mother, wife, and daughter-in-law into the mix.

Consistent with findings from Clemmens (2003), Edin and Kefalas (2005), Kendall et al., (2005), and SmithBattle (2000; 2005), the teen mothers in this study reorganized their lives and priorities and focused on their children and taking care of their

family. They were the primary caregivers for their children, with some help from their in-laws, particularly their mothers-in-law. Participants' husbands occasionally helped care for their child, but the responsibility primarily was the mother's. It is important to note that they also wanted to complete their education to gain a better future for their family, which is consistent with the findings from studies by Clemmens (2003), DeVito (2007), Hun et al., (2005), and Shanok and Miller (2007).

The literature on teen mothers suggests that strict authoritative parenting contributes to girls' early dating and sexual activity (Beers & Hollo, 2009; Fessler, 2003; Geronimus, 2003; Hanna, 2001; Holcombe et al., 2009); SmithBattle, 2000; Turley, 2003). This was also true for the participants in this study. Participants in this study assumed that through marriage they would gain independence from their parents' authority. In reality, once married, participants shifted to a different authority with strict boundaries. Their social lives were limited to their husband's family, particularly female relatives with children. But interestingly, they shifted their frame of reference from girls their age to other Hmong teen mothers or female family members who had been mothers as teens. So unlike what is found for teen mothers in the dominant culture, (Clemmens, 2003; DeVito, 2010; Hanna, 2001, participants did not report feeling alone and abandoned by friends.

Several of the participants reported that their family experiences were difficult. If they'd experienced parental conflict, separation, or divorce, it impacted their relationship with their husbands. However, regardless of the strain in their marriage and the way their husbands treated them, they insisted on staying and working out the marriage. They also

stayed to prove to their family and relatives that they were wrong in their prediction that because they married young, they were going to divorce young.

What may be most unique in this study is the role of daughter-in-law that Hmong teen mothers must assume. This particular role is quite specific to Hmong culture in which newly married women sever ties with their families of origin to their family by marriage. Teen mothers in this study described how they were socialized into this role from an early age. Thus, understanding how this role fits in with those of teen, mother, and wife is also very important. Even with a small number of participants in this study, it is clear that this role can be quite varied, depending on their relationship with their husband, how they related to their in-laws, and the expectations their in-laws had for them. All of the participants described worry about their ability to adequately perform the role. They lacked confidence in their skills but still wanted to satisfy their in-laws. Regardless of this variation, this is a significant role for these young mothers to enact.

The contribution of this study to literature are several important things. The first being that pregnancy out of wedlock will often lead to marriage and teen mothers may already be culturally married when they become pregnant. Secondly, pregnancy and marriage is not about the individuals, but the extended family structure that become involve. As a result, teen mothers are not alone, they have a supportive network that assist and help them in many ways, such as childcare. At the same time, the family and extended family structure help enforce the boundaries of what these married teen mothers can and cannot do because of their identities as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law.

It is important to note that although several of the participants in this study came from single-parent homes. They talked about how their unhappy home lives contributed to their desire to leave home. For three of the participants, this was the impetus for their early marriage and pregnancy. But it was not the case for all participants. One participant came from a married, two-parent family and was very school-oriented. Her dedication to her educational goals continued after pregnancy and marriage. The small sample does not allow one to draw conclusions, but rather suggests that family of origin may play an important role in second-generation Hmong American women's decisions to marry early and have children

Theory Integration

In symbolic interaction theory, individuals construct their meanings through the interaction process with other individuals (LaRossa & Peitzes, 1993). A symbolic interaction theoretical lens makes it possible to see the influence of the Hmong community in the lived experiences of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers. As a collective group of people, the pressure to conform to the community's norms and values are very strong and present (Lee et al., 2006). Traditionally, the Hmong community accepts teen marriages as a norm. When individual teen mothers were asked about their acceptance into the Hmong community, their response was yes, because teen marriages is a norm in that community. Not wanting to deviate from the norms and create social disharmony, Hmong parents and elders accepted teen marriages, even though they condemn those who married young.

Saving face is an important value in the Hmong community (Lee et al., 2006).

Individuals do not want to lose face and be rejected and abandoned by the community so they conform to the norms. Teen marriages are followed through to prevent losing face for both families when pregnancies are known and when an elopement had occurred. Here it is possible to see the influence and feedback of the collective community on teen mothers' and parents' acceptance of teen marriages in the Hmong community.

Once teen marriages are accepted, it is used as a transition to adulthood. In the Hmong community, culture shapes the roles and identities of men and women. Through socialization with others in the community, Hmong women know what the identities and roles of married women are. They are mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law who must care and provide for their children and husband's family first. Their identities influence their roles and tell them what they must do and can and cannot do. For example, as a wife and daughter-in-law, they are obligated by cultural norms to attend and help with family and extended family events. Their behavior is constantly being checked by members of the Hmong community, especially in the early stages of taking on these roles. Fulfilling these obligations means they will be considered a 'good wife' or a 'good daughter-in-law' in the Hmong community. If they don't, they risk being shamed and bringing shame on their husband and husband's family, either directly or indirectly through social networks such as their clan.

Implications for Future Research

The current study revealed differences in second-generation Hmong American women's experience as a teen mother. It also revealed some of their challenges since the

participants were married and had many responsibilities. The findings are important to inform future research as well as provide suggestions for practitioners and educators who work with this population.

Research. There is a need to further examine whether or not there are differences in Hmong teen mothers' experiences if they are culturally married or not married. Moreover, it would be important to learn about marriages in which partners share the same last name because their relationship is a taboo in the Hmong community. These are important areas to further explore because there may be more Hmong American couples in this similar situation as new generations grow up.

The current study was based on a very small sample—five second-generation Hmong American teen mothers' interviews. Further study should include a larger sample to capture the variety of experiences as well as more confidently articulate the similarities. Additionally, it would be very beneficial to interview participants' husbands to get their perspectives. Another area that needs further exploration is the psychological impact and stress the young women experience because of marriage.

Previous research has mainly focused on the experiences of Caucasians, Hispanics, and African American; the Asian American experience is notably absent. Future study would benefit from looking at other Asian American groups to capture a more complete understanding of the lived experience of second-generation teen mothers.

Practice. Results of the current study provide some basic ideas to consider when working with and providing services for Hmong teen mothers. It would be beneficial for schools to provide support for the teen mothers. For example, a Hmong teen mothers'

support group could be offered. Educational workshops about parenting, communication and couple relationships, and co-parenting would be helpful to these newly married and/or young mothers. Although general knowledge about these topics is not culture-specific, there are many aspects of parenting, wifehood, and motherhood that are grounded in Hmong culture. For example, an area that might be unfamiliar to non-Hmong practitioners is the pressure teen mothers experience due to the daughter-in-law role. It is also important for them to know that parenting and marriage are not just about the teen mothers individually, but is an extended family and community phenomenon within the context of collectivist Hmong culture. This must be considered when supporting these young women in their new roles.

Limitations

The current study contains limitations that warrant discussion. First, four of the five of the participants recruited for this study were over age 18; one participant was 17, but legally married so a parent's/guardian's consent was not necessary. According to the literature, the participants would be categorized as older teen mothers. Younger teen mothers are considered ages 17 and younger. However, with just one participant in that category, data were not adequate to provide a rich description of the experience of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers who are 17 and younger. It should also be noted that this distinction may not be valid in the Hmong culture.

The next limit is the length of the interview. It was very challenging to capture the complexity of the experience of second-generation Hmong American teen mothers with their many identities and responsibilities. The researcher had to be considerate of

the participant's time, since a few of the interviews were at participants' home where their children were present. A couple of interviews were at coffee shops where the participants' husbands sat in the car for the duration of the interview.

The final limitation relates to the willingness of the participants to share accurate and truthful experiences. Three of the interviews were completed in participants' homes because they did not have transportation or were not allowed to go out with people who were not related to their husbands. Therefore, interviews were completed in areas that were not secluded from the rest of the family members. Participants lived with their in-laws, so parents and siblings-in-law were also home. Although they tried not to intrude, these were open spaces that may have affected how forthcoming the participants were in the interview.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Teen Mother Participants (N = 5)

Characteristic	<i>n</i>
Age	
17	1
18	4
Marital Status	
Not Culturally or Legally Married	1
Culturally and Legally Married	1
Culturally Married	3
Education	
Completed 12 th Grade	4
Completed 11 th Grade	1
Number of Children	
1	4
2	1
Residency	
With In-laws	4
On Their Own	1
Employment Status	
Employed	2
Unemployed	3
Driver's License	
Yes	0
No	5

Appendix A

ID Number: _____

**Teen Mothers of Second Generation Hmong Americans
Demographic Information**

1. How old are you?

2. What grade are you in?

3. Are you culturally (a cultural wedding was held or the bride price was paid) or legally married?
 - a. If you are married, how old were you when you married?

 - b. If you are not married, are you still with the father of your child?

 - c. Did you have a cultural and/or American wedding?

 - d. Was a bride price paid?

4. How old is your husband/father of the child?

5. Is the father of your child Hmong?

6. How old were you when you had your first child?

7. How many children do you have?

8. Who do you live with?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Mother

1. Can you tell me what it is like to be a mother?
2. What does it mean to be a mother?

Wife

1. Describe the circumstance(s) under which you were married.
 - a. Did you wanted to get marry?
 - b. How did you feel?
2. Culturally and/or legally married? Describe why.
3. Describe what it is like to be married.
 - a. Easy?
 - b. And adult? How so?
 - c. New roles? New identities?
4. Describe your relationship with your husband.
 - a. Describe any struggles.
5. Describe how you and your husband support your family?
 - a. Meet needs?
 - b. Help from parents and in-laws?
 - c. Receive MFIP or cash assistance?
 - i. Health insurance? From where?
 - d. Finance affects relationship with husband? Parents? In-laws?

Daughter-in-Law

1. Describe what it is like to be a daughter-in-law.
2. Describe your duty as a daughter-in-law. Responsibilities?
3. Describe your relationship with your in-laws.
 - a. Help you and your husband in any way?
4. Live with in-laws?
 - a. Describe what it is like to live with your in-laws.
(If you are **NOT LIVING** with your in-laws, who do you and your husband live with? Describe the circumstance behind that.)

Teenager

1. How do you get around to places?
 - a. Driver license? Car? Car Insurance?
(**NO**—who takes you places then?)
2. Who do you compare yourself to? Role model? Other teen mothers?
 - a. Kind of qualities?

3. Describe how being a mother, wife, and daughter-in-law has affected you and your education?
 - a. How has that changed your educational goals and goals in life?
 - b. Do you plan to continue your education after graduation or do you have other plans?
 - c. Support from parents and in-laws?
 - d. Who takes care of your child(ren) while you're at school?
4. Describe how marriage and motherhood effected your social life?
 - a. Go out with friends? Can you go out with friends? Ask for permission?
 - b. Describe circle of friends.
 - i. Their thought on you being a mother and married?
 - c. Spend more time with friends or with family?

Kinsystem

1. Age parents married? Circumstance behind marriage?
 - a. Still married?
 - b. Describe if parents' relationship influenced your decision to marry.
 - c. Talked to you about marriage while growing up?
2. Describe your relationship to your family now that you are married.
 - a. Your relationship with your relatives
 - b. Treat you different? Describe.
 - c. Talk about you for marrying young?
3. Any siblings, cousins, or friends who became mothers in their teens? Did they marry? Describe the circumstance.
4. Describe your relationship with your parents before marriage.
 - a. Perform traditional gender role? Examples. Feeling?
 - b. Parents strict? Much independence?
 - Allowed to go out with friends and boyfriends?
 - Feeling?
5. Describe your relationship with your parents now.
 - a. Treat you differently? Like an adult?
6. Describe their reaction to your marriage.
 - a. Supportive?
 - b. Wanted you to get marry?
7. As a married teen mother, do you feel accepted in the Hmong community?
 - a. Reaction? Shame?
 - b. How about in the non-Hmong community?
8. If you could go back, what would you had done differently?
 - a. Hold off marriage?
 - b. Hold off having a child?