Parenting After Divorce with an Immigrant Community: An Exploration of Hmong Parents' Parenting Experiences

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Dedication

To the resilient divorced Hmong parents, like my own.

Abstract

Parents with shared children are faced with many challenges after a divorce or separation. One such challenge is to negotiate shared parenting responsibilities with their former spouses. This can be further exacerbated for immigrant parents as they may lack the know how or resources to traverse the legal system, in addition to seeking out a cultural divorce. Moreover, divorce may still be highly stigmatized which can serve as a barrier for communication between parents and between families. Yet little is known of how immigrant parents come to share their parenting responsibilities after divorce and the role of family in this process. This paper is comprised of two qualitative studies with immigrant community in the US: a study with Hmong key community informants to explore their perceptions of barriers to shared parenting and the role of family in the decision-making process; and a second study with divorced Hmong parents centered on their parenting experiences after divorce.

The initial qualitative study broadly follows a community engaged approach with 17 key community informants selected to share their knowledge on the topic. A semi-structured interview guided by previous literature on divorce and parenting was designed. A thematic analysis of the transcripts found 6 themes. Themes revolved around perceived barriers to communication between former spouses and the role of specific family members in facilitating or impeding the shared parenting process.

The second qualitative study was guided by an interpretative phenomenological approach with 10 divorced Hmong parents. Five Hmong fathers, and 5 Hmong mothers were part of this study. Through analysis, themes centered on how parents came to their current childcare arrangement, what were their experiences in sharing parenting responsibilities with their former spouses, and the role of family in the shared parenting process.

Implications for findings across the two studies are also shared. Most importantly, findings seem to support a need for a cultural lens to better understand the experiences of divorcing parents. Many in this community do not come into contact with the legal system after a divorce and instead implement informal shared parenting arrangements. Findings raise concerns of how applicable the clan mediation system of divorce remains applicable for Hmong parents in the US today. As Hmong families acculturate and adopt more Western ideologies of parenting, this may clash with the culture and presents ambiguity for parents in how to share parenting after divorce. Moreover, it is unclear how clan leaders sanction childrearing arrangements if at all. For parents that use the legal system, they may be required to participate in mandated parenting education programs. Yet the applicability and effectiveness of such programs for Hmong parents needs further exploration as findings across the two studies here illustrate both structural and cultural barriers to maintaining contact between former spouses. Most importantly, family members seem to play an instrumental role during the decision-making process of shared parenting arrangements and after divorce as a caregiver role. Thus, further examination of how intervention programs and resources are adapted to include the extended family after divorce could be helpful for closing some of the gaps in this community. Moving forward, suggestions for future directions include continued exploration of how immigrant parents come to share parenting, the role of family during this process, and the impact of the various arrangements on child adjustment and well-being.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Divorce in the United States (US) has been on the decline in the recent decades, with a record low in 2019 of only 14.9 for every 1,000 marriages ending in divorce (Raley et al., 2020). As more Americans postpone marriage or choose to forego marriage altogether, the gap of America's "marriage divide" deepens as more college educated and economically wealthier individuals are more likely to choose marriage and stay married (Raley et al., 2015). Moreover, some researchers suggest that certain demographic and racial/ethnic groups continue to be vulnerable to marital dissolution (Brown & Lin, 2012; Cohen, 2019), including some immigrant populations (Furtado et al., 2013; Ryabov, 2021). Research suggests that children of divorced parents are at higher risks of behavioral problems if they experience a parental divorce or separation when young (Williams & Dunne-Bryant, 2006), have a higher likelihood in experiencing poverty if parents have lower education levels (Hogendoorn et al., 2020), and lower college attendance and probability of completing college when there was an unlikely divorce (Brand et al., 2019). One of the strongest predictors of child adjustment to a divorce or separation is parents' ability to maintain a collaborative coparenting relationship after a divorce or separation (Herrero et al., 2020; Viry, 2014). Although research on divorce and coparenting have been prolific, most studies have predominantly been focused on white families (Becher et al., 2019; Beckmeyer et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2016). As a result little is known of how immigrant families navigate parenting after divorce. Hmong, a Southeast Asian immigrant group who have been in the US for 47 years, are unique in the study of divorce as many still forego civil marriages in favor of traditional cultural marriages. Thus, when a divorce is introduced, many may not encounter the legal system or may face additional barriers in accessing contact with shared children as divorce is still highly stigmatized in this community (Vang, 2010). Due

to the dearth of literature, the primary aim of this dissertation was to explore the role of culture in the shared parenting process after divorce with an immigrant population.

In this original qualitative dissertation, an initial study (Study 1) broadly guided by the community engaged approach (Belone et al, 2016) was designed to better understand key community informants' perceptions on coparenting and parenting after divorce in the Hmong community. In Study 2, I used an interpretative phenomenological analysis framework (Eatough & Smith, 2017) to explore the lived experiences of divorced Hmong parents coparenting and parenting experiences. Findings from this research can be used to gain a better understanding of diverse shared parenting experiences after divorce. Moreover, results may also contribute to interventions and education programs that center culture and family members in shared parenting practices such that Hmong parents have greater access to support after their divorce.

Background

The divorce and coparenting literature have typically involved samples of predominantly white families (Becher et al., 2019; Beckmeyer et al., 2019; Jamison et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2016), with few focused on Asians (Kurrien & Vo, 2004; Nozawa, 2020), and none on specific Asian immigrant groups in the US like the Hmong. Moreover, the existing literature with Asian families tends to be from outside the US (Hoang & Kirby, 2020; Hoang et al., 2020; Jeong et al., 2018; Sun & Jiang, 2017; Zhang et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2020), with married couples, (Hoang et al., 2020; Sun & Jiang, 2017; Kurrien & Vo, 2004) and focused on the role of grandparents (Hoang & Kirby, 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). Little is known about coparenting practices among other extended family members after divorce (Jones, 2011).

Shared parenting among kin can be beneficial for both parents and children (Jones, 2011;

Zhang et al., 2022), but few have explored diverse family structures in the divorce and coparenting literature. Specifically in Asian cultures, coparenting relationships and arrangements have been shown to go beyond parents and immediate family members to include extended family members (Hoang et al., 2020; McHale & Sirotkin, 2019). Yet with the differences in immigration history among Asian subpopulations, it is important to refrain from considering the Asian population as a monolithic group. For instance, the Hmong who are part of the Southeast Asian refugees, have a unique history and culture that presents particular barriers to parenting together after divorce due to their clan-based structure (Tatman, 2004). They also have a different pattern of divorce since their arrival to the US compared to their Asian counterparts (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993), yet no studies have examined such relationships post-divorce in Hmong families. Therefore, the overall goal of this project is to better understand the role of culture in shared parenting with a specific subgroup of Asian immigrants, the Hmong, by first investigating how the community members conceptualizes this concept to inform divorced Hmong parents shared parenting experiences.

Conceptually, the divorce literature has typically documented coparenting as the ideal post-divorce parenting relationship to limit the impact of divorce on children. This ideal parenting arrangement includes maintaining boundaries, communication and support, and equal sharing of parental responsibilities between parental figures (Margolin, 2001). Feinberg's coparenting framework (2003) also highlights interrelated dimensions of coparenting: agreement/disagreement on child rearing issues, division of labor related to child rearing, support/undermining between both coparents, and joint management of family interactions. Child-rearing agreement refers to the degree to which parental figures agree on child-related

decisions and topics such as behavioral expectations or moral values to instill. Joint family management encompasses former spouses the new family structure after divorce by their communication and management of boundaries. The amount of support or lack thereof, such as respecting and upholding the other parent's decision is highlighted in the support/undermining dimension. Division of labor involves the degree to which a parent is satisfied with duties and responsibilities (e.g., child's medical care, daily routines) shared with their former partner (Feinberg, 2003). In this dissertation, I use the term shared parenting rather than coparenting to denote the inclusion of multiple caregivers in the parenting process after divorce. Guided by previous scholars' conceptualization of coparenting, shared parenting in this study is defined as how multiple caregivers engage together in their agreement on child rearing issues, how child labor is divided and amongst who, and how individuals may support or undermine one another in the shared parenting process.

The two studies that comprise this dissertation will focus on divorced Hmong parents' experience of shared parenting with their former spouses and family members. The social construction of families and parenting roles are reflective of the strict gender roles in the Hmong community (Lee et al., 2019). Moreover, as it is common for many to live in multigenerational households, this also influences how and who is engaged with shared parenting (McHale & Sirotkin, 2019). A community-engaged approach (Belone et al, 2016) guided my dissertation research aimed to address gaps in research and theory. Community-engaged research recognizes the importance of insider knowledge and insight provided from community members as necessary to identify and design culturally appropriate research studies (Isler & Corbie-Smith, 2012).

Moreover, I recognize that as a second-generation immigrant Hmong woman who has undergone extensive schooling in a Western education system, my conceptualization and understanding of parenting and coparenting was influenced by Western ideologies. To combat my own biases of parenting together after divorce and the influence of culture, it was important to engage with older, key community informants who were steeped in our Hmong cultural traditions. Findings are used to map on to the experiences of divorced Hmong parents in the second study.

The intent and goal of this study was to understand how they conceptualized parenting together after divorce in the Hmong community. Findings from this study were used to map onto the second study with Hmong parents about their experiences with shared parenting after divorce. This innovative approach differs from past studies with families as it utilizes a community-engaged framework to gain an initial understanding of the phenomenon prior to exploring the same phenomenon, in this case, shared parenting experiences, with families who had actual experiences. This research promises to contribute to the literature on coparenting and add a new theoretical lens for understanding the phenomenon based in a specific cultural community, namely the Hmong. It will shed the heretofore-typical use of a Western ideology of coparenting to include a new perspective on parenting together after divorce from a culturally diverse family experience.

Conceptual Approaches to Coparenting

Since its introduction during the 1980s, coparenting has received great scholarly interest (Rosenthal & Hansen, 1980), with past studies focused on child outcomes and inter-parental conflict to inform divorce education programs and court decisions (O'Hara et al., 2019). Various

models and definitions have been used to define the construct, with an overall agreement that coparenting refers to shared child-rearing responsibilities among two individuals, particularly parents (Feinberg, 2003; Margolin, 2001). Baum (2004) proposed three variations of coparenting styles: cooperative, parallel, and conflictual coparenting. Cooperative parents characterized parents with higher frequency of contact and satisfaction despite some conflict. Parallel parenting involved coparents who had high levels of conflict despite having high levels of contact with children. Parents in this group also had moderate levels of contact with one another but lower satisfaction and the non-resident parent was perceived to have a limited role in children's lives (Amato et al., 2011). Conflictual coparenting is portrayed by different levels of involvement for primary and non-residential parent, lower levels of compromise, and higher engagement in attack strategies for addressing conflict (Baum, 2004). Others have also identified single parenting as a typology: non-residential parents who rarely saw their children or were perceived to have little influence on their children's lives and little communication with resident parents (Amato, 2011). Regardless of coparenting typology, attitudes (e.g., perception of the other parent's parenting capabilities (Markham & Coleman, 2012; Russell et al., 2016), satisfaction with divorce decree) and custody arrangements (Markham et al., 2017) played a great role in quality of coparenting relationships between divorced spouses. For example, mothers' who perceived fathers to be important for child well-being (Petren et al., 2017) or fit as a parent (Petren et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2016) were more likely to encourage communication between children and their fathers. Additional barriers to coparenting are type of custody arrangements made between former spouses (e.g., formal vs informal) (Markham et al., 2017), physical distance (Russell et al., 2016), or type of divorce such as intimate partner violence

(Hardesty et al., 2016).

Consistent with a family systems perspective, parents are perceived as needing to maintain a relationship to raise their shared children. Research has shown that when both parents are able to support each other's parenting decisions and maintain boundaries, both parents and children are able to better adjust and limit the impact of the divorce (Ferraro et al., 2016; Herrero et al., 2020). Moreover, as families encounter changes in boundaries, rules, and roles as they transition from living together as one family to separate homes, having a positive and supporting coparenting relationship can limit the stress from such changes (Pruett & Donsky, 2011). Although parents are often the most likely people to provide caregiving to shared children after a divorce (Baum, 2004; Markham et al., 2017), prior theoretical (Kurrien & Vo, 2004; McHale et al., 2014) and empirical (Yoon, 20015; Wu et al., 2018) publications have pointed to specific persons beyond parents that play a critical role in parenting after divorce. For instance, research with Black families have highlighted the role of kin and friends in caring for children after separation (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004; Taylor et al., 2022). Other research reflecting race and ethnicity indicates grandparents in caring for young children before and after marital separation in Hispanic families (Burnett, 1999) and Asian families (McHale et al., 2014). As previously mentioned, the literature on divorce and shared parenting with the Asian population in the US is limited. As many cultures within this population are collectivistic and hold values that center around family, divorce often carries a stigma as it disrupts these ties which ultimately can impact the flow of communication between former spouses, family members, and parent-child relationship (Rai & Choi, 2018; Yeung et al., 2018). Moreover, for the Hmong community, many may not legally formalize their marriages but do undergo a cultural process in recognizing their

marriage. When families experience a divorce in the Hmong culture this can create ambiguity in the family system, particularly for Hmong women as they are removed from their father's clan during marriage and casted out from their husband's clan during divorce. Children who primarily reside with their mothers after divorce also face ambiguity in who's clan they can call on for support, especially when they choose to marry in the future. Therefore, although this process may be the primary pathway to divorce for many in the community, little is known of how this system encourages parenting together after divorce and how Hmong parents come to experience shared parenting. As such, the experiences of divorced Hmong parents are unique and warrant greater attention.

My dissertation will contribute to the literature by exploring shared parenting within an immigrant community. By doing so, this will widen our definition of family and incorporate diverse family systems when considering who is part of the parenting process after divorce. A goal of this research to understand how applicable current theoretical and conceptual models fit with this specific population, thus contributing to an expansion of coparenting conceptualization. This research can also contribute to the knowledge and cultural awareness lenses of professionals who work with immigrant persons like the Hmong.

Theoretical Foundations

This dissertation project is guided by the following theories: family systems theory, family stress models, life course theory and ecological systems theory.

Family Systems Theory

One of the core assumptions of Family Systems Theory is the need to understand the relationship among the parts of a family to gain a full understanding of the organism (Bowen,

1976; Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). The focus on the "whole" and adoption of a systems perspective allowed for examination of the process and shared responsibility (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). For families after divorce, the notions of rules, boundaries, hierarchy, feedback loops and equilibrium are central in understanding families as a complex system. With this theory, divorce is perceived as a transition which family members renegotiate these central components to create "new" or working system to raise their shared children.

Although family systems theory is an influential lens for examining families after divorce, particular attention to how this theory applies to Asian American families is important to consider. For instance, filial piety is a cultural concept in which one is expected to prioritize family over personal needs and are obligated to obey their parents, grandparents, and elders (Park & Chesla, 2007). Thus, family rules are mandated by those perceived to be authority figures and have influence over major life decisions (McHale et al., 2014). Moreover, in many Asian cultures there are clear hierarchies of power in which there are rigid boundaries between family subsystems. As a result, encouragement of creating clear boundaries to facilitate communication between subsystems (e.g., parent and child) may not align with Asian cultural values. Other components in Asian American family systems may include loyalty, face-saving, and harmony; all which center on the notion of maintaining homeostasis (Lee et al., 2005). Divorce in such communities is then perceived as disrupting this homeostasis, with prior studies noting that those initiating divorce in Asian communities often experiencing isolation (Abraham, 2000). For Hmong families, shame and stigma may be exacerbated due to their close-knit, clan-based structure in which divorce severs ties and often sour relationships between both families and clans.

Thus, family systems theory offers one lens in understanding how divorced families come to share parenting after divorce. Specifically, as divorced families are seen as a family system due to the shared children they share. However, due to the limited literature with this theory on diverse families, particularly Asian American families (Baptist & Hamon, 2022) and immigrant and refugee families (Furtado, 2013), this theory should be understood in relation to such limitations.

Family Stress Models

Family stress theories offer one perspective in examining how families respond to a stressor over time and the resulting impact on the family unit. Amato's divorce stress adjustment perspective (1993; 2000) was used to guide this dissertation and will be discussed fully in study 1. Amato's stress adjustment perspective (1993) on divorce is similar to family stress theories like that of the Double ABCx model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) in which families' adjustment (X factor) to a stressor (A factor; divorce) is influenced by the type of resources (B factor) they have access to. Both models also highlight that the meanings family attribute to divorce affects how the stressor is experienced (Amato, 1993; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). This is relevant to Hmong parents as the meanings attached to divorce influence how families adjust to parenting together.

Life Course Theory

Elder's life course perspective (1994) offers a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the development and health of individuals across the life span and life stages. An individual is seen as having agency in creating their own lives through choices that are taken in given opportunities or constraints within history or their social circumstances. Most importantly,

this theory argues that one's life course is embedded and shaped by the historical times and place they experience, and the life transitions experienced vary accordioning to the time in which a person experiences it within their lifetime. Linked lives is another component of this theory and it assumes that the lives of family members are interconnected with one another. In this sense, even after a divorce, parents relate to one another due to the shared children they have with research showing that this relationship affects child well-being (Petren et al., 2017) and parent-child relationships (Peltz et al., 2018).

Hmong parents' experiences of shared parenting after divorce are based on their divorce decisions, such as the use of the traditional clan mediation system or the US court system. This impacts how shared parenting is arranged: who is involved in the process affects with whom parenting is ultimately shared. The historical background of the Hmong people also influences how shared parenting is experienced by Hmong parents after divorce. As a refugee population, the first wave of immigrants in the US were characterized by family separation, trauma from losing of family members during the war and escaping of persecution, and feelings of loss as they adapted to a new host country that was vastly different from their home (Tatman, 2004). Their children, including those who immigrated and were born in the US, became the next generation of immigrants. Within this existed a cohort that was typically foreign born but arrived at an early age (< 5 years of age) or were born in the US during the 1980s (Lee & Clarke, 2013). This was a unique cohort as these children were the ones who grew up straddling their first-generation immigrant parents' culture and the US American culture. Although little empirical evidence or documentation may exist of this cohort today, their experiences are quite different to second-generation Hmong immigrants. For instance, it was typical during that time for

individuals to marry early and young (< 18 years of age) and begin their families soon after marriage. Hmong women most likely resided with their husband's family after marriage and the typical household consisted of multiple families living in one home. This was in part because, according to cultural tradition, single women were not able to live on their own away from their family. Moreover, culturally, sons must live at home to care for their aging parents. Divorce was taboo and rarely practiced. Family and community shunned those who were divorced. Post-divorce, children were traditionally assigned to live with a parent based on gender, son with their fathers and daughters with their mothers. This was in part due to sons carrying on the family name and lineage and daughters eventually marrying out of the family.

Life course theory provides a practical framework for understanding the Hmong experience of divorce and shared parenting over time.

Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1992) offers a conceptual framework for understanding the nested systems in which immigrant families like the Hmong exist. Human development occurs within the context of multiple nested and interdependent systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These nested systems influence both individual and family development. The individual nested within these systems holds particular traits (age, sex, health, psychological functioning) that influence how the varying systems interact. This theory provides a critical lens for families experiencing a divorce transition as interaction within a family system, such as parents' coparenting relationship, impacts other subsystems like that of the parent-child relationship. As parents are also embedded within ecologies of work, extended families, court, and culture, the connections across these

ecologies become even more critical during transitions where changes to existing support and relationships are rapidly occurring.

Given the focal phenomenon of this study, the microsystem represents the individual parent who has divorced and their proximal interactions (e.g., interactions with family members or with the other parent). The mesosystem is comprised of systems of the microsystems or interactions among them. For example, the interactions between extended family, family of former spouse, and their family of origin can influence the divorcing parent's adjustment. The level beyond the proximal factors of these two systems is the exosystem which consists of the different institution and community factors that influence development. In this sense, the exosystem represents the availability of resources in accessing a divorce (e.g., clan mediations) and support in arranging childcare. The macrosystem outlines the sociocultural contextual factors that influences development. In this project, the macrosystem is especially significant as shared parenting experiences are influenced by one's economic, immigrant status, acculturation, and cultural values. The final level, the chronosystem is also of pertinence. First and foremost, the timing during one's life that they experience a divorce can shape their own development. Second, the perception and attitudes towards divorce and childcare arrangement may shift across generations which can shape the experiences of divorced Hmong parents. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's framework provides a structure that outlines the complexity of shared parenting after divorce in an immigrant community.

Researcher's Positionality

Although I have provided separate positionality statements within both articles as it relates to the overall inquiry of each study, I provide here a more in-depth overview of my

positionality to the research as a whole and my background to give a thorough understanding of how I came to arrive at this project. I consider myself as a pragmatist, as I am often asking questions of what "works" when combated with a research problem. Although my recent research program including this dissertation has been mostly qualitative, this stemmed out of the dearth of research with my community on this topic. Before embarking on quantitative studies, I believe it is necessary to first explore if what I am understanding and seeing matches with what is already in the literature. Thus, I don't feel tied to one specific interpretative framework or philosophy but choose what I believe best meet the purpose of the research at hand. For this project, I believe it is necessary to operate out of a social constructivist paradigm as my intention is to unpack culture, a concept that has meanings formed through interaction with others (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Moreover, in operating out of this framework, I acknowledge that my own background has shaped my interpretation of culture. Thus, as I am part of the community that I am researching, it is critical that I specify certain aspects of my lived experiences and social position that influences the ways I approach, see, and interpret my research.

I am a 29-year-old Hmong American, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, and educated woman. I was born and raised in Stockton, California in an immigrant family. My parents divorced and as the oldest in our family, I saw firsthand their struggles with shared parenting. I have not experienced divorce, nor do I have any children of my own. Yet I have observed many others in addition to my parents within my own community experience their own divorces and ways in which they navigated shared parenting (if at all). Thus, although I may not be a divorced Hmong parent, these experiences have shaped my understanding of divorce, shared parenting, parenting, and family.

Family Background

I am the oldest in a family of six children. One of my siblings is biological, with the remaining four half-siblings who share the same mother but different fathers. Both of my parents are 1.5-generation immigrants; they arrived in the US with their families when they were still too young to hold any memories of their home country (Portes & Zhou, 1993). They encountered typical immigrant experiences; they served as translators for their parents and experienced changing power dynamics due to language barriers. Yet my family, in many ways, did not fit the traditional Hmong immigrant family. My parents followed the norm of that time and married quite young. I was born when my mom was only 15. Unlike their peers, they divorced years later after my brother was born and we both were still in grade school. Although divorce is still stigmatized today, during the time of my parents' divorce, it was very taboo within our culture. Thus, I saw firsthand the shame and isolation that both experienced in our community soon after as they were labeled as divorcees. Because they were traditionally but not legally married, they did not use the court system in the US to legalize their divorce. Yet they did encounter the court system to engage in a long battle of custody for my brother and me. We eventually settled into a routine in which we lived with my mom most of the time and saw my dad on the weekends. As time went on, his involvement waned and became non-existent for a while.

After their divorce, the neighborhoods in which we lived were poor and had high crime activities. We moved a lot and I remember changing schools' multiple times. As the oldest, I gradually took on the role of being the second parent in our household. I learned how to not only care for my siblings but also to coordinate my time and schedule around their needs. We settled into a rhythm in which I took care of the household while my mom took on the role as the

financial breadwinner.

As she entered a new relationship and additional children were born, our dynamics continued to change. Because my siblings' father was not Hmong, I saw how those in our extended family and community at large reacted to my mother dating a person outside our race. From my memories and perspective, I recall on multiple occasions times that she had to hold her head high as others spoke of her inability to be a good mother as a divorced Hmong woman. I also stood witness to those within her own family shaming her for being with my siblings' father because he was not Hmong and could not understand our traditions.

My oldest half-sibling was diagnosed with autism at an early age; such a disability was the first for our family. We knew of few others at the time who had children with autism and our family struggled with coming to terms with the diagnosis and how to ensure my brother received the proper care. My half-sister was born a few years afterwards, and she was the second in our family, which meant she was subjected somewhat to strict the gender roles that our mother learned from her own parents. Although there is an age gap between my half-sister and me, her experiences growing up in a bicultural household has shaped my conceptualization of family. When my second youngest half-sibling was born, I had just graduated from high school and was about to begin my college journey. He was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder that impacted his body's ability to process food and gain muscle tone. At this time, my mom and siblings' father had separated, and we were back in our earlier rhythm with me as the caretaker and she as the breadwinner. Due to my siblings' conditions, I became interested in the social sciences and began to work with children with learning disabilities. My mother and siblings' father reconnected soon after and had my final half-sibling who is currently in grade school. At the

time I'm writing this dissertation, they have been separated again for quite some time; my siblings are in a similar routine as I experienced where they typically see their fathers on the weekends.

As I continued my higher education journey, which took me to places far away from my home and family, my privilege increased more than ever. I began to climb the economic and social ladder and build networks that contributed to my privileged status. I became hyper aware of my position in my own community and in the world, of how I could be an expert in some circles, but an unmarried and filial Hmong daughter in another space. These experiences over time have shaped and instilled in me a sense of compassion for Hmong families who have experienced divorce. It is also the reason I desire to be someone who utilizes my position to help others. Most importantly, my family background positioned me to learn how to live with ambiguity at an early age. As our family took various forms over the years, I had to learn how to navigate the continuous changes.

Study 1

In the first study, "We Can't Be Friends": Listening to Hmong Community Informants' Perspectives on Shared Parenting after Divorce, I explored the role of culture in shared parenting after divorce. Informed and guided by a community engaged approach (Belone et al, 2016), I interviewed 17 key community informants from a Midwestern state on their perception on shared parenting after divorce in the Hmong community. I recruited informants from my primary advisor's network. Interview questions focused on informants' roles in the community, parenting within their own families, and perception of others' parenting after divorce.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, I found that the changes in

shared parenting after divorce could be described by six themes: perception of high conflict divorces that lead to family members choosing sides and greater involvement of certain family members. In relation to Amato's stress adjustment perspective that guided this project, my conclusion was that key community informants perceived divorce for Hmong families to be a stressful transition, with few having the know-how to create and maintain an open communication channel with their former spouses and family members. Most importantly, a cultural nuance in relation to this stress perspective is that Hmong parents may be cut off from their families as divorce is perceived to bring shame to their families. Consequently, they lose their support system, which ultimately influences their ability to parent and share parenting.

Study 2

In the second study, "Who's Watching the Kids?: Hmong Parents Parenting Experiences After Divorce", I explored the lived experiences of divorced Hmong parents. I conducted 10 interviews with currently or previously divorced Hmong parents and analyzed data loosely guided by an interpretative phenomenological framework (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The nature of parents' relationship and shared parenting practices could be described by the type of system used (traditional vs court) during the divorce process, how primary parent perceived value of other parent, age of shared children, and if either parent was remarried. I then explored how these experiences aligned with previous conceptualizations of shared parenting in the literature. My conclusion was that Hmong parents' experiences with shared parenting after divorce were not consistent with the literature on coparenting. Hmong parents did view their former spouse to be important to their shared children's development but named multiple family members that were part of the shared parenting process. Moreover, although Hmong parents reported using a

variety of modalities to communicate with their former spouses, their experiences were unique as almost all parents had informal arrangements with their former spouses. Many in the study did not seek out formal custody arrangements and some attributed responsibility to kin in how to negotiate childcare arrangements. In the Hmong culture, individuals may be hesitant to seek out the court system as this could be construed as overstepping their roles by not including the family members or clan representatives in the process. As such, parents in this study arranged shared childcare with whomever they thought was most reliable. The overall conclusion was that there seemed to be great ambiguity for parents in how to share parenting with their former spouses and family members as there were no explicit conversations about who was responsible for what.

Taken together, this dissertation sheds light on a unique group, the Hmong. A community perspective grounded the study by first establishing ways that the Hmong conceptualize shared parenting and the cultural factors that influence it, and then examining actual shared parenting after divorce from those who had experienced the phenomenon. This study illustrates the need for a cultural lens when defining what it means to parent together and who shares in that process after divorce. Finally, both studies call for future scholars and practitioners to be culturally mindful when working with divorcing families so that shared parenting is embedded within the entire family system rather than just the two divorcing spouses.

Chapter 2: Study 1

"We Can't Be Friends": Listening to Hmong Community Informants' Perspectives on Shared Parenting after Divorce

In the recent decade, the narrative of the two-parent married family structure in the United States (US) (Raley et al., 2015; 2020) has undergone significant changes (Smock & Schwartz, 2020) due to the rise of cohabitation, single parent families, and individuals turning away from marriage (Cherlin, 2020). When data is disaggregated, racial-ethnic minorities are most likely to begin a family in cohabitating relationships (Brown et al., 2008; Cherlin, 2020) compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts. For Asians in the US, data has continuously painted the pattern of low divorce rates, high rates of marriage for significant period of times, and lower single parent families in comparison to other racial-ethnic groups (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Copen et al., 2012; Shattuck & Kreider, 2013). As a result, there has been less scholarly attention paid to this population and even less to understanding how divorce impacts specific subgroups of Asians in the US. Although various Asian cultures (e.g., Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Thai) may share similar qualities as a collectivistic community like that of having a strong sense of family that emphasizes filial piety, social harmony, and family solidarity (McHale et al., 2014; Park & Chesla, 2007), the differences in immigration history among Asian subpopulations, in addition to unique cultural beliefs, play an integral part in individual and family lived experiences in the US. Most importantly, as the family unit is central in many Asian communities (McHale et al., 2014), divorce is highly stigmatized (McHale et al., 2014; Yeung et al., 2018) which can serve as a barrier in accessing support and building coparenting alliances (Hong & Welch, 2013). Hmong, a Southeast Asian immigrant group who has been in the US for

47 years, have seen rising divorce rates since their arrival (Pfeifer, 2008). The most recent census data show 3.0% of Hmong men and 4.9% of Hmong women reported being divorced (US Census Bureau, 2017). These numbers may be higher as it is common to carry out a traditional Hmong marriage ceremony, with a civil marriage being a formality. As a patrilineal clan-based community, marriage ties together individuals, families, and clans. Divorce introduces ambiguity in the family system as it severs these ties, which impedes communication across families in renegotiation of parenting responsibilities. Thus, a primary goal of this study was to explore how Hmong parents shared parenting after divorce through key community informants as they can help identify gaps and structural barriers to effectively address difficulties in parenting together after divorce.

Asian Families and Parenting

In many Asian cultures, the most important aspect of an individual's life is family; this is where they must practice loyalty, obligation, and interdependence (Sullivan, 2005; Yeung et al., 2018). There is a sense of duty to the family where the individual is part of the totality of the larger unit and social structure. As such, in many families, children are raised by a wide range of adults in addition to their parents such as their grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins (McHale et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2005). In Asian communities where there are traditionally large family households, older siblings are also typically delegated childcare tasks to support parents in childrearing (Yunus, 2005). Often, in these multigenerational households in which parents were unavailable, grandmothers would step in as the surrogate mother (Yunus, 2005) with other family members in the household providing additional care (McHale et al., 2014). Thus, the responsibility of child-rearing is shared by the group where a substitute parent may be needed

depending on the occasion (Yunus, 2005; Yeung et al., 2018). This shared parenting style instills in children the need to behave accordingly to not bring shame upon their families (Sullivan, 2005) and emphasizes the interdependence in Asian families and communities (McHale et al., 2014).

Today, this kin caregiving system may be shifting or changing as contemporary Asian families are more likely to live in nuclear households rather than with extended family structures (Pilkauskas et al., 2020). For instance, Japanese men in urban areas have been found to engage in more housework equal to or more than their wives when employed full time or had higher levels of education compared to wives who were non-employed or lower education levels (Shwalb, 2004). Yet in comparison, parents who live in more rural settings may adhere to stricter gender roles with mothers taking on more responsibility as the primary caregiver during infancy and toddlerhood (Luo et al., 2013). Father participation in direct childcare may be limited and increase only after the child ages to include physical play when young, yet often their participation is viewed as temporary and only when mothers are unavailable (Kurrien & Vo, 2004). As immigrant Asian families such as the Hmong acculturate to the US, they may be faced with conflicting views of childrearing and roles in the parenting process. Initially as a group that lived in rural parts of Asia, their parenting practices and definitions of parenthood and shared parenting may be different to that of Western ideologies. Moreover, traditional Hmong households are comprised of multiple generations including grandparents, siblings, parents, and other relatives. Currently, 36% of Hmong in the U.S. reported living in a multigenerational household (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021).

Divorce in Asian Families

Research suggests that individuals across various Asian countries now have increased accessibility to divorce (Chen & Yip, 2018; Dommaraju & Jones, 2011) as seen in the change of more lenient divorce laws (Chen & Yip, 2018) or societal shift in attitudes towards divorce (Huang, 2005). Despite so, divorce is still perceived as highly stigmatized in many Asian communities as it brings shame for failing to uphold cultural norms (Kim & Kim, 2002; Liong, 2016). For example, a review of socio-cultural risk factors with South Asian immigrant women finds that stigma about divorce is a barrier in the initiation of a divorce despite domestic violence being a concern (Rai & Choi, 2018). Additionally, similar studies with other subgroups of Asian immigrants in the US emphasizes the shame and cultural stigma of divorce (Bauer et al., 2000) particularly for women from communities that practice patriarchal values (Lawson & Satti, 2016; Yuan & Weiser, 2019). For instance, due to the hierarchical patrilineal family structure in many South Asian immigrant communities (Guru, 2009; Lawson & Satti, 2016), divorce is strongly stigmatized in which Pakistani women have shared experiences of humiliation and rejection by family members (Tonsing & Barn, 2017), loss of valuable assets (Midlarsky et al., 2006), and pressure in leaving children with fathers or extended family (Bhandari & Sabri, 2020). Thus, in comparison to traditional households where extended family members divided household chores and childrearing responsibilities (Yunus, 2005), women from such communities may be more likely to experience single parenthood rather than coparenting with their former spouse or family members after divorce (Lawson & Satti, 2016).

When parents can support one another's parenting decisions, both parents and children are able to better adjust and limit the impact of the divorce (Ferraro et al., 2016; Herrero et al., 2020). Prior studies have suggested that the negative impact of divorce or parental separation on

children's adjustment can be moderated by the coparenting relationship (Ortega-Gasper et al., 2008; Pires & Martins, 2021). For instance, Parkes and colleagues' (2019) analysis of longitudinal data from the US Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study showed coparenting to have additional effects to the couple relationship on child's behavior beyond effects from parenting alone. Suggesting that parents who can provide supportive coparenting while continuing to develop their own individual parenting abilities can lessen the long-term impact of the couple relationship for early childhood behavioral problems (Parkes et al., 2019).

Hmong Context in the US

Initially political refugees, the Hmong were forced to flee their homes due to their involvement with the US government during the Vietnam War (Quincy, 2017). Many eventually resettled in the US (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993), with Minnesota having the second largest Hmong population in the US (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2019). Since their resettlement, the rise in divorce rates has been considerable (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), with the most recent census data showing at least 9% of U.S.-based Hmong are divorced (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). One study documented that the prevalence of Hmong divorce had more than doubled from 2% reported in 2000 to 6% in 2010 (Xiong, 2013).

Traditionally, the Hmong culture has placed great value on family and having a sense of community. This ideology of family impacts many aspects of Hmong life such as marriage where it is perceived as extending the family rather than an individual process (Dunnigan, 1982). The Hmong are also a patrilineal clan-based community that practice patriarchal ideologies in the family system. As such, the traditional family system follows a hierarchy where the eldest man holds the final say in family decisions (e.g., divorce). Under the clan system, individuals are

born into their father's clan which are organized by last name in the Hmong community (Xiong et al., 2013). Men never change clans; women experience a transfer from their father's spiritual lineage to that of their husband's clan during marriage. Individuals are discouraged from marrying those within the same clan; therefore, inter-clan relationships are essential as clans are intended to serve as a form of capital, with those identifying with a clan being able to access support and resources. Thus, marriage creates bonds between two individuals, two families, and two clans (Dunnigan, 1982). Moreover, there are Hmong couples who undergo the traditional marriage ceremony but lack a legal marriage certificate. Hmong couples often forego a civil marriage as the traditional Hmong ceremony is adequate for the community to acknowledge that the couple, families, and clans have become intertwined.

It is possible that many couples may now choose to bypass this traditional process to use the US court system to either dissolve their legal marriage (if there was one) and solve custody disputes without the need for traditional clan mediations. As Hmong culture continues to evolve and individuals acculturate to US American society, changes and generational differences continue to impact the divorce process where couples may have increase access to divorce through different pathways in the US (Meredith & Rowe, 1986). Despite possible changes, this phenomenon is one that still carries shame for most Hmong families as divorce severs family and clan ties and access to capital (Xiong & Xiong, 2010). Particularly for women, it becomes unclear to whose clan they belong as they are cut off from their former spouse's clan and are no longer a part of their father's clan. They may also lack support from their own community, experience stigma and isolation, and may be cut off from cultural resources, all byproducts of cultural values and traditions (Vang, 2010). Additional barriers to shared parenting are

introduced if Hmong parents remarry as it goes against the cultural norm to keep in contact with former spouses and their families after severing clan and familial ties. This presents significant challenges such as maintaining contact with former spouses and sharing of child-rearing responsibilities. A prior study with previously divorced Hmong persons in the US found the most prominent reasons for divorce included personality or life differences, abusive behaviors, and infidelity (Her & Xiong, 2023).

Due to the dearth of empirical research on Hmong divorce and shared parenting practices, virtually nothing is known about how parenting is shared in Hmong families after divorce and with whom. From anecdotal evidence and preliminary findings from a prior study on divorce (Her & Xiong, 2023) Hmong parents typically voiced having a lack of contact or any communication with their former spouses or other family members. Moreover, a handful of participants reported experiencing intimate partner violence which necessitated restraining orders against former partners, all which restricted coparenting relationships. Furthermore, theoretical publications suggest the conceptualization of the ideal coparenting relationship after divorce may not be applicable for immigrant families where multiple caregivers are involved in the parenting enterprise (McHale et al., 2014). One study with Vietnamese families showed various extended family members assuming similar responsibilities to that of the parents of the child such as feeding, clothing, and caring (Kurrien & Vo, 2004). Similarly, traditional Hmong households are composed of multiple generations including grandparents, siblings, parents, and other relatives (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Studies have shown that multiple family members (e.g., siblings) do play a large role in childrearing in Hmong families that goes beyond the typical babysitting or offering support (Juang & Meschke, 2017; Lamborn & Nguyen, 2013). Therefore, using the little

knowledge we do have about parenting within Hmong families, a primary goal of this study was to begin filling in the gaps by exploring how Hmong parents came to their shared parenting after divorce.

Current Study

The aim of the study was two-fold: (a) to explore the ways key community informants conceptualized shared parenting after divorce for Hmong parents and (b) identify the roles of family members in the shared parenting process.

Theoretical Considerations

This study was guided by stress theories, specifically Amato's stress adjustment perspective on divorce (Amato, 1993; 2000). This general model views divorce as a stressor that unfolds over time and the development and adjustment of children as impacted by the resources they are afforded. Such resources included but are not limited to parental support (e.g., supervision, guidance, emotional and social support) and socioeconomic resources. Those who have greater access and availability of resources have greater opportunities to develop social and cognitive competence when met with stressful life transitions such as experiencing a parental divorce. Divorce is viewed in this sense as a series of stressors that can ultimately impact a child's adjustment and well-being due to possible experiences of conflict preceding and following a divorce, along with life disruptions that are introduced after divorce (e.g., loss of contact with non-custodial parent). Parents ability to maintain collaborative relationships post-divorce is thus seen as a factor that can mediate or moderate stress encountered from the divorce process.

Author Positionality

Although I identify as a Hmong American woman, I recognize the layers and complexity of my identity. For instance, my identity as a Hmong person who speaks the Hmong language may contribute to others seeing me as part of the community. Yet also as a Hmong woman that has undergone extensive schooling in a Western and American education system, I may be perceived as an outsider. Moreover, as a second-generation immigrant, I may not be able to fully communicate in Hmong with the same fluency as first-generation immigrants. Or I may be perceived as an expert due to my grasp of the literature and high English proficiency, yet lacking knowledge on the subject as I have not experienced divorce herself. Thus, in navigating this insider-outsider role along with the strict gender roles, it was important for me to be aware of how my various identities could serve me or work against me when engaging with community members. This is important to ensure participants' comfortability in providing their experiences and knowledge on how divorce impacts parenting in Hmong families.

Method

Community Engaged Approach

Although divorce is often viewed as a stressor, little it is known about the specificities in how divorce can impact Hmong families. This study is broadly guided by a community engaged approach (Belone et al, 2016) in which central figures with cultural insider knowledge are included in the research process. Key informants in community engaged research are gatekeepers in their regulation of access to people and information and often serve as cultural experts. Although typically community members, key informants often hold elite or privileged status due to their knowledge regarding specific topics (McKenna et al., 2011). Moreover, their roles and status in the community is important in understanding the type of information that they can

provide to a given study. As such, an important aspect of this study was to select specific key informants from the community in various employment sectors that would be able to provide their insights to shared parenting after divorce (McKenna & Main, 2013). Specifically, key informants who encountered divorced Hmong families were of primary interest. For example, clan leaders were considered for this study as they often are called upon to provide or take part in the traditional clan mediations for divorcing Hmong couples.

Participants

Participants were recruited primarily through a Hmong faculty's wide network. Criteria for participation were identifying as Hmong, hold a formal position in the Hmong community and/or have continued engagement with Hmong families that have undergone the divorce process, hold knowledge that would be relevant to the study, and were willing to share their knowledge. Specifically, those who held roles as educators, community leaders, or attorneys who practice family law were of interest due to their ability to provide knowledge on divorce and shared parenting in Hmong families. For instance, educators were individuals who often encountered children from diverse family backgrounds and would be able to provide accounts of how shared parenting impacts children's well-being. Community leaders often served roles as mediators for divorcing couples and would be able to provide deep cultural insider knowledge of the culture in shaping shared parenting experiences after divorce. Lastly, attorneys who assisted Hmong individuals or couples in traversing the legal realm of divorce and custody were of interest as well due to their ability in sharing about the differences between legal versus informal parenting arrangements of Hmong families.

Twenty-seven key community informants who met such criteria were contacted. Of the

27, two shared they were no longer interested after the initial phone contact, one shared they did not feel qualified based on their employment to share their experiences, and seven were not able to be reached. The final sample consisted of 17 key community informants (see Table 1).

[Table 1 here]

All participants were from a large urban city in a Midwestern state in the US. Using Portes and Zhou's (1993) definition of generational status was used, first generation were foreign-born children who immigrated to the US as adults and second-generation immigrants were either born in the US or arrived in the US before age 12. Participants who immigrated between 12 and 18 years old were categorized as 1.5 generation. Although participants were sought to provide their perspectives as community leaders or educators about parenting and divorce, some have also experienced divorce themselves and shared about their own experience during their interviews.

Procedures and Data Analysis

Due to the gender dynamics and hierarchy within the Hmong culture, it was important for me to discuss with my advisor who is a Hmong male faculty member, on how to best navigate my identity when engaging and initiating contact with participants. This was important, especially as most were Hmong men, possibly more steeped in traditions due to their role in the community or were first generation immigrants. Initial conversations with my primary advisor consisted of designing an appropriate script for the initial phone contact along with discussion of proper engagement and asking of certain questions during the interview. For instance, it was deemed appropriate etiquette as a Hmong woman when calling a married Hmong man to extend the invitation for participation in research to his wife. It should be noted that although all were invited, none were present during interviews. The study procedures were approved by the

University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB ID: STUDY00009497).

Between May 2022 – August 2022, I conducted semi-structured in person, online (e.g., Zoom), or phone-based interviews dependent on participants' preferences and availability (See Appendix D for interview guidelines). The interviews averaged 56 minutes and ranged from 28 to 82 minutes. All interviews were conducted in either only Hmong or both English and Hmong, based on participants' comfort. Participants were asked to share how they were engaged with the community or what their role was in the community, parenting in their own family (e.g., What does parenting look like in your own family?), and parenting after divorce (e.g., After a divorce, do you think the same people are still involved in the parenting process?). For this study, responses to the latter half of the interviews focused on shared parenting after divorce was the primary focus.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated by me. A thematic analysis approach was used to explore the patterns within and across each participant's interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, I listened to the audio interviews and read the transcripts on multiple occasions to allow for full immersion of the data. The initial readings include notetaking of any potential codes or themes in the margins. After all transcripts were read at least once, they were all then imported into the NVivo™ programming software (QSR, 2020) which was then used to formally code each transcript. After the initial coding of the first transcript, the list of codes generated was compiled into a code book. The list of codes was then used to code the rest of the transcripts with additional codes being added into the codebook. After each interview, the codebook was updated and edited as necessary, and I returned to previous transcripts to compare new codes. Hand drawn mind maps were used to visually see how codes could be combined or

interconnected. Codes were then compiled into themes based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach in which similar codes were grouped together into a theme or a code was promoted into a theme. Major potential themes were shared and discussed against original raw data in transcripts with a trained volunteer member on several occasions. Discussions on interpretations and meanings of themes were held, with any discrepancies noted and resolved prior to finalizing the final list of themes.

Methodological Rigor

To assess the quality and rigor of this qualitative study, various verification procedures were utilized (Anfara et al., 2002). To ensure transferability, I engaged in triangulation in analyzing transcripts, memos, and coding during the data process. Transferability was also further addressed through purposive sampling as only informants who came into contact with divorced Hmong families were interviewed. To address dependability, a trained volunteer familiar with the study was engaged in collaborative discussions and analysis of the transcripts to help me better recognize my own limitations in interpretation and reach meanings of participants' responses. Lastly, I practiced reflexivity through journaling my thoughts, emotions, and reactions during the study and interview to assist with confirmability. Reflexive memoing and documentation of my initial reactions and reflections during data collection and data analysis was included.

Findings

The following themes were found to be important in how key community informants conceptualized shared parenting for divorced Hmong parents and the role of family in the shared parenting process post-divorce: perception of difficulties in maintaining contact and

communication between ex-spouses, the ideal coparenting relationship, how specific family members may impede or facilitate the coparenting relationship, and the role family members play after a divorce. Themes are presented by frequency, beginning with most frequently mentioned and the other themes in descending order according to mentioning frequency. To protect the identity of the participants, their names have been removed and instead replaced by a number. Quotes shared include participants number and gender in parentheses (#, gender with W for woman and M for man).

Barriers to Maintaining Contact and Communication

Three themes emerged regarding factors that were barriers to divorced Hmong parents' ability to maintain contact and communication with their prior spouses. Contact refers to parents attempt at communication via a specific modality (e.g., phone) while communication was defined as the transmission of information.

Type of Divorce

Almost all participants (n = 14) discussed how the type of divorce parents experienced greatly impacted the communication between former partners. Most notably, of those that did discuss about the types of divorce, 85% of community informants perceived high prevalence rates of hostile or high conflict divorces in the Hmong community. This in turn, was perceived as a significant challenged that made it difficult for parents to set aside their differences to parent together. These types of divorces were characterized by parents' inability to be in the same room, inability to hold conversations without yelling or fighting, or ability to initiate contact with their former spouse. For example, one participant shares: "Then there are few, very few couples that I've seen that actually have a cordial relationship where they actually just talk about the kids like

when they're gonna pick up the kids or when or how to support the kids." (P06, W). Another participant resonates with this perceived lack of communication by sharing:

> They agree that by dividing them [children] you are responsible and for the children they are neutral. So if you come or I come, it is ok. But very few cases where the young do this. All the majority are enemies. It's not just the two divorcing that has issues but also the two families. They fight and there is a very big gap, distance between the families too. Yea, so this is the biggest issue. (P12, M)

As a result of their inability to communicate amicably after a divorce, often one parent may then take on the primary parental role with minimal contact with the non-primary parent. As one participant shares:

> However, once a divorce occurs, often time, I see that pretty much, the wife, the mom, the mother is pretty much left to take care of all the kids. The husband might be involved but not as much as he is supposed to be. (P11, M)

This inability to communicate may be carried out in ways that negatively impact the shared children, such that they may not have access to the other parent. % of Participants talked about the power dynamics in using the legal system such that family courts were perceived to be biased for awarding custody to women compared to men. As the legal system was perceived as biased towards women, the negotiation of parenting time, custody, and child support were also factors that were perceived to impact Hmong parents' ability to maintain communication. One participant shares an example from his work as an attorney:

> Since I can't live, rent a place on my own since I don't have the finance to do it, I'm just gonna go live with my parents. So, he [father] moved to [state]. And guess what happens?

> When he moved to [state], she [mother] calls him 2 months later saying please come back. Why? Nobody wants to watch your kids. And so now I need you to be here to watch your kids. And he said no I'm not gonna do it because I can't even afford to live in Minnesota anymore, so I'll be a deadbeat dad. So now you're pushed to a corner where he can't support your kids anymore financially." (P13, M)

Choosing Sides

The perception of family or clan members taking sides after a divorce was an additional barrier that community informants perceived to be impeding divorced Hmong parents' ability to stay connected (n = 7). Although the family unit is central to the Hmong way of life, due to the clan-based nature of the community, a divorce creates an insider-outsider situation for the families involved. As one participant shares:

> Because I will say it [coparenting] is hard because that really comes down to because side, we're taking sides. If your family [*neeg tsa*] or the women's side, we take that side. Or the *kwv tig*, the husband's side they will always take his side. Again, without really understanding plus now they put the kids in the middle. And then, now they say, because of your mom, because of your dad. (P11, M)

Similarly, another participant shares how family members can take sides in deciding who takes part in raising shared children:

> Hmong people, so after a divorce, the maternal grandparents they don't want to see the son in law anymore either. The in laws don't want to see their daughter in law anymore either. Unless they have these grandchildren, the maternal grandparents will love them if their daughter is the one raising them. But if paternal grandparents, it is their

grandchildren, and others they will love them, but this is one that is difficult for us Hmong. (P09, M)

Moreover, 35% of community informants perceived divorced Hmong parents engaging in high rates of triangulation in which children were forced or pressured to choose a side during or after a parental divorce. “And it happens where dad is like you didn’t choose me. So now that you need me, why am I doing that, and the kids are in between.” (P13, M). Similarly, another participant shares:

> If the children are with the dad, then the dad teaches them to not like the mom anymore. Or if the children are with the mom, then she teaches them to not like the dad. So, they lose that opportunity to help each other with the children. So, I do see these types of problems more and more. (P08, M)

“We’re Enemies, Not Friends”

About one third of key community informants also discussed this concept of *siab me me,* having a small heart. In meaning, this phrase roughly translates to being close minded. Participants discussed how they perceived many in the Hmong community to having a small heart or were close minded in their inability to communicate with one another after divorce.

> For me, I have seen it for those outside and inside my own family, I have seen. Us Hmong, we are close minded [*siab me me*] so when divorced, dad don’t want to call mom and mom don’t want to call dad too. So after divorce, we have protection orders, so even if you want to call, police don’t let you call so it would be difficult. Or if the dad wants to call mom, then there might be problems. For us Hmong, I do see that we do not really call one another after divorce so only those who are close outside to tell [relay messages]

but for dad to directly tell the mom or the mom calls the dad, there are few in reality. (P09, M)

Similarly, another participant shared:

> They will fight heavily, and there will be a lot of sadness [*kev tu siab*] and us Hmong, we are close minded [*siab me me*] so when we talk, some understand some do not. In those cases, that is when the children suffer the most. (P08, M)

Closemindedness also referred to divorced parents' inability to dissociate their romantic relationship to that of the coparenting relationship. Thus, by doing so they were viewed as not able to see the bigger picture or the consequences of their behaviors on the shared children.

> And sometimes we don't look that far. And I see that with both guys and ladies as well because we make choices sometimes it's not for us and sometimes it's not in the best interest of the other party or best interest of the children. We know that. We know that and we still do it. We do it because we want to be the parent that comes out on top of the divorce. And it's not necessarily best for children. It's heartbreaking in that sense and when you do that, everybody loses out. (P13, M)

Due to their closemindedness, divorced parents were perceived as being enemies after divorce and served as a barrier in communication with one another.

> Well, when it comes to the divorce, after the divorce, there is a huge crisis in our Hmong community. The problem is because the two parents are just like enemies, they cannot face one another. That is the big issue in the Hmong community. So even though they are separate and go their own way and do their own thing but when they come together and see each other, they have to fight. Never get along. And this is a huge crisis to that and

> huge burden to the kids. Once divorced, the two families, like the other side, the wife's side and the husband's side, they don't get along anymore. (P12, M)

Role of Family in Shared Parenting after Divorce

The extended family were found to be both a hindrance and a form of support for divorced Hmong parents. Forty-one percent of community informants discussed how extended family members could impede the coparenting relationship between former spouses while others shared that specific family members were substitute parents for children after divorce. For example, one participant shares:

> But when it is like this, from what I have observed, there are many who are uncle or aunty to be the middle to help them communicate, help them mediate so the children have a way to be helped. I see some like this too. And then, if they have a older sibling to voice their opinion together and ask for help, then they go tell and maybe mom and dad will listen a bit. If not, the children will receive help from one but not the other [parent] so not enough help. I do see these issues. (P08, M)

Family Members as Supporting Characters

About half of the community informants (n = 9) discussed how the ideal coparenting relationship after divorce begins with the two former spouses and their ability to build a communication channel that puts the needs of the children first. Beyond the two parents, family members would ideally serve as supporting characters when parents were unavailable. Yet due to the perception of high conflict divorces, family members were required to play a larger role at various times after the divorce. As one participant shares:

> I think during the divorce itself, I think a lot of the aunties and grandmas, grandpas do a

> lot more. A lot more involved and they do a lot more. And then once things get stable again, then they don't have to do as much. And so, it depends on that time of that divorce. (P01, W)

The role of grandparents was perceived to be of great value for Hmong children's development. Yet divorce may sever these bonds or opportunities in building relationships between grandparents and grandchild, along with the additional layer of support grandparents could potentially provide.

> I've heard many stories where children who are growing up in broken homes and their grandparents were not in the picture, because their parents are divorced, and then these children did not get any monetary support, does not get any emotional support and they had to fight on their own and they had to survive on their own, they had to go through college and pay their way through college. (P02, M)

Family Pressures

Of those that discussed family, 35% shared their perception of how the family places pressure on the divorcing couple to parent a certain way. Traditionally divorce occurred at the family level, such that family members and clan members had equal if not greater power in the decision-making process about divorce and the division of children. Family members who may be more acculturated in which they respected the autonomy and decision of the divorcing individual or couple, were perceived as facilitators in sustaining relationships post-divorce.

> Because the women, the younger generation that is born here and those that are born overseas but grew up here, like came here when they were 1 or 2 years old and they came here and did kindergarten and preschool here. They've adopted the American way. The

> issue is between the two couple, so they're relaxed. The pressure comes from the family. If you divorce, then you need to do this, do that. So, the child follows this method and uses the idea to do that to another person. So, the issue is this. But when they divorced, they are happy to divorce. But later on, when things are brought up, the pressure comes from family, both sides. And they become the biggest enemies between the two couples. But if the family is relaxed, it's your life and you decide to separate and divorce, then you have to live like Americans and live neutral, let the children be neutral. And both do the best to support the kids. In cases where the family is relaxed and let the couples make the decisions then, it is possible for these two to stay as friends. (P12, M)

Hmong parents may also face additional pressure when they remarry as it signifies the start of a new life [*pib ib lub neej tshiab*]. As such, the concept of needing to keep in touch with the former spouse may be perceived as unnecessary because the shared children from prior marriages are now considered part of this new family. Due to this, stepparents and families of the new stepparent could serve as a barrier if they exert pressure on the parent to limit communication with the former spouse.

> Because you divorce and remarry someone new, the jealousy comes from your new family. Your new husband, you cannot talk to your old husband anymore. But they don't understand that I am talking to my new husband because I have my children. And we both have to support our children. They don't understand this. The pressure that you need to distance from your old husband because they don't care about your kid. (P12, M)

Older Siblings as Second Parents

Thirty-five percent of community informants discussed that due to the difficulties divorce

may introduce for families, older children were often sought to help with caring for the young children. Some described this as babysitting although the details shared on the duties older siblings took on were similar or almost identical to that of parents. For example, one participant also discussed her own experiences with divorce during the study and shares:

> And I think that my daughters, my oldest one definitely took care of my younger ones. Because there came a to a point where I was so depressed, I couldn't even take care of my children (voice begins to break). And so there were times I didn't even cook for them, didn't even tell them to do their homework just because I was so depressed. So my older daughters took care of the younger ones making sure they did their homework, washed the dishes, clean the house, cooked. So today, even my younger girls, my older girls take care of my younger girls. (P01, W)

Similarly, another participant shared how the lack of parental involvement and supervision in divorced Hmong families can contribute to older siblings taking on more parental duties.

> The dad is absent in lot of the cases where the mom, some mom they do an amazing job, they are attentive, even though they work ok but then there are many moms who are struggling because they have to work. So, then they're not there and they're relying on the kid, on their older kids to help the young kids. So the kids get neglected right? So, for the most part, they're old enough, they stay home by themselves. Or if they're lucky enough to have a grandmother, and grandmother cooks and provide the food. But I think the raising in terms of schooling, homework, and experience, it's just completely missing. So, I think that's it's very harmful very, very harmful for them. (P16, W)

As older siblings may be tasked at a young age to care for their younger siblings, some may not

be forthcoming in these responsibilities. This may limit our knowledge of what we know about older siblings and future scholars should be mindful of this when exploring the role of older siblings in immigrant families. As one educator shared:

> For experience, as I work in school, I still see that. And few nowadays where the kids have the responsibility where they get home and take care of the young. I'm not saying that there are none, there are some that come to after school programs that say they cannot stay because I have to go home and babysit [*zov menyuam*]. Sometimes, like I said, we Hmong are scared so they don't want to tell so they'll say you're not old enough so don't tell others that you're coming to watch your siblings. But there are still some, but we have not physically gone to speak with them. But I know some that run into some issue here and there sometimes. (P05, W)

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore the ways key community informants made sense of parenting after divorce for Hmong families. Two concepts appear to characterize the informants' view: shared parenting impeded by barriers to communication and family members involved in the shared parenting process. As highlighted by the barriers to communication and contact theme, community informants stressed the perceived prevalence of high conflict divorces in the Hmong community. This in turn, resulted in Hmong parents' inability to communicate with one another after a divorce, with the intensity of hostility towards one another also influenced by the families. One possible explanation for the perceived high conflict divorces could be attributed to the institution of marriage in the Hmong community. Often in communities like the Hmong where family and marriage are central to the way of life (Yeung et al., 2018), one's social status

is attached to their marital status as well (Sullivan, 2005). This creates an environment in which divorce is viewed as a last resort for it disrupts the social harmony of the group. Yet by doing so, individuals in unhappy or harmful marriages (e.g., intimate partner violence) find themselves with years of pent-up resentment or significant trauma when they are finally confronted with a divorce. For instance, one study found 32.8% of Hmong college women to have experienced some form of violence in their romantic relationships (Takahashi & Lee, 2018). In Hmong families, divorce can also sour relations between families and clans that results in an ingroup-outgroup experience in which families may side with the person who initiated the divorce or their own biological child regardless of who is at fault. This can trickle down to the shared children in which they may feel pressure to choose between the two parents, two families, and two clans. Studies have found that when parents engage in negative coparenting behaviors such as gatekeeping, triangulation, and high conflict this has a direct effect on a child's mental health due to exposure to and involvement with conflict (Lau, 2017; Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016), which could be exacerbated within this community as children may feel caught between families and clan. Future studies should continue to explore this nuance.

Key community informants discussed various family members to be part of the parenting process before and after divorce. Similar to the literature on coparenting after divorce (Markham & Coleman, 2012), community informants discussed ideal shared parenting to begin with biological parents being the core foundation for shared children and family members acting as an additional layer of support for both parents and children. Yet community informants highlighted that in reality, this ideal situation was perceived as too challenging for Hmong parents to achieve after divorce, and rather there was a lot of ambiguity in who should be part of the process.

Specifically, key community informants highlighted the importance of the parent's ability to focus on the needs of the children and set aside their differences (Markham & Coleman, 2012; Hardesty et al., 2017) for children to adjust to their parents' divorces. Although a difficult process for many parents (Markham & Coleman, 2012), divorced Hmong parents may face additional labor or efforts in untangling their romantic relationship from their coparenting relationship.

Furthermore, if a parent remarries, the new stepparent also has considerable power in the decision-making process of the frequency of contact with former shared children. This is especially true for Hmong women, as remarriage connotes the beginning of a new life with a new partner. Thus, traditionally, they may be pressured from their new spouse, family, or clan to cut ties with or limit contact with their former spouse. For instance, in the past, when Hmong women remarried, they left their children to their former spouses or parents to care for (Vang, 1982). It seems that for divorced Hmong parents to maintain contact for a cooperative coparenting relationship after remarriage, they may be required to push back on family or clan members who are pushing them out of their children's lives. This can possibly introduce additional stress as the individual would have to disrupt the social harmony of the group or family for their own interests or needs.

Although research points to informal arrangements of parenting responsibilities to be more conducive to the coparenting relationship (Kelly, 2007; Markham & Coleman, 2012) this seems to work for those who have a cordial enough relationship to maintain consistent contact (Markham & Coleman, 2012; Markham et al., 2017). Findings suggest this is a significant challenge in the Hmong community due to ambiguity in how to share parenting responsibilities,

higher rates of high conflict divorces, and high possibilities of trauma experienced during marriage. Moreover, for Hmong parents who do use the legal system, they may do so as they are already in a contentious coparenting relationship (e.g., seeking custody). Thus, it seems Hmong parents may benefit from additional layers of support after divorce such as learning healthy coping mechanisms. Studies have shown that individuals who have better coping skills are able to adjust better to a divorce (Miyamoto et al., 2014).

Although both Hmong mothers and Hmong fathers discussed child support, fathers discussed child support as a barrier to parenting. As many Hmong in the US still live in poverty (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2019) it may be difficult for low-income fathers to have a significant portion of their earnings be attributed to childcare. Most importantly, this may work against low-income fathers as they may be unable to afford living expenses which in turn can result in the parent compensating by working longer hours or moving in with a relative (Teachman & Paasch, 1994), all which takes away from their ability to take part in parenting (Bartfeld, 2000). In comparison, for low-income mothers, the financial assistance received through child support can be helpful in ensuring the basic needs of shared children are met (Bartfeld, 2000). Findings from this study add to the literature by questioning the efficacy of child support with this community and instead calls for different ways to offer financial assistance to primary caretakers without impeding father involvement.

Lastly, findings appear to align with Amato's divorce stress adjustment perspective (1993; 2000) in that divorce is perceived to be a stressor for Hmong parents as it can be a barrier to parenting together. Negotiation of parenting responsibilities is perceived as a stressor for families as they can come to lose contact with shared children or one parent taking on the sole

responsibility of parenting. The meanings that are attached to divorce further exacerbates this stressor and limits the resources that are available to both divorced parents and their children. Thus, parents who do not communicate with one another after divorce further diminish their own social network and social support. Parents and children may also lose access to clan resources and support after a divorce, particularly for Hmong women as they are casted out of their husband's clan and removed from their father's clan during marriage. Availability and accessibility to resources within the family and community are vital to Hmong parent's adjustment to divorce. Children who lose access or connection to their father's clan are also left in limbo. If they reside with their mother and she does not remarry, who's clan they should turn to for support remains ambiguous. Hmong children in this sense may carry their father's clan name but are not afforded the same access and availability of support from the clan.

Future scholars should expand on this work by examining the prevalence of divorce types and further explore effective strategies in maintaining a collaborative relationship for those in high conflict divorces. Moreover, additional research in how immigrant families are coming into contact with the legal system in the US and their experiences would be beneficial for legal professionals and programs that provide legal aid for such families. Additional work with Hmong fathers examining parental involvement after divorce is also needed to better understand their experiences and ways to engage fathers in the shared parenting process. Lastly, additional community engaged work with the Hmong community is needed to better understand how individuals continue to use the clan mediation system today in the US and the benefits of this system.

Limitations

Despite the study being one of the first to explore how key community informants make sense of shared parenting after divorce with this population, this study is not without its limitations. Due to the recruitment strategy, men were overrepresented in this study. This could impact the types of information shared about divorce and shared parenting. For instance, almost none discussed the impacts of domestic violence in the divorce process and how that could impact the coparenting relationship as individuals would have to confront and relive their trauma. In a prior study with divorced Hmong women, intimate partner violence was reported as being one of the most prominent reasons for divorce (Her & Xiong, 2023).

Interviews with key community informants were only conducted once. Although many interviews resulted in rich data, continued establishment of rapport and relationships such as including community members during analysis process would have been beneficial to the study. Yet due to time constraints to complete this dissertation in a timely manner, community members were not invited back to share their thoughts on preliminary findings but moving forward, the author recognizes this is a vital component of community engaged research and will strive for seeking ways to include community voices throughout the research process.

Lastly, it is also important to note that key community informants although unique in their ability to provide perspectives about specific topics, their social locations (SES, gender, professional role) greatly influence their views about such topics. This may not be representative of all community members. Future scholars should be considerate of the quality of information received from key informants as they may be limited by their own experiences.

Conclusion

Divorce can be a stressful transition for families and understanding how parents share

parenting after divorce is vital so that professionals are able to better understand how to offer support and assistance, especially for immigrants' families in which family is central to their way of life. Key community informants can offer valuable knowledge and information in identifying some of the gaps that resources could be tailored to. In immigrant communities like the Hmong, they may struggle with implementing strategies that are found in the literature or coparenting education programs as both often promote a collaborative coparenting relationship. Hmong parents may struggle with high conflict divorces along with structural barriers that impact their ability to learn and sustain skills that are characteristic of such relationships. Lastly, family seems to play an integral part for some in that they can hinder the coparenting relationships of parents by placing undue pressure on the parents and children to take sides after a divorce. Future research should further explore the dynamics of this to aid our understanding of how extended family members could be incorporated in the parenting process after divorce.

Chapter 3: Study 2

Who's Watching the Kids?: Hmong Parents' Parenting Experiences After Divorce

One of the strongest predictors of child adjustment to a divorce or separation is parents' ability to maintain a collaborative coparenting relationship after a divorce or separation (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016; Lamela et al., 2016; Markham et al., 2017). An ideal coparenting relationship or alliance is one in which parents can set aside their own conflicts to focus on the needs of the child (Becher et al., 2019), which is often one of the most difficult aspects of the divorce process for many parents (Markham & Coleman, 2012). Yet when parents can set aside their differences, not expose children to conflict, or form allegiances with children (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016) they are able to communicate positively about child rearing and be more flexible in their parenting arrangement (Lamela et al., 2016).

Yet despite the plethora of scholarly work on post-divorce and coparenting, little is known of how immigrant and refugee groups in the US navigate their life after divorce; research has been predominantly with white middle class families (Adamsons & Pasley, 2013; Bonach, 2005; Petren et al., 2017). Hmong, a Southeast Asian immigrant group, have seen considerable divorce rates since resettling here in the US (Xiong, 2013). Anecdotal evidence suggest that many Hmong in America may still forgo a civil marriage. Thus, when parents divorce, it is unknown how families come to share parenting responsibilities, particularly for families that do not encounter the legal system. As divorce severs and oftentimes, sours relationships between families and clans, maintaining communication and contact with one's ex-spouse can be difficult. Remarriage can be an additional barrier as traditionally marrying into another clan signifies the creation of a new family, and communication with one's prior family is not

encouraged. Due to the dearth of literature on parenting experiences post-divorce in Hmong families, this study aims to address gaps in the literature by exploring the parenting experiences of Hmong parents, an immigrant group in the US.

Coparenting After Divorce

Coparenting is often conceptualized as the process in which two adults work together in their role as parents in the negotiation of child-rearing responsibilities (Margolin, 2001). In this sense, coparenting refers to not only after divorce but within marriages and outside of romantic relationships (mother-grandmother dyads) (Li & Liu, 2020). It has also been used interchangeably with phrases such as "shared parenting" (Nielsen, 2011), and "parenting alliances" (Becher et al., 2019). Initial coparenting research focused on prevention and implementing interventions for divorcing parents who found it difficult to coparent due to negative feelings about one another (Pillow et al., 1991; Stanley et al., 1995). Those who were supportive of one another's parenting despite their negative feelings, had children who were able to adjust better to the divorce (Pillow et al., 1991). Research soon after focused on coparenting within two-parent married families and the processes that contributed to their ability to coparent together successfully (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002; Gable et al., 1994). Beyond the 2000s, the coparenting literature primarily focused on predictors of collaborative coparenting relationships (Christopher et al., 2015; Kolak & Volling, 2007), along with the role of technology in aiding these relationships (Ganong et al., 2012). Studies stressed stable and higher quality coparenting relationships to be associated with sociodemographic variables including higher levels of education (Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016), exes with fewer psychological problems (Russel et al., 2016), and greater access to support (Wang & Amato, 2000). These factors are

believed to alleviate stress from divorce. Despite the extensive work on coparenting after divorce, the literature has been predominantly with white families (Lamela et al., 2016).

Despite the plethora of studies on coparenting, there is no general consensus on the types of typologies that exist, although the literature has focused on the level of conflict, frequency of contact, and quality of relationship between former spouses when examining types of coparenting relationships after divorce (Bonach, 2005; Hardesty et al., 2017; Petren et al., 2017). Results have been mixed in that engagement in a type of coparenting relationship has better outcomes for families, with some noting that single parenting or parallel parenting after divorce to be of little difference for child adjustment (Amato, 2010; Amato et al., 2011). Although the coparenting field has acknowledged the relevance of context and the diversities in experiences with coparenting after divorce (Feinberg, 2003; Fernandez-Rasines, 2017; Nozawa, 2020), research with certain groups have been lacking. Most importantly, the coparenting literature after divorce has primarily stemmed out of Western countries (Feinberg, 2003; Becher et al., 2019) and with white families (Amato, 2010; Nielsen, 2011; Russell et al., 2016), therefore a limited view of family underlies this body of research and neglects the diverse family structures that exist.

Role of Family Members in Shared Parenting Post-Divorce

Researchers have been calling for diversifying and expanding the narrow definition of family to account for extended family networks that are often prevalent in many communities (Jones et al., 2007; Kurrien & Vo, 2004; McHale et al., 2014). For example, research has consistently shown that family members such as maternal grandmothers tend to be highly involved in raising children in African American families (Jones et al., 2007) Southeast Asian

families (McHale et al., 2014) and non-Hispanic Latin families (Pulgaron et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2000). Studies have also shown parents identifying family members like that of aunts (McHale, 2011), and older siblings such as an older sister (Park & Chesla, 2007) in helping with childrearing.

Although there are emerging bodies of work on parenting with various family members (Jones et al., 2007; McHale et al., 2014), few have examined how this extended kinship type of parenting may change after a divorce, and none with this specific community, the Hmong. Although divorce is common across various countries today, it is still highly stigmatized in some societies (Bauer et al., 2000; Lawson & Satti, 2016; Tonsing & Barn, 2017) where divorcees can experience isolation (Abraham, 2000) and loss of financial, tangible, and social support from their networks (Hong & Welch, 2013; Lawson & Satti, 2016). It is unclear if parents from these societies lose access to the extended kinship in childrearing as they may be ostracized from their family (Hong & Welch, 2013; King et al., 2004) or if there is a change in network size that still relies on extended family members to parent together (e.g., maternal grandparents).

Marriage and Divorce in Hmong Context

Hmong in the US were political refugees involved with the US government during the Vietnam War (Quincy, 2017). After the end of the war, thousands of Hmong were forced to flee their homes and many eventually resettled in the US (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993), with Minnesota having the second largest Hmong population in the US (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2019). The initial waves consisted of Hmong refugees fleeing the war with the final wave arriving from long-term refugee camps in Thailand in 2004 (Cha & Dunnigan, 2003). Since their resettlement in the US, they have seen rising divorce rates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), with the

recent census data showing at least 9% of U.S.-based Hmong are divorced (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). One study documented that the prevalence of Hmong divorces had more than doubled from 2% reported in 2000 to 6% in 2010 (Xiong, 2013). Furthermore, community-based research has identified rising divorce rates in Hmong families living in the US as a community concern (Collier et al., 2012; Yang, 2003).

As a patrilineal clan-based community with patriarchal practices and values, the man is traditionally viewed as the head of the family and the woman is seen as the caregiver and homemaker (Moua & Lamborn, 2010). Hmong men and women are born into their father's clan with women experiencing a change in clan membership once she marries. Marriage in this sense goes beyond the two individuals, and ties together two families and two clans. Thus, divorce is highly stigmatized as it brings shame to both the individual and group units as they've failed to uphold their moral positions and in disrupting the social harmony of the community. Moreover, as divorce severs ties between families and clans, it was highly discouraged and often viewed as a last resort.

For those that do seek out a cultural divorce, procedures in carrying out one often followed two customs in the Hmong culture. First, *xa poj niam* (*xa* means return and *poj niam* means wife) or return-the-wife dissolution in which the husband returns (*xa*) the wife to her family of origin when the marriage is considered irretrievably broken. Specifically, when traditional options (family mediations from both sides of the family) have been explored in a struggling marriage for some duration, the husband takes the initiative to divorce the wife by asking his clan leader to appoint two men to return (*xa*) the wife, either physically or symbolically, to her side of the family. If the wife's side of the family accepts, they will demand

for certain conditions, including the returned price (a penalty to save face), children, and property. These conditions are negotiated between the two clans and ideal as both clans are involved in the decision-making process to dissolve the marriage while preserving interclan relations. Second, *tso xov* (*tso* means release and *xov* means news) or notify-the-family dissolution which involves a divorce where the husband and/or his side of the family does opt to return the wife and instead pay a penalty fine due to a presumed at-fault wife (i.e., laziness, infidelity). In this type of divorce, the husband asks his clan leader or a family member to appoint a male relative to contact the wife's side of the family, usually the father or a brother, and notify (*tso xov*) them that the marriage is irretrievably broken, and the couple has decided to dissolve the marriage. Furthermore, the notification would also entail that the former husband and his side of the family will no longer be responsible for her wellbeing, including the funeral. Under this option, the clans take a hands-off approach to child custody and property division and instead the couple can informally decide on how to best proceed.

Today in the US, Hmong Americans are not required to ascribe to such traditions as there are now various pathways to divorce. Most importantly, the use of the court system to enforce things such as parenting time or custody are often sought out when the traditional clan mediation system may not be conducive to their situation. For instance, anecdotal evidence suggests Hmong women to distrust the traditional divorce system as final decisions regarding divorce often fall upon Hmong men. This could potentially be one reason why some may choose to opt out for the American court system in finalizing divorces or child arrangements. Moreover, due to the traditional gender norms, it is not clear how Hmong fathers are involved in the parenting process after divorce as their prescribed role during marriage traditionally did not require high

involvement in parenting. As such, the goal of this study was to explore both Hmong mothers' and Hmong fathers' experiences with parenting after divorce.

Current Study

The aim of the study in understanding divorced Hmong parents' experiences was threefold: (a) identify modality of communication preferred when communicating with former spouse; (b) explore how Hmong parents shared their parenting responsibilities with their former spouse, and (c) identify additional members that played a part in the shared parenting process after divorce.

Methodological Framework

The way in which people come to experience an event is influenced by culture, family system, and social practices. Thus, the experience of divorce is not universal as it can vary across social and cultural contexts (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Using a social constructivist paradigm, I believe that realities are socially constructed, with meanings ascribed to experiences by the social actors themselves (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Knowledge in this sense cannot be understood without the context in which it exists; the subjective experiences that are produced through the symbolic interactions between actors that co-construct the meaning of these social realities. Using this lens, I examined how Hmong parents gave meaning to their experiences of parenting after divorce. Thus, an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was identified to guide this study as it aligned well with this lens to gain a first-person point of view of the participants' subjective experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). As it is family to phenomenology, it shares to some degree similar theoretical emphasis in elucidating a phenomenon; it differs to other schools of phenomenology in its interest in highlighting the lived experiences of the phenomenon in the

context of one's socio-historical position.

Data Collection and Analysis

Selection and Access to Participants

The study procedures were approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board (IRB ID: STUDY00009497). The primary objective of sampling in IPA is to select participants from a homogenous sample to better understand the participants' lived experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Initially the goal of the study was to recruit a homogenous sample as much as possible (Hmong parents who were divorced only once, had only minor children with former spouses, had communication with former spouses) but changes to recruitment were implemented after facing significant challenges in recruiting based on initial selected criteria. After discussion with my primary advisor, the criterion was expanded to include any divorced parent, with child of any age with a Hmong identifying ex-spouse and living in the US.

Recruitment used a purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Those who met selected criteria in advisor and authors' networks were shared information about study and asked about interest in participation. A flyer advertising the study was also shared on social media and several listservs (See Appendix A). Community informants from the prior study were also asked to share information about study with their own networks. After little success in recruiting based on these techniques, I gained traction in recruitment through snowball sampling from participants in the current study and through recruiting from my own personal network. For instance, recruitment of Hmong fathers was a significant challenge, possibly due to the sensitive nature of topic and me being a Hmong woman. To be able to recruit Hmong fathers, I had to tap into relationships with the Hmong males in my own network and have them vouch for me to set

up initial contact phone calls. During these initial contact with participants, it was important for me to thoroughly explain the research process, emphasize confidentiality along with the limits of confidentiality (e.g, child abuse), and the intentions of the research. After completing each interview, participants were asked to share with their own network directly after and were reminded once more via a thank you text message a few days post interview.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 2022 to February 2023 through a combination of in person and phone interviews. Interviews were in English, Hmong, or both depending on participants' comfortability. Interviews lasted 61 minutes on average, ranging from 30 to 142 minutes. The final sample consisted of 10 Hmong parents, five previously divorced Hmong fathers and five previously divorced Hmong mothers. To provide for a more homogenous sample in line with IPA, the remaining 10 participants were selected for analysis due to being within a particular age group (30-50) and generation (1.5 or 2nd immigrants). Two of the 10 participants were a married couple and shared about their experiences of shared parenting as a stepparent and as a parent with their former spouses. For this study, only responses about their experiences as a parent to their shared children from their previous marriages were analyzed and their data was treated as two separate cases. Initially 13 participants were interviewed. One was removed from the sample as she did not meet selected criteria (ex-spouse was non-Hmong) and two were removed from analysis due to their age (both were > 60). Of the 10, six had at least one minor child with a prior ex-spouse at the time of the study, with the remaining participants sharing retroactive recollection of coparenting when children were younger compared to adult children.

[Table 2 here]

Preparation of Interview Guide

Relevant literature on divorce and shared parenting was studied (Ferraro et al., 2016; Hong & Welch, 2013; Markham & Coleman, 2012; Markham et al., 2017) and a list of 30 questions was compiled. The initial draft of the semi-structured interview from this initial list of questions was created using my experiences as a cultural insider and my native understanding of Hmong socio-cultural context,. The first draft was reviewed by my advisor, who is also Hmong and has over 20 years of experience in working with Hmong families. This initial draft was also reviewed by another faculty member who was not Hmong and had strong qualitative skills. After discussion on the reviewed draft, the interview guide was revised to a total of 18 questions in line with the research questions. This draft was then translated and piloted with two community members, one who was a currently divorced Hmong woman and with a Hmong man. The draft of both English and Hmong versions of the semi-structured interview guide from these discussions with community members were then finalized (See Appendix E).

The questions allowed the participants to share about their divorce, parenting experiences as a parent, role of older siblings and family members in parenting, arrangement of childcare and contact with the legal system, communication with former spouses and in-laws, and the role of stepparents. Additional probing was only used to further gain meanings and perspectives of participants lived experience. The intention of the interview guide was to obtain first-hand accounts of participants in a manner that would be easy for participants to answer and connect with. Therefore, the questions served the purpose of getting participants acclimated to thinking about parenting and the role of family members in shared parenting after divorce, along with how they maintained contact with their former spouses (if at all) and the role of others in the

shared parenting process.

Process of Analysis

Preliminary Coding

The role of the researcher in IPA is to interpret the underlying subjective meanings shared through the stories and lived experiences that are told (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Due to the nature of phenomenology, analysis was constantly happening and evolving over time, from the beginning of data collection to the writing phase. Memoing and reflexivity were constant throughout the study in making sense of participants lived experiences. This method was used as guidance when coming to understand meaning of participants' experiences through focusing on both textural (what was experienced) and structural (how experience was shaped by their conditions and context) components. A community volunteer who spoke fluent Hmong and English was recruited to assist with transcription of audio interviews. Interviews were transcribed into English with some of the original language (Hmong) kept in transcripts for context (e.g., metaphors, description of family members).

Following the guidelines of the principals of IPA (Eatough & Smith, 2017) after verbatim transcription and translation of all interviews, each transcript was read in its entirety. Any preliminary themes or ideas that were of significance to the overall inquiry of the meaning of the lived experience was noted in the margin of transcripts. Particular attention was paid to participants' use of language in describing their experiences and interpretation to the underlying meaning given. After gaining a general understanding of each transcript through both reading transcripts and listening of the interview audios, transcripts were read again with potential codes noted for significant chunks identified. The analysis of a single transcript was completed prior to

coding of another, with this process followed for each transcription until initial analysis of all were complete. This follows an idiographic approach which is consistent with IPA methodology (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Final Coding

After coding of each transcript, transcripts were recoded using NVivo^{TM} software program (QSR, 2020). Using Smith's et al (1999) IPA methodology as guidance, passages were examined that focused on coparenting relationships with former spouses, communication, and roles of specific family members in shared parenting process after divorce. The following table provides examples of the data analysis of the transcribed data with codes and memo (see Table 3). After memoing and coding of each interview, codes across all interviews were compared. Codes that represented a similar topic or similar meaning were clustered together. Detailed examination of codes and statements from transcripts resulted in either promotion of themes into super-ordinate themes or cluster of codes under an overarching theme. Mind maps were used throughout the process to illustrate potential connections between codes and themes. Initial themes were shared with a community member in which discussion of applicability were discussed. This iterative process of analysis involved a close interaction and engagement between the text and primary researcher to allow for full immersion in the data.

[Insert Table 3 Here]

The study was designed to use an interpretive phenomenological approach (Eatough & Smith, 2017). However, as interviews proceeded, it became clear that Hmong participants were not inclined to share about their shared parenting experiences in the depth required to achieve 'thick descriptions'. They were generous in their descriptions of 'what', 'how', and 'who', but it

was difficult to get to 'why' and to deeper levels of meaning that involved emotions. As a result, responses were quite thin, making it difficult to go into detail when describing participants' lived experience of the phenomenon of shared parenting. For instance, although participants were asked to document how they felt during certain experiences or to provide specific examples and were prompted to provide sensory details during the interview, participants did not recount their lived experiences in this way. Rather they noted if the involvement of the other parent made them feel good or bad and provided examples of involvement of the other parent but did not recount their own specific experience, emotions, or thoughts during this process. This is a limitation of the data. It is important to note that conducting a phenomenological interview with this population may not be the best approach. As a general rule of thumb, reflecting on experiences and talking about feelings and emotions are not common in the Hmong community, at least with this sample of participants. However, it is important to note that the findings presented are reflective of participants' descriptions of their lived experiences, based on what they were willing to share. Therefore, one can conclude that the study employed an IPA approach to design an interview protocol aimed to understand participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon of shared parenting post-divorce; however, data analysis became more thematic due to the limitations of the interview data. The discussion section offers a further discussion of this limitation and offers future recommendations.

Methodological Rigor

To assess the quality and rigor of this study, I utilized recommendations of Anfara et al (2002). Specifically, to ensure transferability, I engaged in triangulation in analyzing transcripts, memos, and coding during the data process. Transferability was also addressed through

purposive sampling as only participants who had experienced a divorce to another Hmong individual and shared children with their ex-spouses were interviewed. To address dependability, a trained volunteer who is of Hmong descent and is familiar with the study engaged in collaborative discussions with me during the analysis process. Lastly, I practiced reflexivity through journaling my thoughts, emotions, and reactions during the study and interview to assist with confirmability. Reflexive memoing and documentation of my initial reactions and reflections during data collection and data analysis was included (See Appendices G and H).

Author Positionality

As divorce related matters are seen as a private to the family and not typically discussed with outsiders in the Hmong community, it is important to acknowledge the various factors that could have influenced participants' comfort in participating in this study. As a Hmong woman in my late twenties at the time of recruitment, this could have elicited stronger feelings of trust from female participants. Due to the strict gender roles in the Hmong community, male participants may have felt uncomfortable or unsure in how to navigate engagement with a female interviewer. This could be a byproduct as to why interviews with the male participants (M = 41 minutes) were much shorter on average in comparison to female participants (M = 81 minutes). In addition, interviews that were conducted via phone, could have contributed to the anonymity for participants to feel safer in sharing their experiences as the Hmong are a very tight-knit group and divorce is a sensitive topic.

As a Hmong American woman, I recognize the importance of acknowledging my own biases and life experiences I may bring as a Hmong woman who has not personally experienced divorce but as a child of divorced Hmong parents. During the research process, reflexivity was

incorporated and practiced through journaling and meeting with my primary advisor along with a community member to discuss and confront some of these biases and document any personal reactions to participants shared experiences. It was important for me to discuss the findings of these studies with individuals who were of Hmong descent due to the cultural nuances that divorce presented in the Hmong community. Yet I recognize that in doing so, there may be cultural insider bias and in future studies, I should aim to include both cultural insiders and outsiders when coming to understand the experiences of divorced Hmong families. Additionally, particular attention was paid to ways in which my own lived experience as a child of divorced parents influenced my interpretations of participants own lived experiences as a divorce parent, how I conceptualized parenting and shared parenting and spaces that either confirmed or were different to this conception through analysis.

Findings

The following are common themes that were found to be imperative to Hmong parents' experiences with parenting after divorce. Analysis revealed a multitude of themes that were grouped into three main categories: How Hmong parents came to their current arrangement with their former spouses, Hmong parents' experiences with shared parenting with former spouse, and the role of specific family members in the shared parenting process after divorce. Presentation of themes begin with most frequently mentioned. To protect the anonymity of participants, pseudonyms are used. Interviews were transcribed verbatim but for ease of readability and to help succinctly capture the participant's message without altering their meaning, quotes shared in this text have been edited to remove filler or repetitive words or phrases (e.g., "um").

Coming to Current Childrearing Arrangement

Although all participants were previously divorced, some (*n*= 4) were divorced more than once which had implications of how they experienced parenting after divorce across multiple partners. For example, one participant shared how she was able to coparent with her oldest child's father but had difficulty in maintaining communication with her daughter's father that created barriers to coparenting. Moreover, the process of the divorce itself impacted how parents came to the arrangement of their shared children. For instance, in more ambiguous divorces in which there were no legal divorce and/or clan and family members did not carry out the proper procedures in a divorce, there was also ambiguity in how to share childrearing responsibilities. In a proper and ideal traditional Hmong divorce, male representatives from each clan mediating the process should explicitly outline who shared children are to live with to limit the ambiguity of how parents should share childcare after divorce. Yet as such cultural customs and traditions are passed on orally, knowledge of such traditions may differ from person to person and clan to clan. As a result, not all may be aware of the need to carry out this process which leaves parents to decide by themselves who should be involved in the shared parenting process. Of the 10 participants, six of the Hmong parents came to their parenting arrangements informally without the assistance of clan leaders or the court system. It should be noted that although parents were asked how they came to their arrangements and if they used the court system, they were not explicitly asked what if any, the role clan leaders, or representatives had in the decision-making process of this arrangement. Of those that were categorized as informal, parents mentioned that they came to their own parenting arrangement alone or mutually with their former spouse. Future studies should explore this nuance by asking Hmong parents to explicitly share what was said by clan elders and leaders during their divorce process in relation to childcare.

Not all participants (n = 5) come to experience the same proper procedures of obtaining a cultural divorce. How a cultural divorce is carried out, impacts how childrearing arrangements are implemented. When a divorce is initiated, both spouses and male representatives from each respective clan should be present to discuss grounds for the divorce. But in instances which the other spouse is not present or refuses to participate in the mediation process (e.g., does not show to mediation talks), clan representatives often leave the decision to the person initiating the divorce on if they would like to leave or stay in the marriage. This is outlined by one of the Hmong mothers in which she shares:

> We, basically you know, like I said, we had a lot of rocky stuff in our marriage, anyway. In the Hmong society it was just more like well, we can't control our son anymore. So, it's up to you if you want to stay this way. But if you can't handle the stress and the pressure, then if you leave, we're not gonna stop you. (Nag)

This similar sentiment was shared by another Hmong mother:

> Yeah, we didn't go to court. Honestly his family did not even come to say anything [divorce procedures]. They did not come to say like how the traditional would be. They, my uncle kept calling them, and they just kept saying that my husband, my ex-husband didn’t want to say it. That they couldn’t reach my ex-husband. That's what they kept saying that my ex-husband refuses to go, and that my ex-husband was saying if we’re not married then we’re not married. And so, my uncle called so many times, and then I told my uncle you don’t need to call anymore. If you see anyone that is good, then just go (meaning if you are to remarry, you are free to do so). So that's how we ended it. We never had any parents involved, because my ex-husband refused to show up, and the *kwv*

tig (husband's family) could not tell him anything so they just let it be. (Lisa)

Due to the ambiguity of this process, this may lead to parents seeking out the US court system as it is able to legally formalize what the role of each parent is. One Hmong father outlines this in his situation in which his former spouse physically left their marriage with little notice:

> Yes, so she just left anonymous. She didn't call or check on her, on our daughter. She didn't call, she didn't check on how she's doing and all this stuff. So what I did was I just enrolled her in school and because it's in our county and I went back to court. I went back to court and then I reopened the case and saying that she neglected the kid. And she never call to check on her kid. I actually hired a sheriff to serve her all these court papers but she was never been found. (Vang)

Childrearing arrangements in this sense may resemble more single parenting or lone parenting with limited involvement from prior spouse. The remaining four who did encounter the legal system, primarily did so to have their shared arrangement legally recognized and were Hmong men. Only one of the four appeared to have a contentious relationship with his former spouse as he shared that he was recently in court fighting for custody and parenting time two weeks prior to the interview. It should also be noted that only one of all 10 participants mentioned being legally divorced from their prior partner. For this particular father, as he was legally married, this prompted him and his former partner to have explicit conversations on custody during the legal divorce process. Yet for the remaining parents (n= 6), especially those who did not use the US court system, they seemed to face ambiguity as they were left adrift to design informal arrangements themselves, without sanction from clan members or the court system.

Sharing of Parenting Responsibilities with Former Spouse(s)

Participants were also asked to share how involved were their former spouses in their shared children's lives and to provide specific examples of types of parenting responsibilities that were shared. Specific responsibilities described entailed providing financial assistance, cooking and ensuring children were fed, taking part in activities with children (e.g., going to the park) and being part of children's academic experience (e.g., going on field trips, attending parent-teacher conferences, assisting with homework). The following themes and subthemes were found in relation to how Hmong parents experienced parenting with their former spouse(s) after divorce.

Fluctuating Relationships with Former Spouses

The coparenting relationships that parents had with their former spouses were not static, and changed over time. Of the 10 parents, one father considered his situation to be a collaborative coparenting relationship, one father resembled single parenting with almost no contact from former spouse, and a mother who had frequent contact with her former spouse. The remaining seven parents experienced incongruent contact with the former spouse in terms of shared parenting. Non-residential or non-primary parents were seen to come and go throughout the shared children's lives. As such, shared children encountered inconsistent parenting in terms of quantity and quality.

> Truthfully, I don't think she [ex-spouse] [is] involved much. On the weekend, she will pick them up and stay overnight, and then drop off the next day. Again, not every weekend. I think, when we separate on our paper it actually state[s] that she can have them on the weekend[s] but I understand. She doesn't pick them every weekend, and it's

> fine with me. So, in terms of I think involvement that's as much I know. It's that she pick[s] up them sometime on Friday, sometime on Saturday, and then drop them off right on Sunday before school on Monday. (Alan)

Another parent who was the primary caregiver shared:

> He just got involved into my two older girls' life for about 2 years, but he doesn't see them on a regular basis. He only he only sees them during when school start because he'll come pick them up and take them school shopping, and then sometimes for the holiday. (Lee)

Some also shared how children took the initiative to maintain the relationship with their non-residential parent.

> So, we weren't like following anybody like every other week type of deal. It wasn't like that. It was on, they will call their dad like, hey, dad, are you home? I want to come see you. And then they would go, and it became like that. So, it wasn't like every single week or other week. It was whenever they didn't have school activities or stuff like that, and they'll ask, and if he was home, he wasn't going to go out anywhere then they would go see him. (Lisa)

Only one parent seemed to defy this in that she shared feeling happy with the coparenting relationship she had with her former spouse. "We do very well co-parenting, and it's because of that relationship and that history that we had, and we get along this way." (Kristy)

Perceived Value of the Other Parent. Even if parents were not able to experience an amicable or "good" divorce, all the parents in the study shared a commonality in that they valued the bond between non-primary parent and shared children. For instance, one participant shared

that even though she feels as though her ex-spouse hated her after the divorce and she experienced domestic violence towards the end of her marriage, she still encourages her children to maintain a bond with their father:

> I've instilled in my kids that even though your dad is not the brightest, you still have someone to call dad. And even if he may not be able to teach you anything, he is still there and maybe he doesn't know how to teach you something but what if your car dies, and you need him to pick you up, he can come pick you up. Because he's your dad. He's gonna come pick you up. He might not know how to fix it, but he'll come pick you up, and that's something I always try to teach everybody is that sometimes you have to look at the good. Not focus so much on what's upsetting you, but appreciate what little this person can give you, and you have to hold on to that. (Lisa)

This was also seen in the way parents wanted for the other parent to be more involved in their shared children's lives.

> I mean, I did want her [ex-spouse] to be there to help me raise her so my daughter won't feel alone. But that is something, something you cannot help. Because the child choose [me] so I had to accept their decision so they don't feel lonely or neglect by the one that she wants to stay with. (Vang)

Another parent echoed this sentiment:

> It breaks my heart. And if I could say one thing or if I could do one thing to make him flip a switch and think about them and not himself, I would do it in a heartbeat. Just to make my girls, I don't know. I don't know if it's happy, or make them be able to just, I wish that for them. I wish they could have a relationship with him, but we know it can't

be. (Nag)

Age of Children. Coparenting needs and relationships between former spouses depended on the age of the shared children (n = 6). Children who were younger and required more hands-on parenting seem to lack involvement from the non-residential parent. Some experiences were due to the prescribed traditional gender norms in which women are seen as the caretaker, especially during the formative years of the children.

> Because I have my parents, they live with me so when the kids were smaller, I had my parents to help babysit. Back then, I wasn't involved with the kids because they were small you know. They just did their own. I did my own thing. Until they got bigger. (Pao)

Another parent echoed this as well:

> Even with my youngest daughter, her dad didn't come around. He hasn't been coming around until just recently. I would say last year around November he had called. He had called my brother, and then he spoke with my youngest daughter just saying that he wanted to see her, because it is a good age. Because with my 2 oldest girls when they were small, they would come and pick them up for one night, and then drop them off the next day, and it would be like every year or 2 they'll just come and pick them up for one night, and then drop them off and then nobody is going to watch them because they're still small. Their dad didn't want to wake up early and take care of them. (Lee)

It was only when children were teens or perceived of as self-sufficient enough, that non-primary parents may reenter their lives. Yet due to the limited or inconsistent pattern of involvement over the years, parents shared that children may have built up resentment that impacts their relationship with this parent.

Gendered Based Experiences. When recounting their experiences, some used gendered language (n = 4). Participants expressed how as a Hmong man or a Hmong woman, this influenced their ability to function and parent alone or together with others. For example, one participant shared:

> But I tried to be involved but I guess, us guys were not as attentive as the moms are. So us guys, well me because I can't speak for everybody, but speak for myself. I wasn't really involved as much as I should be I guess. (Pao)

Additionally, this type of language appeared to reinforce the traditional gender norms in which women were perceived as being "better" or having an innate sense of caregiving.

> Because they are boys …. they do sometimes when it's necessary to do it, but not always. They don't have that mentality of motherhood or trying to watch over their siblings. So, my 2 older boys, they're independent, so they just do whatever. (Kongmeng)

This in turn influenced how parents engaged in parenting with their shared children,

> They're girls so they're more mature, they're more, like they listen more [obedient] so it was easier for her [current spouse] to raise them. And for them, and I have boys and of course they're hardheaded and not as mature. (Pao)

and the expectations that they held for their children:

> You need to learn how to cook, clean and do that. Learn these basic things that's going to help you in life. And that's something that you know as a mom, a single mom, and being a Hmong woman in our community that has been embedded in me from my parents. (Lee)

Lack of parenting behavior: "*The Kids Are Left Behind.*"

Although many parents identified other caregivers in their network after divorce (n = 8), parents also discussed the lack of parental supervision or monitoring of shared children after divorce. This in part was due to a parent not prioritizing shared children after divorce or lacking involvement from parental figures all together. The language often used to describe when parents were not paying attention to their children included: “going out to play”, “having hobbies”, or “partying”.

> And so, I went and got my son, and I told my in laws that good or bad you are his grandparents and he is your grandson. School’s calling because he is not going to school and at that time his dad was partying too much. (Lisa)

Or as shared by another parent:

> I don’t know if she goes to parties or not but that’s what my daughter tells me. When she was around 4-5 years old. My daughter even told the mediator that too herself. That without me asking my daughter hey how did you know that. She just said yea, my mom gets dressed up on the weekend and go out and drop her off at her auntie’s house. (Vang)

As parents come to terms with their divorce, they may also need significant time to deal with the emotional and mental aftermath of the dissolution of their relationship. More importantly, parents who were lacking in financial resources had to seek out family members to assist with parenting. In such cases, older children or grandparents, particularly grandmothers seem to play a greater role in these situations.

> When we separated, we had joint custody. So, at that time I was living by myself, and it was pretty tough because I only got to see her every other weekend. Just for the weekend and I lived by myself so it’s hard for me. And sometimes I would take her to my parents’

house and they would help care for her. And then I worked full time, and I didn't really have much time with her. And it's pretty tough, pretty hard, pretty stressful. (Vang)

Similarly, another parent shares the instrumental role her daughters and mother played in helping care for the youngest:

> Junior was only 6 months when I got divorced so you know whether it's babysitting, whether it's helping make bottles, feeding him changing him. Whether it's, hey, watch him while I cook, or like on weekends if I had to work it'd be like, hey I know grandma's the primary caregiver in taking care of Junior, but you guys know him better than she does. So make sure you're watching him, playing with him. If he starts to get fussy, then go get grandma. (Nag)

As a result, parents stressed the need to teach children to become self-sufficient individuals at a young age and to learn value in helping care for their younger siblings.

> So, I taught my kids to help one another. So, my oldest gets home first, and so she would be the one to come and when she gets home, she wash[es] the dishes, and then she cooks, and then my second, my middle daughter, she gets home, she makes the rice, and then my youngest comes home later. So then one of them has to go to the bus stop and get her. (Lee)

Amicable connections: *We're Still Friends*

Parents discussed the importance of having positive communication with their prior spouses to create a conducive environment for parenting across parents and families to flourish (n = 8). Often positive communication was described as "being friends" which was characterized by being able to initiate and have contact with former spouses to hold a conversation without

yelling or fighting.

> You know we both talk about it and laugh about it, and we talk like friends. So, we get along to this day. We still talk like friends. The only thing that we talk about is just the child about our son, and that's it. Other than that, we're both we're supportive of each other's family, you know. (Lee)

Similarly, another participant shared:

> So, with [name of ex-spouse], one of the beauty about humans and like friendships and stuff, we get along just fine, and we talk the same way as we talked back then. And we see each other the same way because were partners in life. And so right now we're strictly about the kids, like they need this, they need that. (Kristy)

Modalities for Contact. Contact was described as initiating conversations based on participant's own modality of choice (face to face or assisted through technology). Direct contact with former spouses after divorce ranged from multiple times a week to non-existent. Three main types of modalities were found as ways to contact former spouses: face to face, phone calls, or text messages. Communication through these modalities were primarily centered on children's needs and arrangement of pickup times. Six of the 10 shared that they did maintain some level of contact with their former spouses and the remaining four that did not, shared they valued the other parents' role and encouraged children to maintain contact if they did so desire.

> Interviewer: When you guys do talk, is it more so in person, text, or email?
>
> Alan: Sometimes text. Sometimes, we see each other because she still goes to the same Church we used to go to. Sometimes, we see each other in Church, we say something about the kids. We don't talk about nothing else.

Similarly, this was resonated by another participants: “Mostly text. I will call very little, and only to confirm something very urgently. But mostly we do texting.” (Alan)

For those with minimal or no direct contact with their former spouses, children who were old enough and had their own technology devices, were able to stay in contact with their non-primary parent.

> I don't communicate with him. They have their own cell phone so they can talk to their dad, text him, whatever. I don't care. That's their business. But I always tell my girls that you're old enough to decide. (Lee)

Parents often did not discuss the frequency of contact between child and non-residential parent but did encourage this relationship even if they may not be speaking to the other parent.

Role of New Stepparent. This friendship type of relationship often changed when one of parent remarried (n = 3). This in turn impacted the frequency of contact between former partners, and the sustainability of the communication channel between the two.

> Other than that, we don’t really talk. Especially ever since I got remarried. Before I got remarried, we would talk. We would actually talk and carry conversations and there would be a little short conversation about the kids and about whatever. But after I got remarried, we don’t talk anymore. Only if it’s necessary. We just message each other and say hey I’m on my way to pick up the kids or they need this or they need that. That’s how we do it now. Just message back and forth mostly. (Pao)

Limiting contact with former partners were sometimes seen as a sign of respect to their current partners. “But ever since I got married yea it’s since, it’s a form of respect for my current wife. And I see she knows that too. Being that we’re Hmong. It’s not the same, it’s not like White

Americans.” (Pao)

There also appeared to be a need to reassure the new partner that the communication being shared with former spouses was only about the shared children and to not be misconstrued as romantic in any way.

> And I talk to his wife, and you know his wife knows, and I told her like flat out like I don't want your husband. Trust me, and I said, we only, we have to talk because we have a child together. If it wasn't for the child, I do not want him. [laughs] And I said, you don't have to worry about anything. And I said, if you and I always tell my son’s dad, that if it makes your wife feel a lot better, you can put us on speaker, because I really don't care, because there's nothing to hide. (Lee)

Similarly, this was noted by another participant:

> I think there’s reason why we part away and because of the communication issue, so I don't want her or anyone to misconstrue that you know? Like playing or anything like that. So unless it's very important with that, I'm not, I don't talk to her directly. No. (Alan)

Role of Family Members in Caring for Children after Divorce

Parents identified various family members in helping them care for their children after divorce: grandparents, grandmother, older siblings, eldest daughter, aunts, uncles, and stepparents. The parents of the divorcing parent played an instrumental role in caring for shared children: four Hmong mothers returned home to their parents after divorce and four of Hmong fathers lived with or in proximity to their parents. Grandparents played a greater role if parents had minimal contact or involvement with the non-residential parent. “During that time, I was raising Mark. Me and his grandma were raising Mark for the first few years. Just that I was

working at the same time, too, and working two jobs." (Bee)

Specific family members were sought from parents' network to help with raising of children if proximity was not an issue. Traditionally as Hmong families practice patrilocal residency after marriage, paternal grandparents and family members had a greater role in parenting. After divorce, their involvement may become greatly diminished if parents no longer kept in contact with one another and if shared children moved with mom out of the shared household. Stepparents may also not be as involved in parenting shared children from previous marriages due to the ambiguity about their roles as a parent.

> You know I'd be honest. I don't think she [stepparent] is doing as much, but you know she has some hesitation, because my kids are older, and so she didn't want them to feel like she's bossing them around, and I think that maybe they' don't know about their mother and what she would say so she can be cautious about that. So, I wish she does more. But you know, as time go by hopefully, things will change. (Alan)

The language used by some of the parents in describing their experiences in parenting with a new spouse seems to contribute to this ambiguity. "Those are <u>your</u> kids; you do what you have to do. And <u>my</u> kids, I don't need you to try to mend them like you do with <u>your kids</u> because we don't have them most of the time." (Pao)

Discussion

The aim of the study was to understand divorced Hmong parents' experiences, with a focus on how Hmong parents came to their parenting arrangements, how parenting responsibilities were shared, and the role of family members in the shared parenting process. Specifically, the intention of this study was to explore if the coparenting literature would be

applicable to Hmong families as multiple caregivers may take part in the parenting process before and after divorce. Initial themes presented are focused on the coparenting dynamic and relationship between former spouses; this appeared to influence the role of family members in the shared parenting process after divorce. Thus, the following section is organized by highlighting the coparenting relationship between former spouses, followed by the impact this relationship had on the role of family members.

Findings highlight the changing nature of the relationship between parents after divorce in the negotiation of childrearing roles, such that non-primary parents were lacking involvement during the formative years of their shared children's lives. As reflected in the literature for Asian parents, fathers tend to lack engagement and hands-on parenting with their young children when the mother was the primary parent (Frewen et al., 2015; Lin & Li, 2018). For Hmong fathers who took on the primary caregiving role after divorce, they highlighted specific female figures that contributed to parenting (e.g., grandmothers). Most importantly, parents in this study did not explicitly discuss wanting to limit contact or remove the non-residential parent from the lives of shared children. Rather, parents expressed valuing the bond and relationship children could have with the non-primary parent. When children can have stable continuous relationships and attachment with their non-residential parent without exposure to parental conflict, they are more likely to have better outcomes and well-being (Rasmussen & Stratton, 2016). Yet as most of the literature with children has lacked diversity, future research should continue to explore this relationship with this population.

Communication between co-parents. As noted in the first study of this dissertation, community members perceived few Hmong parents to keep in contact with one another and

when they did, it was unclear what type of modalities of contact were used. Findings from this study found Hmong parents to primarily use phone or text messaging to contact and communicate with their former spouses with communication primarily centered around shared children. The type of communication technology used has been linked to coparenting relationships in previous studies, such that parents who are more collaborative are more likely to be flexible in the types of mediums used in comparison to more contentious relationships (Markham et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2016). For instance, more contentious parents have been found to use email rather than phone or in person communication (Ganong et al., 2012). Unlike these findings, participants in this study were on two extremes of the communication spectrum in which there appeared to be consistent contact with former partners or contact was almost non-existent. Contentious parents were more likely to have no direct contact with former partners and if they did, they used text messaging. Despite the contentious relationships between parents, children were still encouraged to use communication technologies to have a relationship with the non-primary parent. Yet what remains unclear is if children may feel caught in the middle due to the limited contact between parents and future researchers should continue to explore and examine the role of technology in communication patterns to better understand how Hmong parents share responsibilities after divorce.

The impact and ambiguity of informal childrearing arrangements. Prior studies suggest that the formality of the shared parenting arrangement impacts the current coparenting relationship between former partners (Markham et al., 2017; Pearson & Thoennes, 1990). For instance, those with formal custody arrangements are more likely to have relationships that are high in conflict or non-existent in comparison to informal arrangements (Markham et al., 2017).

Although some parents in our study encountered the court system, many had informal arrangements regardless of relationship quality. Most importantly, informal arrangements were ambiguous in that parents lacked clarity in how to arrange and share parenting responsibilities of children for divorced Hmong parents. As the non-residential parent's involvement was unpredictable, primary caregivers were unsure of how to incorporate their role in parenting. In addition, more than half of the participants shared that they had an informal arrangement which further contributed to this ambiguity as clan leaders did not explicitly share who should be involved in childcare and what their responsibilities entail. As such, specific family members played a greater role in these families after divorce. Grandmothers and older siblings specifically held greater parenting responsibilities when the primary parent was not available. Moreover, when parents remarried, new parents can be unsure of how to navigate boundaries within the family system which further contributes to the ambiguity of shared parenting. Traditionally when one remarries, they are encouraged to cut ties with their former spouse and begin a new life with their new partner. If their shared children from previous marriages are living within the same household, the new stepparent is to be perceived as the new primary mother or father. Yet unlike what has been traditionally practiced, most of the parents in this study pushed for the involvement of the non-residential parent. This further complicates the role of stepparents as they may be unsure of how to be part of the shared parenting process.

Cultural challenges to the notion of collaborative parenting post-divorce. Lastly, findings seem to suggest that the traditional system of divorce for Hmong parents do not encourage collaborative coparenting as defined in the literature or as stressed by the US court systems. Parenting both as a verb and noun, to be a parent or to do parenting, is conceptualized differently

in a literature that is heavily based on Western ideologies to that of the Hmong culture. As an example, there is no direct translation of this concept in the Hmong language. Thus, when asked questions pertaining to parenting, not only is data a bit sparse but also more likely to focus on the behavioral attributes of doing parenting (e.g., helping with homework, feeding, making sure children are safe, etc). Therefore, this concept of coparenting is not only foreign to those in the Hmong community and challenging to do, but also quite different to how they come to understand what is parenting. This is evident in the ways that parents came to their childrearing arrangements as some parents mimicked others with the non-residential parent having children during the weekends while others left the decision to the child to initiate contact with the non-residential parent. Traditionally the notion was to support a marriage because if a marriage was successful, then children in this sense was viewed as being successful and thriving as well. Thus, when a family experiences a divorce, children of the divorced parents are viewed as a bad seed as their parents are perceived to be unsuccessful in upholding their marriage. As previously noted in the discussion of study one, marriage is central to the way of life in the Hmong community. Thus, divorce is not only seen as a failure in marriage but failure in their roles within the society. As a result, other families and individuals in the community may choose not to affiliate with both children and parents who have experienced divorce in fear of also being labeled with shame. In this sense, collaborative coparenting that is often touted in the literature and parenting education programs, may be counterintuitive for some cultures and possibly a reason why we see such low numbers of legally recognized childrearing arrangements. Yet as Hmong families acculturate to the US culture, we may see an influx of such arrangements, but the current state of Hmong families warrants additional attention to understand how they traverse

both legal and cultural traditions to come to parent together.

Moving forward, researchers should continue to explore how immigrant parents like the Hmong come to share their parenting responsibilities through a more cultural lens, as many may have informal arrangements. Furthermore, additional research should explore blended families and how immigrant families renegotiate their family systems. This could help contribute to the literature on how children from such backgrounds may fare after a divorce. Additionally, studies should focus on single parent families after divorce and the role family members play. Understanding how single parent families are formed after a divorce could give better insight on gaps in the shared parenting literature.

Limitations

Although one of the first studies to explore the experiences of divorced Hmong parents, the current research is not without its limitations. The study was initially designed with an IPA, yet due to the limitations of data recruitment and especially the quality of the data, findings presented in this study may not align with those of a typical phenomenology study. This could be a byproduct of the methodology and appropriate use of it with this population. Hmong parents in this study had difficulty in describing their experiences in relation to emotions and rather shared their lived experiences by recounting prior discussions held for instance. When interviewing exclusively in the Hmong language, the questions surrounding emotions such as can you share how you felt during this moment provided a sense of conversational awkwardness, particularly when conversing with older or first-generation immigrant parents. Thus, future studies that utilize this methodology should seek to understand how it can be appropriately applied in interviews with such a population. Moreover, as a cross-sectional study, there was limited

engagement with participants beyond the one-time interview. Moreover, as some participants were providing retroactive accounts of their parenting experiences, this could impact what they shared as memory can be faulty. As relationships between parents are constantly changing, future studies should aim for continued engagement beyond a one-time interview to better understand the cultural nuances and complexities related to shared parenting.

Another limitation is the that the study did not include the voices of the prior spouse or shared children to triangulate data. Although parents did not discuss ways in which they may have limited contact between children and non-residential parents, the prior spouse or children may not have felt the same way or have had the same experience. Research should continue to explore this line of work by expanding to include both ex-spouses and the voices of the children of divorced Hmong parents to better understand such experiences.

Conclusion

After a divorce, parents with shared children are tasked with how to negotiate and share parenting responsibilities. For divorced Hmong parents, many engaged in informal arrangements such that they never come into contact with the legal system (e.g., custody). Meaning that parents lack the legal protection and benefits that may come with being afforded legal custody of shared children. It also remains unclear how divorced Hmong parents come to their informal parenting arrangements as this dissertation is more so focused on the overall shared parenting experience. Initial findings from this study appear to show that informal arrangements are created based on parents perceived need of the other parent and if the non-primary parent desires to be involved in the shared parenting process. Moreover, as family members were identified as playing an integral part in the shared parenting process after a divorce, both as caretakers and as

decision makers, it is imperative that future scholars continue to tease apart the level of involvement both family members and clan leaders have in negotiating and sustaining these shared arrangements.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The critical importance of having both parents involved in the coparenting process after divorce has been well-established (Amato, 2010; Markham & Coleman, 2012; Petren et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2016). This dissertation adds to the extant literature with a particular focus on culture in shared parenting with a specific immigrant group and challenges both the notion of 'legal' or 'traditional' divorce as the universal, and the typical two parent model that has been dominant in the divorce and parenting literature. As previously noted in the literature section of study two, not only does the field lack a consensus on how to define coparenting but it also remains unclear if there are differences in the types of coparenting relationships for children adjustment (Amato, 2010; Amato et al., 2011). Therefore, children from high collaborative coparenting relationships adjust better to the consequences of divorce (Becher et al., 2019), yet how children fare in situations where parents have lower engagement or engagement is non-existent remains uncertain (Amato, 2011). Thus, it may not be only the level of involvement but who is involved that matters. Growing evidence has pointed to diverse family systems in parenting after divorce such that multiple caregivers are involved in the process (Yoon, 20015; Wu et al., 2018). Yet due to the dearth of literature with Asian immigrant families in the US, it remains unclear who specifically beyond the two biological parents are involved, their roles, and how they contribute to parenting together after divorce.

In this dissertation, I provide information by highlighting Hmong community informants' perception of parenting together after divorce and divorced Hmong parents' experiences with shared parenting. In my initial study, I explored key community informants' perspectives on parenting and shared parenting after divorce through a qualitative study informed by a

community engaged approach (Belone, 2016). In the second study, I initially designed a specific type of phenomenology study (IPA; Eatough & Smith, 2017) to examine the lived experiences of shared parenting with divorced Hmong parents. Although the second study was limited in how participants made meaning of their lived experiences, both studies do add to the overall literature, with contributions to theory as well. This dissertation was guided a social constructivist paradigm and was grounded in how participants attributed meaning to marriage, divorce, and shared parenting.

Initially people of an agrarian society, Hmong families had multiple children to help with caring for crops and animals (Xiong & Tuicompee, 2000). It was also the norm to live in multigenerational households with grandparents and grandchildren co-existing together. Hmong families also lived in proximity with other Hmong families and as a tight knit community, many often knew of one another. Therefore, it was the norm for multiple individuals to be involved in parenting children (Pfeifer et al., 2013). For instance, if a child needed to be disciplined, parents asked other family members such as an aunt, an uncle, and older sibling, or grandparent to talk or discipline the child. The assumption being that if the child hears the same message from various adults, they would be able to understand their wrongdoings. Today in the US, although multigenerational households are still present in the Hmong community, the family structure is quite different. Adult children may no longer reside with their aging parents or unmarried adult children may move out of the household. In this changing landscape, it was thus important to identify what shared parenting looks like in Hmong families in the US today. Findings from study one with key community informants seem to suggest that like the literature (Amato, 2010; Markham & Coleman, 2012; Petren et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2016), both parents should be

communicating with one another for children to thrive and adjust to the divorce. In other words, this coparenting model is perceived to be conducive to the community, yet Hmong parents face significant challenges in reaching this type of ideal relationship because of high conflict divorces or their inability to put their differences aside. Yet many in the initial study, although first or 1.5 generation immigrants, had high education levels which could contribute to the way in how they think and conceptualize parenting. This could be one explanation why community informants seem to have a rather similar conceptualization of the ideal shared parenting situation after divorce rather than "it takes a village" approach in parenting. It is also possible that as the Hmong community acculturates to the US, their practices, beliefs, and values may begin to adopt that of the mainstream culture.

Key community informants also held the perception that many in the community had high conflict divorces and minimal contact with one another after a divorce. Many of the participants were practicing law or were clan representatives that took part of mediating the divorce process. Thus, they could be coming into greater contact with those who do experience a high conflict divorce rather than more amicable divorces which could skew their perception of prevalence of type of divorces. In comparison to this perception, those in study two did not share the same experience. Rather, divorced Hmong parents desired for greater parental involvement from the other parent and wanted their children to have a relationship with their non-residential parent and other family members. Most importantly, six shared that they did maintain some level of contact with their former spouses and the remaining four that did not, shared they valued the other parents' role and encouraged children to maintain contact if they did so desire. This is an important distinction across the two studies as key community informants may be sought by

those outside the community for knowledge in adapting appropriate resources for the general community. If their perception does not match the actual lived experiences of Hmong parents, the information shared may not be helpful or relevant in assisting divorced Hmong families.

One of the primary findings from study two was that more than half of the sample had an informal arrangement with their former spouses. Although participants were asked to describe how they came to their parenting arrangements, parents did not specify how their arrangement was made in relation to their traditional divorce (ie., how involved were clan members). Some with informal arrangements discussed how they allocated that responsibility to kin in which some requested for the sons to stay with their dads and daughters to stay with their mothers. This was similar to study one in which community informants did discuss how they felt it was important for shared children to keep in contact with both parents as this would ensure they had both family and clan support that were necessary for their future marriages. In the Hmong culture, as a patrilineal community, both sons and daughters need the assistance of their father's clan during the marriage ceremony. A male representative from the father's clan is sent to negotiate the terms of the bride price with another male from the potential spouse's clan. Thus, for some divorced Hmong parents it was important to have their shared children be in contact with their non-residential fathers. Most importantly, those with informal arrangements seem to lack protection from either system and experienced more ambiguity in boundaries, roles, and rules with their family. In Amato's stress perspective (1993), access to resources after a divorce influences the adaptability and overall well-being. In this sense, those who did not utilize the US court system or incorporate family members in the decision-making process were left adrift in their arrangement of childcare. As they were not legally formalized arrangements, non-

residential parents are not encouraged to take part in the parenting process. Yet Hmong parents may be hesitant to seek out legal resources to formalize their arrangement as they may face further isolation from their family and community for bypassing the clan mediation system.

Lastly, findings across the two studies seem to suggest that the clan mediation system for divorce used by the Hmong people may not align with the values of Hmong families in the US today. Although findings from study one highlights the pressure parents may face from family members or clan representatives on who to include in the shared parenting process and how to arrange childcare, it is unclear how childrearing arrangements are sanctioned if at all. Thus, as seen in study two, many had informal arrangements in which they came to with their prior partner or by themselves. It remains unclear what sources of information parents used in guiding their decisions, particularly for the parents that had greater involvement from the non-residential parent (e.g., weekend visits, every other week). Moreover, across the two studies, this concept of "being friends" or having positive communication between ex-spouses was not common and difficult to do. This could be a byproduct of the clan mediation system, as in the past, many did not advocate for parents to maintain a relationship with one another after a divorce, especially when a parent remarried. For instance, in marriage ceremonies elders lecture the couple, particularly the woman to forget of her past lovers or boyfriends as she is to begin a new life with her spouse and his family. Therefore, not only is there ambiguity in how parenting responsibilities are divided and shared after a divorce, but this system is also perceived to be biased against certain individuals, particularly Hmong women. In a prior study that is currently under review, I outlined how Hmong women choose to opt out or bypass this system for the US court system. If a woman initiates a cultural divorce, this triggers a series of steps in which there

are varying types of mediations that are carried out by Hmong men. This complicates their role and power during the divorce process as they would have to navigate how to advocate for themselves. In some instances, divorce is even seen as not a viable option despite the experiences of domestic violence within the home due to the repercussions it would have on their family and social status. Yet for those that do opt for the US court system, they are still left in limbo such that it remains unclear who's clan they are a part of. This presents issues for children of divorced parents as belonging to a clan ensures access to support and resources. In conclusion, which system Hmong parents use for divorce has implications for how they come to their childrearing arrangements.

Limitations

Although one of the first to explore shared parenting after divorce with this population, the two studies in this dissertation are not without its limitations. For the initial study, as previously mentioned, the demographics of the key community informants may not be representative of how all in the Hmong community conceptualized parenting together after divorce. Most importantly, as many of the individuals interviewed were encountering Hmong parents during times of contention, this may bias their perspective on the types of challenges Hmong parents face in parenting together after a divorce. It is possible that parents who are more agreeable may not be utilizing or coming into limited contact with either system during their divorce process.

For the second study, although guided by a type of school of phenomenology, the overall essence of parent's lived experiences such as emotions felt during such experiences were not gathered. Although participants were asked to share their feelings during the interviews, it was

culturally appropriate and provided a sense of awkwardness for parents as explicit discussion of one's emotions is not a social norm. Moreover, although IPA calls for a rather homogenous sample, due to challenges faced in recruitment, the final sample consisted of a rather heterogenous group (e.g., varying education levels). As such, parents' knowledge of and access to resources could influence their experiences of shared parenting.

Implications of the Two Studies

Findings across the two studies suggest a need for a cultural framework in understanding shared parenting experiences by Hmong parents. By doing so, this can help shed light on the perceived barriers that impact shared parenting relationships along with the role of family in impeding or facilitating these relationships. Most importantly, approaching this body of work with a cultural lens allows for researchers to be more mindful of the type of language used to describe parenting and parenting experiences. It also makes space for researchers to acknowledge how cultural norms can play a factor in relationships after divorce.

Findings across the two studies also call for widening the definition of family member role responsibility when trying to understand parenting after divorce. Although the literature on Asian families has focused on kin caregiving, few have examined this after divorce (Hong & Welch, 2013). As the literature has primarily focused on white families, this dissertation adds to the literature by highlighting that there are multiple caregivers in the shared parenting process post-divorce. All the participants identified multiple caregivers after divorce, but the language used may not be what is expected in Western literature of parenting. For instance, many used phrases like "watching kids" or "babysitting" when talking about parenting. Most importantly, due to the stigma attached to being divorced, it was unclear if Hmong parents were able to seek

support or have other individuals take part in the shared parenting process. Findings across the two studies, especially study 2, seem to suggest that divorced Hmong parents do rely on specific persons beyond their former spouses in shared parenting. Yet this should be noted with caution and warrants additional research as some of the findings also highlight the diminished involvement of adults after divorce. Thus, it appears that Hmong parents may not be completely alone in parenting after divorce, yet their social network of kin may be greatly diminished as divorce sever ties between families. It is important to continue researching how clan leaders and family members encourage shared parenting among divorced Hmong parents. A recommendation is to make explicit the knowledge of how to carry out a traditional divorce and how childrearing arrangements fits into this process. Often Hmong women and children are left out of such conversations as they typically do not hold the knowledge of the tradition. Therefore, by outlining for all those impacted and involved by divorce the traditional procedures along with how shared parenting is to be allocated would be one step towards understanding how the clan mediation system allocates shared parenting after divorce.

In addition, studies on divorce or separation have focused on either legally divorced or separated parents from cohabitating relationships. As Hmong are unique in that many are recognized within their community to be married, legally they may not reap the benefits that are afforded to married couples. This has implications for when divorce is introduced into the picture as parents may have to learn how to navigate both systems. Additionally, as parents may not encounter the legal system, this brings up the question of how to create appropriate resources for this population. Most importantly, resources that will aid Hmong families in navigating high conflict divorces and those who have experienced trauma from domestic violence are desperately

needed in the community. As a collectivistic society, individual experiences that disrupts the social harmony of the group are minimized like that of divorce and intimate partner violence. Although there are resources outside of the community (e.g., Asian Women United of Minnesota) and some within (e.g.., Hmong Family Strengthening Helpline), individuals may still be hesitant to reach out for fear of retaliation or lack knowledge of such resources. Typically, those who contact the police or use the court system (e.g., restraining orders) against the person committing the violence are shunned from their families and possibly clan as well. This is seen as an act of going against their own kind as traditional male elders and clan leaders prefer to address such issues through services of mediated disputes before any legal actions are taken (Rai, 2011). Thus, it is necessary that change begins at the family level in which family members provides support and ensures those who seek outside family support to feel safe in doing so. They should also encourage those who are experiencing domestic violence to be removed from the situation and to seek both personal and professional support in processing and coping with these experiences. For this to be possible, both the community and outside person of contact (e.g., family professional, social worker, police officer) must work hand in hand, with family members pushing for use of existing resources and community outsiders being willing to learn and work from a culturally aware standpoint.

Moreover, as Hmong men hold positions as clan leaders and carry out these traditional divorces, a suggestion for initial steps towards strengthening Hmong families are to have these individuals be educated on such topics. This could be in the form of community led workshops that discusses the experiences of those who have been divorced and have experienced intimate partner violence. For this to be possible, Hmong men must exist in these spaces as learners and

not experts as they are often perceived as. It would be most important to also include the voices of Hmong women and children to understand how to best provide protection as they are typically the most vulnerable individuals in these situations due to Hmong men holding power in sanctioning divorces and childrearing arrangements. Additionally, clan leaders should also discuss how to best provide resources for Hmong parents who are unable to parent together (e.g., domestic violence) and how to ensure those with limited kin support have their needs met. A byproduct of doing so is the building of trust for Hmong women and the younger generation in continued use of the traditional clan system.

Lastly, when considering resources from outside the community, often education is vouched as the necessary route for divorced parents to manage their situation post-divorce as seen with mandated education programs for divorcing couples with shared children (e.g., Parents Forever Program, Becher et al., 2015). Yet the findings from these studies seem to imply that such formalized education may not be appropriate due to structural and cultural barriers. Parents may need another layer of support before they are expected to engage in collaborative coparenting strategies. For instance, some scholars have pushed for high conflict parents to engage in more parallel parenting tactics as it can be difficult for them to communicate (Johnston, 2006; Sullivan, 2008). This is something that can be considered and explored with immigrant populations as well in possibly tailoring some of these programs to be more mindful of cultural practices.

Future Directions

To better understand how immigrant communities like the Hmong are coming to their shared parenting arrangements and the role of family in this process, future studies should aim

for have continued engagement and longitudinal designs. More importantly, both parents and children should be included to better understand the decision-making process and impacts on child well-being. Such studies could focus on exploring parents' perception of one another and if shared children share similar perceptions or how parents' communication patterns can impact shared children's lived experiences (e.g., being caught in the middle).

Although outside the scope of this dissertation, it is important for scholars and practitioners working with this specific population to understand the varying levels of trauma individuals and families face before, during, and after a divorce. As previously noted in study 2 by one of the participants, domestic violence is a well-known issue in the Hmong community but as it is a sensitive topic, many may not be willing to share their experiences. Experiencing violence within the home is not only traumatizing for the victim but also for those who are witnessing the events as well (i.e.., children) (Takahashi & Lee, 2018). Therefore, future scholars should begin to explore and unpack how such experiences influence how Hmong parents engage with one another after divorce and how such arrangements influence child well-being. Such studies could focus on the role of culture and use of the traditional system for divorce impacts families who have experienced domestic violence and how families cope with these experiences after divorce.

Gender is another component that should be further explored as it is referred to throughout this dissertation: from the way in which I must learn how to navigate my research as a Hmong woman, or in the ways participants come to understand shared parenting, or in the ways they describe their own experiences. Traditionally, there were gender scripts in which Hmong men and women were expected to abide by yet as we acculturate and adopt Western

ideologies of what is gender, our expression of this concept has begun to change. This is seen in some of the ways the newer generation of Hmong immigrants talk about gender, the use of pronouns within our community, and the push for more work with LGBTQIA+ in the Hmong community (Mayo Jr, 2013; Pha et al., 20115). Gender has often been linked to specific roles in parenting therefore future scholars should explore how this changing landscape has influenced shared parenting. Such studies could focus on if there are generational differences in thinking about shared parenting in relation to one's gender and if the expectations to perform parenting duties are allocated by gender and how this influences informal child rearing arrangements.

To advance the knowledge of professionals working with such families, it is important that future inquiries be steeped in the socio-cultural background of the communities that participants are drawn from. Doing so would possibly require a team member to be fluent in cultural norms, values, and practices or to invite community informants to be part of the process. This would also assist in combating biases and assumptions that underlie how parenting is conceptualized.

Conclusion

This dissertation aims to advance the field and shared parenting literature by highlighting the perceptions and experiences of shared parenting after divorce with an immigrant community, the Hmong. Findings from across the two studies calls for a cultural framework in working with this community as many holds informal childrearing arrangements with their former spouses. Most importantly, this dissertation aims to widen the narrow view of family when discussing parenting after divorce as family are seen to play an important role during decision-making and childrearing. Findings illustrate that there are perceived structural and cultural barriers that can

impede divorced Hmong parents' ability to engage in collaborative parenting relationships such that contact is often limited. Moreover, due to the patrilineal clan-based nature of the Hmong community, family members are also shown to exert pressure on shared parenting arrangements to be in favor for the individual that they support. As such, those who are perceived to be at fault by family and clan members may lose access to support and a diminished network of caregivers. Thus, to better understand how family plays a role in shared parenting arrangements, future studies should continue to advance this line of work with diverse populations.

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Table 1
Demographics of key community informants

	Age	Gender	Generational Status	Age Arrived (years)	Education	Marital Status	Role in Hmong community
01	46	F	2	4	Masters	Remarried	Educator; Director of a non-profit Hmong organization
02	43	M	2	1	Bachelors	Married	Hmong community clan representative
03	58	M	1.5	14	Masters	Remarried	Hmong community leader
04	52	F	2	2	Masters	Divorced	Educator
05	-	F	1.5	12	Masters	Divorced	Educator
06	38	F	2	3	Masters	Married	Volunteer for various Hmong organizations
07	38	M	2	N/A	Some college	Married	Hmong community leader
08	60	M	1	20	Associate	Married	Hmong community leader
09	43	M	2	10	Associate	Married	Hmong community clan representative
10	65	M	1	22	Associate	Remarried	Director of a non-profit Hmong organization; Mediator
11	39	M	1.5	13	Doctoral	Married	Educator
12	-	M	1.5	14	Masters	Married	Mediator; Community leader
13	48	M	2	8	Juris Doctor	Married	Attorney; Family Law
14	58	M	1.5	14	Masters	Married	Educator of Hmong culture
15	53	M	2	11	Juris Doctor	Divorced	Attorney; Family Law
16	53	F	1.5	-	Masters	Married	Educator
17	43	M	2	1	Juris Doctor	Married	Attorney; Family Law

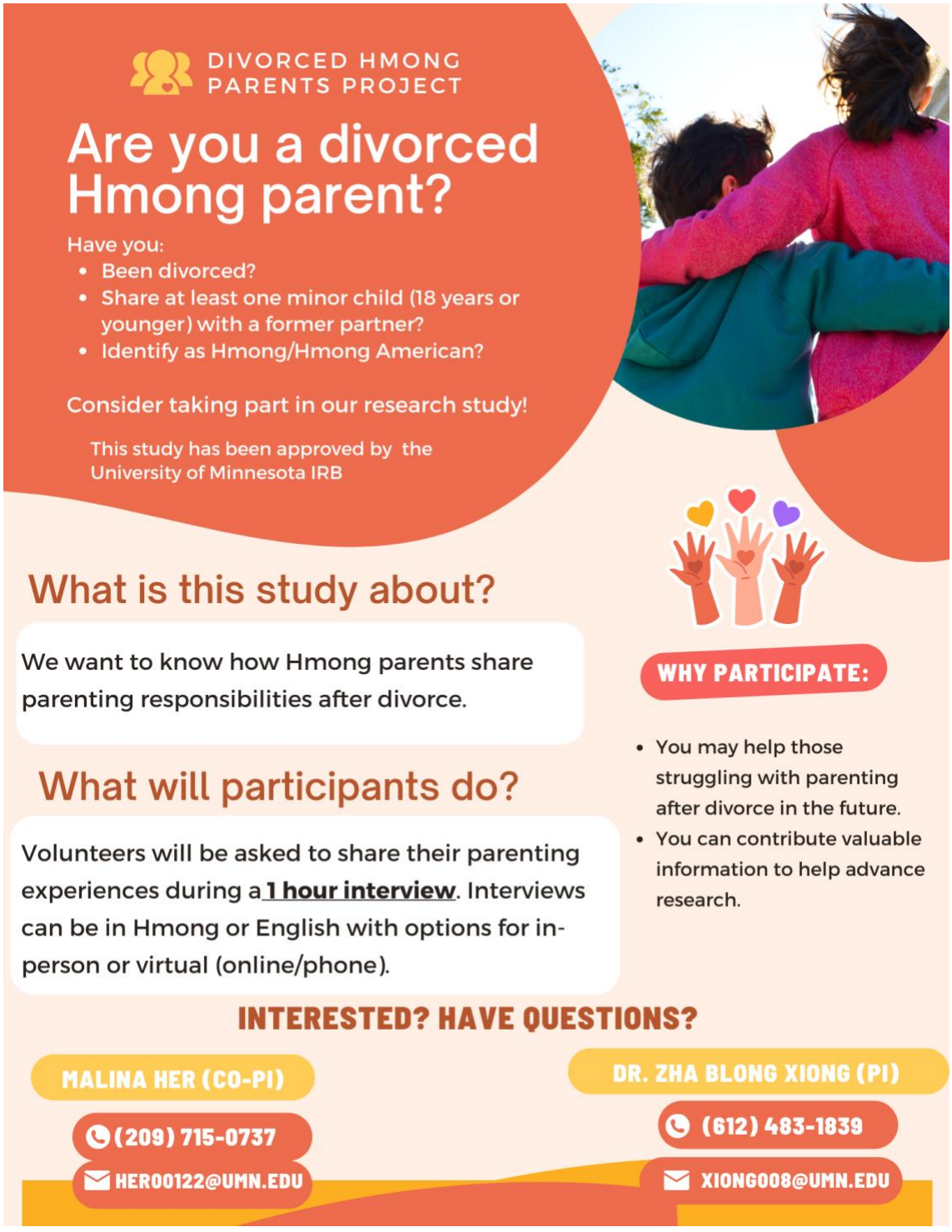
Table 2
Demographics of divorced Hmong parents

	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Employment	Marital status	Number of former partners	Number of children with former spouse(s)	Childrearing arrangement
1	Bee	39	M	Some college	Truck driver	Remarried	1	1	Formal; non-custodial parent
2	Kong Meng	48	M	High school	Press operator	Divorced	3	4 (all from 1st marriage)	Informal; coparent
3	Vang	41	M	High school	Truck driver	Divorced	1	1	Formal; sole custodial parent
4	Alan	52	M	Doctoral	Pharmacist	Remarried	1		Informal; primary parent
5	Pao	48	M	Some college	Unemployed	Remarried	2	5 (3 from 1st marriage, 2 from 2nd marriage)	Informal; non-primary parent
6	Kristy	39	F	Some college	Provider Relations Specialist	Divorced	1	4	Informal; primary parent
7	Lee	43	F	Some college	Accountant	Divorced	3	4 (1 from 1st relationship; 2 from 2nd; 1 from 3rd)	Informal; primary parent
8	Lisa	47	F	High school	Accounts Receivable	Remarried	1	2	Informal; primary parent
9	Mai	33	F	Some college	Educator	Divorced	2	4	Informal; primary parent
10	Nag	49	F	Some college	Nurse	Remarried	1	4	Informal; primary parent

Table 3
Initial notes and coding the data doing IPA

Memo	**Significant Statement**	**Codes**
Retroactive perspective about how his lack of parental involvement has impacted his current relationship with daughter. Rejection; resentment; lacking attachment What contributed to this?	I guess they have resentment. So they don't call me on a daily basis. I call them. I keep up and keep track. My daughter right now, she really like, she doesn't want to know me now, so she's totally resenting me right now. So, you know, I mean I was, I was really heartbroken. But at the same time I knew it was coming.	Lack of father involvement Resentment
This mention of "being friends" after divorce seems to imply a positive relationship; blended family in which siblings outside of relationship are perceived as part of family; clear lines of who is in/out of family	So we get along to this day we still talk, like friends. The only thing that we talk about is just the child about our son, and that's it. Other than that we're both we're supportive of each other's family, you know. I don't tell my kids like that's your stepbrother, or that's your half-brother, or you know, like my dad got remarried. So my kids have that embedded in them.	Being Friends Communication Positive communication Family boundaries Siblings
This notion of taking sides seems to be implied; seen as a theme in study 1; ex parents taking side of their child which then impacts their access/availability to grandchildren	Like I told my ex-mother in law, it's not me cutting you guys from the kids life. You're cutting it yourself, I mean these are your grandkids. Whether or not you want to believe it or not. They're your blood, you know, and if you don't care for them. It doesn't bother me because I'm still here.	Taking sides Grandparents Contact with children

Appendix A
Flyer



Appendix B
Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, Twin Cities 1985 Buford Avenue Department of Family Social Science St. Paul, MN 55108
College of Education and Human Development (612) 625-5882

Divorced Hmong Parents Project

Background and purpose:

You are invited to be in a research study with Malina Her who is a graduate student from the Department of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. The purpose of this research is to help us better understand how do Hmong community members understand shared parenting. You are selected as a potential participant for the study as you identify as Hmong and/or have expressed interest in the current study. For you to participate in this study, we want to make sure you understand what the study is about, how it involves you, and any potential risks and benefits. We will also address any questions you may have prior to your participation. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your past divorce(s) and who you received support from in a one-hour interview.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you can choose among three methods to participate: phone call, online meeting, or in person. During this time, we will ask you to introduce yourself (age, place of birth, current marital status, education, etc) and questions about parenting before and after divorce. The interview is planned for 35 minutes and will be recorded to ensure accuracy.

Risks:

There is minimal risk for you to be in this study. It is possible you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions we ask but you are not required to answer any question(s) you do not like. As this is a voluntary study, you have the right to stop the interview at any time without hurting your present or future relationships with the University of Minnesota, Malina Her, or Dr. Zha Blong Xiong. Any participants who need or want additional help, will be referred to culturally appropriate resources.

Benefits:

Although there is no direct benefit to you, your responses will greatly contribute to our

understanding of divorce in the Hmong community. There is no compensation for your participation, but we extend our greatest thanks and gratitude for your time, effort, and thoughts.

Confidentiality:

All the information gathered from you will be saved in a secure place (i.e., private drive) that is accessible only by the primary investigator and research team. An identification number will be used in place of your name immediately after this interview. Any reports using information you shared will not use your name to ensure no one will know your identity. After the study is done, the interviews will be kept confidential for another year prior to being destroyed or deleted after three years have passed.

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have. Your questions can be directed to Malina Her, principal investigator for this study at her00122@umn.edu. To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

I understand what the study is about, how I can participate and for how long, and the potential risks of my involvement. I have asked my questions and have received my answers. By answering yes, I agree to participate in this research.

Appendix C
Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH
Divorced Hmong Parents Project

You are invited to be in a research study with Malina Her who is a graduate student from the Department of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. The purpose of this research is to help us better understand divorced Hmong persons shared parenting experiences and communication post-divorce. You are selected as a potential participant for the study as you have experienced divorce at least once, identify as Hmong, and have expressed interest in our study. For you to participate in this study, we want to make sure you understand what the study is about, how it involves you, and any potential risks and benefits. We will also address any questions you may have prior to your participation. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your shared parenting experiences after divorce in a one-hour interview. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Dr. Zha Blong Xiong and Malina Her, Family Social Science (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities)

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

We will schedule a meeting with you based on your preference (face-to-face, phone, or online). During this time, we will ask you to introduce yourself (age, place of birth, current marital status, etc), describe your parenting experiences after divorce (is your former spouse involved, what is your current relationship like and how often to do you communicate) and shared child arrangements (do you share legal custody, what kind of informal arrangements have you made and how did you come to this arrangement). The interview will be about an hour long and will be recorded to ensure accuracy.

Confidentiality:

During the project, information from this study will be kept private and will be stored securely. Only the research team will have access to information that identifies you. Your identifying information will not be shared with others outside of this research study. However, organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that provides ethical and regulatory oversight of research, and other representatives of this institution, including those that have responsibilities for monitoring or ensuring compliance (such as the Quality Assurance Program of the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP)).

Any personal information that could identify you will be removed or changed before we publish any report or share the results or data from this study. Audio recordings and transcripts will be

saved in a secure place (i.e., private drive) that is accessible only by the primary investigator and research team. An identification number will be used in place of your name immediately after this interview. After the study is done, the recordings will be kept confidential for another year prior to be destroyed or deleted after three years have passed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, Malina Her, or Dr. Zha Blong Xiong. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Will I be compensated for my participation?

Although there is no direct benefit to you, your responses will greatly contribute to our understanding of parenting after divorce in the Hmong community. There is no compensation for your participation, but we extend our greatest thanks and gratitude for your time, effort, and thoughts.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study is (are): Dr. Zha Blong Xiong and Malina Her. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at 209-715-0737, her00122@umn.edu or Dr. Zha Blong Xiong at 612-483-1839, xiong008@umn.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an IRB within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 (Toll Free: 1-888-224-8636) or go to z.umn.edu/participants. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

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

Appendix D
Interview Guidelines for Study 1

Introduction

- Introduce self and goal of current study
- Provide quick overview of previous projects that have led to current study
- Pause for questions/concerns

Consent (IRB approved verbal assent or written)

- Explain and verbally go through consent form
    - Pause throughout to check for questions or concerns and understanding
- Ask for a verbal consent for participation and recording of interview

Interview

- *Begin with demographics about participant*
    - Current age, generational status, education level, state of residence (if outside of Minnesota), current employment, and current marital status
    - Expand on marital status if participant is comfortable
        - If currently married, ask length of time and number of children shared
        - If other, ask if participant had experience a divorced, length of time since, type of divorce experienced (traditional vs legal or both) and children shared

- *Questions about parenting and role of caregivers*

Give participants some time and probing to think about parenting and how it might've changed or evolved over time (e.g., before immigration vs now)

    - In prior interviews, I've talked to Hmong parents before about parenting and we often hear about really important things like feeding, clothing, and making sure their children are safe, and they're obedient which are all really important parts of parenthood. We also know families teach kids about things that are really hard to describe sometimes and go beyond physical caretaking.
    - What does parenting look like in your family? When parenting children, who is responsible for what in your family? What works well and what seems to be challenging? (ie., how do you parent your own children)
    - In comparison to your own family, when thinking of Hmong families in general, who do you think is typically involved? And what are their responsibilities?
        - What are the roles of grandparents (paternal and maternal) in caretaking? (What do grandparents do in Hmong families? Especially if they are living all together in one house?)
        - What are the roles of siblings, especially older siblings, in caretaking? (Often we hear that older siblings take on a huge role in parenting. In your own family or observations, do you see this as well? What specifically do older siblings do or could you describe specific tasks they are in charge of?)
        - What are the roles of aunts and uncles in caretaking?

(Do you have aunts or uncles or other family members outside of grandparents and siblings that help take care of the children? How about teaching children values and what kind of values?)

- *Questions about shared parenting after divorce*
    - After a divorce, are the same people still involved in the parenting process?
        - Does parenting become shared across multiple people or just one person after a divorce?
        - Are the roles of grandparents (paternal/maternal), siblings, and relatives the same? If so, how?
    - For children to grow up healthy and happily, who do you think needs to be involved in parenting after a divorce and why?
        - How will these individuals be sharing responsibilities? And can you name or list specific responsibilities?
    - What makes it difficult to have all these people involved in parenting after divorce?
        - Do you think it is challenging for ex-spouses in the Hmong community to keep in contact with each other? Why or why not?
        - Sometimes it can be very difficult to keep in contact with one another after a divorce because of how the relationship ended. In cases like this, who do you think helps care for the children then?
        - Does it change if the parent remarries? How?

- Considering how long we have been in the US (40-50 years) is this a concern still today? When thinking about parenting after divorce, is this something we need to address in the Hmong community?
    - How do you think we can address this concern for Hmong families? What are the next steps?
- <u>Wrap up</u>
    - Ask for any additional questions/concerns
    - For male participants, ask if ok to have wife participate in study as well to hear her perspective
    - Thank community member for their time and to pass word along about study to potential interested individuals

Appendix E
Interview Guidelines for Study 2

Introduction

- Introduce self and goal of current study
- Provide quick overview of previous projects that have led to current study
- Pause for questions/concerns

Sharing of Information Sheet

- Explain and verbally go through information sheet
    - Pause throughout to check for questions or concerns and understanding
- Ask for a verbal consent for participation and recording of interview

Interview

- Demographics
    - Current age, generational status, education level, current employment, marital status, and number of children

Questions about parenting after divorce

To help parents become acclimated to talking about parenting

- How many children do you share with your former spouse and what are their ages?
- When thinking about your day to day life with your children, could you describe for me what your daily routine with your children are like? For example, when you wake up what do you first do and what do your children do?
- Is there anyone who helps you with your daily routine with your children, like taking them to school, helping with their homework, making sure they've eaten, disciplining them? Can you describe a specific example?

Questions about role of other family members

- (For those with multiple children) When talking to other Hmong parents, they have shared that it may still be common for us to have our oldest or older siblings care for the younger children. How true is this for your family? Can you describe what your oldest or older children do to help you with parenting?
- Would you say you currently share parenting responsibilities with anyone? Can you describe with who and what it is like?

Questions about ex-spouse

- When thinking about parenting, can you describe how involved your ex-spouse is? Can you provide an example?
- How does it make you feel when your ex is involved? Can you describe if it's a good or bad feeling and why?
- Was there a time when you ever thought your ex-spouse was a good parent? Can you describe why?

- Do you think your shared children think of their other parent this way too? And why would you think so?
- Do you think your ex's parenting has changed or is different now compared to when you were married? Can you think of a time to show how they have changed or stayed the same?
- In past interviews, Hmong parents share the different ways they came to share parenting with their ex. Either it was mandated through court or they had an informal arrangement between them on who would do what and when. How did you come to the current arrangement that you have now with your former spouse?
- How happy would you say you are about this current arrangement? Why?
- Can you think of a time when you communicated or talked with your ex? When was it? What was it about? And how did you communicate (text, email, in person, etc)
- Do you often keep in contact with your ex then? Why or why not?
- (For those who do not communicate with their former spouses) Have you thought about sharing parenting with your ex? Your former in-laws? Why or why not?

Questions about blended families

- Is your ex remarried? Does their current wife/husband help care for your children too? What is that like?
- When speaking to divorced parents, they have told me that sometimes they talk more to the stepparent than their ex. How true would you say this is for you? And if you have this experience, can you describe what it is like and how it feels to talk to your ex new partner?
- (For those currently remarried) Do you share any children with your current spouse? Can you describe what their parenting is like? How involved in parenting is your current wife/husband with your shared children with your ex? Can you describe that that is like for you?

Wrap up interview

- Ask for any additional questions/concerns
- Thank participants for their time and to pass word along about study to potential interested individuals

Appendix F
Audit Trail

After dissertation proposal meeting:

- Re-drafted interview guidelines and questions
- Removed words referring to coparenting, emphasis on shared parenting instead
- Shared revised draft with Dr. Xiong for feedback
- Met and discussed with Cathy on how best to carry out interview and brainstorm how to prompt participants to think about parenting beyond physical caretaking

Interview process for study 1

- Reached out to own social network
- Majority/almost all of participants recruited from Dr. Xiong's personal and professional network
- Discussed recruitment of participants to be from various sectors, may have own experience of being divorced and shared children they may be parenting with their former spouse, needed to have some time engaged in community
    - Engagement in community loosely defined but were interested in educators, family and divorce attorneys and community leaders who had experience in mediating for Hmong couples
- Intended for interviews to be about 30 minutes after collecting demographic information but participants for study were enthusiastic about sharing their ideas about the study along with topic of interest
    - Only 1 was around this time, all others were about 45 to over 60 minutes long
    - For those that did have their own divorce experience, most were willing to share their own stories. For some interviews, it felt like participants were focusing too much on their own experiences or their own experiences were impacting the way they viewed necessity or ability of others in the community to coparent with their former spouses (e.g., participant 01 and 03)
    - Many were also interested in returning or continuing to be a sounding board to continue thinking about how to implement and carry out second study (noted in recruitment tracking sheet)
    - Many were also interested in hearing about findings of our study
    - Also took notes of reflection and/or thoughts before and after interviews
    - Note that Dr. Xiong and I discussed multiple times on how to interact with some of these participants as some were older and men; how to navigate the political gender space (e.g., how to address individuals, what to say, inviting their spouses to participate although none did)

Analysis process

After completion of community informant interviews in late summer of 2022, began to analyze data to inform data collection for second study

- Preliminary analysis shows the diversity of experiences and important to change recruitment strategy to reflect this
- Important to capture those who were across different generations and experiences to understand how not a monolithic group
- Shared initial findings with a community member to get their thoughts

Interview protocol and questions for study 2

- Initially drafted questions based on preliminary findings and literature
- Shared with Cathy to get opinion and discussed how to make questions more culturally appropriate; also discussed the need to recruit a wider audience to ensure capturing voices of different shared parenting experiences
- Shared refined questions with Dr. Xiong; suggestions on making notes on why specific questions were included and how to frame questions; I was concerned about questions not being phenomenological and asked how to best formulate questions in Hmong and culturally appropriate ways to ensure this approach was being followed
- Piloted questions and translated questions before initial interview; read through English questions and made sure they grammatically made sense and asked "when I ask this question, what does it make you think about?"
- Made an excel spreadsheet documenting each specific question and its purpose, need, and reason for asking

Sharing about study/flyer

- Shared flyer through social media (Facebook) through own personal account and DHPP account. Although a lot of interest through reshares and likes, no interested person reached out to ask about study or expressed interest in participating
- Also shared flyer and information about study through contacting prior community informants and tracked when in excel spreadsheet. Although all expressed interest in sharing flyer, none have currently reached out with potential participants who may be interested (12/2022)
- Shared flyer and information about study with specific persons/individuals to share with their own personal/social network
- Also began developing partnership with mediation center for Southeast Asian in hopes to share more about study and gain participants
- Had one anonymous individual reach out to me via email inquiring about financial incentives and did not reply back after finding out there were none
- Another participant shared she heard about study through her niece who I used to attend high school with and expressed interest in participating

Interviewing process

Began 10/2022

- For participant 01, her daughter reached out to me sharing her mom would like to share her experience. She introduced me to her mom and was present during the in person interview at her house for comfortability purposes and translation if needed
- For participant 02, he was a prior participant in study 01 and I reached out to him to share about our current study and he expressed interest in participating himself. We met in person at his office for the interview.

- For participant 03, I reached out to this participant as I knew he was a divorced parent who was keeping in contact with his former ex. He initially was hesitant as he did not want others to know of any sensitive information but after sharing more about the research process and interview questions, he expressed interest in answering questions via phone call.
- For participant 04, I shared the flyer with a family member and they shared it with this person who expressed interest in helping study via a phone interview.
- For participant 05, I shared study information with own partner and he shared information with the participant. He initiated contact with participant to thank him prior to interview. Also participant agreed to participate as he stated it was for a me getting my ph.d
- After these interviews, noticed that the interview did not take as long as anticipated (~30 minutes) rather than an hour and reformatted the questions of questionnaire to how statements
- For participant 06, have known participant for a few years as she was previously married to a relative. Came into contact for this study through another relative who reintroduced us.
- For participant 07, came into contact with participant through participant 06. She introduced us via facebook and I was able to connect with her and share about our study.
- For participant 08, I reached out to one of the community informants from study 1 again. She shared the study with her network and stated someone was interested and for me to contact participant.
- For participant 09, he expressed interest in participating to Dr. Xiong. I was given his contact information to initiate contact, provide additional information, and set up a time for interview
- For participant 10, I came into contact with individual through Facebook. Participant shared that her niece shared our flyer with her. Her niece is an old friend from high school. She shares in interview that she was hesitant to participant but her niece vouched for me and she agreed to reach out.
- For participant 11, expressed interest in participation to Dr. Xiong. I was given her contact information to initiate contact, provide additional information, and set up a time for an interview
- For participant 12, participant 04 shared our flyer with his own network and shared someone he knew was interested in participating. He provided me their number as participant asked him to have me call him for an interview.
- For participant 13, heard of our study through participant 12. Is the wife of participant 12. Expressed interest to participate and I initiated contact and scheduled an interview.

Interviews completed 02/2023

Transcription of audio

- Late fall 2022, notified of being awarded for COGs grant
- Recruited assistance of prior team member to help with transcribing initial 4 interview audio (completed 01/16/2023)
- Transcribed and translated the rest of the interviews myself

Analysis process

- Began analysis in late fall 2020 of first initial interviews. Met with volunteer member Sher to discuss preliminary codes and themes in first set of completed interview
- Finished the coding of the rest of interviews and imported them to Nvivo. Codes and themes were discussed once more with member

Appendix G
Reflexive Memos

01

A retrospective case. I remember being excited and nervous as this would be the first time I was finally going to interview someone specifically about their parenting after divorce experience. After the interview, I remember walking away with more questions than answers as this particular participant shared her experience of having a former husband who lacked parental involvement in any way before and after divorce.

02

After the interview, I remember thinking what a unique case this was as the participant shares how involved he is with his children and how much they liked living with him. Something he shared that struck me was that when they did live with him, he would make sure that there was enough food in the house then he would leave for work. I think this highlights an important piece of this picture that shows parental monitoring that may be less in some of these families after divorce. As families transition directly after divorce, they may be unaware of how to renegotiate some of these boundaries and rules of how to keep communicating.

03

I was hesitant to reach out to this person as they were a relative member. Ever since I began DHPP, I was hesitant to reach out to my own personal network although I knew so many individuals who had gone through the divorce process. This person is also someone who I have conflicted feelings about due to personal experiences in the past therefore I had anxiety and was nervous about the interview. Leading up to the interview, I questioned myself alot on if I should be doing this interview and if there would be any good that could come of it. I lost sleep and ruminated quite a bit about the interview.

During the interview, I did feel or perceive some awkwardness between us. I attributed part of it due to the gender dynamics, our lack of a deep personal relationship, and the foreignness of research itself.

After the interview, I did feel like it was a meaningful interview although short and to the point. I think his personal experience is impactful as he is part of the second generation and currently coparenting with his ex partner, something we do not have a lot of documentation on. I think it would also be important to include others to check my own biases especially in relation to this specific case. He also mentioned that initially it was hard to communicate with his ex, but over time his thought process is that when you think about the children, it is necessary to keep in contact with them. He does highlight the importance of keep written record of their conversations and not being happy about current arrangements, which I think highlights the potential strain and hostility they may have towards one another.

04

Was put into contact with participant through mom. Prior to engagement, I did not have a lot of contact or conversations with this person although I knew he had been divorced. Also is mom's boyfriend at the time of interview. After interview, I felt that the participant contributed something new to the study as he discussed still having negative feelings towards his ex but finding ways to still interact and coparent together.

05

Came into contact with participant through own partner. He reached out to participant personally and initiated conversation first prior to the interview. I recall thinking throughout the interview that the father was unique in that he was a very involved single parent father to this daughter. I also was very interested in the daughter-father relationship and dynamic but did not dive into the topic further to not deter from interview questions. Also a different perspective in that participant has full custody of child and mom is not involved.

Some thoughts and questions to explore could be differences in men and women when it comes to coparenting:
Daily routines with children (especially as these are quite involved fathers)
And differences in expectations for those in Hmong vs mainstream American families (in other words, what do Hmong parents considered to be coparenting? And is communication a requirement for that to occur? If so, how frequently? And about what? Role of new family members such as stepparent in this process?)

Participant 06

I had not talked to this participant in a long time. Since the last time we saw each other in person, she had experienced a divorce to my relative and was currently coparenting. Despite the time that had passed, we picked up as if it was yesterday. She felt very cordial and easy to talk to. I thought individual provided great perspective in coparenting and also provides specific examples with rich details; still keeps in contact with prior spouse and family; informal arrangement with children spending every other week at each parent's house; mutual divorce.

Participant 07

Provides great perspective on interracial relationships; two different fathers and both are African/Black American; speaks about stigma and discrimination and shame as a parent due to children's father being Black and out of the race; also speaks of the differences in Hmong culture and being shunned despite wanting to remarry a Hmong man to please parent; felt deterred from that path due to discrimination from others and not being accepting of children being mixed race.

Participant 08

Came into contact with participant through another participant from study 1. She was quite talkative and willing to share her story. It was also apparent that she had shared her story before or had practice as she jumped right in and needed little prompting throughout interview. But because she had a lot to share, had to redirect a few times back to interview questions. When participant was off-topic, I did not stop the conversation and instead waited for her to pause and then redirect when possible. I also thought she had a lot of great ideas on how to best move forward in finding resources and helping those in community.

I did feel quite overwhelmed after this interview because there was so much information and although she shared great ideas on how to best proceed forward, it felt daunting and overwhelming. I felt physically and mentally drained as the task at hand felt too big suddenly and close to impossible. Honestly, I felt a bit defeated and wondered if my research was doing any good or would do any good after this interview. The participant made some great points about how necessary action was needed now and for me it seemed so far away from turning my research into something concrete that could be used to guide the creation of such resources.

Participant 09

Came into contact with participant through Dr. Xiong. During initial phone conversation and interview, participant seemed a bit stand offish and not too talkative. Felt like I had to prompt more during the interview to get specific examples. He did speak about lack of parental involvement of current spouse to that of his ex-spouse. And he also mentioned that he would not consider his current arrangement to be coparenting - as his ex spouse was not very involved.

After this interview I began thinking of how rich data was from the Hmong mother that I had vs the Hmong fathers interviewed. Although some of the fathers in the study had full physical custody or children were living with them, they needed more prompting or did not share really rich information about parenting compared to women in our study. Raises questions on if having a male interviewer would help with this and also need for more relationship building prior to engagement.

Participant 10

Participant is an ex-aunt of a friend from high school. Prior to the interview, she shared how my friend vouched for me and share this with her. During the interview, she had really rich examples and thoughts that I think could make a great contribution to exploring coparenting and share parenting dynamics. I did not ask her question about older sibling as her children were only one year apart. Made me think about equity - participant talked a lot about beautiful relationship she had with her father and it made me think of the lack of father-daughter relationships I have seen in the Hmong community. What if all divorced Hmong women were able to receive the support from their fathers the same way she did – what kind of impact would that have? It also made me think about generational differences although participant made a great comment about how it might not be a generational thing but your outlook and perspective you take on life. It made me think of what would’ve been common and what messages were socialized to be a good Hmong daughter such as being quiet, private matters, being patient. All things that could’ve influenced why Hmong women choose to stay in bad marriages. After the end of the interview, I walked

away feeling great. It felt great to speak to someone who was from the same city and who knew what the neighborhoods were like and how hard it was to exist there.

Participant 11

Is related to Dr. Zha Blong and he shared contact information with me
Social support looks like physical support (childcare, buying things, being there physically) which is similar to another participant (father; participant 04)
Mom has to take on disciplinarian role and making sure kids are meeting basic needs
Provides specific examples of coparenting differences (no routine vs routine) at mom and dads houses. Compares own parenting to mom's parenting as well and what it is like to be the oldest child and the responsibilities; cycle of having too much responsibilities as the oldest child and wanting to find freedom in marriage. Also unique case in marrying individual out of state
Also quite long interview and have to work on bringing individual back to questions but also trying to give space for individual to share her story and build rapport with her throughout interview. By doing so, was able to learn of specific examples of how she cared for her children and how her family played a role in her life as a parent. Also shares new partner role in coparenting relationship
Putting kids in middle of relationship

Participant 12

Is a friend of participant for this study and put me into contact with him
Participant was honest about his lack of involvement and how his own parenting has changed over the years compared to his first marriage to now
He also touches on the difficulty with coparenting children from previous relationships with current spouse due to different parenting styles, time spent with shared children, and gender dynamics. I felt participant had a lot of rich knowledge about his situation and seemed he has thought alot about his experience as a father after divorce
He also touched on role of own mother in raising his children, especially with first marriage as he was not always home or working. Touched on a similar topic others have voiced which is needing to prioritize children first. He also talked about the decision making process during and after divorce; the role family members play and one's ability to stand up or against this process is crucial to decide what is best for your and your children; resounded with own thoughts on this as I was also thinking about those who have personality and ability to think and stand up for themselves will be able to navigate through this process. Poverty, education noted as factors in coparenting arrangements in which participant talked about those who have less money are not wanting to use the legal system. Also participant talked about different lifestyle and thinking just from physical location in US; he mentioned being down south and having a country lifestyle and being more "mellow" which could be one reason why he sought peace and did not want to use the legal system

Participant 13

Met participant through previous participant, is the wife of

She mentioned towards the end of the interview that is it really this barrier of gender that is preventing Hmong parents to coparent? Is it really that hard to cross over boundary and do that? And it made me think that its quite possible the due to the lack of gendered neutral spaces, the perception of keeping communication channel open (even if discussing about the children) is so huge that it becomes a barrier to keeping in contact with prior ex-spouse