Student Leadership in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study Examining the Experiences of Hmong Student Leaders in Higher Education

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my students in the Hmong student organization. May this manuscript assist you in your ongoing, life-long search to better understand yourselves.

Abstract

This thesis is a phenomenological investigation of the lived experiences of six Hmong student leaders enrolled in a public four-year institution of higher education. Specifically, the study examined student leadership development among this population of students and sought to determine patterns of responses in their leadership experiences. Using Braun and Clark's (2006) Thematic Analysis to examine the data, four patterns emerged. First, the participants discussed the importance of developing key skills. Second, participants discussed the ways in which their leadership experiences contributed to their feelings of belonging and community development on campus. Third, participants discussed their experiences navigating multiple identities and social roles. Fourth, participants discussed the ways in which they used their leadership experiences as a means to facilitate social action leading to equitable outcomes. The findings also strongly suggested that race and ethnicity was a significant factor in the participants' student leadership development.

Keywords: student leadership, leadership, Hmong, Asian American, phenomenology, thematic analysis, higher education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My earliest memory of serving in an elected leadership position was when I was a third grader in Mr. Sepnafski's elementary classroom. I distinctly remember giving a speech to my classmates outlining the reasons why I would make a great class treasurer. While I remember winning the elected position, I do not remember what role I played in actually managing any real class funds. As the years continued, I remained involved in leadership positions. For the remainder of my primary education, I served as an elected student leader on the school's Student Council, and in high school, I served multiple years in an elected leadership position in various school student organizations and community student groups.

In college, my interest in leadership became much more critical and personal. It was during these years that these leadership experiences would begin to spark a personal exploration of my Hmong American identity. As my understanding of my racial and ethnic identity became more complex, I began to understand how my racial and ethnic heritage influenced how I engaged with my peers as a leader. Through those years, as I came to better understand my racial and ethnic heritage, I found myself having become much more confident in myself as a leader.

After graduating with my undergraduate degree and through my first professional position, I found myself serving in an invited role as an advisor to a Hmong student organization in a higher education institution. Through this experience, my understanding of my previous leadership experiences and racial identity development had come full circle. In addition, the opportunity to serve as an advisor gave me a unique perspective as an up-close, yet still an outside-observer of student leadership in

action. It was through this lens that I began to critically question the intersections of leadership and racial identity. As I spoke with Hmong student leaders throughout the years, a common theme emerged: when Hmong student leaders spoke about their leadership experiences, it was tied closely with the development of their racial and ethnic identity.

This thought has stayed with me throughout the years, and I became curious to see if this pattern was coincidental or if there was a more significant pattern to be discovered. As I informally began exploring the literature regarding Hmong student leadership, I found only one consistent theme—that scholarly literature about Hmong student leadership in higher education was virtually nonexistent. Being a very young immigrant population in the United States also lent to the dearth of overall scholarly literature about the Hmong, as well. Much of the existing literature about the Hmong has focused on the barriers and challenges they faced since immigrating to the United States. In addition, most of the literature discussing Hmong history begins in the 1960s when a significant portion of the Hmong population in Southeast Asia became directly involved in the Vietnam War (Lee, 1996, 2007; Lee & Green, 2010; Lee, Jung, Su Tran, & Bahrassa, 2008; Watson, 2001).

A Brief History of the Hmong

The Hmong are an ethnic Asian tribal minority group whose historical origins have been traced to current day China before immigrating to Southeast Asia. Because the Hmong did not have surviving written records detailing their history, secondary sources, outsider accounts, and Hmong folk stories have provided much of what is known about Hmong history. According to Lee (2007), "an origin in China is the most

plausible," based on an examination of linguistic patterns, genetic studies, and historic Ancient Chinese literature documenting tribal clans throughout the region. For centuries, however, it is believed that the Hmong had been a nomadic agrarian people living in the highland and mountainous regions of Southeast Asia who practiced slash and burn farming (Watson, 2001).

According to Watson (2001), during the Vietnam War, the Hmong served alongside U.S. troops as military allies against the Lao Communists and the North Vietnamese; however, in May 1975, when the last U.S. troops were evacuated out of Southeast Asia, the Pathet Lao communist officials began a series of retaliatory campaigns to seek out and eliminate any former U.S. allies and their families, including the Hmong. According to DePeow (2012), the Hmong began arriving in the United States in the 1970s as refugees following the U.S.'s "Secret War" in Laos.

By 1980, approximately 50,000 Hmong had settled in the U.S., and in 1990 the U.S. had approximately 95,000. In 2000 and 2010, the population rose to 186,300 and 260,000, respectively (Hmong National Development, 2013; Watson, 2001). Because of the complete lack of research regarding Hmong student leadership, I had taken a step back and became curious as to how race and student leadership intersected. I had hoped that these topics would assist in illuminating some potential answers to my questions about Hmong student leadership.

Leadership Research

Unfortunately, while the study of leadership has a long history, the examination of the intersections of race and leadership is very limited and according to Armino, Carter, Jones, Kruger, Lucas, Washington, Young, and Scott (2000), "little alternative and even

less investigating [of] the intersection of race and leadership [has been undertaken]" (p. 496). In fact, this overall limited literature examining race and leadership in higher education appears to have only surfaced in the last 15 years (Armino et al., 2000).

Yamasaki (1995), one of the earlier researchers examining race and leadership found at the time that "leadership notions and practices which are ethnically bound constitute an area of study which is virtually untouched" (p. 33). While researchers have recognized that the dearth of literature existed, very few studies have been done to build upon Yamasaki's research. In a study by Dugan and Komives (2007), they found that not only did student leadership self-efficacy develop during college, but that there may also be a connection between leadership self-efficacy and Asian American identity development. In his study, Hu (2011) found that Asian American students reported the lowest level of leadership efficacy among all other races when the factor of race was disaggregated in his study. Kodama and Dugan (2013) found a similar pattern and stated that Asian Pacific American students "reported lower levels of leadership self-efficacy. . . but the reasons for this phenomenon are unclear and need further examination" (p. 196). Low leadership self-efficacy among Asian American students appears to be a common pattern throughout the existing literature.

The importance of leadership development for students in higher education is discussed in detail by Dugan and Komives (2007), who stated that there is "an institutional, and societal, mandate that calls for institutions of higher education to purposefully develop socially responsible leaders" (p. 5). Traditionally, college attendance has been correlated with "cognitive and social development [and] increased career opportunities" (Yamasaki, 1995), and many scholars have agreed that there is a

link between educational attainment and increased social and economic privileges (Astin, 1993; Hilliard, 2010; Hu and Wolniak 2013; Yamasaki, 1995). Given that college missions frequently articulate an objective of preparing society's future leaders, it would be reasonable to assume that there would be attention paid to the ways in which leadership development takes place for all students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds.

Furthermore, numerous models and definitions have been presented for the use of examining leadership development among college students in general. According to Lee (2011), three primary leadership development models have been used to examine leadership in higher education: the relational leadership model, the leadership identity development theory, and the social change model of leadership development. Through his examination, Lee (2011) concluded, however, that while these models provide a good starting point to examine leadership, "the generalizability of these frameworks may not extend to Asian American students, particularly regarding how notions of racial identity may influence their leadership" (p. 2).

Researchers also agree that additional research needs to be done regarding Asian American students in higher education (Liang, Lee, & Ting, 2002; Yamasaki, 1995; Yammarino & Jung, 1998). According to Yamasaki (1995), the overall, contemporary scholarly literature regarding Asian Americans in the nation's higher education system has seen a "meteoric rise" (p. 1). This is partly because of the increase of enrolled students of Asian descent in colleges over the past few decades. For example, between 1980 and 2010, college attainment for White students rose approximately 13 percentage

points, while college attainment for Asian American students rose approximately 19 percentage points during the same period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

The same pattern of interest in scholarly research on Asian Americans can also be said about the interest in scholarly literature regarding the Hmong. The literature regarding Asian Americans in the U.S., unfortunately, paints a very inaccurate picture of the Hmong experience. When examining both the demographic and educational attainment levels for Asian Americans against that of Hmong Americans, it is clear that their experiences are very different and it would be inaccurate to generalize the overall experience of Asian Americans with the experiences of Hmong Americans. For example, according to a report by the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), the Asian American population in 2010 was at approximately 17.3 million individuals, while at the same time, the Hmong population only reached approximately 260,073. The Hmong American population only accounted for 1.5% of the Asian American population, making it very difficult to generalize Asian American experiences to Hmong American experiences.

Furthermore, according to a report by the Hmong National Development (2013), the "Hmong have some of the lowest bachelor's degree attainment rates across racial and ethnic groups" (p. 7), while Asian Americans overall are considered some of the most educated subgroups throughout the U.S. based on educational attainment levels (U.S. Census, 2012, 2013). For instance, among the U.S. population of individuals 25 years or older, it is reported that 49.2% of all Asian Americans across the U.S. have a Bachelor's degree or higher, while only 14.5% of Hmong Americans across the U.S.

have the same educational attainment during the same time (Hmong National

Development, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2013).

There is very little available research to provide an accurate insight into Asian

American student leadership development and even less is written about the leadership

development of Hmong students. The existing research and demographic information

makes it clear that the existing literature regarding Asian Americans and leadership

cannot be easily generalizable to the Hmong population, and therefore, this research

attempts to offer a foundation to begin examining Hmong student leadership by first

providing an understanding about the experiences of Hmong student leaders on a

university campus. This study proposes to use a phenomenological methodology using

a focus group method with a group of Hmong student leaders to better understand this

phenomenon among this population. Using thematic analysis, I hope to illuminate

patterns of responses that give insight into what it means to be a Hmong student leader.

Statement of the Problem

It is clear that there is limited literature examining Asian American student

leadership and virtually no existing literature examining Hmong student leadership in

higher education. While the literature provides some guidance about how Asian

American students perceive their leadership experiences, this limited knowledge does

not provide academic professionals a holistic understanding of this population. The

most alarming finding by Dugan and Komives (2007) was that Asian Americans "often

anchored the lowest scores among scales of leadership self-efficacy" (p. 14). Years

later, findings from Hu (2011) would conclude that "compared to Asian Americans,

students from other minority groups actually were less likely to hold leadership

positions in cultural or community groups" (p. 526). Intuitively, it would reason that if leadership self-efficacy was very low among Asian American students, then individuals from this population should also exhibit low levels of participation in leadership positions. These counter-intuitive findings suggest that there may be a more significant disconnect that has not yet been thoroughly examined by researchers.

The literature appears to articulate a pattern of low leadership self-efficacy among Asian American students, and it is unclear as to whether or not this pattern among Asian American student leaders would be consistent with the experience of Hmong students. In short, scholars and academic professionals simply do not have enough information about the leadership experiences of Hmong students to make an informed decision about their leadership development programming.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The question as to why Asian American students—and potentially Hmong students—do not score high on measures of leadership self-efficacy is not within the scope of this study. In fact, because of the lack of any study on Hmong student leadership, this research study proposes to build a foundation by systematically exploring the phenomenological experience of Hmong student leaders in higher education. This study was guided by the following research question:

What patterns emerge when Hmong students describe their leadership experiences on a college campus?

Conceptual Framework

Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) Critical Race Theory (CRT) frames the conceptual framework used in this study. At the root of CRT is the notion that racism is

not simply a series of isolated, unrelated, individual acts. While it certainly can—and does—manifest in those forms, CRT instead discusses racism in systemic terms that permeate social constructs through dominant narratives in seemingly acceptable social norms that appear normal and common sense in such a way that perpetuates the advantages of Whites (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), there is no standardized set of doctrines to which all Critical Race Theorists subscribe; however,

> these scholars are unified by two common interests—to understand how a "regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" and to change the bond that exists between law and racial power (p. 14).

Definition of Terms

To provide clarity to this study, this section includes definitions of key terms.

Leadership

Scholars tend to agree that there are many definitions of leadership (Barlett & Bartling, 2007; Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012; Hilliard, 2010; Lee, 2011; Lunenburg, 2010); however, the definition of leadership used in this study will draw from Dugan and Komives (2007), as "a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change" (p. 9).

Student Leader

For the purposes of this study, the term *student leader* is defined as an individual enrolled in an institution of learning that is in a formal position in which they are

responsible for overseeing a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change.

Hmong American

For the purpose of this study, the term *Hmong American college students* will be used to describe the study population. The terms *Hmong* and *Hmong American* will be used interchangeably throughout this study.

Overview of the Research Methodology

CRT often employs storytelling as a means to give voice to underserved populations and integrates experiential knowledge to make meaning (Ladson-Billings, 1998). This pillar of CRT informs the use of a phenomenological approach in this study. The goal of phenomenological studies is to explore an experience or phenomenon, "rather than correlational or confirmatory quantification" (Logue, 2005, p. 395). Phenomenological studies utilize qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to gather data.

In this study, a focus group is used to gather data. The focus group discussion with the research participants was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. The transcript was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis, and patterns of responses were combined to illuminate themes that provided a framework to better understand the experiences of Hmong student leaders on campus.

Significance of the Study

This study benefits not only student affairs practitioners, but also researchers and the research participants. It cannot be emphasized enough the importance of the role that this study will play in providing a foundation to the exploration of Hmong student

leadership in higher education. Having a framework to better understand the

experiences of Hmong students in leadership positions helps provide student affairs

practitioners with a better context in which to construct culturally responsive

interventions and strategies in their leadership development programming. According

to Lee (2011), "integrating insights about specific populations is necessary to develop

models of leadership development that more accurately reflect these students' values

and perspectives" (p. 9).

Limitations and Assumptions

First and foremost, the findings from this study are limited to the population of

students in higher education who self-identify as having Hmong racial and cultural

heritage. Because this research specifically explored the experiences of Hmong

students of traditional college age, enrolled in a 4-year public university, the findings in

this study are only representative of this demographic and cannot be generalized to all

Hmong American students due to significant differences in education and personal

experiences. In addition, the participant group (n = 6) is not large enough to generalize

the findings broadly to the population of Hmong college students.

Second, because this is a qualitative study, the limitations are also bound by the

methodology used. Qualitative studies, and particularly phenomenological studies, are

context specific and it would be inappropriate to generalize the findings in this study

beyond the context and its research participants. In addition, the use of a face-to-face

focus group as a data collection method may have increased the risk of participant bias

or group think, or prevented disclosure of personal information. In addition, this study

only employed a single focus group session to collect data, so the results may not reflect

the level of richness that can be obtained from multiple focus group sessions or individual interviews.

Third, it is possible that audio recording the focus group session may have intimidated the participants, leading them to perhaps feel uncomfortable about discussing personal information during the focus group. The transcribed notes also did not capture facial expressions, tone, pitch, and body language.

Finally, phenomenological research may also be affected by purposeful sampling. Participants in this study self-selected to participate, therefore, the research findings could be significantly affected by the types of students who self-selected to participate in this study. For example, all participants have previously held multiple leadership positions and were all of traditional college age, between 19 and 25 years, and five out of the six participants self-identified as being female.

In addition to the limitations of this research, some assumptions were made. It was assumed that the feedback from the participants was true and that the experiences they articulated during the focus group session were not falsified. There was no reason for me to assume that any of the participants would be untruthful, but there was also no reasonable way for me to verify any of the participants' experiences. It was also assumed that the participants would be able to clearly articulate the extent of their own leadership experiences and its implications regardless of the diversity of leadership experiences each participant brought to the focus group.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated the need for providing research regarding student leadership among Hmong students in higher education. As a result of the existing lack

of research, leadership development programming in higher education is developed using leadership models that may meet the needs of most students, but not students of color and certainly not Hmong students. The next chapter will describe in detail the literature that exists on leadership, CRT, and Hmong college students. The following chapters will discuss the research methodology, the study's research findings, and its implications in leadership development programming.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature available discussing the concept of student leadership and its intersections with the lived experiences of Hmong college students in the United States. It is vital to first note that the literature examining leadership development among students from diverse and underrepresented populations is extremely sparse and requires more study (Chang, Astin, & Kim, 2004; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Hu, 2011; Hu & Wolniak, 2013; Jenkins, 2007; Kezar, 2000). Therefore, the examination of the literature here provides a foundation that moves us toward a better understanding for the need to examine this topic in more detail.

There is a wealth of overall literature regarding leadership development and there are certainly prominent researchers studying this particular topic. However, because of the narrow and unique perspective that this research examines, it should be noted that this literature review is not meant to be a fully comprehensive summary of the available literature on this topic.

In this chapter, the first section will provide a brief discussion regarding the evolution of leadership as a scholarly topic. The second section will more closely examine the scholarship surrounding student leadership in higher education for students of color. Finally, the third section will conclude with a discussion of how Critical Race Theory has been applied in educational contexts, and the importance of its framework in exploring student leadership development among students from diverse and underrepresented populations.

Leadership

Leadership is a dense and rich topic that includes a variety of perspectives, theories, and models focusing on different leadership frameworks and contexts. The literature regarding leadership in the context of higher education is no exception. The definitions and conceptualizations of leadership are complex and according to Dugan, Komives, and Segar (2008), there are nearly as many definitions of leadership as there have been scholars who have studied it. Early definitions defined leadership in regards to personal traits (Mann, 1959) including their influence, communication skills, foresight, and adaptability. Today, definitions of leadership appear to synthesize together personal traits with contextual circumstances (Dugan, 2006).

Each of these conceptualizations has been referred to through differing terms. For example, the first model was termed as trait-based leadership and was defined by Zaccaro, Kemp, and Bader (2004) as "relatively stable and coherent integrations of personal characteristics that foster a consistent pattern of leadership performance across a variety of group and organizational situations" (p. 104). Some examples of traits examined by the leader in this paradigm included personalities, cognitive abilities, skills, and expertise. According to Zaccaro (2007), trait-based leadership could perhaps be traced back to Francis Galton in 1869, who argued that "personal qualities defining effective leadership were naturally endowed, passed from generation to generation" (p. 6).

Trait-based leadership has also been described and discussed by different researchers with different terms, despite the fact that many of these models had very similar conceptualizations of leadership. For example, in his research Dugan (2006)

referred to these conceptualizations as an *industrial* model of leadership. According to

Dugan (2006), *industrial* leadership focused on the "individual as leader, promoting

command and control models, power and authority, rational and analytical thinking and

strong managerial influences" (p. 217). Another researcher, Lunenburg (2010) referred

to this leadership paradigm as *transactional* leadership. Lunenburg (2010) defined

transactional leadership as a model that "involves leader-follower exchanges necessary

for achieving agreed upon performance goals between leaders and followers" (p. 89).

The trait-based leadership model guided much of the development of leadership

research until the mid-1900s (Zaccaro, 2007; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004), when

alternative theories challenged the trait-based leadership model. These emerging

theories focused on the psychology of leadership and overall suggested that leadership

was situational (Bird, 1940; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1974). According to Mann (1959),

"sufficient evidence has been accumulated to give impetus to the situational approach to

leadership. . . and that the selection and stability of any leadership pattern is a function

of the task, composition, and culture of the group" (pp. 246-247). According to Zaccaro

(2007), these alternative theories dominated the leadership scholarship until the 1980s

when the trait-based leadership model reemerged in popularity.

These alternative leadership models are termed *postindustrial models* (Dugan,

Komives, & Segar, 2008), which focused on relational, reciprocal, and values-based

conceptualizations. One such postindustrial model, transformative leadership, is

defined by Caldwell, Dixon, Floyd, Chaudoin, Post, and Cheokas (2012) as "an

ethically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes

by optimizing the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honoring the

moral duties owed by organizations to their stakeholders" (p. 176). While the authors in this article discussed the features of transformative leadership in relation to the culture of corporate American business, the application of these ideas throughout educational contexts is articulated in Lunenburg (2010). According to Lunenburg (2010), there is strong evidence in the literature that speaks to the effectiveness of the use of transformational leadership models at various job levels and throughout various contexts.

Leadership literature outcomes.

The overall scholarly literature discussing student leadership in higher education can be categorized into three patterns: (a) examining student outcomes, (b) discussing improvements to leadership programming and implications, and (c) describing the student experience. These categories, however, were not meant to be mutually exclusive and some studies, in fact, addressed two or more of these categories.

Examining student outcomes. Based on the available literature, multiple studies attempted to examine the outcomes that occurred as a result of a student's participation in leadership development programs. One source that is often cited in leadership scholarship is Astin (1993), which summarized a longitudinal study examining more than 200 four-year colleges and universities throughout the U.S. This study, titled *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*, looked at over 25,000 enrolled college students who completed the surveys between the 1985 and 1989. According to Astin (1993), the study employed over 80 different outcome measures, but he summarized these outcomes into three broad categories: academic development, personal development, and satisfaction. While this study did not directly discuss

leadership development, it is often cited by researchers examining student leadership due to the wealth of information it provided about student outcomes. In fact, this study has been cited in many student leadership development studies that took place afterwards.

Dugan and Komives (2007) was another influential national study that examined student outcomes based on the Social Change Model (SCM) of leadership development. This study collected data from over 63,000 students who were enrolled in 52 college campuses throughout the United States. In addition, to assess longitudinal changes in leadership development, this multi-year study collected data from the same group of students at two points—during their first year in college and during their senior year in college. The model in this study was characterized by the *seven C's*, including: consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. The researchers found that "participants reported neutrality approaching agreement across the majority of the SCM values" (p. 12)—the *seven C's*—and therefore concluded that there was still significant room to work with students on the development of "critical leadership competencies" as measured by the SCM. In addition, this study found that there was a statistically significant positive change in reported leadership self-efficacy of students over time.

Other studies attempted to examine the relationship between different identities and leadership outcomes. For example, Dugan, Garland, Jacoby, and Gasiorski (2008) examined commuter students and leadership self-efficacy, Dugan, Kodama, and Gebhardt (2012) attempted to examine the relationship between a student's racial identity and development in socially responsible leadership, and Hu and Wolniak

(2013) explored the relationship between scholarship recipients and leadership capacity. Furthermore, other sources looked at the relationship between gender and leadership development (Armino et al., 2000; Dugan, 2006; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Haber, 2011; Kezar, 2000).

Discussing improvements to leadership programming and implications. Many studies focused on examining current leadership programming and discussed implications for ways to improve leadership development programs. Some of these studies simply described different functions of leadership development programming including functions of a student organization (Hilliard, 2010; Reese, 2008; Taylor, 2008) as well as best practices for student leadership programming (Al-Omari, Tineh, & Khasawneh, 2008; Haber, 2011). Taylor (2008), for example, wrote a brief article describing the functions and procedure of starting a student organization. This article included goal setting, program development, and implementation of initiatives.

Other sources discussed more critical methods of improving leadership programming including considerations of racial identity (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kodama & Dugan, 2013; Lee, 2011), improving critical consciousness (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Hoops, 2011; Ngo, 2013; Ospina & Foldy, 2009;), and suggesting unconventional leadership models (Astin & Astin, 2000; Kezar, 2000; Lunenberg, 2010; Stepteau-Watson, 2012; Voorhees, 2011). For example, Kezar (2000) offered the idea of *pluralistic leadership*, a model which focused on three primary strategies: (a) developing an awareness of identity, positionality, and power; (b) acknowledging multiple perspectives and leadership; and (c) mediation. According to Kezar (2000), these strategies were based on the assertion that "multiple leadership

beliefs existed but that the institution had no means of acknowledging and negotiating these differences" (p. 8). As a result of her observations and studies, Kezar articulated that the current problems with traditional leadership models resulted in marginalized students not fitting into the institution, a development of "group think" among student leaders and the leadership program coordinators, and overall miscommunication or lack of communication between those in the dominant group and those from marginalized populations (p. 9).

Describing the student experience in leadership development. Despite the vast wealth of scholarly literature regarding student leadership, very few studies have explored the holistic student experience in leadership development. However, among the studies that have done so, a qualitative approach has been the primary methodology employed (Armino et al., 2000; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005; Yamasaki, 1995). In fact, Armino et al. (2000), Logue et al. (2005) and Yamasaki (1995) each used a phenomenological approach to better understand the "personal structure of leadership experiences from the perspectives of the student leaders" (Logue et al., 2005, p. 395). According to Armino et al. (2000), the use of phenomenology was appropriate in that it "seeks to explore the 'different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and various phenomena in, the world around them'. . . " (p. 4).

In her study, Yamasaki (1995) explored leadership in a Japanese American college student organization. Using multiple methods, including semi-structured interviews and field observations, she worked with a subset of nine participants and found that student leaders sought to establish their ethnic identities through their

participation in the student organization, as well as "to cultivate ties within their ethnic community and develop members' social networks" (p. 28). In addition, Yamasaki found that the participants exhibited a "hybrid" (p. 28) model of leadership, using multiple leadership strategies including more traditional approaches such as the use of hierarchical leadership in combination with more egalitarian practices that emphasized collaborative efforts among the students. Yamasaki (1995) concluded that the students were conceptualizing and practicing leadership based on their "interplay between cultural and contextual factors" (p. 28).

Logue et al. (2005) did not examine racial identity, like Yamasaki (2005) had done. Instead, Logue and her colleagues examined the overall experiences of six White traditional-aged student leaders. The results showed that participants overall reported a very positive experience as student leaders. Logue et al. (2005) found three primary themes that emerged: people, action, and organization. In the theme *people,* students discussed their interpersonal relationships within their student organizations at length and focused on "the participants' experience of others" (p. 399). The next theme, *action*, illustrated the activity level of the participants. According to the researchers, "the participants attributed their very existence as *leaders* to *action*" (p. 402 [emphasis added]). In the final theme, *organization*, the research participants described "leadership experiences in relation to the respective organizations and the events or activities sponsored" (p. 403). In addition, the issue of gender differences and the impact of time management was an integral part of the results, although the researchers did not discuss these findings in great depth.

Examining data from 106 participants from two different college campuses, Armino, et al. (2000) sought to explore why low numbers of students of color participated in leadership development programs. To do this, the researchers attempted to determine how congruent leadership programs were with value orientations and leadership experiences of students of color. The researchers articulated six results that emerged from this study. First, although many of the research participants served as elected leaders in student organizations, the students of color did not consider themselves leaders. According to Armino, et al. (2000), "most participants did not consider themselves 'leaders.' In fact, some resented the term 'leader' being used to describe them" (p. 3). Second, research participants discussed the personal cost of being a leader. Specifically, the authors found that African American student leaders articulated a fear of losing "privacy, interdependence, associations, and collateral relationships" (p. 4) as a result of being a student leader. Third, the participants reported difficulty in finding role models on campus. Fourth, students of color often took part in same-race student organizations as a means to meet their identity development needs, while it was found that the same students who actively took part in predominantly White groups did so because they were seeking opportunities to gain what they perceived as "ideal leadership experiences" (p. 5). Fifth, participants in this study "articulated a strong group responsibility for becoming involved," as opposed to conventional leadership literature that describes leadership as something to pursue individually (p. 5). Finally, the researchers found that their leadership experiences differed between male and female student leaders.

Finally, Dugan (2006) looked at college men and women and attempted to determine whether or not groups of different genders collectively differed in their leadership paradigms. In this study, the researcher used the SCM and collected data from 859 participants. Upon examining the data, the researcher found that mean scores for women were higher than mean scores for men across all of the leadership constructs in the SCM framework, supporting previous research that suggested women, in general, utilized more relational leadership strategies. Thus, Dugan (2006) suggested that "women possess an advantage when leadership is defined according to the emergent paradigm" (p. 222).

Why is student leadership important in higher education?

Given the essential role of higher education in preparing leaders in all contexts and economic sectors, student leadership development among college students has been an ongoing area of interest for stakeholders and researchers in higher education. In fact, most colleges and universities include student leadership as a component within their mission statements (Adams & Keim, 2000). According to Adams and Keim (2000), "the question of what makes a person a leader has been raised by academicians, politicians, and business people all over the world" (p. 1). Researchers such as Astin (1999), for example, have also suggested that "the greater the student's involvement in college [including leadership involvement], the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development" (p. 528-529).

The interest in student leadership is also important for prospective employers. According to Al-Omari, Tineh, and Khasawneh (2008), leadership skills are becoming increasingly important to different kinds of employers. With the recent Great Recession

of 2008, colleges and institutions of higher learning have been under closer scrutiny by employers and graduates regarding how well they are preparing students for life after graduation (Stone, Horn & Zukin, 2012). In their report, Stone, Horn, and Zukin (2012) described how recession-era college graduates were faring in the workplace and how they perceived their college education. While the report examined multiple topics including job placement and college debt, it also explored student perceptions of preparation in job skills. According to the report, only 31% of the research participants reported that their college prepared them "extremely well" in leadership skills development, while 46% stated that their college experience prepared them "pretty well" in leadership skills development.

Popular leadership models in higher education. There are many student leadership models that span the literature, but four particular models appear to dominate much of the literature regarding student leadership development in higher education. These models include Kouzes and Posner's (2007) Leadership Challenge Model, the Relational Leadership Model (RLM) (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998), the leadership identity development theory (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005) and the Social Change Model (SCM) of leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000). According to Wisner (2011), the most significant similarity among these leadership models is that they each emphasize "the relationship between leader and followers and their shared values" (p. 354). The SCM and its implications in the research has already been described in detail in the previous sections of this thesis. The following sections will provide a brief overview of the remaining models.

Leadership challenge model: The five practices of exemplary leadership. This

model of leadership described leadership as a process of an individual exhibiting five

key behaviors that were considered by the researcher as "positive leadership behaviors."

According to Kouzes and Posner (2007), these practices included: *Model the Way*,

Inspire a Shared Vision, *Challenge the Process*, *Enable Others to Act*, and *Encourage*

the Heart. *Model the Way* was described similarly to identifying leaders' values and

aligning their actions to their values. As the name implies, it was also described as

being a role model for peers and subordinates. *Inspire a Shared Vision* described the

act of setting goals and envisioning outcomes, as well as "enlisting others in a common

vision by appealing to shared aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 16). *Challenge*

the Process was described as identifying and seizing opportunities to improve, as well

as to take calculated risks that would generate small wins. Kouzes and Posner

described *Enable Others to Act* as the means of "fostering collaboration," creating and

maintaining meaningful relationships, and "strengthening others by increasing self-

determination" (p. 16). Finally, *Encourage the Heart* was described as the process of

celebrating victories and creating community, as well as recognizing contributions and

"showing appreciation for individual excellence" (p. 16).

    Relational leadership model. The relational leadership model was described by

Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998) as having five key components that build

"commitment toward positive purposes that are inclusive of people and diverse points

of view, empowers those involved, is ethnical, and recognizes that all four of these

elements are accomplished by being process-oriented" (p. 121). This model described

leadership as a process "knowing, being, and doing" through various leadership

components including: *Inclusive*, *Empowering*, *Purposeful*, *Ethical*, and *Process-Oriented*. According to Uhl-Bien (2006), this model did not "adopt traditional organizational and management language of 'structure' and 'entities'. . ." (p. 661). Instead, this model argued that a paradigm shift in understanding leadership was necessary, where organizations were viewed as "elaborate relational networks of changing persons, moving forward together through space and time, in a complex interplay of effects between individual organizational members and the system into which they enter" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 662). Furthermore, according to Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), the practical applications of this model helped to "sensitize leaders to the importance of their relationships and to features of conversations and everyday mundane occurrences that can reveal new possibilities for morally-responsible leadership" (p. 1425).

Leadership identity development theory. The Leadership Identity Development (LID) theory was a framework that attempted to describe the "shifting leadership identity as moving from a hierarchical, leader-centric view to one that embraced leadership as a collaborative, relational process" (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005, p. 609). This theory, which was developed using a qualitative study of undergraduate students, framed student leadership development as a linear process through six stages, which included: (a) awareness, (b) exploration and engagement, (c) leader identified, (d) leadership differentiated, (e) generativity, and (f) integration and synthesis (Komives et al., 2006). Throughout each stage, the student would not only gain a more complex understanding of leadership, but would also be

engaged in more complex leadership experiences as confidence and leadership self-efficacy increased.

An example of LID theory in research includes the work of Renn and Ozaki (2010). In this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach to examine the experiences of 18 undergraduate students leading "identity-based campus organizations whose mission included serving the needs from a given psychosocial identity (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)" (Renn & Ozaki, 2010, p. 14). This study not only examined LID, but also used psychosocial identity development theory. From their findings, Renn and Ozaki found that these student leaders developed through two identity "paths"—a *parallel* path and a *merged* path. Students exhibiting a *parallel* path were those who viewed their psychosocial and leadership development as separate from each other, whereas students exhibiting a *merged* path viewed both their psychosocial and leadership development as intertwined and co-dependent. The researchers also found that regardless of the "path" taken, the participants affirmed the importance of both psychosocial development and leadership development as salient developmental processes.

Examining student leadership development among students of color.

For quite some time, researchers have acknowledged that a gap existed in the literature examining leadership development among students of color in higher education and this acknowledgement has led multiple scholars to begin examining said gap. According to Kezar (2000), "collectively these studies suggest that gender, race, and cultural background impact leadership beliefs" (p. 7).

In addition, scholars have found that differentiated strategies are necessary to meet the needs of student leaders from different ethnic and racial backgrounds (Haber, 2011; Hilliard, 2010; Kezar, 2000; Kodama & Dugan, 2013; Yamasaki, 1995). Other scholars have suggested that the instruments and models traditionally used to examine leadership do not accurately take into consideration the nuanced role that leadership plays among students of color (Dugan, 2006; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Liang & Sedlacek, 2003; Neilson & Suyemoto, 2009). In addition, according to Dugan (2006), "A shortage of instruments designed to specifically measure the leadership development of college students continues to exist" (p. 219).

Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2012) identified some of the gaps in the literature regarding leadership preparation programs. While their article discussed primarily administrative leadership, they briefly discussed the gaps in student leadership literature, as well. Their concern was primarily in the methods used to study leadership. According to the authors, "a critically missing component of research is about those actively engaged in learning—the candidates—and their lived and learned experiences" (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2012, p. 10). Here, the scholars articulated a need for more qualitative research that would provide more in-depth discovery of the leadership experience for students of color.

Additional challenges facing leadership development exploration among students of color included a misunderstanding of how ethnicity and culture influence leadership development (Haber, 2011; Hu & Wolniak, 2013). As suggested by Haber (2011), "students of color tend to adopt more relational and process-oriented views and styles than their White counterparts" (p. 70). In addition, the existing models of leadership do

not always accurately validate the experiences of students of color (Jenkins, 2007). To illustrate the importance of validating leadership development among students of color, Kodama and Dugan (2013) concluded "caution should be taken in interpreting leadership development findings from studies that do not disaggregate data by race" (p. 195). Despite these efforts, however, significant gaps continue to persist in the literature (Chang, Astin & Kim, 2004; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Hu, 2011).

Among the outcomes, research has supported the assertion that students' racial identity affected their leadership development. In fact, the literature consistently discussed the importance of considering diversity and race in leadership development. For example, after examining responses from 833 student leaders in Florida, Jenkins (2007) found that overall there was a statistically significant positive relationship between student organizational diversity and the development of leadership skills. In addition, according to Jenkins (2007), "as society becomes more and more diverse, preparing college students to become active participants and leaders in a pluralistic society becomes both more urgent and, potentially, more complex" (p. 8).

Scholars examining race as a factor in leadership development have also found that African American students consistently scored higher than White students on the Social Change Model across multiple values (Armino et al., 2000; Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008). According to Dugan, Komives, and Segar (2008), "the rationale [for students of color to engage] in leadership was to contribute to social change through advocacy and education" (p. 487), thereby contributing to their higher scores to serve as a social change agent through the process of engaging in leadership positions.

However, this same study by Dugan et al. (2008) found that Asian American students scored significantly lower on the values in the Social Change Model.

Interestingly, Dugan, Kodama, and Gebhardt (2012) found that the methods used to examine race and student leadership development were sometimes contradictory. For example, the authors in this study articulated that qualitative studies often reported race as a significant influence on student leadership development, however, studies employing quantitative means found "minimal or no significant influences between race and leadership" (p. 175). In this study, however, the authors found that "for students of color, the effective development of an internally validated racial self-concept was a significant contributor to leadership capacity" (Dugan, Kodama, & Gebhardt, 2012, p. 184).

The problem with the "Asian American" racial category. Before continuing on, it is vital that this thesis briefly discuss a lingering issue that plagues scholars studying issues of race in higher education. First and foremost, racial categories of identification have continued to change over the years, and therefore, the language and definitions of *diverse*, *minority*, and *underrepresented* students have changed. This becomes particularly problematic when scholars have attempted to focus on the student leadership development of *Asian Americans*—a racial category that combines a wide variety of different South Asian nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities into one seemingly cohesive group. Sometimes this racial category is expanded as *Asian American Pacific Islanders* (AAPI) to encompass the surrounding geographic locations closely linked to South Asian countries.

Scholars continue to argue for the recognition of the heterogeneity of *Asian Americans* (Alvarez, 2002; Hune 2002; Inkelas, 2004; Museus & Chang, 2009) because of its potentially negative implications. For example, according to Pang, Han, and Pang (2011), "many educators have a monolithic view of Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students as being high achievers who have little need for educational services" (p. 378). A recognition of this heterogeneity is also important because the Model Minority (Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011) narrative has often been used as a political argument against social justice initiatives. According to Pang et al. (2011), the Model Minority myth inaccurately "advances the view that AAPIs have successfully assimilated into mainstream society. . . [and therefore], it presents an underlying message that racism is no longer an obstacle to social mobility" (p. 379). However, all scholars examining the Asian American experience have overwhelmingly agreed that the Model Minority myth ignores the prejudice and discrimination that AAPIs regularly experience (Pang et al., 2011; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2012; Yeh, 2002). In fact, according to Pang et al. (2011), "the history of AAPIs demonstrates that racism and social oppression have been barriers to their full inclusion" (p. 379). Furthermore, the U.S. Census Bureau, as well as most institutions of higher education use this terminology, as well, and often do not disaggregate this group into its many subgroups (Dizon, 2011).

For the sake of consistency, however, it is necessary to continue using this specific terminology within the context of this thesis with the understanding that this imperfect term combines together multiple cultures and ethnicities from divergent historical contexts.

Leadership development among Asian Americans students. With that being

clarified, while expanding this topic for examination, we still find that very little is

written specifically about Asian American student leadership. For example Yammarino

and Jung (1998) only found four articles specific to the discussion of Asian American

student leadership. Although scholarly research on Asian American students in

education has "increased significantly in the past twenty years" (Buenavista,

Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009, p. 69), the exploration of student leadership

development among Asian Americans is grossly underrepresented.

Since Yammarino and Jung's (1998) early work, the research on Asian American

student leadership has grown, and overwhelmingly, scholars have continued to find that

Asian American students tend to exhibit the lowest scores on scales of leadership

capacity and leadership self-efficacy (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Hu, 2011; Hu &

Wolniak, 2013; Lang, Irby, & Brown, 2012; Liang, Lee & Ting, 2002). These findings

come in stark contrast to the pattern articulated by Hu (2011) in that Asian Americans

are more likely to take on leadership positions in their communities and the larger

society.

Because of the lack of literature regarding AAPI students, scholars have used

findings from AAPI community leaders to try to explain this inconsistency.

Specifically, scholars have hypothesized that this inconsistency may be due to the ways

in which Asian American community members internalize the meaning of leadership.

For example, Lang, Irby and Brown (2012) stated that "Chinese participants considered

moral character as the most important factor in leadership" (p. 8). In addition, Kezar

(2000) found that "people of color [including AAPIs] tended to have nonhierarchical views of leadership whereas those of White men tended to be hierarchical" (p. 8).

The process of pursuing leadership may also be different among AAPIs. In his article, Yamasaki (1995) had described a cultural phenomenon among Asian American community leaders, which he termed *unsolicited leadership*, where the election of an individual into a leadership role was made of someone who had the skills to lead, but was not necessarily seeking a leadership position. The community had sought to "collectively force capable individuals into leadership positions" through social coercion (Yamasaki, 1995, p. 24).

In regards to AAPI students, Jenkins (2000) suggested that the values of Asian American students and other students of color are not being validated in conventional leadership paradigms. Liang, Lee, and Ting (2002) suggested that perhaps conventional leadership models do not take into consideration that "our current understanding of leadership skills excludes practices generally found among Asian Americans, such as subordination of the individual to the group, deference, and obedience to elders" (p. 81).

Leadership development among Hmong American students. Unfortunately, the literature specifically regarding Hmong student leadership in higher education is nonexistent. Overall, a great deal of the early scholarly literature examining Hmong students in educational settings was deficit focused and the priorities were to identify the specific challenges Hmong American students faced in schools (DePouw, 2012; Hang, 1997; Vang, 2004; Xiong, 2012; Xiong, Detzner, Heuster, Eliason, & Allen, 2006; Xiong & Lee, 2011).

However, the available scholarly work currently focused on leadership among Hmong American adults or community members (Lor & Yang, 2012; Moua & Riggs, 2012). Following the death of General Vang Pao, a significant national Hmong leader who formerly served as the primary military commander of the Royal Lao Army during the Vietnam War, Lor and Yang (2012) proposed a leadership framework meant to serve as a resource and reference for those who found themselves in a leadership position in the Hmong community. This framework consisted of three primary components: (a) knowledge of the Hmong leadership continuum, (b) the infusion of a culturally embedded leadership structure into one's leadership style, and (c) an embracing of the key attributes of leadership. The authors described the first component, *Hmong leadership continuum*, as having a critical understanding of the Hmong cultural values and traditions, as well as having knowledge of key historical leaders. This included understanding the clan leadership structure and its evolution and implications throughout Southeast Asia and the United States. The second component here, *the infusion of a culturally embedded leadership structure into one's leadership style*, was described by the authors as being able to navigate through leadership using strategies that were characteristic of leadership ideologies that consider traditional, as well as progressive leadership styles. For example, during this current transition in the Hmong community, the dualism of traditional "clan leadership and Western leadership models both still play important roles" (Lor & Yang, 2012, 10). The third component, *embracing the attributes of leadership*, was described as being able to embody positive leadership characteristics in an ethical and meaningful manner that meets the needs of stakeholders and constituents. These suggested characteristics included traditional

means including understanding language, having a respected background, and embracing Hmong cultural values, as well as Western characteristics including confidence, talent management, and creativity.

Another study discussing Hmong American adult leaders examined Hmong women leaders. Using a narrative study methodology with a group of nine young female professionals, Moua and Riggs (2012) examined factors that contributed to the participants' leadership development, strategies used in attaining and maintaining their leadership roles, and barriers participants encountered on their path to becoming a leader. Through this study, the researchers found that the participants' experience in impoverished families motivated them to seek out educational opportunities to escape their socioeconomic status. In addition, some barriers that were consistent among the participants included experiences of racism, ageism, and sexism. Finally, the researchers found that the participants discussed their need to navigate multiple roles in their Hmong communities and in their professional communities.

Critical Race Theory

The origin of critical race theory is attributed as a branch of critical race legal theory born out of the 1970s by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), who were concerned with the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1998). According to Closson (2010), critical race theory was originally "conceived as an oppositional scholarship within mainstream legal scholars' discourse" (p. 264). Delgado and Stefancic (2012), summarized critical race theory as a means of "studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism and power" (p. 3).

The framework of critical race theory has often been discussed as having multiple "tenets" and a number of consistent and defining themes emerge. First and foremost, it attempts to examine racial discrimination and racial inequity through the presentation of stories from the perspective of people of color. Specifically, these stories come from people of oppressed populations whose stories are often suppressed or silenced, and therefore, these stories are referred to as "counter-stories" (Creswell, 2013, p. 32). According to Ladson-Billings (1998), "the 'voice' component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism and beginning a process of judicial redress" (p. 16).

Second, the framework of critical race theory uses race at the forefront of the examination of social inequities, while at the same time critical race theorists recognize the complexity of race and its role in our realities. Race, as described by Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, and Parker (2009), is a socially constructed paradigm and according to Creswell (2013) is not static, "but one that is fluid and continually shaped by political pressures and informed by individual lived experiences" (p. 32). The implications of race are further examined by Price (2010), who described the ways in which race has a "material effect in terms of the unequal distribution of power and wealth" (p. 148).

Third, while critical race theory addresses inequities specifically regarding race, it also considers inequities as a whole, considering multiple ways in which individuals from underrepresented populations are "othered", through different methods of categorization such as gender, class, ability, and so on. (Creswell, 2013).

The general application of critical race theory in the field of education was introduced by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who argued that the examination of racial inequities in education remained "untheorized" (p. 49). According to these scholars, this was not because race had not been previously and meticulously examined in education, but instead they wanted to illuminate the limitations of the "multicultural paradigm" (p. 60) of their day. Specifically, Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) critique of the multicultural paradigm was that because of its limitations, its tenets were being used to reinforce White privilege and racial inequities, essentially getting "sucked back into the system" (p.62).

Over the past decade, critical race theory has been used in various contexts to analyze and better understand the lived experiences of students of color in higher education institutions (Giles, 2010; Hammack, 2012; Hutcheson, Gasman, & Sanders-McMurtry, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Price, 2010; Teranishi, et al., 2009). In her article, Closson (2010) reviewed the literature surrounding critical race theory and how its applications could inform practitioners to better understand the experiences of students of color in adult education programs. While Closson went on to discuss a variety of topics associated with critical race theory, one of her primary ideas in this article was that racism was a normative behavior perpetuated by the systemic structure of higher education—and society—and in order to address these barriers, the institution itself needed to be realigned. For example, Closson articulated how White faculty members could "escape responsibility and accountability for racism by defining racism as an overt act," thereby absolving them from acknowledging how institutional racism affected their students (p. 269).

In Teranishi et al. (2009), the authors discussed how critical race theory had been used to examine the experiences of AAPIs in higher education. They discussed in length the ways in which race played a role in college access and admissions. Specifically, the authors discussed how the *model minority myth* associated with AAPI student populations, was inappropriately applied against affirmative action policies and other policies that attempted to address inequitable access to higher education for students of color. According to Teranishi et al. (2009), "the persistent attention received by AAPI students enrolled in or applying to elite four-year institutions has obscured the reality that a significant proportion of AAPI college students attend two-year colleges" (p. 61).

In their examination of the experiences of students from AAPI populations, they articulated two significant concerns. First, the authors articulated that the student development theories used by practitioners "often ignore the role of race in the student experience," and second, that "research on racial climates focuses primarily on the experiences of Whites and Blacks" (Teranishi, et al., 2009, p. 62). This "Black-White binary," a term also used by Closson (2010, p. 262) and criticized by multiple critical race theorists (Giles, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Price, 2010), in essence superficially obscures the realities of the experiences of students of color who do not necessarily fit into this duality.

Finally, Teranishi, et al. (2009), utilized critical race theory to make suggestions for future policies and programs to address the needs of AAPIs in the United States. By examining college access and admissions policies, as well as the college student experience of AAPI students, they concluded that "normative frameworks unfairly, and

often incorrectly, position Asian American Pacific Islander students as the least in need of academic, financial, social, or psychosocial support" (65).

According to Teranishi, et al. (2009), "using a CRT lens can yield outcomes that better address the true needs of the beneficiaries of such policies and programs within higher education" (p. 59). It is because of CRT's emphasis on storytelling, examination of race, and critical understanding of inequities that makes this an ideal means to frame this qualitative study.

Conclusion

While leadership scholarship is dense in variety and depth, it lacks a critical examination of leadership from the perspective of marginalized populations, including women and people of color. The literature examining leadership development among students is another dense topic that lacks this same perspective.

The examination of student leadership and its use in student development in higher education for students of color appears to be at its infancy, based on the minimal, but growing literature available on this topic. What we know suggests that Asian American students consistently score low on conventional leadership metrics, and scholars suspect that this is due in part to these metrics not being culturally tuned to the specific values of Asian American students. In addition, there is a diversity of ethnicities and nationalities subsumed into the racial category *Asian American*, which result in inaccurate perceptions and conclusions about these individuals. As was described in the previous sections, the literature regarding Hmong student leadership is also virtually non-existent.

Meanwhile, critical race theory was proposed as a way to "rethink traditional educational scholarship" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). However, very little of this research overall focused on Asian American students in the academy, especially in regards to student leadership development. The discussion surrounding race in higher education is often times positioned using a binary Black-White paradigm, which often results in an oversimplification of perspectives that minimizes and excludes the unique perspectives of students from other racial backgrounds (Closson, 2010).

With these considerations in mind, this research project attempted to utilize a qualitative methodology to understand the phenomenological experiences of Hmong student leaders in higher education. The following chapters will detail the study's methods, its participants, and the findings.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study. A description of the sample and participant selection will be followed by a description of the data collection methods used. In addition, a description of the data analysis process will also be articulated. Finally, a discussion regarding the researcher's positionality in reference to the research study will be discussed.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenological experiences of Hmong student leaders in higher education.

Participant Selection and Description

This qualitative method sought to identify a group of six student research participants who met the following inclusion criteria. First, the research participants had to be enrolled as a student in a four-year institution of higher education. Second, research participants had to self-identify as having Hmong cultural or ethnic ancestry. Third, research participants had to have held an elected or appointed leadership position for any length of time within the previous 12 months of the data collection date. These criteria were determined in order to align with the research goals and objectives.

Within the context of this study, the term "elected position" was defined as a leadership position in which the participant was selected through a majority vote by a set of peers into a position of influence or responsibility. In addition, the term "appointed position" was defined as a leadership position of influence or responsibility in which the role was given to the participant by an authority figure or the participant voluntarily took the role.

To identify potential research participants, an announcement was made

articulating the inclusion criteria at a meeting of the Hmong student organization at a local four-year university. An additional announcement introducing the research study was made to a listserv of Hmong students on the same campus. All students who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in a no-obligation informational session where they learned about the research goals, the associated risks and benefits, and the data collection procedure. Ten individuals attended the no-obligation information session, and each individual was provided copies of the consent forms and asked to return the consent forms or email the researcher within 3 days if interested in participating as a voluntary research participant.

Seven eligible research participants expressed interest in participating in the study and submitted consent forms. After scheduling the focus group session, one student chose to withdraw from the research project due to scheduling conflicts, resulting in a total of six research participants remaining.

The research participants were provided with a brief questionnaire where they had an opportunity to voluntarily self-identify their ethnicity and rate their overall satisfaction and level of involvement in previous leadership experiences. Based on this brief questionnaire, one participant self-identified as being male and five participants self-identified as being female. All research participants reported being between the ages of 19 and 25 years and at the time of the study were enrolled in a four-year public university. In addition, all participants indicated that they had participated in at least one elected or appointed leadership position in the last 12 months. One participant self-identified as "Hmong American" and five participants self-identified as "Hmong."

Each of the participants had experience serving in an elected position in a student

organization and each participant had previous experience in appointed positions, as well. One participant had experience as a leader of an unofficial student group and another student identified having served in a leadership position within their family community. Four students held leadership positions in multiple organizations or groups.

In the brief questionnaire, participants were asked to respond to the question, "Consider all the leadership positions you have held in the last 12 months, on a scale of 1-5 (5 being highest) how satisfied are you with your overall leadership experiences?" Three participants selected 4 and three participants selected 5. Participants were then asked to respond to the question, "on a scale of 1-5, (5 being very often), how often are you involved in a leadership position?" Four participants selected 4 and two participants selected 5.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The study was designed to explore the subjective, personal experiences of the research participants related to their leadership experiences, as well as how their race and cultural ethnicities intersected with those experiences. In other words, the goal of the investigation was to explore the phenomenon of being a Hmong student leader in higher education. The six research participants took part in a focus group session that took place over two consecutive hours. Similarly to Logue, et al. (2005), this method was chosen "to allow student leaders to freely present information regarding personal perspectives of the experiences, and potentially, to reveal percepts that have not emerged in traditional theory and hypothesis testing methodology" (p. 395).

To facilitate this focus group session, an open-ended interview style was combined with an informal conversational interview style. This allowed me to be flexible and to follow up with probing questions that led to a depth of information beyond the intent of the initial responses. As discussed by Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996), the use of a focus group is not only "compatible with qualitative research paradigms" (p. 15), but is also a way to facilitate what the authors refer to as "synergy—when a wider bank of data emerges through group interaction" (p. 15).

Before the focus group session began, the research participants were reminded that the focus group session would be audio recorded and transcribed for research analysis. They were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they had the option to withdraw their participation at any time. Once the researcher received verbal approval from each participant to record the focus group session, the audio recording was engaged and the students were once again asked to provide verbal consent to be audio recorded. Each research participant provided consent.

The focus group session was open-ended and unstructured, and the research participants were first asked to respond to the statement, "Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of being a Hmong student leader." Following initial responses, the researcher asked the research participants appropriate clarifying questions. Clarifying questions included questions such as, "Can you provide me with specific examples?", "Can you clarify what you mean in your previous statement?" "Can you expand on your previous statement?"

Following the focus group session, the audio recording was transcribed into a written document and was analyzed using *thematic analysis* consistent with the six-

phase method used by Braun and Clarke (2005).

Epoche and Researcher Bias

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative studies require researchers to incorporate their own assumptions and understanding to the data, and thus, the process of data interpretation requires the researcher to suspend "understandings in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity" (p. 83). To do so, it was most prudent to first identify and discuss my positionality. In other words, this was an opportunity for me to discuss who I am in relation to the participants of this study. According to Ganga and Scott (2006), I would hold an "insider" positionality. A person with an insider positionality was defined by Ganga and Scott (2006) as "social interview conducted between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage" (p. 2). As a researcher who self-identified as a Hmong American, it would have been easy to define my relationship to the participants simply as an insider.

However, the relationship was much more complicated than our shared ethnicities and race. I had also come to the focus group in a position of power. While the participants were traditional-age college students, I was not only a university staff member, but I was also their mentor and an official advisor to the Hmong student organization on campus, of which all of the research participants were leaders or members. Considering the context of this relationship, it would also have been equally correct to have considered myself an "outsider", which Moore (2012) defined as an individual who would be a nonmember of a social group being studied.

Regarding this duality, Chavez (2008) discussed the outsider/insider distinction as a "false dichotomy since outsiders and insiders have to contend with similar

methodological issues around positionality, a researcher's sense of self, and the situated

knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her/his location in the social order" (p. 474).

In fact, Chavez (2008) articulated that defining positionality is quite complex. Taking

this into consideration, it would be more accurate to describe my positionality as

"insider-outsider." In addition to serving in a position of power in relation to the

student participants, which provided me with an outsider perspective, my previous

experiences as a Hmong student leader provided me with a significant insider

understanding of what it meant to be a Hmong student leader and what it was like to

serve in that capacity on a college campus.

In addition to positionality, qualitative researchers must tease out their biases and

their unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research (Tufford & Newman,

2010). As I started reviewing the transcripts, I employed *epoche*, an important tool in

phenomenology that would help me understand my biases. This tool was used before

the transcript was coded and thematic analysis took place, and I used this tool

throughout the data analysis process.

According to Patton (2002), the purpose of epoche is to "eliminate personal

involvement with the subject material…eliminate or at least gain clarity about

preconceptions" (p. 485). Each time I read through the transcripts, I took note of ideas

that were familiar to my own student leadership experience and attempted to understand

how that familiarity led me to preconceptions and assumptions. Throughout this

process, I was acutely aware that I was a critical education researcher. Because of this

orientation, I was conditioned to look for instances of power and privilege, and I was

drawn to the subject matter from the perspective of an educator. In addition to my

academic background, because of my employment as an academic advisor in a teacher preparation department, I was not only knowledgeable of the services on campus for students interested in developing their leadership skills, but I was also aware of how my own educational philosophy may inform my research.

As I had stated in the previous chapters, my own previous experience as a Hmong student leader gave me preconceived assumptions as to what types of experiences a Hmong student leader would undergo. I was keenly aware that my own previous reflections of my experiences would inform how I analyzed the data. My position of power, academic background, research perspective, and my professional life had the potential to influence this research. For these reasons, I was very cognizant of refraining from using a personal or professional standpoint to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the focus group session was analyzed using thematic analysis with the goal of identifying and reporting patterns in the form of themes within the given data set. To do this, I used a six-phase method of thematic analysis as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2005). Each phase is described in Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2005, p. 87).

Table 1

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of Phase	Tasks Within Phase
1	Familiarizing yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

In the first phase, the data was transcribed from the audio format into a written document for analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2005), the process of becoming familiar with the data included creating the transcript, but also required multiple readings. To maximize a familiarity with the data, after completing the initial transcription, I reviewed and compared the written transcript against the audio recording to ensure that the transcript was free of errors.

Following this review, I employed an informal, non-systematic *holistic reading* process of the transcript and took note of emerging ideas. According to Creswell (2013), the purpose of a holistic reading allows the researcher to "attend to the entire text" (p. 195) and identify main ideas from the overall text. Creswell (2013) also referred to this process as *reading and memoing*, where the "researchers continue analysis by getting a sense of the whole database" (p. 183). The following is a list of main ideas that I noted during the holistic reading process.

- Leadership is a way to develop skills (time management, communication, writing, speaking, etc.)
- Participants use leadership as a way to practice balancing multiple priorities between family, school, work, etc.
- Participants articulated multiple examples of engaging in leadership within team situations where multiple individuals are involved to meet a common goal
- Leadership is empowering
- Gender issues permeate throughout their leadership experiences
- Participants consistently discuss navigating cultural conflicts during leadership positions

- Using leadership as a means to manage shifting cultural values between traditional Hmong and U.S. cultural customs

- Social justice is a motivational factor for engaging in leadership

- Being a leader is a way to "pay it forward"

- Participants discuss the parallels between struggling and overcoming obstacles while being leaders and overcoming the everyday challenges of being bi-cultural

To begin generating initial codes in the second phase, I examined the data using a *detailed reading* process. A *detailed reading* is often described as a systematic means of scrutinizing each sentence or phrase in the given data for relevant and meaningful information. To generate initial codes during this process, I read through the transcript and assigned each sentence, phrase, or paragraph with a code that encompassed the essence of the individual idea being articulated by the research participant. Braun and Clarke (2006) referred to each of these sentence, phrases, or paragraphs as *data extracts*, and defined *data extracts* as "an individual coded chunk of data, which has been identified within, and extracted from, a data item" (p. 79).

In order to maintain consistency, each time a new code was identified, the code was given a written definition. As the coding process continued, I cross-referenced the individual data extract with the definition of existing codes to determine if the data extract fit in an existing code or if a new code needed to be created. Twenty-five different codes were identified during this process. Each code and its definition can be found in Appendix D.

With the initial coding process completed, I moved onto the third phase of the data analysis process and reviewed the codes and placed related codes into clusters to serve as initial *themes*, which are a "form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis" (Fereday & Muir-Chochrane, 2006, p. 4). The creation of themes in qualitative data analysis is discussed in detail by numerous researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Dapkus, 1985; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; and Smith & Osborn, 2007); however, the actual process of developing and determining themes is described a little differently by each researcher. The literature appears to support the idea that the process of developing themes can vary slightly from researcher to researcher. For example, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), "researcher judgment is necessary to determine what a theme is. Our initial guidance around this is that you need to retain some flexibility, and rigid rules really do not work" (p. 82).

Using the codes identified in this phase, I created a visual map of how the codes appeared to fit together. See the map in *Figure* 1. Initial Phase Thematic Map. In the following figures, themes were identified using rectangle boxes, subthemes were represented using rounded rectangles, and ovals represented individual codes. The themes and their associated subthemes and codes were connected in the form of a web, and lines were used to identify the relationship between each element. In some cases, some elements were relevant or overlapped slightly with other elements. Other methods of visualization, such as a Venn diagram, was not used in this initial visual map, because I was most interested in seeing how all the individual elements related to each other first before creating a more refined visualization of the data.
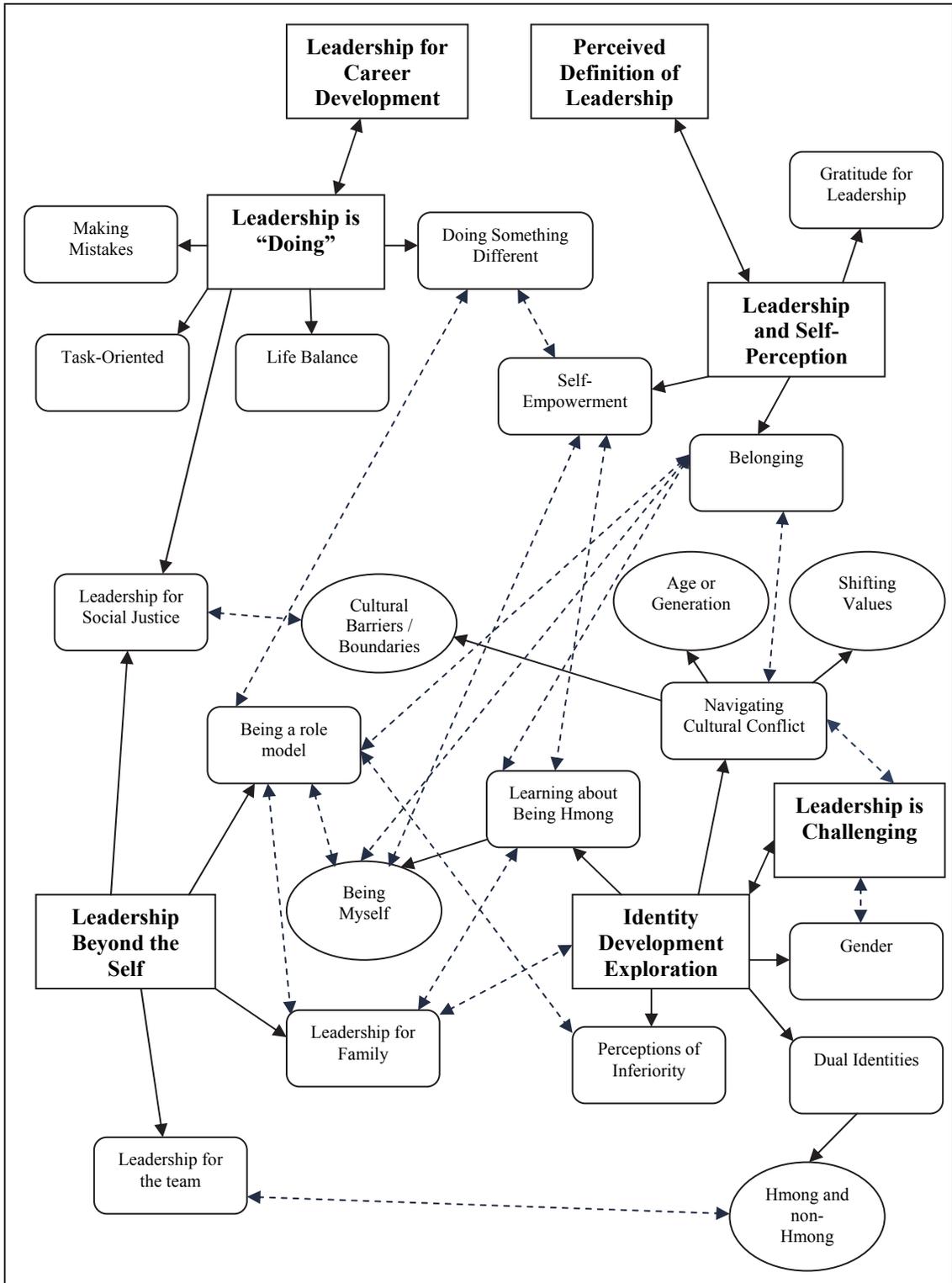
Figure 1. Initial Thematic Map. Visual representation of all identified codes and their

relationships with other codes and themes.

Upon completion of the mapping process, all the data extracts were collated and organized according to their given code. Once the data extracts were collated, the fourth phase involved rereading the codes and data extracts to determine if they, in fact, created a patterned response consistent with the given definition of the code and whether or not the patterns of responses under each code were similar enough to other codes under the same theme. After the review, some data extracts were removed or added. Some themes were collapsed into other themes and some themes were renamed.

Braun and Clarke (2006) described the process of this phase in two levels. The first level is a review to determine if the data extracts are consistent with the codes and themes, which was just previously discussed. The second level of review in this process involved looking at the themes "in relation to the entire data set" (p. 91) in such a way that the final "thematic map 'accurately' reflects the meaning evident in the data set as a whole" (p. 91).

During the second level review of the themes, I reread the entire transcript and determined if the initial themes provided a holistic picture of what the research participants were articulating. This process involved not only rereading the entire data set, but also referring back to the initial notes I created during the first phase of data analysis to determine if the initial themes were congruent to the main ideas that surfaced. In addition, each of the initial themes was scrutinized to determine if it also addressed the research questions of this research project. Through this process, themes were folded together when appropriate, deleted when they were found irrelevant, or renamed and redefined as appropriate. A thematic map of the results following this stage of analysis can be found in *Figure* 2. Revised Thematic Map.

Navigating Identities and Roles

Exploring and Understanding Hmong Identity

Social Identities

Gender

Duality

Generation

Cultural

Inferiority

Belonging and Community

Role Model

Family

Explore New Experiences

Life Balance

Empowerment

Developing Life Skills

Challenging Experiences
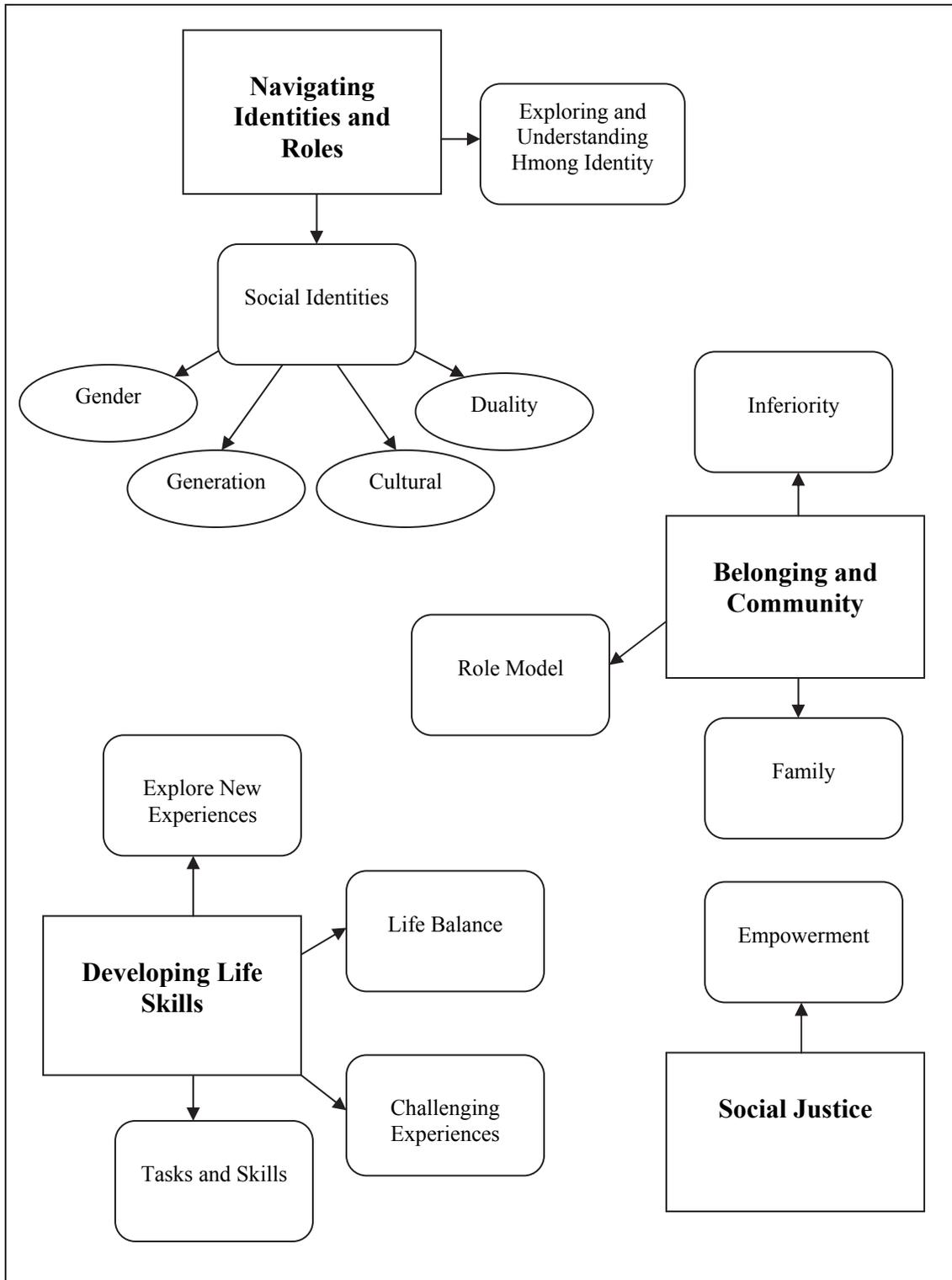
Social Justice

Tasks and Skills

Figure 2. Secondary Phase Revised Thematic Map. Revised thematic map after

refining the themes and collapsing similar codes into subthemes.

The second level review of the themes resulted in four themes: (a) Social Justice, (b) Navigating Identities and Roles, (c) Belonging and Community, and (d) Developing Life Skills. While the four themes were identified, I developed a graphic representation of the themes that would visually describe the relationships between each theme. This final thematic map can be found in *Figure 3*. Hmong Student Leadership Thematic Map. The relationship between the themes and the relevance of this visual representation will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Phase five, naming and defining themes, was an ongoing process that I found was closely intertwined with the previous phases. In fact, I found that it was nearly impossible not to review, refine, and reconsider the naming of the themes as the data analysis continued. Based on the patterns of responses found in each theme and subtheme, a gradual and natural definition of each of the themes emerged. These themes and their respective definitions are described in more detail in the following chapter.

As phase six suggests, producing the report is the final step. However, as I have found, it has been advantageous for me to take ongoing notes and to articulate my findings as each phase moved forward, and therefore, just like in phase five, I have found that the tasks within this phase have been intertwined throughout the previous phases.
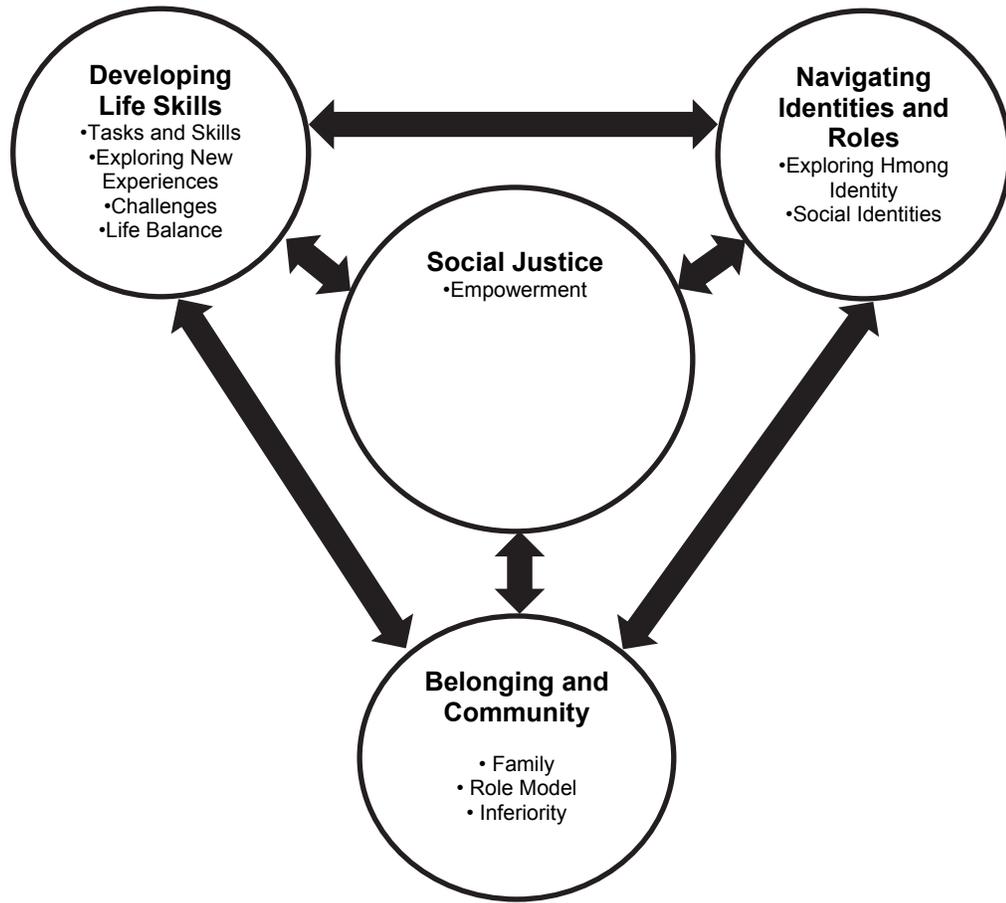
Figure 3. Hmong Student Leader Thematic Map. Final visual representation of themes

identifying the relationship between each theme.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will first discuss the backgrounds of the participants. Then, it will go into detail discussing the results of the study. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a detailed description of *Figure 3*. Hmong Student Leadership Thematic Analysis.

Participants

The participants in this study were full-time undergraduate students enrolled in a mid-sized, four-year public university located in the Midwest. As previously noted, the research participants were traditional age, full-time college students ranging from ages of 19-25 years. Five participants self-identified as being female and one participant self-identified as being male. One participant described their ethnic and cultural identity as "Hmong American" and five participants self-identified as "Hmong." All research participants articulated that they had served recently in an appointed or elected leadership position. The research findings do not include participants' given names. Pseudonyms are used to provide reasonable confidentiality to the individuals who volunteered for this study.

Pang (Student 1)

Pang was a single, 19-year old first year student, and she described her ethnic background as Hmong. She was born in a mid-sized city in western Wisconsin and moved to her current residence when she was 2 years old. Her household included two brothers and four sisters. Her mother and father were separated at the time of the study. Her father was a welder and her mother worked in manufacturing as an assembler. In high school, Pang took part in multiple elected leadership positions. For instance, she served 1 year as the Vice President of her school's Key Club, and later when she served

as the Publicity Officer in the school Student Council, she also took on the role as the

Secretary for her high school class in 2013. Throughout high school, she balanced her

time between family, school, extra-curricular activities, and a part-time job. At the time

of the study, she served in a leadership role as a Department Manager at a fast-food

restaurant where she had worked multiple years. While attending college, Pang was

living with her mother at home helping to pay household bills.

Mai (Student 2)

Mai described herself as a single, 19-year old female Hmong student who was

born in Phanat Nikhom in Thailand, a transition camp for Hmong refugees preparing to

emigrate to the United States. When she was 2 years old, her family came to the United

States and moved to what she described as a small city in western Wisconsin, where she

spent most of her life until moving for college. Mai's household included both of her

parents, two sisters, and two brothers. Throughout most of Mai's life, she remembers

her mother having health issues, and because she was the eldest sibling in the family,

Mai often served as a translator for her parents and often signed school forms on their

behalf when her father was not immediately available. Mai's father was employed as

an assembly worker at a manufacturing plant and her mother did not work due to her

poor health. At the time of the study, Mai was serving in her first elected position in a

student organization, but still considered her role as the eldest sibling her most

challenging but important leadership role.

Kong (Student 3)

Kong—the only male participant in the study—was a single, 21-year old student.

At the time of his participation in the research study, he was in his fourth year in

college, and he described his cultural and ethnic background as Hmong. Kong came from what he described as a middle-class family from a mid-size city with a population of about 39,000 people in central Wisconsin. Both of Kong's parents graduated from college. When he was 14 years old, his mother received her master's degree while working full-time. His mother was an elementary school teacher, and his father was working from home as an independent insurance agent. Kong started college at a two-year community college in his hometown and previously served as a coach for a regional women's flag football team. When he enrolled in college, he served as a student leader for a summer precollege program, which hosted high school aged students from across the region. At the time of his participation in the research study, Kong was an elected leader of an on-campus Hmong student organization. Kong lived in an apartment off campus and worked at a local restaurant. Kong heard about the research study from the informational presentation during a student organization meeting.

Joua (Student 4)

Joua was a married, female student who was born in a mid-size city in western Wisconsin but spent most of her life growing up in a mid-size city in central Wisconsin until she moved for college. Joua's immediate family included both parents, three brothers, and three sisters. At the time of the study, Joua was married and had two children, one boy and one girl. Both her parents were not employed at the time of the study, and her husband worked as a laborer in manufacturing. All her siblings still lived in the Midwest. Joua had previously served in multiple leadership positions as a volunteer in numerous community agencies and educational institutions. She was also

the leader of a cultural dance group and served in an elected leadership position for a Hmong student organization on campus. She described her eldest sister and her husband as two of her most influential role models. At the time of the study, Joua lived in an apartment in the city where she attended college.

Kat (Student 5)

Kat was a single, 21 year-old female student. She was born and raised in what she described as a mid-size city located in eastern Wisconsin until she moved for college. Kat's immediate family included both parents, three older sisters, one older brother, and one younger brother. Her father worked as a semi-truck driver, which took him across the state, and her mother was a food assembler at a food processing plant in their hometown. Throughout the previous few years, Kat has served in multiple leadership roles including being a Co-Coordinator for a fundraising event to support the National Breast Cancer Foundation, an elected leader for a Hmong student organization for two different years, and the Chair of a Hmong New Year planning committee. At the time of the study, Kat lived in an apartment in the city where she attended college.

Mary (Student 6)

Mary was a single, 23-year old female student. She was born in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest until the age of 1 when her family moved to a small mid-western city in the same region. Mary's immediate family included both parents, one older brother, and three older sisters. She was the youngest sibling in her family. Her father held two Master's degrees and worked as a School Counselor at a local middle and high school, where he worked directly with at-risk students and with students enrolled in the district's English Language Learner (ELL) program. Her

mother held a Bachelor's degree and worked at a regional health and social services office, where she assisted families to access health and family resources. Mary articulated that because of her parents and older siblings, she was influenced to be a leader from an early age, and thus, she had multiple years of experience serving as student leader. She recalled an early experience in middle school, where she managed the school store. As a college student, in addition to having served in an elected position in the Hmong student organization for three years, she was also an elected student body representative, an active participant and leader in various youth sports, and an active leader in summer youth programs. At the time of the study, Mary lived at home with her parents and older sister while she attended college.

Thematic Outcomes

Four primary themes and multiple subthemes emerged through the analysis and review of the data set. The first theme was "Developing Life Skills." In this theme, the pattern of responses corresponded with the participants' interest and ongoing experience with identifying, refining, and developing life skills that they considered essential to their academic and leadership success. The second theme was "Belonging and Community." In this theme, the pattern of responses focused on the ways in which the participants' leadership experiences contributed to their relationships with their family, peers, community, and co-workers. The third theme was "Navigating Identities and Roles." In this theme, the pattern of responses described the relationship between the participants' leadership experiences and the roles or identities they embodied. The fourth theme was "Social Justice." In this theme, the pattern of responses discussed the ways in which they used or perceived their leadership experiences as a means to

facilitate critical cultural reflection, as well as action in both the community and

university leading to equitable outcomes for Hmong students.

The themes, subthemes, and codes were not mutually exclusive. In many cases,

codes extracted from the transcript intersected with each other. Some codes and themes

were presented separately, whereas others were bound in the same paragraph or

sentences.

Developing life skills.

Early in the focus group, there was a common theme regarding the ways in which

the participants' leadership experiences provided them with the opportunity to refine

and develop skills they believed were necessary to their academic or career success. In

this theme, participants articulated the need to practice and refine task-oriented skills

such as making reservations, contacting people, planning events, facilitating meetings,

making mistakes, and balancing a busy schedule.

Tasks and skills. All research participants mentioned the importance of

developing life skills to some extent, but this reflection was more evident among the

research participants who considered themselves newer to the student leadership

experience. Among the research participants, Kong and Mai considered themselves

new to being a student leader. In his opening comments, Kong discussed some of the

skills he exercised recently in his position as a student leader:

> It's only been 2 months [in my position as an elected student leader], and
>
> in those 2 months it's been challenging. . . . It's been like trying new
>
> things that I've never done before. . . [such as]. . . delegating people,
>
> making decisions, making split-second decisions when you don't know

what to do, trying to figure problems out by yourself, and then when you

don't know, you seek help for it.

Mai discussed how exercising these skills helped her to become more proficient in

being a leader:

Taking on three different [leadership] roles at the same time was very

challenging because you needed to learn how to manage your time wisely

. . . eventually after getting used to it, you start kind of organizing

everything and you become more organized and it improves your skills.

I've learned to be able to deal with stress and be even more organized than

I was before, and be more comfortable with getting out of my comfort

zone than I was before.

The importance of developing skills was also discussed by research

participants who considered themselves more seasoned student leaders. For

example, in regards to discussing her leadership experiences, Joua stated,

It's a lot of time managing. I do have a lot of leadership experience. . . so

being able to coordinate the members and working around everybody's

schedule, including mine, is a lot of time managing outside of my personal

life and school work.

Specifically, many of the research participants discussed the skill of time

management. For example, Joua, the only married research participant with children,

stated,

A challenging experience for me is working everything–especially

leadership, the leadership skills around my personal life, having a family

of my own and especially with two kids, it's hard to find a babysitter for

them when I need to be in a meeting with e-boards or having to go to, like,

my dance practice.

Pang also stated, "taking on three different [leadership] roles at the same time was very

challenging, because you needed to learn how to manage your time wisely." Another

research participant, Mary, stated, "It's been really difficult because being a student,

also working, and also being a part of these student organizations, it's very hard to

segregate my time for them."

Challenging experiences. Facing and overcoming difficult or challenging tasks

was also a significant subtheme generated from the data. This subtheme captured the

ways in which research participants perceived how challenging experiences allowed

them to refine their leadership development. Kat, for example, mentioned that it was

because of the challenges that pushed her to become a better leader. "I feel like,

because of those challenges. . . I feel like that is what's making us strive to be better

leaders."

Beyond the undertaking of overcoming barriers and challenges, the research

participants discussed in length the ways in which struggling may be synonymous with

their racial identity. Mary, for example, stated,

I think we are always looking for the better, to strive towards something in

the unknown. For example, in Laos, we're always fending and struggling

to actually survive, to actually live day-to-day. I think that just kind of is

an umbrella over all of us, of why we do the things that we do.

In this statement, Mary referred back to the struggle of the Hmong in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, as well as the struggle they endured as refugees immigrating and learning to acculturate to American society.

The research participants also used this analogy to discuss their experiences on campus and as student leaders. Kat stated, "I think the main lesson is that you have to work hard and you will have to go through struggles to get what you want, and that, I think, has helped me to develop to be a leader. . . ." Pang added, "My thought about being a Hmong leader on our campus is that we're going to struggle. . . I feel that the more we take on the challenges and accomplish those challenges, the stronger we will be individually and culturally." Joua asserted, "It's very challenging to become a leader from all different aspects. . . it is very challenging but be confident in yourself and you can always succeed."

Life balance. A particularly important skill that surfaced from this theme is the subtheme of *Life Balance*. In this subtheme, participants discussed not only how they experienced having busy schedules, but also how they learned to deal with balancing their academics, work, and personal lives. Pang expressed how her busy schedule limited the amount of time she had available to spend with her family, and she illustrated this point by describing that a typical day involved her waking up around 5:00am and ending around 9:00pm. Pang's following comments succinctly describe her thoughts regarding her busy schedule:

Having to go to school at the same time and working, you had to manage, and it was a challenge for me because you didn't really have time for

yourself or for your family. So, you had to, like, plan out your whole day

accordingly so you can get up and get done on time.

Life balance was also discussed in length by the other students. Joua, for example,

offered very similar thoughts as Pang. In her experience, Joua discussed balancing

work, home, and school life. In fact, she expressed that she often had to overlap roles,

such as when she needed to bring her children to meetings or group events because it

was difficult to find babysitters.

Belonging and community.

The need to establish a sense of belonging and to maintain a community among

peers on campus was another theme that surfaced. The essence of this theme revolved

around the pattern of responses that encompassed the ways in which the participants'

leadership experiences contributed to their relationship with their family, peers,

community, and co-workers. This theme not only identified how they sought out a

community in which to belong, but also the ways in which their Hmong identities

influenced the type of community they looked for.

The students' interest in developing community and their sense of belonging was

closely associated with how they identified themselves racially and culturally. For

example, Kong's interest in seeking out a community resulted in his active involvement

with the campus Hmong student organization:

I feel like a lot of the Hmong [students] tend to not be involved in any

organization other than just the Hmong org. They just don't get involved

in other orgs at all either, and I think that might have to do with the fact

that …they don't feel comfortable enough to step into those groups and be

the only Hmong amongst a bunch of Caucasians.

Kong discussed in length how being a relatively new leader affected his perspective and

he was often unsure whether his interest in seeking out a community of peers was

"normal" or not. He also commented that he remembered being a new student to the

campus and feeling the need to seek out friends, but he also commented that his interest

in seeking out a place to belong was one goal he hoped to accomplish through his

leadership role.

Similarly, Kat articulated that she felt the campus Hmong student organization

was a natural place to seek out a community. "I feel drawn to this organization, because

I feel like I belong there and I won't be judged…" Kat also articulated her frustration

trying to find a similar sense of community while serving as a leader at work. She

discussed in length feeling that while she was confident in her ability to complete tasks

and meet goals, she was struggling to find meaningful ways to connect with her

colleagues. She attributed some of this disconnect to having very different interests and

experiences from her mostly White colleagues. Kat stated,

Sometimes it can be hard just because, for instance, some of the things

they do and are interested in, I might not know about…I feel like it's more

of the cultural activity, that if I'm not into it, then I feel like that could be a

barrier.

Mary described how she perceived Hmong students as being naturally drawn to

each other. "As Hmong people, we like to congregate. No matter what, if we see each

other, we'll be like, 'oh my gosh, it's someone I can relate to'…" In addition, Mary

described the importance of belonging on campus and described the feeling of being "othered" in the context of her classes and her co-curricular activities. She stated, "our hair color, our eyes, our appearance, the way that we dress, it signifies to everyone that we are different, and different is something that no one really wants to accept."

Kong expanded upon what Mary said and included how he would define what it meant to belong on campus. Kong specifically articulated that it would give him a sense of accomplishment "just making the Hmong culture more prevalent and [making] our voice heard more."

Inferiority. The data from the focus group also suggested that the research participants may harbor a sense of self-perceived inferiority, which may have affected their perception of their leadership efficacy. This subtheme of *Inferiority* was included in this theme because their discussion of feeling inferior seemed to serve as a motivating factor in determining in which groups they participated and in which leadership experiences they actively sought to participate.

For example, Joua discussed how personal trauma and discrimination related to her racial identity negatively affected her leadership self-efficacy. She stated, "It kind of traumatized us knowing that we are different, so becoming a leader is kind of hard." Joua also articulated that she felt this pressure even more when she was in a group that included predominantly non-Hmong students. According to Joua,

It's a lot of pressure because having to be discriminated since you were little and having that feeling that, oh, you know, 'I'm not good enough because I'm a minority.' I feel that it can impact your leadership skills,

especially if you are trying to be a leader in a different, like, surrounding

or different diverse area.

In response to her comments, Kat revisited her discomfort in speaking out in her

role as a leader at work. In her response, she described in more detail how she often felt

left out of small talk at work, not necessarily because of intentional malice, but instead

because of how she did not relate to many of her colleagues' cultural experiences:

> I would have to say it does kind of make me afraid and not able to build up
>
> courage. . . to speak to them about different kinds of issues that relate
>
> around [work]. So in a sense, I might feel, like, belittled or I'm not good
>
> enough to be a leader or to step up and lead them.

In Kong's response, he agreed and discussed his thoughts about feeling uncertain as a

leader. "I think it might be due to the fact, like everyone said, just 'cause you're

Hmong, you're either afraid that you don't know who's going to listen to you or respect

your decision 'cause you're a minority."

Mai also responded and referred back to Kat's previous statements about her

frustration with connecting to her work colleagues. Mai articulated that as a leader, she

felt as if she were constantly under surveillance by the members, the other leaders, and

outside constituents.

> I want to add on that too, when Kat said that she felt really pressured for if
>
> she would be a good enough leader, I feel that being a multicultural
>
> student leader, as well. I also kind of feel that way sometimes too,
>
> because I feel like they [other students] are judging me.

Mai did, however, also attribute her apprehension to being very new to the role of a student leader. She stated that perhaps her uncertainty and low self-efficacy were due to her very few experiences in an elected leadership position. However, she had not mentioned if she thought this feeling would pass as she gained more leadership experience.

Leadership for the family. Although there was ample discussion about their uncertainties regarding being a Hmong student leader on campus, the research participants also discussed the topic of family. This subtheme of family is folded into the larger theme of belonging and community because the context of their discussion surrounding family is discussed in length as one of the primary motivating factors for them to seek out opportunities to become leaders. For instance, Pang stated, "It's because of my family that I want to succeed as a leader." Pang also discussed the importance of having a very supportive family who saw the value of student leadership experiences. For example, Pang discussed how her family would ask about how she was doing in her leadership experiences, how they would take a sincere interest in what she was doing, and how they would give her the space to partake in different student leadership roles.

Mai's response included her interest in using her leadership experiences as a means to show appreciation to her parents for the sacrifices they made when they immigrated to the United States as refugees. Mai described her parents as significant role models:

> [My parents] came to America not only to be safe from the war, but also
>
> because they had a vision, a dream of what their future generation was

going to have, [such as opportunities] to rise up to be able to be a leader, in

not only the Hmong community, but as well as any community. It's a

bigger deal because of what the older generations have had, and for what

we have now. To be able to rise to that and making them proud is the

most amazing feeling on earth. You feel more accomplished, because you

have fulfilled not only your dreams, but their dreams, as well.

On more than one occasion, Mai spoke about the importance of her family's

"face." In Hmong culture, a family's "face" can be similarly associated with

social reputation, and serves as a significant factor in determining the level of

social capital and influence a family wields in the larger Hmong community.

Mai spoke about her family's "face" in the context of how her participation in a

student leadership role added to her family's "face" value. For instance, Mai

stated, "I not only fulfill my dream [by being a leader], but I also am making my

family proud, like, my family's reputation is good."

When asked to discuss the intersections between family and leadership, Joua

spoke in depth about the ways in which her leadership was both influenced and

informed by her role as a mother and wife. As the only married with children research

participant, she discussed the important role her participation in student leadership

played in her being a positive role model for her two young children. Joua stated,

"having all these experiences with all my leadership skills and being a good role model

in front of my kids can show them that I can get to my dream."

Similarly to Mai, Pang discussed her participation in student leadership roles as a

way to meet her social obligation to her family and community. Specifically, when

asked why she wanted to be a leader, Pang responded by articulating that her interest in

serving the community was tied to some compelling obligation to her parents.

> The reason why I'm a leader…is because I want to show my parents that I
>
> was worth it. That I was worth the fight and struggle here, you know, that
>
> I'm worth all of their struggling and their tears that they went through to
>
> come to America for a better future, and then, giving back to them because
>
> they, you know, had the courage to do that.

> This pattern of participants wanting to make their parents and family members

proud appeared multiple times throughout the focus group and from most of the

participants. In her response, Mary, described her interest in enriching the Hmong

community through her student leadership experiences. When speaking about the ways

in which family and leadership intersected in her own experience, Mary discussed

family in a larger context by using the term family to refer to the larger Hmong

community. To illustrate this, she discussed why she felt compelled to assist Hmong

community members.

> Everyone's going to have those same minority challenges and cultural
>
> challenges, and so I think that us, as leaders, being able to step outside of
>
> the box and go beyond to help them, I think that's – I think for me
>
> personally, is what that means is just simply help influence them [Hmong
>
> community] by doing that [being a leader].

In response to Mary's comments, Mai added that

> The more people that we can pick up, the stronger the leadership or the
>
> movement that we're doing to influence others that have fallen or others

that feel like they will not be able to become as strong of a leader as we

are. We are able to kind of strengthen the Hmong community that way.

Navigating identities and roles.

The third theme that emerged through this study was in regards to navigating

multiple identities and roles. The essence of this theme came to include patterns of

discussion involving the ways in which the participants were learning about themselves

through leadership experiences and how they navigated competing and complex

identities.

As this theme was unwrapping itself in the focus group dialogue, the research

participants discussed in length their observations of the ways in which the Hmong

culture's values were shifting. In the focus group dialogue, this perceived cultural shift

in values and traditions was primarily attributed to the generation differences between

the previous generation who came to the U.S. as refugees —referred by the research

participants as the "older generation"—and the current generation of Hmong who were

born and raised in the U.S—referred by the research participants as the "younger

generation."

Joua's discussion of these shifting values included her comments about how

traditional ideas of what it means to be Hmong have changed because of the need for

the culture to adapt to U.S. cultural norms. She also highlighted the complexity of this

shift when she stated, "although we can still use this old tradition with us, there is a bit

of us that still need a kind of [movement] to the new environment—to adapt to the new

environment." Joua illustrated this idea further as she discussed the ways in which she

saw some of the younger generation struggling to combine together differing and sometimes competing values associated with each generation.

In response to Joua, Kat described an instance when she attempted to have the female members of the family sit and eat with the male members of the family during a large formal family celebration. Kat went on to explain that large formal traditional celebrations in the Hmong household tend to be segregated by gender, and often involved the women serving the elder males their meals first at the host table, and then retreating to the kitchen to serve themselves and dine with the other women and young children. In this example, Kat articulated that many of the family members were open to this idea of everyone eating at the formal table; however, some of the female family members were not interested within this idea because they felt uncomfortable. In the end, they family did not try her idea. Kat stated, "It's just their traditional way of doing things. They don't want to change it. They're resistant to change."

Leadership as a lens for exploring and understanding Hmong identity. The first subtheme in this larger theme included a pattern of responses that discussed the ways in which the research participants utilized their student leadership experiences as a means to better understand and explore their Hmong identity.

As this subtheme emerged, the research participants made comments regarding how their leadership experiences and skills related to their own general development. These statements were coded as "Learning About Myself." Kat's statement here encapsulated the importance of leadership experiences on her identity development. Kat stated, "right now, it's about learning about myself, my leadership traits, and how I can transform that into helping others by simply being the best leader that I can be."

Mai also encapsulated this idea in her comments, "I want to learn about myself, I want to learn who I really am and the potential leader that I can be, versus the leader that my parents told me to be." Overall, the number of comments coded as "Learning About Myself" were minimal, and therefore did not necessarily justify a separate theme or subtheme. However, the comments found in this code were significant because they opened the door and directed the conversation to much more meaningful topics of conversation.

As this topic of exploring their Hmong identity began to surface throughout the focus group session, Mary used the word "struggle" in multiple contexts to describe what it meant to be Hmong. In fact, she associated the act of struggling as a significant characteristic of what it meant to be Hmong. For example, she stated, "maybe it's just because it's a part of us. It's a part of our culture. It's a part of our history that we are continuously struggling." She continued on and articulated that seeing her parents struggling to make a living had initially influenced her to start seeking out leadership roles, and facing challenging struggles helped her to become a better leader.

In response to Mary, Pang articulated that struggling was also a characteristic of being a Hmong student leader on campus. Pang stated, "My thought about being a Hmong leader on a [predominantly] Caucasian campus, is that we're going to struggle." She went on to express that she believed that facing and overcoming different types of struggles would make her stronger—individually and culturally.

Kat also discussed how she wanted to learn more about herself as a leader and as a Hmong woman. In this context, she talked about learning from her mistakes, learning

from her parents, and learning to improve. In her comments, she also discussed her frustration with trying to reconcile her Hmong and American identities.

Mai explained that her experiences with student leadership were quite limited before enrolling in college. Her comments also shed some light in regards to what being a student leader on campus meant to her. Mai stated:

Now that I am in college and I am able to be myself and be on my own, I want to learn about myself. I want to learn who I really am and the potential leader that I can be, versus the leader that my parents told me to be.

Mai went on to explain that while she had always been interested in exploring formal student leadership experiences, she had previously felt restrained from doing so because of household obligations and responsibilities that restricted her availability to participate in those interests. Furthermore, Mai explained that she hoped that through her recent leadership experiences on campus she would be able to better understand what it meant to be Hmong. Mai believed that she had often been told who she was, and now that she was in college, she was using that time to explore and reflect on her Hmong identity.

Mary's comments regarding this subtheme were more indirect and overall, she did not speak too much about this topic. However, in the few comments that she shared, she explained that she was beginning to better understand the cultural lessons her parents had so often tried teaching her. She explained that she was beginning to contextualize the stories her parents used to tell about how they used to live, what their traditions used to look like, and what role they played in the family unit.

Mary also explained that at the time of the study, she was also involved as a community leader. In this formal role, she served as a board member for a nonprofit organization whose mission was to coordinate services for Hmong American families in the community. Working with multiple community members in this organization, Mary came into her role as a student leader having worked with many of the issues facing the Hmong community. In her comments, Mary compared her experience as a Hmong community leader with her experience as a Hmong student leader, and she articulated that these experiences allowed her to reflect on how cultural norms were shifting and changing in the Hmong community. She stated, "I know that our generation, especially [the ones that] go to postsecondary education, are changing our cultural norms."

Social identities. Throughout the focus group session, the participants revealed just how keenly aware they were of the shifting cultural values within their Hmong community. They perceptively also went on to explain in detail their frustration with navigating competing cultural expectations and norms. They often felt that they concurrently navigated in a very Hmong-centric home community while at the same time, they were trying to succeed in a very American-centric community on campus. In this focus group, the competing identities and roles that surfaced included "gender," incongruent intergenerational expectations, and differing cultural roles.

Gender. This concept of gender that surfaced in this subtheme was focused primarily on how the research participants experienced and came to understand competing gender norms. These gender norms were a significant factor in the participants' leadership experience. Interestingly, the concept of gender norms was discussed more among the participants who were more experienced student leaders.

At first, these participants discussed their observations of gender norms. Mary, for example, stated,

> I complain a lot to my parents about why things are the way that they are,
> specifically gender roles. I always ask my parents, I'm like, why do women have
> to cook all the time and clean up and guys do nothing?

She went on to describe how different she acted in different settings, depending on which role was most appropriate. "If [I am] in a family meeting or something like that, I know that I would be more reserved based on my gender role in the Hmong community."

Each of the participants who discussed the topic of gender had similar comments. In response to Mary's comments, Joua stated, "I'm seeing the Hmong culture still stuck at the point where Hmong women are still known as housewives…from the elders, that's what they are expecting of us…nothing more." Joua also expressed that female leaders were not very visible in the Hmong community. "The male are more dominant. They usually take the role of leading and they are more well-known to be the leader than the woman." Kat also described her frustration trying to challenge gender norms in her family and facing resistance not only from the men, but also from the women. "They don't want to change it. They're resistant to change."

As this concept continued in the focus group, the participants began discussing how their roles as student leaders served as a means to take them beyond traditional gender roles. Mary, for example, stated,

> Having that leadership or that drive to do something better or be heard, it
> feels good to say that I have added my time, I've added my dedication, my

knowledge, my experiences to just hone in on this concrete answer to say

that I want something to change and—or I want to have my voice heard.

In addition, Mary discussed how gender roles were changing and the importance of

education and leadership in that cultural paradigm shift.

Hmong women are actually becoming more superior to Hmong men.

Hmong girls, in general, are graduating college a lot more than men. So,

you see that rising issue of "are we going to still suppress women" and

actually say that they can't have leadership skills…It's that controversial

issue culturally, how are we going to adapt to that setting where guys and

girls are equal?

Generation. This concept of generation that surfaced in this subtheme

was focused on the ways in which the research participants navigated through

incongruent intergenerational expectations. As previously stated, the

participants overwhelmingly agreed that the traditional Hmong cultural roles

were something they worked hard at to reconcile. Again, this concept was

primarily discussed in length by the more experienced student leaders.

Mary articulated that the most frustrating generational conflict was in regards to

the lack of voice she had in making decisions as well as the lack of opportunity she had

in being influential in the community. As a student leader, she explained that she had

influence over the direction, goals, and execution of their programming. However, as a

young member of the Hmong community, she felt silenced and helpless in the

community. She stated,

It's always been like that for our culture, or that's how my parents raised

me to say that, you know, even though we are a family, it's like, I'm your

mom, I'm your dad, you need to abide by my rules because I'm older than

you.

Mary explained that the Hmong social system relied heavily on Hmong elders to serve

as the cultural brokers, and therefore they also held the most social capital and

influence. These elders were often exclusively Hmong men who served as clan leaders

or influential older male family members.

Being a leader and being a Hmong woman is very perplexing because

there's that cultural conflict that you don't want to overstep. You don't

want to shame or overrule or override the elder.

Joua was also concerned as to whether or not she would be taken seriously as a

leader in the Hmong community. Her concern was partly due to her being female, but

also because of her relatively young age. She stated,

Would they respect me as a young leader or would they just push me

down, because I'm too young to be a leader for them? So having that

thought in mind, like, it's hard when you try to educate an elder that, as

young adults, we can lead them, especially in this new generation.

In this comment, Joua not only expressed her uncertainty regarding her legitimacy as a

potential leader in the Hmong community, but she also expressed her interest in

teaching the Hmong leaders about the American culture and its implications on the

younger generation of leaders. As Joua continued her comments, she described that the

most significant challenge for young Hmong student leaders was how to reconcile these competing cultural expectations:

> The biggest challenge, I feel, that the Hmong student leaders right now is having is trying to work around the traditional generation, trying to get them to understand what's going on and trying just to adapt to the new one.

> While the younger student leaders did not explicitly comment on this concept of generational inconsistency, during the focus group they nodded their heads in agreement as the more experienced research participants articulated these ideas.

> *Culture.* By far, one of the most significant concepts in this subtheme was regarding culture. Specifically, this concept was focused on the ways in which research participants understood and navigated through differing cultural environments as student leaders. Throughout the focus group, the research participants compared and contrasted the cultural environments of the Hmong and the American social norms and how these differing environments affected their leadership development. This concept was significant in their leadership development because while they discussed very specific identities, such as gender and age, the general topic of culture was the context in which those other concepts were embedded.

> Joua, for example, discussed how complicated it was to navigate through cultural differences. In her comments, she brought up issues pertaining to school, home, elders, and education. She stated, "It's very complicated to be in a situation right now with having to be in school and being a leader outside of the Hmong or outside of my own

culture." She went on to explain that being a leader on campus was easier to ascertain than being a leader in the Hmong community, despite feeling more "at home" and more "accepted" in the Hmong community. She described the Hmong community as being "too traditional" and therefore, more hostile to more progressive ideas of young leaders and female leaders. However, she also explained that she thought that while it was easier to get into leadership positions on campus, the college community was also difficult to traverse, because she often felt pressured to simultaneously recognize and honor both Hmong and American cultural norms at the same time.

In response, Pang explained that she was concerned about how her race and culture influenced the perception of her leadership abilities by other students on campus. She stated, "as a leader, I feel that, since we're Hmong, they [other students] think different of us because – maybe because we're not a Caucasian." When asked why she was concerned about this, she explained, "Hmong people are such a small group of people [in ethnicity] that they're not heard in America as often as other ethnicities."

Kat described a situation in which she ran for an elected student leadership position in another student organization on campus and while she won the position, she continued to feel a significant amount of pressure. Kat stated,

I felt very pressured at the end of the year just because I was the only

Hmong person in that organization and everyone was in their own cliques,

and it's – you feel like you're not equal up to them, I guess, in a sense.

Duality. Wrapping up this subtheme, the concept of duality surfaced. In this subtheme, duality referred to how the research participants reconciled these competing

identities and roles in their lives and in their leadership development. While the participants recognized that their understanding of their situation was complicated, they also found ways to recognize when it was appropriate to express differing identities in different environments.

Mary articulated that it was important for her to understand and express both Hmong and American cultures, despite the often competing norms. She stated, "I want the older generation to see where I'm coming from but also, like, I want them to know that I'm not forgetting my culture and my heritage to where I want to better my culture with these new ways."

The other participants added that while navigating multiple identities may be challenging, there were certainly some potential advantages or strengths associated with having multiple perspectives. Mai responded to Mary's comments and explained that finding a middle ground between competing cultural narratives was important. She stated that, "having a little bit of both worlds, the Hmong world and the American world, and being able to find a middle ground [was important]." In response to Mai's comments, Pang simply added "what makes us unique is that we live in two different worlds." Mary also added that, "I think Hmong student leaders are unique because we have this intellectual background where we can blend our two cultures."

Social justice.

In this theme, the pattern of responses discussed the ways in which the participants used or perceived their leadership experiences as a means to facilitate critical cultural and racial reflection, as well as action in both the community and university in an attempt to foster equitable outcomes for Hmong students. While this

theme explores social justice as it takes place throughout the context of the larger

Hmong community, it also examines the way the research participants use social justice

as an internal process to overcome their reported feelings of internalized inferiority.

Many of the patterns of responses found in this theme overlap heavily with some

of the previously discussed themes and subthemes. However, it became clear through

the focus group session that at the heart of many of their comments was a deep interest

in critical reflection of their racial and cultural identities. Through their comments, they

identified hierarchal structures that systematically erect barriers, they discussed their

observations of systemic power and privilege, and they explored internalized

oppression. In addition, they explained how they employed counter-narratives through

reflection and action.

Mary discussed in length her thoughts regarding the social justice role she played

on campus and how her position as a Hmong student leader was an integral part of that

role.

> We are the most diverse and innovative student leaders on campus, and the
>
> reason why I say that is because…we're the only diverse organization on
>
> campus that everyone knows that we're prevalent here, that we are active,
>
> that we are doing different activities every year, that we're changing the
>
> perception of the Hmong people here.

Mary did not go into detail about what she meant by the phrase "we're changing the

perception of the Hmong people here." However, she continued to explain that she was

concerned about being perceived as "different," which she associated as not belonging

on campus.

In response to Mary, Pang responded by discussing her thoughts about whom she believed was accountable for taking on the responsibility to advance social issues relevant to the Hmong community. Pang stated,

This is what my dad tells me. He's like, when you grow up, you find a job so that you can help your own people, and I think what he means by that is that since, in the past, like, the Hmong people have struggled so much, and the only people who really helped the Hmong people were the Hmong people themselves. So, if Hmong don't help Hmong people, who are going to help Hmong people?

Mai agreed with Pang and stated, "I also want to be a Hmong leader so that I can influence and give back to the Hmong community, as well." Kat also commented on her interest in being a Hmong student leader for the purpose of giving back to her community.

Despite their reported low levels of leadership self-efficacy as discussed earlier, through their comments, the research participants expressed their ongoing interest in serving as leaders and the empowerment that came with this role. This theme included two subthemes: "role model" and "empowerment."

Role model. The use of "role model" is included in this theme of social justice because the students' discussion about themselves as role models and leaders is clothed in the context of their interest in critically examining their role on campus. When asked to elaborate on their interest in serving as role models, Pang stated,

when a Hmong person becomes a leader, others now feel it's a big deal for us because – for the Hmong population because it shows that, you know,

that we are as equal as every other ethnicity out there, and so we shouldn't

be afraid to become leaders.

In this statement, Pang expressed a level of pride and empowerment in being a role

model that was not as evident earlier in the focus group. She went on to explain that it

was important for Hmong students to be involved and to be leaders.

Kat also expressed that she wanted to be a leader "simply to help others" by being

a role model that other students could "look up to." When asked to expand upon who

the "other students" were, she described other Hmong students, non-Hmong students,

and the younger generation of Hmong students. When asked to clarify, she explained

that she was interested in being a role model for younger Hmong students, because she

had felt that when she was growing up, she did not see many Hmong role models nor

did she encounter many Hmong women in influential leadership roles.

When the group was asked about their previous experience being a role model,

Joua stated that "having to be a leader, it's mainly being a good role model, so as a

mother, I try to be as good of a role model as I can for my own children." Joua also

explained that she was a student leader because she wanted to "show that I can do it, so

everybody else can do it, too."

As the discussion continued, the participants were asked about examples of

influential role models they had seen. The group consensus was that there had not been

many Hmong role models in the community; however, they all pointed to members of

their families. Joua, for example, spoke in depth about her family and about her

parents. She briefly stated, "I personally have always looked up to my dad." Kat also

talked about her parents as role models. She shared, "seeing my parents having to

struggle and [seeing] how hard they work for what they have, it does show me that kind of guideline of how you have to be."

When the focus group was asked if anyone had any final thoughts about role models, Pang again explained that living as a Hmong person meant it was their responsibility to find ways to contribute positively to the Hmong community, and therefore, being a leader and being a positive role model was their responsibility. Pang also stated that her role models were very influential in her leadership development.

Empowerment. The subtheme of "empowerment" included responses in which the research participants exhibited pride in their accomplishments and in their roles and responsibilities. This subtheme was intertwined throughout the discussion involving role models; however, this subtheme is different than the previous because it identifies the ways in which participants' experiences led to feelings of positive leadership self-efficacy.

First and foremost, Pang described being a role model as being empowering. Pang described this feeling of empowerment as being meaningful not only to her, but also to the larger Hmong community. Pang asserted,

> When a Hmong person becomes a leader, others now feel it's a big deal
> for us because it shows that we [as Hmong] are as equal as every other
> ethnicity out there, and so we shouldn't be afraid to become leaders.

Mary expanded upon Pang's thoughts and explained that having more Hmong student leaders on campus was empowering because it placed them in influential positions, whether to influence policy or as gatekeepers of resources. Mary described her own experience as a committee member of the campus' student governance

leadership team. In her position, she met with student organizations who were

requesting funds and resources. She also worked to recommend formal disciplinary

action upon student organizations that did not follow the appropriate policies. Mary

stated that

> It makes me feel empowered that my voice is being heard on this
>
> committee, especially being chosen out of the thousand students here on
>
> campus. I thought it was an honor to actually be offered to be a part of
>
> this committee.

Mary also discussed the importance of having diverse perspectives in the body of

student leaders on campus. She explained that while she often perceived her cultural

and racial background as a deficit, she also found that it provided uniquely positive

attributes as well. She stated, "I think because of our cultural differences, that makes us

more unique to be able to adapt and to be able to come up with different ideas and

different solutions."

When the group was asked if they had any comments in response to Mary, Mai

briefly stated that "to be able to be a leader is a very amazing feeling in our [Hmong]

community because I not only fulfill my dream and expectations, I am also making my

family proud." Following Mai's comments, Kong was also very brief. He stated, "It

[being a student leader] makes me feel like I've accomplished something, at least."

Kat provided the final thoughts for the group. In her final thoughts, she explained

that being Hmong and having a unique perspective empowered her as a leader.

> Being different definitely can make us be a good leader on campus and
>
> make us unique…you can have so many different kinds of leaders, but it's

because of those differences, it's because of, you know, the skills that I

have that you don't or the skills that she has that I don't, that will help us

make the campus a better community, and I think because of that, of all

the things we talked about, our challenges and stuff, that's what really

makes us unique.

Representation of Themes in the Visual Figure

Referring to *Figure 3*. Hmong Student Leader Thematic Map, it is important to

briefly discuss how the visual model attempted to accurately represent the data that

were collected and the themes that emerged. The placement of the themes within this

model was informed by a number of factors.

First, the data suggested that the theme of *Social Justice* was particularly

significant, because it appeared to serve as a foundation for the participants' leadership

experiences. In addition, *Social Justice* informed the actions and motivation of the

student leaders. Thus, the theme of *Social Justice* was not only placed in the center of

the model, but this theme was also made slightly larger than the other three themes.

Second, the data did not suggest that a linear relationship existed between the

themes, so a nonlinear model was necessary. This appeared to be evident in the ways in

which the codes overlapped and related to each other. In addition, the participant

comments also sometimes included elements of multiple themes at the same time.

Therefore, the model showed the individual themes on the same visual plane and

minimized the implied hierarchy between the themes.

Third, it was evident that while the theme *Social Justice* was significant in

informing the other themes of *Developing Life Skills*, *Navigating Identities and Roles*,

and *Belonging and Community*, these themes also informed each other and overlapped

quite often. Two-way arrows were used throughout the model to represent the

relationship of the overlapping themes. It was an intentional decision not to use a

Venn-diagram model to represent the overlap of the themes, because I believed that

such a diagram would not only distort the data, but I also thought it may have led to an

illegible diagram considering the amount of text embedded within the model.

Taking these observations of the data into account, this resulted in the model

shown in *Figure 3*. This model succinctly summarized not only the themes that

emerged from the data, but also attempted to identify the relationship between the

themes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

As previously noted, phenomenology is meant to speak to the nature of a particular phenomenon and describe how it is experienced by a participant. As stated by Gato (2009), "phenomenology is not a positivist approach that can demonstrate cause and effect relationships" (p. 138). In this case, the study explored the phenomenon of being a Hmong student leader in higher education. The goal of this study was to capture and describe the lived experience of the participants. It was not to prove or disprove theories about Hmong student leaders. However, several of the research findings in this study were consistent with the existing literature.

Although it would be inappropriate to make sweeping generalizations from the research findings due to the small, non-randomized sample of participants, the experiences expressed by the participants reflected other research findings regarding Hmong student experience in higher education.

The research question being explored in this phenomenological study was: what patterns emerge when Hmong students describe their leadership experiences on a college campus?

Examining the Data

One of the most significant concerns found in the literature regarding student leadership development was the idea that the existing leadership paradigms do not adequately speak to the holistic picture of leadership development, especially for students of color or traditionally marginalized populations. At best, these existing leadership paradigms provided a partial picture of the holistic experience for students from these populations.

As I began reviewing the themes and individual statements collected from the participants, the data suggested that there were certainly some similarities between the findings of this research and some of the existing leadership development models articulated in the literature review. Specifically, elements of the *Relational Leadership Model* (RLM) (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998) and the *Leadership Identity Development Theory* (LID) (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005) appeared to surface. Elements of the RLM, which focused on the "complex interplay of effects between individual organization members and the system…" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 662) were well represented not only in the theme *Belonging and Community*, but also in the theme *Navigating Identities and Roles*. This focus on interpersonal relationships was evident as participants discussed the importance of developing a community among their peers and finding a place to belong.

In addition, elements of the LID (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005), which focused on the process of an individual moving from a leader-centric perspective to a more collaborative, relational perspective of leadership, was also well represented in these themes. When comparing the experiences of the new leaders to that of the more experienced leaders, it was evident that the perspectives of leadership were slightly different. The new leaders, those with only one year of elected leadership experience, were more comfortable discussing how their leadership experiences provided them with personal growth and with personal skills. While this development was important, this appeared to illustrate a leader-centric perspective because the new leaders were more aware of how their leadership experiences were benefiting and contributing to their own personal growth.

The more experienced leaders, those with multiple years of leadership experience, on the other hand, discussed in more detail how their leadership contributed to the overall campus community or the larger Hmong community. In addition, the experienced leaders also discussed their interest in taking action to correct what they perceived as social injustices, as well as to embrace collaborative relationships and community building. This pattern suggested that the participants were in different stages of leadership identity development, with the new student leaders in the initial stages of leadership identity development and the more experienced student leaders discussing a more complex and systems-focused leadership perspective.

However, as was suggested by Dugan and Komives (2007) and Dugan (2006), many traditional leadership models do not always accurately take into consideration the nuanced role that leadership plays among students of color. While elements of the RLM and the LID did surface from the focus group, the findings did mirror the scholarly literature in that they did not explain all elements discussed by the Hmong student leaders. For example, where the themes of *Belonging and Community* and *Social Justice* were evident in the results of this study, the LID did not address these findings at all. The RLM may have done a better job of addressing the theme of *Belonging and Community*, but it did not take into consideration the role of *Social Justice* in the participants' leadership experience.

In addition, the data from the participants also showed that they exhibited both trait-based leadership as well as postindustrial leadership. In regards to trait-based leadership, the theme *Life Skills* looked at the ways in which the participants' leadership experiences provided them with the opportunity to exercise specific skills, such as

managing time, managing resources, overseeing staff, and so on. These trait-based

leadership skills are consistent with what Dugan (2006) described as characteristics of

"industrial" models of leadership, where the focus was on the individual as a leader who

promoted command and authority through strong managerial skills. At the same time,

the participants exhibited characteristics of "postindustrial" models of leadership, which

prioritized relational, reciprocal, and values-based conceptualizations (Dugan, Komives,

& Segar, 2008). These postindustrial characteristics were found within the comments

of the themes *Social Justice* and *Navigating Identities and Roles*.

Studying leadership development among students of color.

The literature review revealed that the ways in which students of color defined

leadership was important to understand. If traditional leadership assessments were not

compatible with how students of color defined and embodied leadership, they could

inaccurately inform not only practitioners, but also the students themselves as to their

aptitude for leadership positions.

As was discussed in Haber (2011), "students of color tend to adopt more relational

and process-oriented views and styles than their White counterparts" (p. 70). This study

was not meant to compare the Hmong students' leadership styles to that of their White

peers, however, the data in this study suggested that among this group of Hmong

student leaders, relationships were a significant component of their leadership style.

The students' interest in developing and maintaining interpersonal and

collaborative relationships through their leadership was demonstrated primarily through

the theme of *Belonging and Community*. Throughout this theme, the participants

discussed the value of relationships and this value informed their understanding of

leadership. In regards to how "relationships" intersected with "leadership," this theme demonstrated two things. First and foremost, the participants discussed in length the importance in establishing a sense of belongingness and maintaining a community among their Hmong peers on campus. Their leadership experiences contributed directly to the development of their relationships with peers, family members, the community, and their co-workers. As was found in Kat's comments, she stated, "I feel drawn to this organization, because I feel like I belong there and I won't be judged." In this statement, Kat first expressed the importance of her relationships by finding a community in which to belong, and she expressed the natural fit she felt once she was a part of the group. Similarly, Pang discussed in length the importance of her family who supported her and took an active role in her interests as she participated in student leadership experiences throughout her education.

In addition, this theme demonstrated the importance of the students' use of relationships as a strategy in their leadership style. For example, Joua discussed in length how her decision-making process included the consideration of the perspectives of the other leaders and the members. Kat also discussed in length her experience as a leader in her work place and how she utilized a relational focus in her leadership style. Kat stated, "[Leadership] is also reaching out to my team members and getting to know them more." Kat continued this thought by expressing that "as a leader, you should be able to relate well with others and have an emotional intelligence. . . ."

This would suggest that leadership models and assessments that align with relational styles of leadership may be more appropriate in measuring leadership efficacy for Hmong student leaders. While these measures alone still would not provide a

holistic picture of their student leadership effectiveness and efficacy, the traditional trait-based leadership measures alone would certainly be a less effective and less accurate measure.

Identity development. The concept of identity development was particularly important in the literature review. For example, Jenkins (2007) had found that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between student organization diversity and the development of leadership skills. The results of this study demonstrated that the participants utilized their leadership experiences as a means to further explore and understand the complexities of their racial and ethnic identities in the context of their American nationality. These results aligned with the findings in the literature review.

If we considered being a "leader" as a social identity, which is what Leadership Identity Development (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005) attempted to do, it would help us understand why leadership and racial identity development correlate with each other, as was found in the literature review. In other words, as an individual navigates multiple identities (in this case "leadership" and "ethnicity"), they begin to form a more complex and more complete understanding of each identity and how these identities inform and influence each other.

In this study, participants not only discussed ethnicity but also spoke in length about gender, generation and age, and culture. The literature does attempt to discuss some of these other identities as important factors in leadership development, but very few can be found that provide the depth necessary to determine more specific recommendations and conclusions to assist student leaders.

Furthermore, in regards to these multiple identities, the participants articulated the importance and difficulty of balancing what they perceived as a struggle between their American identity and their Hmong identity. This balancing act, or duality, is found in the literature, particularly among the population of Hmong community members born in the United States from Hmong refugee parents. The findings from this study supported the literature that discussed the ongoing duality of Hmong American identity and its implications in influencing the experiences of Hmong students in higher education (Moua & Riggs, 2012).

Leadership development and social justice. According to Dugan, Komives, and Segar (2008), "the rationale [for students of color to engage] in leadership was to contribute to social change through advocacy and education" (p. 487), thereby contributing to their higher scores to serve as a social change agent through the process of engaging in leadership positions, as was found in the literature review. This was evident in the findings of this study, as well.

The theme *Social Justice* suggested a pattern of critical reflection and a keen interest in addressing social injustices related to students' racial and ethnic identity. Not only did the participants discuss their observations of social injustices, but they also described the ways in which they used their positions of leadership to advocate for the needs of marginalized groups. For example, Mary discussed her leadership experience not only in the Hmong student organization, but also as a member of the university's student government. In her example, she discussed how empowered she felt in her role as a member of the finance committee. She stated, "it makes me feel. . . empowered that my voice is being heard on this committee. . . . I thought it was an honor to

actually be offered to be a part of this committee. . . ." She continued on to discuss her ongoing interest in empowering her Hmong peers to engage in policy decisions and in advocating for appropriate resources that would support underrepresented student populations on campus.

Leadership self-efficacy. The literature review suggested that Asian American students tended to have a lower level of leadership self-efficacy. According to Kodama and Dugan (2013), students with low leadership self-efficacy perceived themselves as less likely to be successful when engaging in leadership. This study found that the participants discussed in length feelings of internalized inferiority, and therefore, the findings from this study appear to support the literature.

Again, researchers are not sure why Asian American student leaders tend to score and exhibit lower levels of leadership self-efficacy; however, in this case, the pattern of responses from the Hmong student leaders suggest two potential explanations: (a) that their low leadership self-efficacy is related to their feelings of not belonging on campus or not belonging in a leadership position, and (b) that they lack visible role models in formal leadership positions on campus.

The first explanation is derived from the pattern of responses from the participants that suggests that their feeling of internalized inferiority is related to how unwelcome they sometimes feel on campus. The internalized perception of feeling unwelcome, whether real or not, is a significant deterrent to feeling confident in a leadership role, according to the students. For example, Joua stated, "having been discriminated since you were little and having that feeling that. . . I'm not good enough because I'm a minority. . . . I feel that it can impact your leadership skills, especially if you are trying

to be a leader in a different surrounding or different diverse area. . . ." Other participants' comments mentioned feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, feeling unwelcome, and feeling like they have been unfairly judged as a leader through preconceived stereotypes.

The lack of role models was also a significant subtheme that was generated throughout the focus group discussion. The participants stated that not only did they not see many Hmong professionals in leadership roles on campus, but that they also did not see many Hmong students in leadership positions on campus. Furthermore, the participants suggested that Hmong students avoided leadership positions. For example, Kong stated,

> I feel like a lot of the Hmong people tend to not be involved in any organization
> . . . they just don't get involved in other organizations at all either. . . they don't
> feel comfortable enough to step into those groups and be the only Hmong. . . ."

Interestingly, these two potential explanations for low leadership self-efficacy among Hmong student leaders may have also served as motivation for the participants to seek out leadership experiences. As was found in the theme *Social Justice*, these Hmong student leaders sought out intentional means to disrupt these internalized feelings of inferiority and self-doubt through leadership. They also sought these leadership experiences in order to be role models for their peers.

Conclusion

When describing their student leadership experiences in higher education, Hmong student leaders revealed four significant patterns of responses. First, in the theme *Developing Life Skills*, they described their interest with identifying, refining, and

developing life skills that they considered essential to their academic and leadership success. Second, in the theme *Belonging and Community*, they described the ways in which their leadership experiences contributed and intersected with their relationships with their families, peers, community, and co-workers. Third, in the theme *Navigating Identities and Roles*, they described the relationship between their leadership experiences and the roles or social identities they embodied. Fourth, in the theme *Social Justice*, they discussed the ways in which they used their leadership positions to facilitate critical cultural reflection, as well as to foster action leading to equitable outcomes for Hmong students.

It was found that the existing leadership models did not consider both leadership development and ethnic identity development which was important among the Hmong student leaders. Because these leadership models, overall, did not holistically meet the needs of students of color, this may have been one of the significant limitations that explained why current leadership models inaccurately measure leadership self-efficacy among students of color, particularly Asian American and Hmong student leaders.

The motivation for this group of Hmong students to engage in student leadership appeared to be complex, but the pattern of responses suggested that they did so as a means to practice and refine critical life skills, develop their racial and ethnic identities, and to seek out strategies to meet the needs of their Hmong peers and community.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research provided an important foundation that supports the need for more complex inquiry into the role that race and ethnicity has on student leadership development in higher education. The results from this research stimulated a variety of

additional questions that introduce opportunities to explore this subject matter in more depth.

First and foremost, additional research regarding the experiences of students of color and other marginalized populations in leadership positions is an important foundation. Considering the variety of research already undertaken to better understand leadership in higher education, the significant lack of existing literature examining leadership among students of color makes this area particularly important. It would be prudent to explore student leadership among Hmong male students to determine if gender was a significant factor in respect to leadership development. For example, this study only included one male participant in the group of six participants, and therefore, conclusions regarding the experiences of male Hmong student leaders were not possible within the scope of this study.

A second recommendation would be to explore Hmong student leadership development using both qualitative and quantitative methods with a larger sample size. While this study did not provide a generalizable sample size, having such a study would benefit both practitioners and students alike.

Third, ongoing leadership studies of populations from other social identities and racial sub-populations would add to the literature. Populations such as Native Americans, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Questioning (LGBTQ), Latino, first-generation, and nontraditional students would add to a more complete understanding of student leadership in higher education. The literature review indicated that the leadership experiences of students from these populations are unique, as well.

Fourth, future research can also explore how Asian American students define leadership. For example, a phenomenography study exploring how leadership is defined amongst this population of students may continue to lead researchers to better understand why Asian American students tend to score low on traditional leadership self-efficacy measures.

The overall lack of research examining the experiences of students from underrepresented populations suggests that postsecondary institutions may not be equipped to meet the needs of all students when developing intentional programming to build leadership capacity among their students. Attention should be given to exploring student experiences using qualitative methods, until a more holistic student development model can be developed that would meet the needs of students of color.

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Appendix A

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
Hmong Student Leadership in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study Examining the
Experiences of Hmong Student Leaders in Higher Education

You are invited to be in a research study exploring the experiences of Hmong student leaders in higher education. You were selected as a possible participant because 1) you have recently identified that you have served in a leadership capacity in the last 12 months, 2) you self-identify as being a student of Hmong ancestry, and 3) you are enrolled in a post-secondary institution. 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:
Dang Yang, Master's Student Researcher
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Dr. Na'im Madyun, Faculty
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
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madyu002@umn.edu
612-624-5761

Background Information
The purpose of this study is to explore student leadership experiences of Hmong student leaders at a Midwest four-year post-secondary institution.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
1. Participate in a no-obligation informational session. Taking part in this informational session does not mean you have committed to being a research subject. This informational session is simply an opportunity for you to learn more about the research goals, its risks, and its benefits.
2. Participate in one focus group. This focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis as part of this research project. The focus group will last up to two (2) hours and will include the Student Researcher, Dang Yang, and a total of six (6) Hmong student leaders.
3. Participate in one follow up individual interview. This individual interview will last up to one (1) hour and will be audio recorded and transcribed as part of this research project. The individual interview will include you and the Student Researcher, Dang Yang.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study
By participating in this study, please be aware that the study poses minimal **risk**. There is a risk that you will feel uncomfortable and distressed. In our focus groups and in our individual interview, we will discuss topics related to leadership and student life, as well as race, ethnicity, and culture. This risk is minimal, however, and the level of anxiety may differ from person-to-person.

There are no direct benefits to participation in this study.

Overall, this research study will add to the body of research about student leadership among an underrepresented population—the Hmong, with which a limited amount of research has been conducted. Furthermore, this research study will assist Student Services staff members to better understand the co-curricular development of this population of students, which may lead to more culturally relevant and more effective academic and leadership development support in the future.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation—monetary, or otherwise—for your participation in this research project.

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records, including tape recordings, transcripts, and researcher notes will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected laptop and only the researchers will have access to the records. Research notes, transcripts, and tapes will be used for educational purposes. Audio tapes will be erased and/or destroyed one year following the conclusion of the research project. Physical notes and physical transcripts will be destroyed and shredded one year after the conclusion of the research project.

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, with the researcher, or with the University of Wisconsin-Stout. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions
The researcher conducting this study is: Dang Yang. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at the UW-Stout School of Education Office in 267 Heritage Hall, 715-232-4047, or yangda@uwstout.edu.

The advisor of this research project is Dr. Na'im Madyun of the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. If you have any concerns or questions, you are encouraged to contact him at 612-624-5761 or madyu002@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or advisor(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

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

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. I consent to being audio recorded during the focus group and during the individual interview.

Print Name:⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Signature:⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯   Date:⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Signature of Investigator:⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯   Date: ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯

Appendix B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Hmong Student Leadership in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study Examining the
Experiences of Hmong Student Leaders in Higher Education

Instructions: Do not put your name on this form. Please answer the following questions as best you can.
These questions are completely voluntary, and you do not need to answer them if you choose not to.

1. Have you participated in an elected or appointed leadership position in the last 12 months?

    _____ Yes   _____ No   _____ I prefer not to answer

2. Consider all the leadership positions you have held in the last 12 months, on a scale of 1-5 (5 being
   highest) how satisfied are you with your overall leadership experiences?

    1   2   3   4   5
    Not Satisfied at All   Very Satisfied

3. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being very high) how often are you involved in a leadership position?

    1   2   3   4   5
    Not Often at All   Very Often

4. Would you like to be sent an electronic copy of the results or thesis/publication after it has been
   completed?

    _____ Yes   _____ No   _____ I prefer not to answer

    If yes, where would you like me to send an electronic copy to: _____

Demographic Questions

    Ethnicity (write in):_____ Gender (write in):_____

    Current Year in College:_____ Age (in years, as of today):_____

This study is being conducted by:
    Dang Yang, Master's Student Researcher
    University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
    Post-Secondary Teaching & Learning Department
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Appendix C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: FOCUS GROUP

Student Leadership in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Study Examining the
Experiences of Hmong Student Leaders in Higher Education

Introduction (to be stated verbatim):
Thank you for taking part in this research study. The goal of this research project is to examine and better understand what your experiences are like as Hmong student leaders on campus. Today, we will participate in a focus group. As voluntary research subjects, you have the right not to answer any question and you have to right to end your participation as a research subject at any time during or after our focus group. Your privacy and confidentiality is very important and to make sure your identity is protected, you will each be given a pseudo-name.

> *Pass out name tags with names "Student 1", "Student 2", "Student 3", "Student 4", "Student 5", and "Student 6".*

Today's focus group may last up to 2 hours in length, and it will be recorded using an audio recording device. Each time you speak, please introduce yourself so our audio recording can pick up who is speaking at the time. When you address another student, please use their pseudo-name on their name tags.

There are risks and benefits associated with this research project. While this research is not intended to cause any serious risk to you, as participants in a qualitative study, you may experience anxiety and feelings of discomfort as we will be discussing in detail your experiences on campus as Hmong student leaders.

As a participant of this research study, the benefits may include better understanding your own leadership development and may allow you to make better informed choices regarding your leadership development. Furthermore, this study will add to the body of research about student leadership among an underrepresented population. There will be no direct benefits to participating in this research project.

Today's focus group will be audio recorded and the recording will be transcribed before the data is analyzed. This audio recording will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to me and the transcripts will be only accessible to me and my research advisor. Before I begin recording, do you give me permission to record this session?

> *Get permission. Start recording device.*

Today is _____. This focus group will be audio recorded and transcribed for research. Do you give me permission to record and transcribe today's focus group session?

> *Get permission from each research subject so it is on the audio recording.*

Thank you. Take about 10 seconds to think about your leadership experiences on campus. *Wait 10 seconds.*
   1. Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experiences of being a student leader.

Appendix D

TRANSCRIPT ANALYSIS CODES and DEFINITIONS

Leadership is challenging   any statement saying that leadership is challenging or describing the

types of challenges faced being a leader

Cultural barriers   (a subgroup of "leadership is challenging") a statement describing

students dealing with potential cultural barriers while serving as a

leader or during every day experiences

Task oriented   statements where students are describing daily tasks they performed

while in a leadership position

Making mistakes   statements where students articulate making mistakes

Learning about myself -   statements where students express self-discovery or express self-

reflection as a result of a leadership experience

Doing something different   statements where students express tasks that were beyond their

normal comfort zones; doing new tasks, learning new things, etc.

Life balance   statements where students discuss balancing a variety of tasks to

achieve a balance between life, work, school, etc.

Leadership for Family   Student expresses family as a driving motivation for their interest in

leadership

Miscellaneous	a statement that sounds interesting and perhaps profound, but the researcher is unsure about how to code this statement. The researcher will return to this statement and review it later.
Definition of leadership	a statement where the student tries to define leadership through metaphors, similes, or other means
Leadership for career	statements where the student expresses career development as a driving motivation for their interest in leadership
Leadership for the team	statements where the student expresses leadership as a means to meet the needs of the immediate group or team
Inferiority	statements where the student expresses fear of not being good enough
Empowerment	statements where the student expresses empowerment due to leadership experiences
Gratitude for leadership	statements where student expresses gratitude for having had the leadership experience
Gender	statements discussing how gender affects their leadership experiences; or statements regarding observations surrounding gender roles
Age/generation	statements discussing how age or intergenerational conflicts affect leadership experiences

Cultural conflicts	statements discussing the perceived conflicts that arise (whether during leadership experiences or other types of experiences) specifically based on perceived cultural differences
Hmong vs. Non-Hmong	statements that suggest that the student acts different in differing contexts depending on the ethnic make-up of the immediate group or team that the leadership experience is enclosed in
Shifting values	statements discussing how leadership intersects the shifting values of the new generation
Learning Hmong	statements indicating using leadership experiences as vehicles to learn and practice the Hmong culture
Social Justice	Statements discussing ways in which the student uses action to create positive change, whether it be positive change in the Hmong community and its people or for the larger community in general
Dual Identity	Statements where students discuss having multiple cultural and ethnic identities
Belonging	Statements made about how their experiences serve as a catalyst to belong—either to the university or to a larger community
Role Model	Statements made by the students suggesting that they are motivated to lead or to partake in different experiences because it allows them to serve as a role model to other people of their community