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Contours of Race and Ethnicity:

Institutional Context and Hmong American Students'

Negotiations of Racial Formation in Higher Education

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Rican Vue

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Contours of Race and Ethnicity:
Institutional Context and Hmong American Students'
Negotiations of Racial Formations in Higher Education

by

Rican Vue

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Walter R. Allen, Chair

Hmong American students and their struggles are largely invisible yet are grossly misunderstood when they are seen. The current study addresses this lack of recognition as well as how Hmong students endeavor to be acknowledged, respected, and understood. In particular, this study explores how Hmong Americans negotiate the contours of race and ethnicity to construct an affirming identity on their respective university campuses. Guided by a framework of campus racial climate, this study examines how institutional context shapes students' experiences of race and ethnicity and consequently processes of racial formation. Drawing from qualitative case study methodology and semistructured interviews with 40 Hmong American students, this study examines Hmong American students in two different institutional contexts. At one institution, Hmong Americans exhibit a critical mass inside and outside of the

predominantly White campus. In the other institution, there exists a plurality of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs); however, Hmong Americans are underrepresented on campus and absent in the larger institutional context.

The findings of this study illuminate the complex negotiations of identity for Hmong students. First, negotiations of identity involved constraints from both ethnic community outsiders and insiders; however, constraints from the inside were complicated by racialization (or racial understandings, expectations, and impositions). Race and racism operated through various stereotypes to constrain the identity and experiences of Hmong American students as both Asian and Hmong. These racial stereotypes mirrored larger racial understandings and reflected how students experience the campus racial climate. These stereotypes had detrimental effects for participants' identity and sense of belonging on campus but also evoked personal and shared significance of educational success.

Second, individual and collective acts of ethnicity benefited from community, but they required addressing intercommunity tensions and commitments. Membership in cultural organizations allowed the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMTC) participants to validate and affirm their racially visible and socially different presence on the predominantly White campus as well as to maintain commitments within their communities off campus. At the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), performing in a culture show enabled participants to differentiate their experiences from Asian Americans collectively and also deconstructed a static and determined view of Hmong Americans.

Finally, the contours of race and ethnicity were shaped by structural diversity, historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, and the proximity of co-ethnic community, illustrating how these dimensions inform racial formation processes. At UMTC, critical mass sustained a visible

presence and enabled students to garner resources such as select cultural and curricular programming. Such programming, however, had a marginal impact on limiting racial experiences on the predominantly White campus. These experiences were informed by the racialization of Hmong Americans in the Twin Cities. Additionally, despite having a presence in the institutional context, Hmong Americans were unrecognized or compromised in select campus policy and procedures.

At UCLA, Hmong Americans were recognized through disaggregation policies, yet the persistence of race was maintained by the demographic absence of Hmong Americans and the lack of curricular inclusion and cultural programming. Hmong American students were less constrained by the instrumental force of ethnic community, particularly the ethnic-specific images and the cultural demands of living in an ethnic enclave that their UMTC counterparts experience. However, UCLA participants experienced more isolation and also lacked the capacity to make substantial institutional impact. The experiences at UMTC and UCLA indicate that the status of Hmong Americans as insiders and outsiders within institutions is constantly being negotiated and illustrate that status is never fixed and subject to agency and structure. Thus, centralizing the dynamic experience of Hmong Americans in policy, practice, and programming are important for ensuring that Hmong Americans are affirmatively included.

The dissertation of Rican Vue is approved.

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Walter R. Allen, Committee Chair

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2013

For my family

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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

*I felt an initial moment of uneasiness—the same feeling I had years earlier, when as an undergraduate, my alma mater used Ann Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1997) for the inaugural year of the campus book project. The award-winning book, which centered on the experiences of a Hmong family’s cultural clashes with the western medicine, became an ideal pedagogical tool for multicultural teaching and campus community building. Although the Hmong students welcomed this newfound visibility, we would have been naïve if not concerned about the Hmong experience being forever cemented in the story of cultural difference that hinged on contrasts between western modernism and oriental traditionalism. It was an opportunity and a burden for us then and, in many ways, continues to be both for me. This is because the project of identity and the task of visibility belong to a larger, ongoing project of self-discovery, affirmation, and reconstruction, which is simultaneously psychological, social, cultural, and political. For me specifically, this project and task is also situated along multiple intersecting historical trajectories of being a Hmong woman, an American of Asian descent, and a person of color.*

That brief moment of unease was in response to an email sent to the Hmong organization at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), from an aspiring Asian American actor, requesting translation assistance for a role for which he was auditioning.

I will be potentially involved in a project that requires lines to be said in Hmong. I’ve searched all over and couldn’t find a HMONG translator, so I thought of looking in my alma mater, and found your group’s website.

I’m reading for a 16 year old boy, so some of his lines in Hmong could be:

“This job sucks old man, I hate it”.

I'm also reading for a 20 year old gangster. Lines could be:

"Get the fuck in the car or I'll fuckin' kill you"

This email affirmed rumors and eager anticipation in the Hmong American community that actor/producer Clint Eastwood was casting for a film (Gran Torino), which would involve at least Hmong-speaking actors and therefore shed some light, no matter the shade or hue, into Hmong American experiences.

In considering the request, I found myself wondering how the visibility of Hmong Americans in the movie and the larger social images and messages it represents might translate to shaping the experiences, interactions, involvement, and understanding of Hmong students at UCLA. Would others continue to overlook or view them as simply another group of Asian Americans, who ultimately enjoys the status of belonging to a racial majority population among the undergraduates? Alternatively, would this image locate them as distinct from the high-achieving, problem-free experience commonly associated with Asian Americans? How would their location as "those who have made it" by "overcoming the odds" present a living example as well as a discordant narrative to dominant and often contradictory views of who they are? Finally, how might all of the above be different in a different institutional context? For example, would it be different if there were more than only 30 Hmong students at an institution with over 25,000 undergraduates and, if collectively, Asian Americans existed as a racial minority, rather than plurality, of the student population in numbers?

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are assumed to be a monolithic, quintessential group that is overrepresented and “deminoritized” in higher education. The view that Asian Americans are academically, socially, and culturally adjusted continues to have negative consequences for their experiences in higher education. Although it has affected AAPIs generally, one consequence includes overlooking subgroups such as Hmong Americans who, due to their socioeconomic positionality, may demand extra services to ensure higher education access and persistence. White student affairs practitioners often dismiss the academic concerns of Asian Americans (Liang & Sedlacek, 2003), who are also often excluded from research on minorities (e.g., Astin, 1982) (Nakanishi, 1995) and from educational support programs such as psychological, outreach, and retention services (Hune, 2002; S. S. Lee, 2006; Suzuki, 2002). This narrative leaves little room for the educational struggles experienced by Hmong Americans, a Southeast Asian American (SEAA) subgroup of AAPIs.

This study examines Hmong American students’ negotiations of identity, specifically their experiences of race and ethnicity. Because race is endemic in the fabric of society, identity negotiations for people of color involve a complex process of both internal and external identity work that seeks to make sense of and resolve tensions experienced as a result of racialized status. These tensions are inherent in the contours of race and ethnicity for Hmong American students, which are captured by the ways racialization has constrained, limited, and distorted Hmong American identities. Such confines for Hmong identities are observable in educational research, which have largely been unable to account for Hmong student experiences or situated their experiences along a Black-White racial continuum.

The experiences of SEAs are often absent from the discourse of Asian Americans despite at least two decades of pleas from AAPI scholars in the field. Much of their work centers

on deconstructing the characterization of AAPIs as a uniform category of analysis, which dominates educational research, policy, and practice. Hmong Americans and other Southeast Asian American groups are often cited as exemplary of AAPI cultural and social heterogeneity because of their vastly different experiences from East Asians (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, Koreans). For example, SEAs have among some of the lowest rates of educational attainment nationally (Pfeifer & Lee, 2004) and the highest rates of youth incarceration in California when compared to East Asians, Whites, Latinos, and African Americans (Arifuku, Peacock, & Glessmann, 2006). Today “bimodal trends” among AAPIs are increasingly more familiar and often at the center of arguments for advancing inquiry into AAPI student experiences and reevaluating education policy and practice for AAPIs (Hune, 2002). A consequence of attending to extreme differences in social circumstances is what Ong (2003) has described as the analytical “blackening” of SEAs and “whitening” of East Asians. This analysis is useful for understanding why there exists a growing body of literature on SEAA youth delinquency in contrast to the literature that primarily focuses on explaining educational success of, namely, East Asians, who often are overrepresented in characterizations of the Asian American profile.

However, viewing SEAs as seemingly more colored than their East Asian counterparts, who are often portrayed as “outwhiting Whites,” remains too simplistic at best and essentializing at worst. This juxtaposition conjures up and reinscribes familiar but distorted images of race that subscribes to hegemonic racial order founded strictly on Black-White reference points. A deeper analysis of the issue reveals much more nuance to this either-or binary. In fact, a review of research suggests that SEAs have a tenuous place both inside and outside the discourse of AAPI success: Ironically, they are viewed as both model minorities and delinquents (S. J. Lee, 2001; Ngo & Lee, 2007). In both instances, cultural differences belie explanations for AAPI

success and failure, indicating that collectively AAPIs are perpetually constrained by perceptions of them as foreigners. These contradictory and often fluid racialized understandings of AAPIs are neither new nor specific to education, but they have a dynamic history in U.S. race relations. This history provides a context and serves a foundation for understanding how Hmong students experience race and negotiate identity in school, a primary socializing organization.

Higher Education as a Site of Struggle

Significant areas of interest for this study are the ways in which higher education institutions and university student agency can both confirm and disrupt racial narratives, whatever their content may be in a particular moment and space. Institutions of learning can inform and reify the notion of race wherein students learn racial identities and their place within the racial hierarchy (S. J. Lee, 2005; Lewis, 2008). However, such lessons are not always passively accepted nor do they remain consistent. Notions of race are a product of education institutions as much as they inform them. A critical account of U.S. history illustrates the dynamic relationship between race and education, both constraining and both empowering. Lewis (2008) argued that in schools, “race is present in the ‘hidden curriculum,’ in explicit historical lessons, in discipline practices, and interpersonal relations” (p. 151). For these reasons, education institutions continue to be racially contested spaces in terms of access, content and pedagogy, and intended outcomes—all of which ultimately influence the race identities of groups and the structure of intergroup relationships.

While the issues of education *for whom* and *for what purpose* are far from being resolved, today there is a general consensus, at least rhetorically, that no group be excluded (with the exception of undocumented immigrants who face persistent racialization) and that access to higher education is necessary for social mobility and critical for the development of civil society.

How institutions attempt to incorporate or serve a more diverse populous (in access, content and pedagogy, or outcomes) is continually under question and is a debate largely shaped by beliefs about race. Ultimately, such educational processes bear important weight for higher education institutions given their growing influence and their role in socializing those who will be positioned to enact change.

Although all institutions are implicated in race making (Omi & Winant, 1994), education institutions have had a crucial role in maintaining and, in particular historical moments, disrupting the racial order. An account of U.S. history indicates that education institutions have served as a mechanism for advancing and maintaining mainstream cultural hegemony, which have been espoused by the nation's founding members and cultural makers as the core of national identity and stability (Takaki, 2000; Wollenburg, 1995). Notable instances include, but are not limited to, formal exclusion of people of color from schools, American Indian boarding schools, segregated schooling, repeal of race-conscious programming focused on redistributing opportunity, and legislative bans on bilingual education and ethnic studies (Feagin, 2006). Such moments indicate that the terms and methods of inclusion have been disingenuous for people of color, who are often constructed as eroding the moral and democratic fabric of the nation. Such a legacy of exclusion has had a lasting effect on the social and economic outcomes as they vary by race, as well as dominant explanations for the variation in outcomes.

Research demonstrates the continued significance of race and the effects of racialization when examining the economic and social gains of education for White ethnics and other people of color. Groups such as Irish and Italians, who were once considered racially distinct, have seen better returns on their education and consequently have fared better in terms of becoming incorporated into the mainstream society (Pearlman, 1989). Racial disparities between White

ethnics and people of color underscore the significance of race and how racialization persists through schooling. This racial disparity in education is maintained by both structural inequity and cultural marginalization that perpetuate inopportunity for students of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Kozol, 2005). For example, students of color are disadvantaged by disparate conditions in largely segregated neighborhoods and urban schools (Kozol, 2005). Furthermore, students of color are relegated as outsiders in an educational system that privileges the culture of White middle class Americans. This privileging is underscored by dominant explanations for racial disparities, which often centralize cultural traits of people of color and discount continuing practices of exclusion (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Such racialized narratives perpetuate the continuing significance of race in society and education institutions.

Despite numerous exclusions and barriers imposed on people of color in education and evidence of differences in opportunity, people of color remain optimistic about the value of education for social and economic mobility. Indeed, such optimism about education is evidenced in ongoing battles to gain entry to higher education institutions. The ability of people of color to maintain hope in an institution that has been used to marginalize them requires envisioning education as an instrument of change for social justice rather than merely a tool for social reproduction. That vision for educational equity was crucial and necessary for institutional transformations, which ultimately were a result of external and internal contestations of culture. Contestations included revealing inequities in society that contradict democratic ideals and principles of racial equity.

People of color not only demanded their place in higher education institutions but problematized how they were superficially included in them. From within institutions, struggles for legitimacy challenged dominant notions of inclusion in higher education specifically

demanding more of institutions than simply accommodating the physical presence of people of color. Such agency, most notably illustrated in the student movements of the 1960s, has been responsible for paradigmatic shifts in the meanings of equality and opportunity in higher education. Collective action has also been significant in advancing discussions about higher education institutions' role in intellectually, morally, and culturally equipping its students for a more open and equitable society. These ongoing challenges to the status quo— notions of race and the role of higher education—have undoubtedly transformed the landscape of higher education as evidenced in the increasing demographic and curricular diversity within college and university campuses. Additionally, ongoing internal critiques continue to be a force propelling institutional change, especially in response to the ever evolving racial content and its institutionalization as folk knowledge and culture.

Embodying a perspective of education and race that is empowering, I am guided by analytical frameworks, perspectives and concepts (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Freire, 1970; 1973; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1998) that enable me to chronicle both the marginalization of groups and their resistances to marginalizing forces. I do this in order to overcome the false impression that emancipatory change is insurmountable and that racial injustice and social inequity remain due to individual and collective apathy. Embracing the instructive value of race and the emancipatory power of education foregrounds the project of social justice I am committed to, which relies on a transformative view of education to achieve racial equity.

Current Study

This study examines Hmong American students' experiences at two institutions: The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where AAPIs collectively are a racial plurality among the undergraduate students, and The University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMTC), where AAPIs exist as a racial minority numerically among the undergraduate student population. While the contexts of the two institutions are much more dynamic than its racial and ethnic student diversity (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005), this institutional characteristic is a starting point for inquiry and analysis. Other relevant contextual layers include the metropolitan and regional location of the institutions and the extent to which they are inclusive of the identities of Hmong students. These varying institutional sites are the contexts for the investigation of Hmong student experiences as underrepresented minorities, specifically their negotiations of race as they navigate through postsecondary education. This study aims to engage dialogues about diversity and students of color, while also contributing to the literature on campus climates, by exploring AAPIs within-group experiences of race. The following questions guided this study.

1. How do Hmong students experience race and ethnicity?
 - How do experiences in college compare to those in K-12?
2. How does institutional context shape racialization and campus climate for Hmong students?
 - How do regional context and institutional characteristics inform racial stereotypes?
 - How are racial stereotypes and campus climate related?

3. How do Hmong students negotiate and perform identity?
 - How, if at all, are student engagements (i.e., curriculum, interpersonal interaction, and collective action) processes for identity negotiations, performances, and assertions?
 - How are identity negotiations and performances transformative?
4. How does the dynamic of personal interaction and institutional racial climate shape achievement?

Overview of Chapters

Chapter Two provides an overview of theoretical constructs of racialization, race, and ethnicity that guide the investigation as well as their applicability to Hmong Americans. Additionally, this chapter reviews how Asian Americans have historically been racialized. Next, I review empirical literature on AAPIs in higher education institutions, focusing specifically on issues of race and climate, engagement, and identity. This chapter concludes with the significance of the study, which argues that the examination of Hmong Americans in higher education is necessary for grappling with tensions in higher education literature that center around issues of diversity and racial minority students. **Chapter Three** provides an overview of the context and conceptual framework. Context includes the social and cultural characteristics of Southeast Asian Americans to illustrate the significance of their educational experiences to the study of race in higher education. A more specific layer of context also includes the historical background of Hmong Americans, implications for Hmong Americans' higher education experiences, and a review of Hmong Americans' experiences of race in school. The conceptual framework integrates intersectional identity frameworks with campus racial climate frameworks. **Chapter Four** provides methods of study and an overview of each case site.

Chapter Five demonstrates how Hmong students dynamically experience race in their respective institutional contexts. Specifically, this chapter captures the role of racial stereotypes in shaping student experiences and the salience of stereotypes in each context. I argue that such experiences of race reflect the campus climate. While this chapter illustrates the contours of race, the following chapters focus on the contours of ethnicity in students' negotiations of race on campus. Specifically, **Chapter Six** examines organization participation at UMTC, a rich institutional context for understanding ethnic (Hmong-specific) organizational affiliation and

organizing given the critical mass of Hmong students and institutional proximity to co-ethnic enclaves. I argue that organization participation in this particular context reflects negotiations and expressions of ethnicity that are a response to pressures and expectations of both outsiders and ethnic community. In particular, organization participation serves to contest and disrupt the colorblind racism towards Hmong Americans on campus while also providing a means to manage and negotiate the Hmong community's constant presence, which serves as both a source of strength and constraint. **Chapter Seven** provides a comparative examination of narratives of ethnicity in the context of interpersonal interactions at the two institutions. In this chapter, I argue that narratives of identity, which are necessitated due to the invisibility of Hmong Americans, are constructed to address the specific racialized contents of being Hmong and AAPI in particular contexts. In the final findings chapter, **Chapter Eight** captures the culture show performance of UCLA students in the Hmong Students Association, demonstrating how culture show performances can serve as a critical and transformative function in education spaces. In this institutional context, participants' performances of race and ethnicity are subjected to less co-ethnic constraints, yet they lack the support of a large ethnic presence. Nonetheless, I argue that performances of race and ethnicity work to disrupt their selective inclusion as Hmong students and exclusion as students of color in order to critique the larger climate of diversity at the institution. Collectively, the chapters on ethnicity demonstrate the constraints of race, but also underscore the significance of ethnicity for individual and institutional transformation.

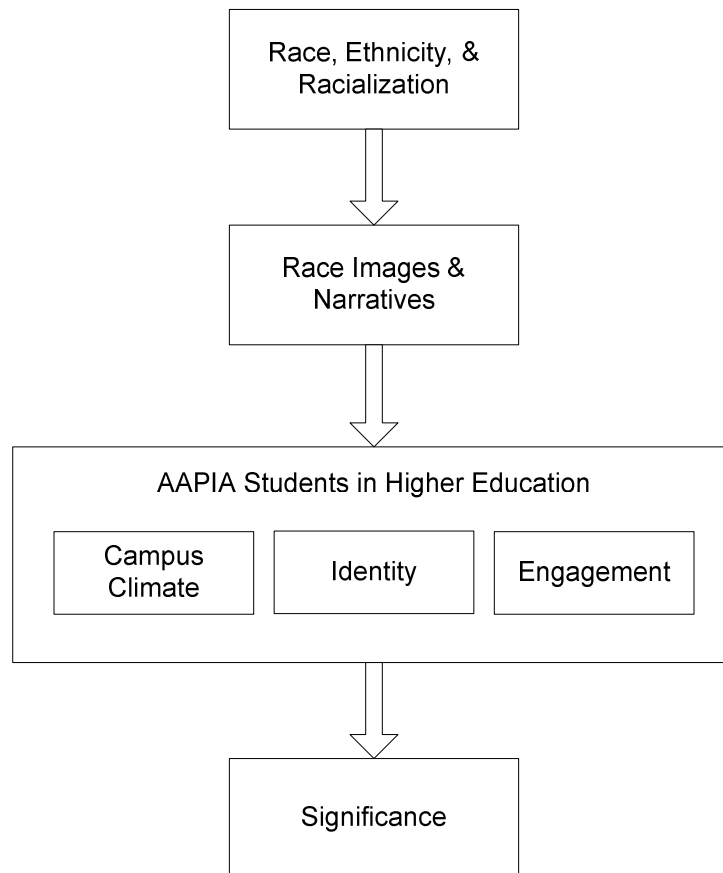
Chapter Nine concludes with a discussion on racial formation that underscores how institutional context shapes the contours of race and ethnicity, and consequently Hmong Americans students' experiences of climate. Specifically, this discussion offers an analysis of the following institutional dimensions: issues of structural diversity (racial and ethnic student

composition, critical mass); legacy of inclusion or exclusion (specifically, the extent to which ethnic identity was reflected in student programming and policy); and proximity to ethnic enclave. The final chapter also includes a discussion of Hmong American students' identity negotiations, which occur at the intersections of race and ethnicity. Finally, implications for practice and future research are offered.

CHAPTER TWO – Literature Review

This chapter begins with an overview of race, ethnicity, and racialization as important concepts for understanding the experiences of AAPIs and Hmong Americans. Specifically distinguishing race from ethnicity largely drives this study’s research questions in terms of how Hmong students negotiate racialization as a social force encountered from inside and outside of school. The following section provides historical background on primary racial images ascribed to AAPIs and their contemporary manifestations for SEAs specifically. Next, empirical research is presented on AAPIs in higher education that addresses issues of climate, engagement, and identity. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study.

Figure 2-1 Literature Review Map



Defining and Locating Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Before proceeding with the literature, it is necessary to define the terms that I use to refer to racial categories. The terms *Asian American*, *Asian Pacific American*, *Asian Pacific Islander American*, and *Asian American and Pacific Islander* collectively refer to over 40 distinct ethnic groups, who differ in national origin, language, religion and culture (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2008). In addition to these cultural differences, they also vary immensely in historical experiences such as immigration history, immigration status, and premigratory education. Finally, they vary across socioeconomic indicators such as education, income, and occupation, much of which is attributable to sociocultural history. Despite these differences, the ethnic groups that represent AAPIs continue to be viewed as having an essential quality. This presumed essential quality has led to various and even contradictory depictions of AAPIs, which shape and obscure their experiences with U.S. educational institutions.

I offer these multiple terms as an example of how race and racial categories are unstable—a process without any finality, a socially constructed artifact that is continually under contestation from those inside and outside. These terms are often used interchangeably and often taken for granted.¹ While the nuances associated with each one is important, the point in offering these varied categories is that they each represent tensions and inconsistencies of within-group identity based on cultural, historical, and social realities. My interchangeable use of the terms, particularly, Asian American and Pacific Islander American (AAPI), Asian Pacific American (APA), and Asian American (AA), is in part to convey how their meaning is trivial for outsiders regardless of internal debates among these groups. Another more practical reason for using the

¹ For further discussion on intercommunity politics, see Espiritu (1992, pp. 102-104) and Nadal (2004).

multiple terms is an attempt to stay consistent with how other scholars or researchers use such terms. In acknowledging intergroup realities and struggle for voice among AAPIs, I use the terms AAPI and AA with caution and awareness that in doing so, I may be reifying the notion of race, to which I aim to give more depth. However, I do so because like Lowe (2005), I too “argue for the Asian American necessity—politically, intellectually, and personally—to organize, resist, and theorize as Asian Americans” (pp. 258-259). According to Lowe, such a collective perspective and strategy is necessary to “destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogenous group” (pp. 258-259).

Theorizing Race and Ethnicity

In this section, I briefly provide background on race and ethnicity and define how they apply to the current study. Next, I summarize racialization as a process of categorization *and* a representational process of defining racial minorities as outsiders to the American White mainstream.

Race versus ethnicity: Assignments and assertions, reconciling category, and process

Although the constructs of race and ethnicity are sometimes viewed synonymously (Brubaker, 2009; Nagel, 1994), this study draws on the work of scholars who viewed each construct as conceptually different and offering distinct analytical value (Espiritu, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1994; Tuan, 1998; Waters, 1990, 1999). Where race refers to physical distinctions such as skin color and facial features, ethnicity refers to cultural distinctions such as language, religion, or national/ancestral origin (Omi & Winant, 1994; Waters, 1999). While I adopt this definition of race and ethnicity for the current study on Hmong Americans, I also find useful the view that Cornell and Hartmann (2007) provided in describing the primary difference between

the two as external ascriptions (race) as opposed to internal assertions (ethnicity). The two views of race and ethnicity propose distinct but sometimes overlapping bases of identification. I explain why the first more objectively categorical view is necessary by also addressing critiques, and then I continue to establish why the latter more subjective view is a crucial addition to the first.

Miles (1997) defined racial identity as referring to how one acknowledges, perceives, and consequently adapts to the sociopolitical and cultural constructs of race (e.g., Asian American) whereas ethnic identity more closely refers to how individuals acknowledge the dynamic forces and shared cultural elements that attach them to one another (e.g., Hmong). Hence, it is possible for one to have simultaneous identities. However, Cornell and Hartmann (2007) proposed that the saliency of one's racial or ethnic identity is dependent on how "thick" (instrumental) or "thin" (symbolic) it is in their lives. As an example, while the U.S. government has categorized Hmong as Asians, their internal ethnic identity may be more salient for them. Ethnic identity may be more dominant in defining their self-concept because they continue to organize their lives around Hmong language, culture, and traditions (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007) while simultaneously dealing with changes in the meaning of being Hmong in the United States (S. J. Lee, 1997). In other words, ethnicity may be more salient because it "[organizes] a great deal of social life and both individual and collective action" (S. J. Lee, 1997, p. 76). In his work and study of SEAA students, educator Kiang (2002) described how students' experiences in the United States stemming from a refugee status, economic conditions, and social location serve as reference points for their identity in school and provide meaning for persistence in college. Because of these distinct experiences, they may not adhere completely to an AA identity as it is currently constructed and represented.

While race as a concept may not accurately capture internal self-identifications or self-identity, it has real consequences for racial minorities and therefore is crucial for understanding their experiences. The racially motivated death of Vincent Chin² remains a tragic example often called upon to illustrate the salience and reality of race for AAPIs (Zia, 2001). Ultimately, such instances suggest that ethnicity, like race, has real and substantial costs for people of color in a racialized society. Unlike White Americans who are able to ignore both race and ethnicity—as the former is normalized and the latter often experienced symbolically (Waters, 1990, 1999)—racial and ethnic boundaries for people of color are socially enforced and imposed (Waters, 1999). The inability for “non-White” ethnics to disregard their racial identities in favor of ethnic identities is a primary critique of the conceptual applicability of ethnicity for racial minorities. For this reason, Tuan (1998) used the term *racialized ethnics* to distinguish the experiences of ethnic minorities who are also racialized from White ethnics. Hence, race is necessary for understanding the lived experiences of racial minorities because they articulate the endemic nature of race in the social fabric, which racial minorities must negotiate (Bonilla-Silva, 1999, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Even as race poses constraints on ethnicity (Kibria, 2000; Tuan, 1998; Waters, 1999), for racialized groups, ethnicity continues to be valuable for understanding how groups self-identify and possibly negotiate race (Song, 2003). Indeed, ethnicity may be activated by race. In response to their collective experiences of race, Vincent Chin’s death became a rallying point for racial identification (or pan-ethnicity, according to Espiritu, 1992) among AAPIs. This latter point reflects Cornell and Hartmann’s (2007) view that when race is asserted from within the group—for example, to define its content—it becomes an expression of ethnicity even if initially

² Two White men killed Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, because they mistook him for Japanese. The men were employees at a Detroit automotive plant and were recently laid off due to growing industry competition from Japan at the time. See Zia, 2001 for more discussion.

constructed by outsiders. Therefore, ethnicity can critique and alter the symbolic content and material consequences of race. This study recognizes expression of ethnicity as a way to negotiate racialized narratives. In other words, although ethnicity competes with and remains constrained by race, it exists as a tool of self-determinism that is vital for a positive self-concept in a racialized society. Finally, ethnicity can also illuminate specific challenges with race.

To summarize, I view ethnicity as both a) cultural distinctions (language, religion, or national/ancestral origin), which can be loosely viewed as more objective measures; and b) in terms of how a group views and defines itself, which are more subjective expressions reflecting the socially constructed and fluid content of identity. This latter view is a relevant and necessary addition to the first for understanding the experiences of Hmong Americans, who are relatively recent immigrants and find themselves adapting cultural practices under new social constraints. One example is the change from an agrarian lifestyle that shaped a large part of Hmong family and society prior to the war and forced migration. Another more relevant example is the education of Hmong females and how its consequent changes in the cultural meaning of what it means to be Hmong for both females and males in the United States (S. J. Lee, 1997). Finally, a fluid view of ethnicity appreciates that being Hmong in the United States today includes a legacy of racialized oppression and a collective memory of resistance that spans beyond this nation. This particular point has been instrumental for Hmong Americans who exist as part of a global diaspora with no nation of ethnic heritage. As a result, ethnicity for Hmong Americans is a product of negotiations in multiple contexts and cultures. Therefore, both race and ethnicity represent in some form categorizations rather than fixed, objective facts rooted in biological ancestry or specific cultural practices. If viewed as static and unchanging, ethnicity is as vulnerable to being reduced to an essence as is race. In this way, both are fluid and ever evolving

in terms of their content, and they are constantly negotiated with changing social conditions, which inform meaning and representation (Nagel, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Racialization. At its core, racialization is the conflation of race and culture (ethnicity) ignoring the heterogeneity of distinct ethnic identities (Omi, 2001). However, racialization is more than simply aggregating different groups; it also involves a process of ascribing meaning that can be assumed and used for differential status or treatment. Racialization involves the use of “color and physical appearance” that take on symbolic and social meaning (Torres & Ngin, 1995). Lewis (2008) suggested other markers of racial difference or otherness, which have symbolic and instrumental significance: skin color, name, language, culture, and socioeconomic status. Therefore, racialization involves both categorization and treatment based on categorization. As it applies to AAPIs, racialization includes a process of aggregating cultural groups descended from the continent of Asia into a singular group while simultaneously ascribing cultural and physical characteristics as inherently shared.

The process of racialization inherently defines a group as categorically and essentially different, specifically in reference to Whites. Although the denotative value of racialization can be employed to understand any racial, ethnic, or cultural group, in the U.S. context, the racialization of Whites is neutralized as normative and consequently the status quo of assimilation, conflating American with whiteness. For example, Irish and Italians were once considered a distinct racial group; however, they were eventually subsumed under the larger race of Whites (Waters, 1990). Therefore, racialization in the U.S. context connotes the process of becoming non-White, a discussion inherently located in the ethnicity debate earlier described in brief. It is beyond the scope of the study to include a more comprehensive discussion of the assimilation literature (see, e.g., Alba & Nee, 2003; Telles & Ortiz, 2008), which more

thoroughly addresses theoretical debates concerning the applicability of ethnicity and notions of what constitutes the U.S. cultural mainstream. The purpose of offering this example is to convey how race and racialization operate differently for people of color, specifically how they are culturally, socially, and structurally constraining.

A significant distinction between race and racialization is that race is often mistaken for a fixed entity while racialization refers to a process to account for the changes in meaning and content of race. Omi and Winant (1994) cautioned:

There is a continuous temptation to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete, and objective. And there is the opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere illusion, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate. (p. 54)

For the most part, views of race as socially constructed have replaced primordial notions of race. This explanation is often used to delegitimize or dismiss the significance of race. However, as Omi and Winant (1994) pointed out, such an understanding of race alone is unable to resolve tensions with or address the material consequences of race, nor does this understanding explain why the content of race (i.e., racial meaning) evolves over time. Racialization explains the definition and redefinition of specific race identities by accounting for how race operates in particular social and historical moments. Omi and Winant (1994) explained the process of racial formations, which underscores racialization as an evolving force:

[It] emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the “micro” and “macro-social” levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics. (p. 4)

Such theoretical insight is relevant for understanding how both race and ethnicity, as presumed objective categories of people, are vulnerable to being reduced to “essences” that result in symbolic imagery and their consequential material conditions. Therefore, the concept of racialization is useful in capturing processes of race rather than attempting to define race itself, which is subject to social pressures and continuous renegotiation. Racial formation is particularly useful for understanding the dynamic nature of race as well as why particular images become meaningful in particular times. For example, AAPIs are labeled as honorary Whites, who are purveyors of the model minority narrative, but they are simultaneously feared and despised as perpetually foreign (Tuan, 1998). Similarly, racialization can help to explain why Hmong and other Southeast Asians are “blackened” and East Asians are “whitened” while both groups remain culturally foreign in the context of U.S. race relations. The next section discusses the historical and social contexts of the dominant images of AAPIs.

Racial Images and Narratives: Current Representations and Historical Roots

Asian Americans are the model minority, the foreigner or both, depending on what the context needs us to be. That is the powerful function of representations is their readiness to be used in a manner that will maintain the ideology that created them. (Lei, 2003, p. 175)

The depictions of AAPIs are far ranging and even conflicting at different moments in history. However, their contradictions make seemingly more sense in the contexts in which they arise. This review is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive list of representations, as there are copious permutations based on the intersections of race, ethnicity, sex, class, and citizenship that affect the lives of AAPIs. However, this review provides select images as necessary for

beginning to deconstruct distorted representations of AAPIs. These images speak to a larger racialized agenda that is historically rooted and has consequences of the schooling experiences of AAPIs. This section locates AAPIs in the larger U.S. racial dynamics and contextualizes experiences of Hmong students.

The primary image associated with AAPIs is one of success, captured best by the model minority image bestowed on them in the 1960s. Chun (1995) described how numerous news articles presented AAPIs as “a population that, despite past discrimination, has succeeded in becoming a hard working, uncomplaining minority deserving to serve as a model for other minorities” (p. 96). This glowing portrait of AAPIs came at a time of social unrest regarding racial inequality in the nation. This narrative was a direct effort to dismantle demands for social justice by other minority groups, namely Blacks (Chun, 1995; Osajima, 2005). As demonstrated throughout history, these actions consistently mirror the earlier tactics of White farmers in the late 19th century who saw Chinese labor “as models to help discipline and reform [B]lacks” who were “spoiled” by emancipation (Takaki, 2000, p. 219). More recently, the success image resurfaced in the 1980s with articles in esteemed press outlets such as *TIME* magazine, once again boldly asserting that AAPIs were “whiz kids” (Osajima, 2005). Despite having revealed its empirical inaccuracy (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Chun, 1995; Tuan, 1998), this image continues to be prevalent in shaping the discourse of AAPIs.

Even as AAPIs are heralded as exemplars of hard work and success, they exist as a threat to the limited admissions spaces in U.S. colleges. The recent publication by CARE (2008) attempted to demystify the notion that AAPIs are “invading” and “overtaking” institutions, which underscores the primacy of this narrative. This image reigned in the 1980s in context of growing anti-Asian sentiment following the economic decline of the 1970s and the competition

from Japan in the 1980s (Osajima, 2005). Along with the resurgence of the whiz kid narrative, these sentiments likely fueled the quota scandals, which limited the numbers of AAPIs in some of the nations' most prestigious colleges and universities (Nakanashi, 1995). Ironically, White Americans came to the defense of Asian Americans, who were proclaimed as victims of affirmative action despite the prevailing thesis of overrepresentation at the time. In his analysis of the discourse on Asian Americans in the media, Osajima (2005) reported, "Asian success is discussed in almost alarming tones, reminiscent of the 'hordes' of Asians that threatened California in the 1800s" (p. 221).

Indeed, recent discourses of an Asian invasion did resemble the narratives equated with Chinese and Japanese in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Only some few years before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the San Francisco school board had a "Chinese problem" on their hands, a sentiment shared across the nation as Chinese immigrated to the United States (Takaki, 2000). Chinese immigrants were viewed as "invading Mongolian barbarians" who existed as a threat to American civility, which prompted the San Francisco school board to "guard well the doors to [their] public schools" (Wollenberg, 1995, p. 3). While this was a prevailing sentiment at the time, others benevolently sympathized with Chinese Americans, "[calling] for a 'compulsory school' for Chinese children so that they would not grow up with the 'vices' of their parents" (Wollenberg, 1995, p. 7).

Approximately fifteen years later, similar sentiments were directed towards Japanese Americans, who were described as diseased and contaminated by "a distinctive character, habits and moral standards . . . which are abhorrent to our [i.e. ,White] people" (Wollenberg, 1995, p. 17). These images of early Asian Americans demonstrate that the public viewed them as culturally distinct and inferior, and treated them accordingly. In education, their racialization

translated to segregated schooling. While Chinese Americans were routinely “Negroized” and lumped with “Blacks and Indians” (Takaki, 2000), in some instances, they were denied education completely because they were viewed as irrelevant and beyond the purview of schools. For example, Wollenberg (1995) noted that “while districts were still required to provide education for ‘African and Indian children,’ no specific mention was made of Chinese or ‘Mongolians,’” which was interpreted to mean that school districts were not required to provide schooling for them (p. 5).

The narratives of hoarding invasion (overrepresentation) and cultural distinction are subsumed under the larger image of AAPIs as perpetual foreigners (Tuan, 1998). Conversely, the model minority narrative complements the “honorary Whites” thesis refuted by Tuan (1998). While these narratives seem contradictory, Ng, Lee, and Pak (2007) argued that they are mutually reinforcing and operate to cast AAs outside the peripheries of normalcy. These same images have manifested themselves in similar but distinctive ways for more recent Asian immigrant groups such as Southeast Asians. S. J. Lee (2001) problematized how Hmong students are polarized in the popular press as both the “new model minorities” who have “overcome the odds” and low-achieving delinquents, truants, and gangsters. Specifically, S. J. Lee (2001) described how Hmong American high school students view themselves differently, influenced by factors such as generation and socioeconomic statuses. Despite students’ self-perceptions, they are categorized under dominant racial understandings. For example, in a more recent review of the literature on Southeast Asians, Ngo and Lee (2007) found that Southeast Asian Americans fall on the two extremes of being either model minority or delinquent. Consequently, SEAs have a tenuous position as both insiders and outsiders of the discourse of Asian American success (Ngo & Lee, 2007).

Because SEAs often share similar social contexts with other racial minority groups (inner city or urban locations dominated by racial minorities), their success or failure can often implicitly elicit Blacks and Latinos as reference groups. Hence, the narrative of “delinquent” too has interracial implications, which ultimately subscribe to a dominant narrative of the U.S. racial hierarchy. For example, Ngo and Lee (2007) suggested that SEA culture can be framed both positively and negatively to explain outcomes of SEAs. In some instances where SEA culture is viewed positively, “over-Americanization” becomes detrimental for SEA success. Often the implication is that SEA youth have assimilated to an urban culture (i.e., low-income Black). Such a framing is limited because it does not problematize whiteness as the norm and inherently positions Black Americans as culturally deficient. However, SEA culture is also often viewed as negatively affecting social and cultural adaptation and assimilation to U.S. schools and other social institutions. Again such a view does not challenge the normalization of whiteness that demonizes the cultural frames of people of color. In both instances, the central and sole focus of culture problematically becomes an explanatory factor for understanding the outcomes of SEAs and other students of color. Such a view negates relevant contextual factors such as sociostructural forces and power dynamics, which inform whose cultural knowledge is deemed valuable. A solely cultural analysis (i.e., specifically situated on the culture of communities of color) is largely responsible for ongoing rearticulations of dominant (and contradictory) images of racial minorities as well as dominant narratives of their intergroup relationships as positioned by larger hegemonic discourses.

In both instances, the academic struggles of SEAs (and students of color more generally) are viewed as a result of their own failings. The assumption then is that SEAs are undeserving of services. Alternatively, as model minorities, they are also positioned as not in

need of services. Given the vast literature on Southeast Asian delinquency that largely exists in policy studies and often outside the purview of education research (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Chang & Le, 2005; Donnelly, 1994; Go & Le, 2005; Goldberg, 1999; Le & Kato, 2006; Le, Monfared, & Stockdale, 2005; Ngo, 2002; Smith-Hefner, 1998), it is evident that SEAs are indeed in need of attention and services. Such inquiries are relevant for education researchers because they elucidate the alternative paths of SEAs when schools and society fail them. More important, such numerous examples of society's failure to meet their needs illustrate that SEAs pose a contradictory narrative to the more pervasive success story that currently dominates images of AAPIs. This narrative can complicate and deconstruct the model minority image; however, it can also be detrimental for understanding the unique racialized experiences of AAPIs if a Black-White racial paradigm dictates images and perceptions of SEAs.

A different lens is needed for understanding how cultural distinction is viewed as a mechanism of success and failure, specifically for SEAs and consequently AAPIs. Too often, the cultural difference thesis is presented as a cultural clash, which emphasizes the traditional or premodern culture of Southeast Asians. This is particularly significant for Hmong, whose premigration way of life was largely shaped by an agrarian, preliterate society and traditional practice of shamanism. This background has indeed created practical difficulties adjusting to the United States. However, over 30 years after immigrating, their pre-migratory way of life continues to cast a shadow in how Hmong are seen. They are continually viewed and portrayed as backwards and stubbornly unwilling to change (e.g., Fadiman, 1997). Their essential qualities are also romanticized as timelessly, culturally³ situated (DePouw, 2006). Such understandings resemble the construction of Orientalism described by Edward Said (1978). This particular

³ The practice of culture is not the center of critique; rather the critique focuses on when cultural practices as an essential quality comes to define a group. This issue is discussed in detail by Lowe (2005).

image of the “East” is rooted in imperialism and is constructed as antithetical to the “West.” Said described Orientalism as a construction of difference rooted in power and knowledge that fundamentally shaped how Western European societies viewed themselves as distinctive to the East. Therefore, while images of AAPIs in today’s context may seem like new manifestations, these images are rooted in particular historical moments of race relationships that work in the interest of maintaining a racial and cultural hierarchy in which Whites hold a position of power and privilege.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Experiences in Higher Education

Issues of race and climate. Understanding campus climate experiences are necessary because they negatively influence academic outcomes and persistence (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, & Hagedorn, 1999). More specifically, hostile campus climates are harmful for students of color’s intellectual development (Fleming, 1984) and can be psychologically demanding (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). These issues raise concerns for Asian Pacific Americans students whose perceptions of negative campus climate were predictors of both depression and academic disengagement (Cress & Ikeda, 2003). Moreover, Asian Americans are likely to underreport these experiences (Kotori & Malaney, 2003), and when they do, in some instances, the racially motivated nature of the incident dismissed (Delucchi & Do, 1996).

Despite the overwhelming perception that AAPIs are impervious to racial barriers in education institutions, they continue to face hostile climates in higher education. Studies continue to document how Asian American students experience stereotypes and overt acts of racism such as racial slurs and harassment on and off campus (Chan & Wang, 1991; Rhoads, Lee, & Yamada, 2002). While these incidents may be interpreted as isolated, Kotori and

Malaney's (2003) study indicated that at one institution, Asian Americans experience discrimination at significantly higher rates than their White counterparts, and 12 percent of their study participants report being physically confronted or assaulted because of their race or ethnicity. AAPIs also face faculty racism (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Um, 2003), with over 40 percent of those surveyed in Kotori and Malaney's (2003) study hearing derogatory comments made by course instructors or university staff.

In addition to overt acts of racism and discrimination, racial stereotyping also negatively impact students experiences on campuses. Ancis et al. (2000) found that Asian American (along with African American and Latino/a) students are significantly more likely than their White peers "to experience pressure to conform to racial and ethnic stereotypes regarding academic performance and behavior, as well as to minimize overt racial-ethnic group characteristics (e.g., language and dress) in order to be accepted" (p. 78). Another study found that racial stereotyping leads to AAPI students' educational disengagement, which is detrimental for their learning (Museus, 2008). As a result, students report feeling misunderstood and distanced from those who stereotype them, which include institutional agents and peers (Kawaguchi, 2003; Museus, 2008)

Although most studies examine AAPIs experiences at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), studies at more diverse or pluralistic institutional settings show similar challenges (Asian Pacific American Education Advisory Committee, 1990, as cited in Hurtado et al., 1999; Okamura & Tsutsumoto, 1998). However, the rarity of such research is perpetuated by the assumption that campus climate as experienced by a particular racial group is determined by their numerical representation in the institution. Furthermore, although the studies reviewed are significant in demonstrating how race and racism continue to be a factor for AAPIs in higher education contexts, the literature remains mixed. For example, a multi-institutional study found

that Asian Americans, along with White students, are less likely than other racial groups to discuss the campus climate as negative; however, Asian Americans discuss wanting more cultural representation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Overall, the vast majority of the campus climate studies do not directly problematize the issue of diversity, as defined strictly by race, which inherently informs these investigations because they do not account for ethnicity or other disaggregated statuses among AAPIs. The absence of ethnicity in campus climate studies obscures within-group experiences with race and climate.

Several recent studies do disaggregate AAPI students' experiences with climate. S. S. Lee, Lee, Mok, and Chih (2009) conducted a mixed method study at a Midwestern institution. Their findings revealed generational, student status and heritage group differences in experiences and perceptions of climate. Specifically, first-generation students, graduate students, and East Asians were the most likely to report experiences with racism or discrimination. Additionally, while not a study on climate, Gloria and Ho (2003) also found ethnic differences in comfort with campus environment. In another study Museus and Truong (2009), qualitatively investigated how AAPI students from White high schools and minority high schools perceive campus climate. The researchers found that those from minority high schools were less satisfied with the campus racial climate, were more likely to stress the salience of racial prejudice and discrimination, and reported more distress in regards to racial stereotyping even though both groups acknowledged their prevalence on campus. Finally, Maramba's (2008) qualitative study examined Filipina/o experiences with climate and found that ethnic (i.e., Filipina/o) representation in the student body, faculty, and curriculum, among other factors, largely determines a sense of belonging and positive campus climate.

These studies demonstrate the necessity of disaggregating in order to identify the unique experiences of smaller subgroups within AAPIs. These studies also echo the point made by S. J. Lee (2006) that AAPIs experiences are varied and complex because of the multitude of intersectional identities that inform them. The implication of these studies demonstrates sociocultural location meaningfully shapes experiences and perceptions of groups.

Additionally, with the exception of Rhoads et al.'s (2002) study, and to a limited extent Ancis et al.'s (2000) study, these studies do not address racialization, nor do they address responses to experiences of race and climate. It is likely that these studies are not intended to do so, particularly given the majority are quantitative studies. This critique is not of the studies themselves, but rather the gap in the literature generally concerning ethnic differences in experiences of climate as well as student responses to climate issues. The limited understanding of student agency in the context of climate studies unintentionally affirms images of AAPI students as passive, accommodating, or socially unconcerned.

Issues of engagement. Despite characterizations of AAPIs as unengaged and overly concerned with academics, several scholars examined how AAPIs engage in institutions. Engagement for AAPIs and students of color more generally occur within a larger institutional climate. For example, negative experiences of race and climate for AAPIs and other students of color often result in social alienation from the larger campus (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), indicating there are barriers for the types of engagements in which they can participate (Rendon, 1994; Tierney, 1999). For example, Kawaguchi (2003) found that Asian students at a Southeast institution report negative racial relations that result in forms of separation from students and student groups. Consequently, beyond academic concerns experienced by all college students, students of color's experiences

also consist of negotiating their place and identity within the larger context of the institution. Therefore, being engaged involves finding spaces of belonging where they can meaningfully participate. The research on AAPIs in higher education highlight how students involve themselves on campus, how students negotiate their environments, and how these activities and experiences affect various outcomes related to persistence, social commitment, and identity.

One area of engagement for students involves curriculum. Asian American Studies (AAS) courses assist students in feeling a sense of belonging by providing a space within the university context in which they can experience academic and social integration (Kiang, 1997, 2000, 2002). Specifically, Kiang (2002) discussed how curriculum and pedagogy are tools that can bridge students' realities outside of school to their learning in the classroom, which he argued is critical for their persistence. Students often feel disconnected to what they are learning because it is not reflective of their reality. Kiang (1997, 2000, 2002) found that AAS courses can help students connect learning to personal community building projects, offering vignettes from students who find a sense of purpose and meaning through these courses. Kiang (1997) also described how AAS courses raise social justice issues, which assist students in their negotiations of race. Finally, Asian American studies can have important implications for student development because the curriculum draws from the varied experiences of Asian Pacific Americans to foster a pan-ethnic understanding of community and history (Kiang, 1997).

Previous research demonstrates that cocurricular involvement, particularly in ethnic-specific or racial organizations, are helpful to mediate the alienating educational spaces encountered by AAPIs in education (Maramba, 2008; Museus, 2008; Rhoads et al., 2002; Vichet & Hudley, 2008). This finding is consistent with other research on students of color (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) as well as literature that show that AAPI students often turn to their peers for social

support (Gloria & Ho, 2003). Some studies also demonstrate that students use these organizations as a basis of pan-ethnic identification and student activism (Rhoads, et al., 2002). Wang, Sedlacek, and Westbrook's (1992) survey study yielded insights into attitudinal differences within and between Asian ethnic groups concerning participation in ethnic-centered student organizations, although the study fails to capture the nature and quality of involvement and the institutional context. Still, Wang et al.'s study is significant in suggesting that students' views on the functionality of ethnic organization are dependent on factors such as generational status and ethnicity. In a quantitative study, Inkelas (2004) also examined participation in ethnic organization among AAPIs and found that it is important for students' ethnic awareness and community commitment; however, she acknowledged that more research needs to be conducted on disaggregated samples of AAPIs. Finally, a study on students of color that included AAPIs in the sample captured how student engagement in student-initiated and student-run support services empower them and their communities (Maldonado, Rhoads, & Buenavista, 2005).

Finally, in addition to curriculum and ethnic organizations or other pan-ethnic movements, students engage in relationships or interactions with students from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. Studies examining cross-racial interactions indicate that meaningful interactions with peers from different racial/ethnic background can result in positive outcomes (Antonio, 2004). Specifically, students who engage meaningfully with students from different backgrounds are less likely to remain isolated (Saenz, Ngai, & Hurtado, 2007). These studies suggest that students' positive and meaningful engagements with one another can have positive influences on both themselves and others. Under appropriate institutional circumstances, students may be able to use these meaningful engagements to learn and teach others about themselves. Collectively, literature on engagements are important for highlighting the agency of students in

the face of hostile climates or hegemonic forces, which create an atmospheric nature of racism on campus that devalue and distort their self-concepts. I continue this perspective in my study of Hmong students, recognizing their potential to resist dominant images of themselves through negotiated cross-racial interactions and collective projects of identity.

Issues of identity development. As higher education provides the opportunity to encounter and interact with people from different backgrounds, these experiences can influence how students see themselves. The literature on AAPI college student development and identity in higher education suggests that various background characteristics and experiences (e.g., ethnicity, generation, class, religion) as well as contextual experiences are important for how students experience college and develop identity (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002). Kodama and colleagues argued that identity development occurs within the students' environmental context, motivated by the need to reconcile tensions between their own and their families' cultural values and societal values. Kodama et al. (2002) proposed that a core tension that students must negotiate is societal racism. In fact, a number of scholars propose that race is a significant aspect of development because of the reality of racial hegemony (Alvarez, 2002; Kawaguchi, 2003; Kim, 1981, Museus, Nguyen, Vue, & Yeung, in press; Nadal, 2004). Alvarez (2002) emphasized that the college environment provides an opportunity to develop a pan-ethnic identity through students' personal experiences with racial dynamics on campus or from settings, such as ethnic studies courses, that raise awareness of historical and societal racism. Alvarez noted, however, that there are challenges to pan-ethnic identification given the diverse group within.

While some development models for AAPIs propose stage models in which ethnic and racial identity exists at separate stages (Kim, 1981; Nadal, 2004), others offer the possibility to

develop along multiple intersecting identifications (race, ethnicity, pan-minority consciousness) (Museus et al., in press). Museus and colleagues' (in press) stage model allows for development along three dimensions of identification; however, it does not necessarily address how gender and other identifications might affect those processes. Kawaguchi (2003) did not address the existence of multiple identities, but she uncovered that precollege and college experiences with racism and discrimination raise students' consciousness of their minority status.

Other identity research suggests that the centrality or extent to which one thinks about their ethnic and racial identity can vary depending on generational status (Philip, 2007). In addition to identifying generational differences for her multidimensional model, Philip's (2007) suggested that particular Asian ethnic groups, such as Chinese Americans, may be more likely to view racial identity and ethnic identity similarly than others, who might be more inclined to view them separately. She provided examples from participant feedback of her survey instrument: A Chinese student found it difficult to separate his Asian Americanness from his Chinese identity, and two East Indians found the Asian American racial category an oversimplification. Finally, Philip suggested that other factors such as religion may be important in racial and ethnic identity.

Overall, these studies suggest that various background characteristics and contextual factors (localized and larger social forces) have important implications for one's self-concept. These perspectives have implications for how students negotiate their environments and identity. Although I review these task-oriented or stage development models as relevant for understanding the racial and identity processes of students' journeys through college, the current study is more concerned with how students activate ethnicity to negotiate hostile climates and race images of themselves. Specifically, this investigation is interested in how identity is expressed in behavioral and qualitative terms rather than attitudinal and quantitative. Particularly, this study is

interested in exploring the sociocultural and structural constraints as well as the agency involved in mediating those constraints through expressions of identity at the interpersonal level and collective level as well as through the formal curriculum.

Significance

Expanding diversity and minority to include AAPIs. Despite the advances made in understanding the experiences of students of color, the literature on race and diversity remains incomplete and inconsistent in how AAPIs are studied. They are more often excluded than included from diversity and minority student research. Inkelas (2003) described Asian Americans as “diversity’s missing minorities” because they are often marginalized from social justice discourses. Nonetheless, there remains much to learn about AAPI higher education experiences and how they may complicate current notions of diversity and race as it applies specifically to policy, practices, and research in higher education.

In the last several decades, the field of higher education has made some significant strides in understanding the campus climate experiences of students of color. For example, scholars continue to document differences in how students of color and White students experience the college environment (Fleming, 1984; Rendon, 1994; Smedley et al., 1993; Tierney, 1999). Although challenges are documented among racial minority groups and AAPIs specifically (Ancis et al., 2000; Alvarez & Yeh, 1999; Chan & Wang, 1991; Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Kotori & Malaney, 2003; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Museus & Truong, 2009), AAPIs continue to be viewed as socially and culturally well adjusted in colleges and universities. The belief that AAPIs are well adjusted is partly due to their visible and highly publicized attainment among the nation’s most coveted institutions. This notion is captured in popular racial jokes that boldly suggest that Asians have taken over colleges and universities

across the country: MIT as “Made in Taiwan,” and UCLA as “University of Caucasians Living Among Asians” (Osajima, 2005). Constructed as a monolithic and therefore overrepresented group, AAPIs exist outside the purview of social justice concerns, as a primary assumption that is they no longer experience barriers or challenges associated with their race.

This persistent perception has largely silenced AAPIs from social justice debates and marginalized them from discourses of race in higher education, which often convene around issues of diversity and minority student status. Omi (2001) describe how African Americans, Latina/os, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans have become the five basic demographic blocs that are subjects of multiculturalism. This narrow definition of diversity has marginalized AAPI ethnic groups by ignoring intradiversity and denying their heterogeneous identities and experiences with race even as it operates to constrain them in similar ways. Consequently, S. S. Lee (2006) argued that AAPIs are “de-minoritized” because their diversity and diverse achievement patterns are obscured by policy, practice, and research that aggregate data and present AAPIs as a culturally similar and high-achieving group.

Both diversity and minority student issues are largely constructed in Black-White terms in which AAPIs hold a tenuous position as insiders and outsiders. As a result of this construction, AAPIs remain peripheral and injurious to social justice interests. Perceived as an overrepresented monolithic group, AAPIs are constructed as threatening institutional diversity goals with their overrepresentation (S. S. Lee, 2006), even taking spaces from other minorities (Kidder, 2006). Simultaneously, their presence complicates debates about race-based initiatives. Omi and Takagi (1996) described AAPIs as abandoned by the political left and embraced by the political right to assert a rhetoric of excellence and meritocracy that is harmful for all racial minorities (Omi & Takagi, 1996; Osajima, 2005) but more immediately and visibly so for Blacks, Latinos, and

American Indians than for AAPIs. The silencing of AAPIs results in others' speaking for them as do conservatives in debates of affirmative action policy (Omi & Takagi, 1996) while in other instances, they remain unspoken for in select institutional programming directed for racial minority populations (Suzuki, 2002).

Hence, the language of "minority student" perpetuates strict binaries and perceptions of race in which AAPIs are often cast as honorary Whites and perceived as culturally assimilated (i.e., just like Whites) in higher education institutions. These notions about AAPI educational experiences are dependent on disregarding the broader social context where AAPIs continue to experience negative consequences of race. This study attempts to examine these assumptions and the dichotomy presented by resituating AAPI educational experience into the larger sociological context of U.S. race relations. This study also explores how these assumptions inform a limited understanding of multiculturalism in educational institutions that reinforce cultural domination for Whites and reinforce the atmospheric nature of racism for students of color in schools. It does so by linking racialization of AAPIs at the institutional level (as either categorical aggregation of various ethnic identities or as a racial Other) to campus racial climate experiences of Hmong students.

The "hidden injuries of race" for AAPIs (Osajima, 1993), which remains underexplored, is a significant gap and an opportunity for greater understanding of the experiences of students of color. AAPI experiences have been and continue to be significant for understanding the ongoing debates involving race in higher education. I argue that uncovering their experiences is critical for grappling with tensions, disconnects, and limits within discourses centered on the minority student. This study aims to contribute to the larger literature on the higher education experiences of students of color, specifically focusing on Hmong students' experiences of campus climate

and race as products of both institutional structure and interpersonal interaction. In addition to examining experiences with climate, my investigation also examines students' negotiations of identity and how the institutional setting can shape the racial content and meaning for one's identity within that context. Specifically, I explore the role of institutional context in shaping the nature, limits, and possibilities of identity negotiations and their collective influence on students' perception of climate. In doing so, I add to the extant literature by providing accounts of AAPI experiences at institutions with varying student demographics.

Disaggregating and validating AAPI intradiversity. This study aims to advance the evolving research agenda put forth by preceding scholars of higher education (e.g., Hune & Chan, 1997; Inkelas, 2003, 2006; Kiang, 2000; Museus, 2008; Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suzuki, 2002; Teranishi, 2010), which include disaggregated research into AAPI collegiate experiences. I aim to do so by focusing on Hmong Americans students, an underrepresented and understudied population of students within the larger AAPI category. Although Hmong Americans have garnered some attention in education, their inclusion in higher education research remain largely limited to a statistic in portraits of disaggregated national data or remain an example cited to compel researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to consider educational consequences of racial aggregation. Outside of these numbers, there remains limited understanding of the experiences of Hmong Americans as they navigate higher education.

Understanding Hmong students' higher education experiences can provide depth and insight to AAPI experiences by shedding light into one specific group's experiences. This is not to suggest that the current study attempts to be representative of all Hmong students' experiences. This research moves beyond the arguments for disaggregating inquiry to advance understanding of within-group experiences with race, racialization, and consequently campus

climate. By examining Hmong student experiences, this study adds to the extant research to provide a more complete, accurate, and holistic picture of AAPIs and students of color more generally. In doing so, my purpose is to inform student affairs practitioners of AAPIs' diverse needs and how they can better support AAPI students. Finally, my findings affirm policies and practices of disaggregated data collection and analysis, such as the practice of collecting admissions data for 23 different AAPI groups at the University of California, which remains one of the few institutions to do so.

Summary

Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans represent a diverse group of individuals and communities who have been demarcated as different based on their phenotype. While recognizing that intradiversity and the internal struggles of AAPIs is critical, it is also necessary to disrupt and overcome the ways in which AAPIs are deterministically constructed and collectively marginalized (Lowe, 2005).

Although race is a defining experience for people of color and therefore has instructive value, it can be constraining for ethnicity. Racial formation theory explicates that the processes of race and ethnicity are ultimately inextricably involved and work to redefine the other (Omi & Winant, 1994). Like race, ethnicity is fluid, ever evolving in content and constantly negotiated with changing social conditions that inform meaning and representation (Nagel, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994). However, ethnicity is conceptually distinct from race (as employed in this study) because it reflects internal assertions rather than external ascription (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007). Scholars have debated the applicability of the concept of ethnicity for people of color (Kibria, 2000; Song, 2003; Tuan, 1998; Waters, 1999) because unlike White Americans, who have ethnic options (Waters, 1990), people of color experience racial boundaries that are socially enforced

and imposed (Waters, 1999). However, despite being racialized ethnics—ethnic groups who are racialized (Tuan, 1998)—people of color may exert ethnicity for self-definition and possibility negotiate race (Song, 2003). One example is when AAPIs exert a collective identity or pan-ethnicity (Espiritu, 1992) to challenge the symbolic contents and material consequences of race. Therefore, the use of race and ethnicity in this study addresses: a) the ways in which race categorically informs ethnicity, and b) issues of agency in racial formations.

The racialization of AAPIs throughout history is informative for contextualizing the experiences of Hmong Americans in the current context. A critical review of how AAPIs have been collectively racialized demonstrates how racial images were created and maneuvered under specific power dynamics and historical contexts to maintain the social and cultural hegemony of Whites. Such images have analytical bearing for Hmong Americans, who experience race in specific but familiar ways.

Finally, this study is guided by the existing body of research in higher education that accounts for AAPI experiences of climate, engagement, and identity. This body of literature empirically grounds the need to further examine and understand AAPI student experiences. In particular, there is limited understanding of AAPI experiences of climate at institutions where there exists a plurality of AAPIs or people of color more generally. Additionally, there remains little inquiry into how disaggregated groups of students experience climate and how they actively engage in resisting negative climates. Uncovering the individual group experiences is particularly necessary given the different ways that students self-identity, experience identity, and engage in higher education contexts.

Collectively, the literature reviewed in this section guides the study theoretically and empirically. Such an analytical framework enables the study to contribute to current discourses

of social justice. Specifically, this study aims to expand the discourse on diversity and minorities in higher education to include AAPI experiences. The review of literature also provides the empirical context to begin to understand and affirm the diverse experiences among AAPI students, which are largely ignored or misunderstood.

CHAPTER THREE – Context and Conceptual Framework

Context

Southeast Asian Americans

Southeast Asian Americans consists of multiple groups that differ in ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. Although Southeast Asia as a region that consist of 10 different countries, literature on SEAs often refer to Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, Hmong/Mong,⁴ and Mien/Iu-Mien (to a lesser extent) because they share a unique political history with one another and with the United States (Um, 2003). SEAs are post-1965 political refugees who immigrated to the United States as a result of different but interconnected sociopolitical occurrences in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Takaki, 1989). Earlier literature often refers to as them as Indochinese because of their shared history under French colonial rule. This history directly relates to their presence in the United States. In an effort to avoid essentializing SEAs, I briefly address relevant socioeconomic and cultural differences among SEAA groups while summarizing their experiences as a group. I conclude with emphasis on their collective importance to higher education research as well as the value of studying these groups separately.

Social identity, immigration, economic and cultural histories. SEAA refugees came to the United States in at least two waves (some have said three; see Takaki, 1989), representing the variation of immigration experiences and socioeconomic status within groups (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995). According to Ima and Rumbaut (1995), the first wave was comprised primarily of Vietnamese refugees who were urban, educated elites while the second was comprised primarily of lowland Lao and highland Hmong and Iu-Mien (often from Laos), Khmer survivors (from

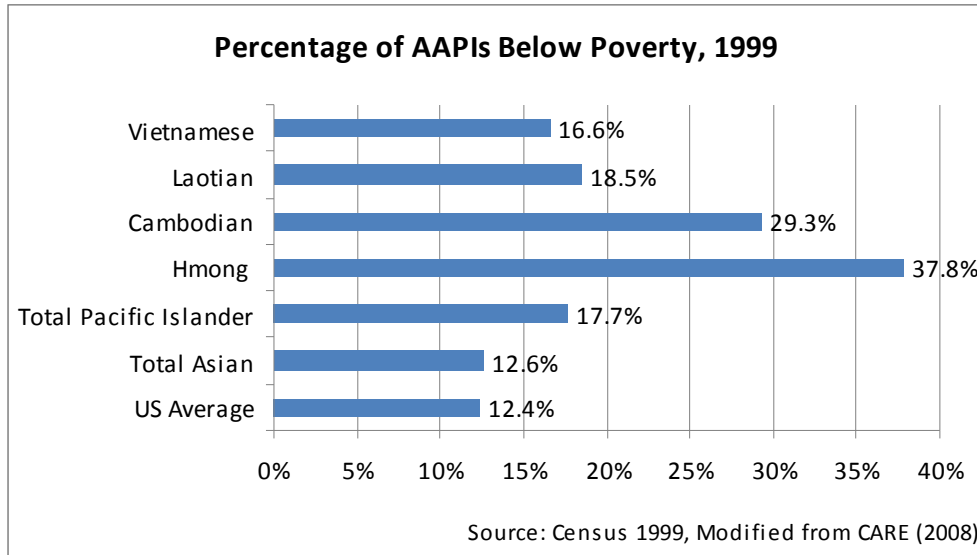
⁴ “Hmong/Mong” reflects dialect difference and encompasses the identity politics within Hmong Americans. I note this here to acknowledge the discontents, but use Hmong for the rest of the paper. Additionally, I use Hmong and Hmong American interchangeably throughout the paper.

Cambodia), and Chinese-Vietnamese and Vietnamese “boat people,” all of whom were more rural and less educated persons with fewer transferable skills. The Hmong and Iu-Mien are often described in similar ways as coming from premodern societies (i.e., farming backgrounds, having little or no formal schooling experiences, and having little familiarity with urban life) (Barker & Saechao, 2000; Fadiman, 1997; Timm, 1994). Hmong have the least formal education of all groups as they come from a preliterate background with no written language prior to the 1950s, when the missionaries developed a written notation based on the Roman alphabet (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Though all groups faced the same affliction of fleeing a war-torn country, those among the second wave faced greater disruption in their lives, experienced genocide, a more traumatic escape, and years in refugee camps before being resettled in the United States (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995). Beyond immigration experience, there exist complicated and conflicting ethnic differences in identity and cultural backgrounds. Though both Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese ethnics (also called Chinese-Vietnamese or Sino-Vietnamese) comprise the Vietnamese population, there is often no distinguishing of these groups in the analysis, which may have important implications given their differences (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995). Additionally, Hmong and Iu-Mien populations have always held a minority status, from their legacies in China to their lives as ethnic minorities of Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. However, numbers for Iu-Mien are often too small and remain absent in comparative studies while both Hmong and Iu-Mien are sometimes lumped under “Laotians” in reports (Gomez, 2005). Finally, SEAA subgroups are culturally different from one another: Where Confucianism underlies Vietnamese and Chinese-Vietnamese cultural norms, Buddhism serves more influential for Laotian and Khmer (Ima &

Rumbaut, 1995). All of these factors have implications for socioeconomic location, identity, and educational experiences for SEAA students.

Figure 3-1 Percentage of AAPIs Below Poverty, 1999



In the United States, SEAAs have high rates of poverty and often live in concentrated poverty such as segregated neighborhoods (CARE, 2008; Teranishi, 2004). With low human capital, the majority of SEAAs find themselves in lower paid occupations and experience difficulty adjusting to an information and finance driven economy (CARE, 2008). Overall, SEAAs are at greater risk of mental health issues such as depression or post traumatic stress yet are less likely to utilize treatment (Hsu, Davies, & Hansen, 2004). These mental health concerns also affect children of refugees who face a host of psychological issues stemming from intergenerational effects of war-related trauma (Han, 2006; Kiang, 2002; Koltyk, 1998).

As relatively new immigrants, SEAAs continue to negotiate U.S. institutions (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Over half live in linguistically isolated households, indicating that adults speak no English at home and speak English less than very well (CARE, 2008). English language learning programs in school are critical and relevant for this population, as many SEAA students

are placed in these programs (Ima & Rumbaut, 1995). These issues will likely continue to be relevant with the recent migration of Hmong refugees in the last decade.

Finally, literature documents high rates of intergenerational conflict as new societal constraints require families to negotiate the continuing role of ethnic culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Among the 1.5 and second generations, delinquency issues such as truancy, gang activity, teen pregnancy, and early marriage have been documented as impeding high school completion and the pathway to college. As a result of the circumstances enumerated above, SEAA students, who are often first-time college students, collectively have community experiences that put them at higher risk of attrition in college (Yeh, 2002). Therefore, given that these factors (i.e., ethnicity, SES, generation) have differential impact on student development and adjustment (Alvarez, 2002; Hune, 2002; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001), scholars must account for the educational experiences of specific groups.

Hmong American Background and History

Hmong people are an ethnic minority group that lives around the world primarily in China, Southeast Asia, and the United States. As a diasporic community, a sense of collective identity is attributed to their tumultuous history and ongoing existence as an ethnic minority group (G. Y. Lee & Tapp, 2010; Thao, 1999). In China and Southeast Asia, Hmong traditionally lived as hill tribesmen practicing swidden agriculture and a patrilineal clan system, both of which have been central in the social organization of Hmong culture and customs. The majority of Hmong Americans belong to one of 18 clan surnames. Hmong also practice shamanism or Christianity and speak the Hmong language, which includes multiple dialects. Prior to the 20th century, Hmong language was exclusively spoken, although written forms of Hmong have been developed and popularized since the mid-20th century (G. Y. Lee & Tapp, 2010).

Though there are many theories of origin, Hmong people trace their history to China where there continues to exist large numbers of Hmong under the larger ethnic umbrella of Miao. Hmong/Miao⁵ history in China chronicles a legacy of ethnic oppression—including periodic war and genocide, economic marginalization, and forced cultural assimilation—from multiple ruling Chinese ethnic groups (G. Y. Lee & Tapp, 2010; Thao, 1999). While it is documented that Hmong ethnics once resided in central China, conflict and warfare with groups such as Han prompted several migrations, driving them south where the majority Miao in China currently reside. Population pressure, poverty, ethnic marginalization, and ongoing struggles for sovereignty eventually led large populations of Hmong to the Southeast Asian countries of Burma (Myanmar), Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos.

Hmong Americans are primarily from Laos, where they first migrated in the 19th century. Since their migration from China to Laos, they experienced minimal stability, having to navigate periodic episodes of political turmoil that occupied the nation. Hmong peoples' foremost migration to the United States was largely driven by the a) civil war occurring in Laos, which was a localized conflict inextricably tied to the Vietnam War, and b) the intervention of multiple

⁵ It is understood that Hmong have ties to particular subgroups of Miao in Southwest China; however, culturally they vary due to migration histories of Hmong diasporic communities. While these ties are generally accepted by both western scholars and the Hmong communities in the west, there is general understanding that the history of Hmong people in China, which rely heavily on the written accounts of Mandarin scholars (since Hmong had no written system), is somewhat difficult to recover fully due to the ways that multiple groups were aggregated under "Miao." Despite this issue and varied theories of origin (e.g., China, Siberia) (Quincy, 1995), there is a distinct narrative that Hmong people in Southeast Asia and the west (e.g., Americas, France, Australia) hold on to as part of their identity. Included in this narrative is a legacy of conflict and ethnic oppression: First, in China from more dominant groups; later, periodically in Southeast Asian countries from both the nations' ethnic groups as well as colonial powers (G. Y. Lee & Tapp, 2010). According to historians of Hmong people, the history of Miao in China is largely consistent with the oral histories of Hmong.

"Hmong" is the term Hmong people (at least in Southeast Asia and those in the west) call themselves and is a somewhat new term in the literature. Virtually all of the pre-1950s literature on Hmong refers to them as Miao or "Meo." The latter term is like the Lao version of Miao, but it carries derogatory connotations, which may not be shared with Miao. Hmong do not accept this term and have made others (e.g., missionaries, U.S. government officials) aware of their preference for the term "Hmong," accounting for its wider use in western literature, primarily after the 1950s and when referring to those in Southeast Asia.

colonial forces, which exacerbated Hmong peoples' ethnic minority and marginalized status. In particular, their involvement in the U.S.'s Cold War and Vietnam War related efforts in Laos—in what became known as the Secret War (Quincy, 2000)—became a turning point in their history, eventually leading to their mass exodus due to immediate ethnic persecution in the war's aftermath. The Secret War was the Central Intelligence Agency's covert military-led operations that involved recruiting, training, and arming a guerilla force of Laotian Hill tribes. These tribes were primarily made up of Hmong ethnics who were trained to rescue American pilots, gather intelligence, and cut off the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the primary military supply route for communist forces that passed through the country. Hmong people were recruited both for their expertise in navigating the rough terrain and their tenuous place as an ethnic minority group, with much to gain and lose. With the fall of Saigon and no victory in sight, the U.S. military advisors withdrew from Laos, leaving the vast majority of Hmong. Because of their participation on the allied forces, Hmong faced immediate ethnic persecution in the war's aftermath. As a result, the majority of Hmong were left to flee by foot to neighboring Thailand. After making the treacherous journey through the jungle and across the Mekong River, those who survived were not welcomed and were placed in refugee camps under dire and uncertain conditions, some for as long as 30 years, until they gained entry into other countries.

Although Hmong (and other SEA) refugees migrated to a number of western countries, the largest number migrated to the United States in several waves. The earliest Hmong migrants came during the mid-1970s in very small numbers when U.S. military advisors pulled out of Laos. The majority, however, came from the refugee camps in the decade that followed, with smaller numbers arriving into the 1990s. In 2003, nearly 30 years after the first migrants' arrival, the United States approved the resettlement of the most recent group of Hmong refugees. This

group consisted of approximately 15,000 Hmong who were expected to be repatriated to Laos when Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand's final remaining and unofficial refugee camp, prepared for permanent closure.

The resettlement process for Hmong and other SEAA refugees were largely conducted through voluntary agencies, or VOLAGs, and their local affiliates. Many of the voluntary agencies had religious ties, resulting in many churches and private American sponsors providing direct assistance to refugees. Between 1975 and 1995, SEA refugees were resettled in the United States under a dispersal policy intended to assimilate refugees quickly and limit overburdening the local host communities. Consequently, many refugees found themselves isolated in small, rural, and predominantly White towns across the country. Despite attempts to scatter refugees, many SEAs undertook a secondary migration, relocating from their initial resettlement location to reestablish clan ties (Chan, 1994) in other parts of the country, particularly in localities that were known to have the most advantageous social services (e.g., English language programs, job placement programs, government aid programs). The formation of ethnic communities continued to develop as even more secondary migrants sought to relocate out of isolation and closer to family and community. Meanwhile, chain migration in the form of direct refugee sponsorship and later family reunification—that is, through family reunification policies—also added to the growing ethnic enclaves. In contrast to the earlier Hmong refugees who were dispersed throughout communities across the nation, refugees who arrived after 2003 were primarily resettled in states where ethnic enclaves had formed as a result of secondary migration, namely, California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. These states currently have the largest populations of Hmong Americans.

While Hmong communities are scattered throughout the United States, the largest concentrations of Hmong Americans live in Fresno County in California and the Saint Paul-Minneapolis metropolitan area. Fresno County was a desirable location due to the vast farming land, mild winters, comparatively lower living costs, and the state's liberal welfare policies (Lieb, 1996). Contrary to California, Minnesota with its cold climate seemed to be an unlikely place of resettlement for Hmong Americans; however, according to Vang (2008), "Minnesota's strong faith-based, voluntary community was instrumental in the resettlement of Hmong refugees" (pp. 11-12). Specifically, several local agencies worked directly with or were local affiliates of national religious agencies (e.g., U.S. Catholic Conference, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services) that were tasked with the resettlement of Hmong refugees.

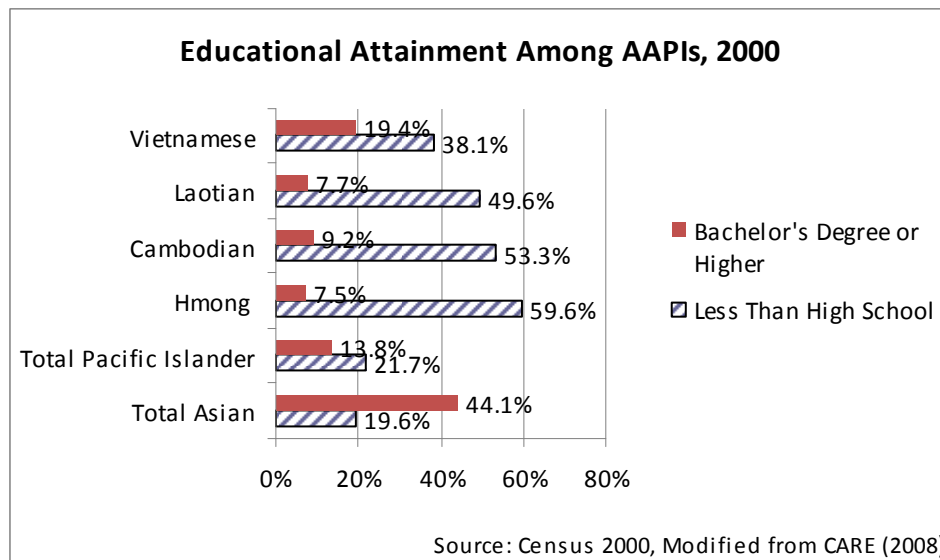
The size of the Hmong community within each locality is symbolized through the two largest ethnic cultural festivities. Thousands of Hmong Americans gather to celebrate the annual Hmong New Year in Fresno in December and the annual soccer tournament in St. Paul in July. Within these two greater metropolitan areas, Hmong have been able to build relatively stable ethnic communities, consisting of their own nonprofit organizations and small businesses that serve the interests of Hmong and other Southeast Asians Americans. Additionally, in both localities, Hmong Americans have been elected to public office. As a result of such visible and viable ethnic centers, it was believed that such a community presence would be able to support when the most recent migration of refugees came to the United States. However, it has been more of a challenge than originally anticipated.

Hmong Americans and Implications for Higher Education

Hmong Americans are underrepresented in higher education and, as a community, have one of the lowest educational attainment rates when separated out of the AAPI category: Only

7.4 percent over aged 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 42.7 percent of the aggregated AA category and 25 percent of the overall U.S. population—Black (14.2 percent), Latino (10.3 percent), and White (25.9 percent) (CARE 2008; Pfeifer & Lee, 2004). Along with other SEAAs and Filipinos, Hmong Americans are the least likely of their Asian counterparts to attend highly selective institutions (measured by average combined SAT scores) (Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004).

Figure 3-2 Educational Attainment Among AAPIs, 2000



However, while Hmong Americans are underrepresented in higher education and may themselves experience the difficulties of alienation and tokenism associated with underrepresentation (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998; Loo & Rolison, 1986), outsiders may have a completely different view of them. Others perceive them as simply Asian Americans. Although college is an opportune environment to foster a pan-ethnic identity (Alvarez, 2002), Hmong students may experience this process tenuously as they negotiate contradictory racial narratives and attempt to understand their experiences within the larger AAPI collective. Though many have often cited Hmong as evidence of the diversity within

AAPIs and the need for disaggregating the AAPI category (Hune, 2002; Suzuki, 2002; Yeh, 2002), there remain few published studies (except for S. J. Lee, 1997) that qualitatively explore their college experiences and to what extent racialization affects their identity, experiences, and perceptions of climate.

Hmong American Student Racial Experiences in Education

Racism and discrimination. Hmong Americans' college experiences show that their difficulties in adjusting may be a result of racial experiences outside and inside of school. Examining the experiences of 21 women who are pursuing or completed a college degree, S. J. Lee's (1997) article is a seminal piece uncovering how Hmong women's college experiences are constrained by economic conditions (which render them vulnerable to welfare policy) and racism. In Lee's study, Hmong in Wisconsin are targets of media stereotypes that portray them as "lazy,' 'stupid,' 'backwards,' and 'foreign,'" creating the wide perception that they are all on welfare. Participants described racist taunts from Whites who articulate these stereotypes and tell them to return to their own country. Lee found that many of the women have internalized the racism of the dominant society and question their own self-worth, which in turn leads them to withdraw and remain silent in class.

Although participants' pursuit of college is in part motivated by hopes of achieving social mobility, some are constrained by their poverty and welfare reform in Wisconsin. While S. J. Lee's (1997) study focused on how higher education affects culture and concurrently how societal constraints affect their ability to pursue education, questions remain about how these factors resonate with students' experiences both outside and inside the classroom as they navigate their college education. Therefore, it is necessary to explore how students negotiate, make meaning, and respond to their racialized experiences.

Within colleges, students experience the social environment through both the psychological (e.g., perceptions of race relations) and behavioral dimensions (e.g., discriminatory acts) (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). In a survey study attempting to elucidate some of the factors that help Hmong students acclimate to a small, private four-year college, Crevier (2002) found that Hmong students overwhelmingly report checking off items “feeling isolated on campus” and “encountering acts of discrimination inside the classroom.” These findings are supported by other research in which Hmong and other SEA students recount specifically encountering racist remarks from both college peers and professors (Um, 2003). While over half of Crevier’s sample was involved with campus organizations, the majority of those were only involved in Hmong student organizations suggesting that they are isolated from the larger social environment.

Content, pedagogy and institutional norms. The educational experiences of Hmong in elementary and secondary schools demonstrate the salience of race and identity in educational institutions where both racialization from outsiders and individuals perceptions of their identity interact to shape educational experiences. School agents often view them as foreign, culturally different or un-American, believing that students’ problems in school would be solved once they became more assimilated. Teachers in Adler’s (2004) study rooted the problem in students’ cultural deficit. In Lei’s (2003) study, teachers contrasted Hmong males with “Americanized students” and defined Hmong males as “deviant,” “mysterious,” and “clannish” because they were quiet in class and kept to themselves rather than initiated conversations with and opened up to teachers. Additionally, institutional practices (e.g., curricular focus on food fairs rather than culturally relevant pedagogy, tracking into lower level courses) work to socially and academically isolate Hmong from the larger culture of the school (Adler, 2004; S. J. Lee, 2002,

2005; Thao, 2003). For example, S. J. Lee (2002, 2005) documented how the unofficial policy of deferring all problems (related to Hmong students) to the ESL department indicates that anything that deviated from the White upper middle class norm was not within the purview of the high school.

In college, DePouw (2006) found that student affairs personnel and researchers who worked with Hmong often subjected them to stereotypes that essentialized them as foreigners. At a conference for state personnel who worked with students of color, a Hmong student was asked specifically to speak about his ancestors. In doing so, he validated his academic achievements as positive by remaining a “traditional, culturally situated” Hmong student rather than one whose achievements could be interpreted as coming at the cost of “over-Americanization” (DePouw, 2006, p. 214). This example also highlights a limited concept of multiculturalism, similar to the food fairs of Adler’s study, suggesting that Hmong students’ cultural distinctiveness is the only way they are considered to meaningfully contribute to the diversity.

DePouw’s (2006) analysis demonstrates how Hmong (and minority) student interest was only superficially embraced by the rhetoric of campus diversity but marginally supported. For example, student-initiated activities that centered around culture (e.g., culture shows, conferences) were praised by university officials because they could point to it as an example of the diversity at their school, but university officials refused to grant requests by Hmong students for a language class. Her study demonstrated how interactions with student personnel continue to exclude them as cultural outsiders and institutional conventions reinforce their marginalization on campus. For example, DePouw pointed to the addition of “multicultural” student services and offices as a way to avoid meaningful institutional change as “students of color were admittedly placed in hostile learning environments throughout the campus, but were directed to these offices

that were considered safe for them” (p. 205). Additionally, since Hmong only received services when they were “good” Hmong, racial diversity became “symbolic, exotic and ‘reasonable’ rather than threatening” to the White institutional norm of the university (DePouw, 2006, p. 206). These practices demonstrate how Hmong students are essentialized, racialized as different, and situated as outsiders who begrudgingly need incorporation into the larger culture of the school. DePouw offers an analysis of Hmong students’ experiences of race; however, her account leaves questions about how students engage in racial formation process to disrupt race images and shape institutions climate.

Conceptual Framework

National debates around issues of access, representation, and equity of outcomes shape the landscape of higher education institutions and become intricately woven into the fabric of institutional culture. As such, higher education institutions imbed racial politics and participate in reinscribing as well as reinventing race through policies that they adopt (and fail to adopt) while reshaping the educational terrain with the faces of its student demographic. Accordingly, Nkomo (1992) described how the racelessness of organizations results in the reduction of race to an “added on” variable to simply take note of the different experiences of people of color within institutions; in actuality, race emanates from the core of cultural entities, which both colors and privileges people’s experiences. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study operates under the assumption that higher education institutions are racial institutions—that institutions are “intervened” with rather than simply intervening in, “structured” rather than simply structuring, and a subject of rather than merely an object of racial disputes (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 12). I explore Hmong students’ experiences within distinct racialized contexts, which produce and reproduce race in its cultural practices.

Figure 3.3 (p. 62) provides a model of the conceptual framework that guides my exploration of Hmong students' experiences with race and negotiations of identity. Below I describe the model, which combines Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) model of intersecting identity (at the center of the model) with Milem et al.'s (2005) and Hurtado et al.'s (1998, 1999) models of campus racial climate (at the outer level). Both models enable me to examine the interaction between individuals and structures and how students might find avenues for negotiating constraints on identity and climate. I begin the description of the model by explaining identity as negotiated through student agency. Specifically, I discuss the role of personal interaction, collective action, and curriculum as avenues or opportunities to assert ethnicity and resist racialized narratives. Next, I explain a model of identity (Abes et al., 2007) and follow with campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 1998,1999), which structures constraints on identity.

Negotiating identity. This study critically examines *how* students engage in a complex process of self-definition and self-representation as a response to the racial content and racial climate of institutional environments. Through this exploration, Hmong students' experiences are not simply determined by categories assigned to them (i.e., racialization) but are a process of student agency that includes acts of resistance. Through a view of ethnicity that situates identity in processes of culture as negotiated rather than fixed, Hmong students are more than the essentialized images that attempt to define them. Students' negotiations of identity occur in formal and informal contexts through individual interpersonal interaction, collective action, and in the curriculum. Therefore, in addition to a view of ethnicity, I draw on literature of student engagement that indicates that curriculum, personal interaction (i.e., cross-racial interaction), and collective action (i.e., formal or informal cocurricular activities) can help students explore,

express, and assert their identities. I view these forms of engagements as opportunities to negotiate identity and consequently the environments.

Understanding *how*, *why*, and *when* students evoke ethnicity to resist hegemonic practices and racial narratives requires an understanding of how students view themselves. While my focus is Hmong students' experiences of ethnicity as related to culture, I draw from critical race feminists' perspectives that argue for recognition of intersecting aspects such as class, gender, and religion as basis of identification that inform meaning making. An identity model developed by Jones and McEwen (2000), and later Abes et al. (2007), incorporated such aspects. I propose that this view is necessary for understanding how identity is negotiated. For example, although it might be expected that much of Hmong students' community experiences are grounded in their low socioeconomic status, as demonstrated by their high rate of poverty (and thus experience similar associated circumstances, segregated neighborhoods and schools, etc.), they do not all share the same SES, nor do they all share the same experiences as individuals. Likewise, the experiences of Hmong women are markedly different from males. They face different sociocultural circumstances such as cultural binds, which require more negotiation in order to pursue college, yet they matriculate at higher rates than males. Dismissing these realities would serve as erasures to their lived experiences and misguide understandings of how students engage in assertions of ethnicity.

The intersections of these experiences inform unique and varied identities that ultimately filter meaning (Abes et al., 2007; Jones and McEwen, 2000) and therefore likely shape the nature of those negotiations. This intersectionality is relevant whether the negotiations occur through collective action based on identification or individual experiences with cross-racial interaction. In other words, the ways in which students negotiate the environment and their identities are

dependent on the saliency of identity as determined by their background experiences, (such as prior experiences with racialization and gender in school and society), as well as current contextual constraints and racial content of the educational terrain. Understanding of how students view themselves and when identity becomes salient can illuminate their engagements for self-determination.

Campus racial climate. To understand the institutional context and structural constraints for identity negotiation, this study also draws on theories of campus racial climate initially developed by Hurtado et al. (1998, 1999) and further extended by Milem et al. (2005). The models address external and internal forces that ultimately shape the climate for diversity at a given institution. The external forces include governmental policy, programs and initiatives, and sociohistorical forces. Within the institutional context, five dimensions that capture processes at the individual and organizational level, which ultimately shape the climate for diversity and consequently the experiences of individuals and groups within institutions. Below, I provide a summary of each dimension.

Compositional diversity, described as structural diversity by Hurtado and colleagues and the majority of campus climate studies, refers to the numerical representation of various racial, ethnic, and gender groups on campus (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005). A diverse student enrollment and faculty are necessary catalysts for achieving a positive, welcoming climate. Compositional diversity can “play an important symbolic role” in communicating the priorities of the campus (Milem et al., 2005, p.15) and has an important role in directly shaping student experiences. Specifically, it has implications for reducing tokenism, isolation, and alienation of racial minority students as well as the potential for fostering a positive campus climate and increased cross-racial interaction that can lead to positive long-term benefits

(Jayakumar, 2008). However, scholars caution institutions in relying solely on compositional diversity for addressing climate issues, as more direct and intentional pedagogical programming are needed (Antonio, et al., 2005; M. J. Chang, J. C. Chang, & Ledesma, 2005; Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). This cautionary note is important for this study, considering that one institutional site for this study has a plurality of AAPIs but a small number of Hmong within. On the other end of the spectrum, the second institution has a critical mass of Hmong students, but AAPIs remain a numerical minority in the predominantly White institution.

Even when institutions succeed in securing a high level of compositional diversity, it cannot be assumed that they have overcome a *historical legacy of exclusion or inclusion*. The historical legacy of exclusion for students of color (at traditionally White institutions) can continue to determine the institutional climate and influence current practices that marginalize students of color (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1998). Many of these practices may go unnoticed in terms of how they benefit a homogenous population, but it is important to acknowledge that they exist as part of a longstanding culture of exclusion. The need for legal pressures and extended litigation regarding diversity obligations serves as an example of institutional resistance and sometimes hostility towards students of color (Hurtado et al., 1998). Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) serve as an example of institutions that have a historic commitment and mission to serving African Americans and whose students of color see better experiential and persistence outcomes (Allen, 1992). This dimension has relevance for Latinos and AAPIs in institutions recently designated as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Asian Serving Institutions (ASIs)⁶ to see if they can yield similar success.

⁶ Asian Serving Institutions (ASIs) are institutions where Asian/Pacific Islanders constitute at least 25 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment while students in other minority groups are less than 25 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment. In 2004, at least half of ASIs were in California. For more discussion, see X. Li (2007).

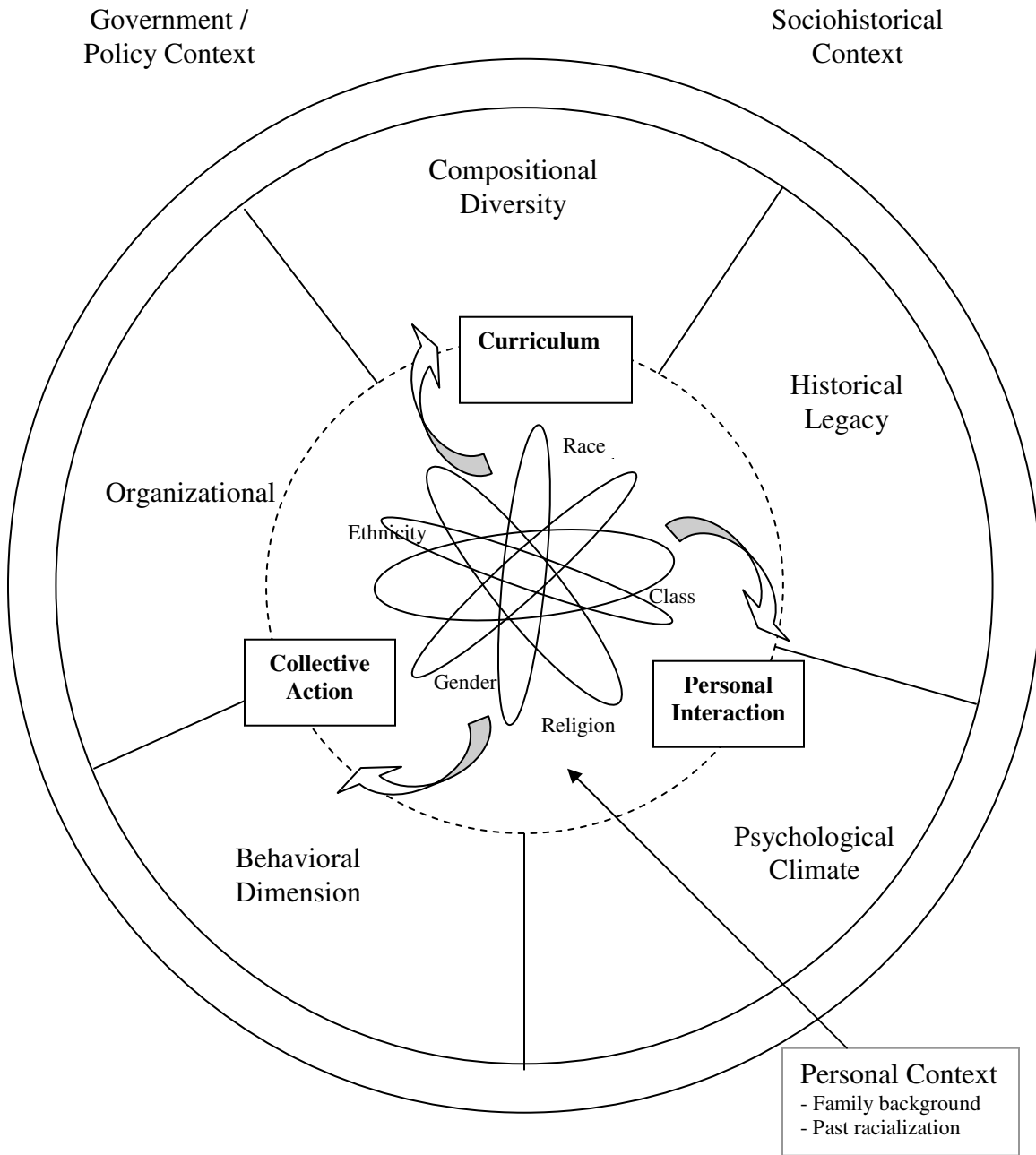
Hurtado et al. (1998) described the *psychological climate* dimension as individuals' perceptions of race generally and the intergroup relationships on campus, institutional responses to diversity, perceptions of discrimination or racial conflict, and attitudes toward those from other backgrounds than one's own. A primary notion is that positionality (one's social location in the institution) affects one's experiences and perceptions of the institution. Students of color are more sensitive to different forms of racism and discrimination and psychological climate affects them in a number of outcomes, including satisfaction and sense of belonging. Depending on the saliency of ethnic and racial identification, Hmong students might perceive the climate differently. While this dimension focuses on views of the individual, it is important to recognize that these views are contextually bound and are a product of the institutional environment. This acknowledgement implicates institutions in being able to take steps that positively enhance perceptions.

Whereas psychological climate focuses on perceptions, the *behavioral climate* dimension concerns social interaction that occurs between individuals of similar background and individuals from another background. Both the nature and quality of the interaction are both important for institutional culture and climate for diversity. Formal and informal interactions occurring inside and outside the classroom that are negative can be isolating, alienating, or constraining. Alternatively, positive interactions are important for fostering one's sense of belonging and mediating negative perceptions of climate. For this study specifically, this dimension provides an opportunity to examine how students individually and collectively experience race and negotiate identity. It views negative interactions as an opportunity for individual identity negotiations or a catalyst for collective negotiations.

Finally, Milem and colleagues (2005) proposed that *organizational or structural diversity* captures decisions about curriculum, budget, tenure, and other structures or processes that guide how campuses operate. These decisions ultimately reflect an invisible organizational culture that provides a foundation for shaping how people view themselves and others. Specifically, it indicates, “how things are done around here” and consequently who is in and out (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 106). For example, Kuh and Whitt (1988) note a dominant culture can present an alienating force for newcomers and underrepresented groups (p.15). This study examines how universities respond to students concerns.

These institutional dimensions structure students’ experiences by reproducing narratives of race that marginalize students’ voices, subject them to essentialization, or fail to include them meaningfully as part of the larger culture of the institution. However, in addition to being constraints for students’ experiences and positive self-concept, I also view organizations as having the potential to permit emancipatory discourses that allow for inclusiveness and self-determined expression. Depending on how institutions operate, students may be less likely to experience isolation, alienation, or climates that are hostile to their sense of self-concept. In other words, climate can be both affirming and dismissive of student identities.

Figure 3-3 Conceptual Framework



Purpose of the Study

Scholars document how Hmong students cannot escape racial images and narratives that are ascribed to AAPIs. Although they may bear little resemblance on the surface, racial images of Hmong students share a legacy of colonialism and racial hegemony that ultimately result in similar and shared consequences. Ironically, the visibility of AAPIs in higher education institutions has resulted in their invisibility as racial minorities. On the Black-White continuum dominating U.S. discourses of race, AAPIs are largely viewed as Whites despite the many instances of racialization, which ultimately confirm their place as racial minorities. However, as AAPIs are being pulled back and forth as either like Blacks or like Whites, they are constructed as distinctively foreign, which is the basis of their marginality. For example, even when AAPIs are viewed as structurally assimilated, they remain cultural outsiders. This unique position and form of racialization have gone largely undertheorized and underexamined in higher education empirical research because there is little room for a minority group that can be and are positioned as purveyors of meritocracy.

The literature in education has been largely unable to grapple with the tensions that AAPIs pose to a Black-White paradigm of race and has been unable to expand current discourses to include them holistically. As a result, AAPIs tenuously exist as insiders and outsiders to diversity discourses and minority students' issues in higher educational debates regarding access and equity. Concerning this study specifically, literature has not fully accounted for the discrepancy in research where it concerns how AAPIs' experience and perceive climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). My model allows me to explore how campus climate, engagement, and identity are related for Hmong students. Given these gaps in literature, I go beyond a Black-

White binary to examine how race specifically locates AAPI educational experiences at the institutional and interpersonal level while acknowledging the sociohistorical context.

By drawing on a concept of racialization, I am able to situate AAPI experiences into a larger frame, which addresses the problems of race as a fixed essential quality and the meanings for why particular images are bestowed on AAPIs. My conceptual model allows me to examine higher education institutions as spaces that project racial narratives through its structures, policies, and practice. The racial narratives that become affirmed through such institutional actions (and inactions) can constrain individuals and groups. The role of ethnicity is critical for this study as it represents a catalyst and a process for negotiating narratives of race and the institutional climates that they foster. Ethnicity can also help elucidate discrepancies among AAPI groups' experiences of race and climate. For the current study, ethnicity is necessary because Hmong students have different social, economic, historical, and cultural circumstances, which may affect how they experience (climate), respond to (engagements), and make meaning (identity) of race in settings where AAPIs are the plurality and a structural minority. Finally, this study is part of a larger effort to extend research on students of color and AAPIs more specifically, recognizing that they are two interrelated pieces to understanding how to provide empirical, theoretical, and practical support for achieving equity and excellence in higher education.

Summary

Southeast Asian Americans share a history in terms of the events that resulted in their migration to the United States, which stem from the conflicts related to the Vietnam War. However, they are a diverse group with varied sociohistorical, premigratory conditions. Collectively, SEAs occupy lower level paying jobs, have higher rates of poverty, and have

lower education attainment when compared to East Asians. Additionally, compared to East Asians, they are least likely to attend selective institutions and they are more likely to be at risk once entering college.

One SEAA group is Hmong Americans, who have experienced a legacy of ethnic marginalization and resistance. They came to the United States as refugees of wars in Southeast Asia. Since they arrived over 30 years ago, Hmong Americans have formed ethnic enclaves in California and Minnesota. However, as a community, they still experience severe underrepresentation in higher education. Literature of their school experiences documents that race is a salient experience for Hmong American students. As S. J. Lee (2002) explained, “Learning America” for them has meant learning they are racial “Others.” These precollege examinations of their educational experiences suggest that they are racialized, and these experiences have limited their opportunities to participate in higher education. It is likely that the dire underrepresentation of Hmong Americans in higher education has limited published empirical inquiry on their experiences.

This study’s attempt to account for Hmong Americans students’ identity (race and ethnicity) in higher education is guided by the notion that race is endemic in institutions. However, students exhibit agency in shifting the terms of inclusion/exclusion. In particular, campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999; Milem et al., 2005) and intersecting identity models (Abes et al., 2007; Jones & McEwen, 2000) frame the current study’s inquiry. Together, these frameworks account for the macro and micro dynamics of racial formations and identity experiences.

To conclude, concepts of racialization, race, and ethnicity inform this study’s framing of identity, which accounts for the numerous ways that AAPIs are understood and the ways that

Hmong Americans are denied recognition. The conceptual framework here attempts to understand the different dimensions of institutional context that affirm or exclude (dimensions of) identity, and therefore shape experiences of climate. Hmong students have different social, economic, historical, and cultural circumstances, which may affect how they experience (climate), respond to (engagements), and make meaning (identity) of race in settings. Their experiences are necessary for better understanding the experiences of AAPI students and students of color more generally.

CHAPTER FOUR – Methodology

Research Questions. This study explores Hmong students' higher education experiences, specifically examining how students engage in a process of self-reconstruction and expression within their institutional contexts. The following questions guide this study.

1. How do Hmong students experience race and ethnicity?
 - How do experiences in college compare to those in K-12?
2. How does institutional context shape racialization and campus climate for Hmong students?
 - How do regional context and institutional characteristics inform racial stereotypes?
 - How are racial stereotypes and campus climate related?
3. How do Hmong students negotiate and perform identity?
 - How, if at all, are student engagements (i.e., interpersonal interaction and collective action) processes for identity negotiations, performances, and assertions?
 - How are identity negotiations and performances transformative?
4. How does the dynamic of personal interaction and institutional racial climate shape achievement?

Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative method was chosen for this study because it seeks to explore how Hmong students understand their experiences. While there are many forms of qualitative inquiry, a key philosophical assumption of qualitative research is that reality is constructed by individuals living and interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen (2007)

described qualitative research as primarily concerned with processes, particularly with how meaning is negotiated. Finally, Sherman and Webb (1998) suggested that qualitative research is concerned with experience, as it is “lived,” “felt” or “undergone” (in Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The purposes for qualitative research, as described by these scholars, are appropriate for my exploration of how racialization influences Hmong students’ experiences in college.

Merriam (1998) characterized case study research as a holistic description and explanation of a particular phenomenon within context. While my proposed study draws on Hmong students’ previous experiences with race in school, through media, and in society generally, my inquiry is bounded by the institutional context. My case study approach looks at each institution to explore how they shape Hmong students’ experiences. As noted by Yin (2003), case studies are appropriate “especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The method intentionally allows one to examine the contextual conditions that may be highly pertinent to the phenomena of the study. According to Babbie (2007), case studies focus attention on one or a few instances of some social phenomenon and “can yield explanatory insights” (p. 298). This study looks at two institutions and attempts to understand the complexities of how racialization influences Hmong students’ experiences within each context. Consequently, student agency within these contexts is a byproduct of that context in terms of how it is necessitated, activated, and constrained.

Babbie (2007) also noted that although case studies are specific, they can also help to explain larger and more general theories. In the current study, each institution serves as a site for understanding Hmong students’ experiences. The current study may also provide more general insights about student development in college, structural diversity, and actions taken by higher education institutions to support students of color. My focus is on Hmong students’ college

experiences, specifically how racialization within a particular institutional context shapes student experiences and simultaneously gives meaning to their involvement and expression of identity.

In sum, a case study approach offers a range of data collection methods, including interviews, observations, and document reviews, to gain a holistic description and understanding of a particular phenomena (Merriam, 1998). This method allows researchers to examine the contextual conditions that can be highly pertinent to the phenomena (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). In addition to methodology which allows me to explore data from varied sources, my choice of a case study approach is influenced by the explanatory and instructive power they hold; despite their specificity, they can help explain larger and more general theories (Babbie, 2007) and also serve as critical pedagogical tools (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991).

Case Sites Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to select the two case sites for this study. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMTC), serve as the sites for examining the experiences of Hmong students for the following reasons. First, they are selective public institutions within their respective states. Second, the ethnic and racial demographics of the institution and its setting provide varying contexts to examine how Hmong students experience college. Specifically, these institutions present opportunities to examine Hmong students' experiences where, racially (i.e., AAPI), they exist as a structural plurality (UCLA) and a structural minority (UMTC) of the undergraduate student population. On another dynamic level, ethnically, Hmong students exist at the select institutions as both lacking and having critical mass. Such demographics are even more significant given their metropolitan and state context; within the United States, California and Minnesota have the largest numbers and concentrations of Hmong Americans. Together these factors create varying institutional

dynamics that embody historical, social, and cultural forces for understanding Hmong students' experiences.

Figure 4-1 Institutional Contexts

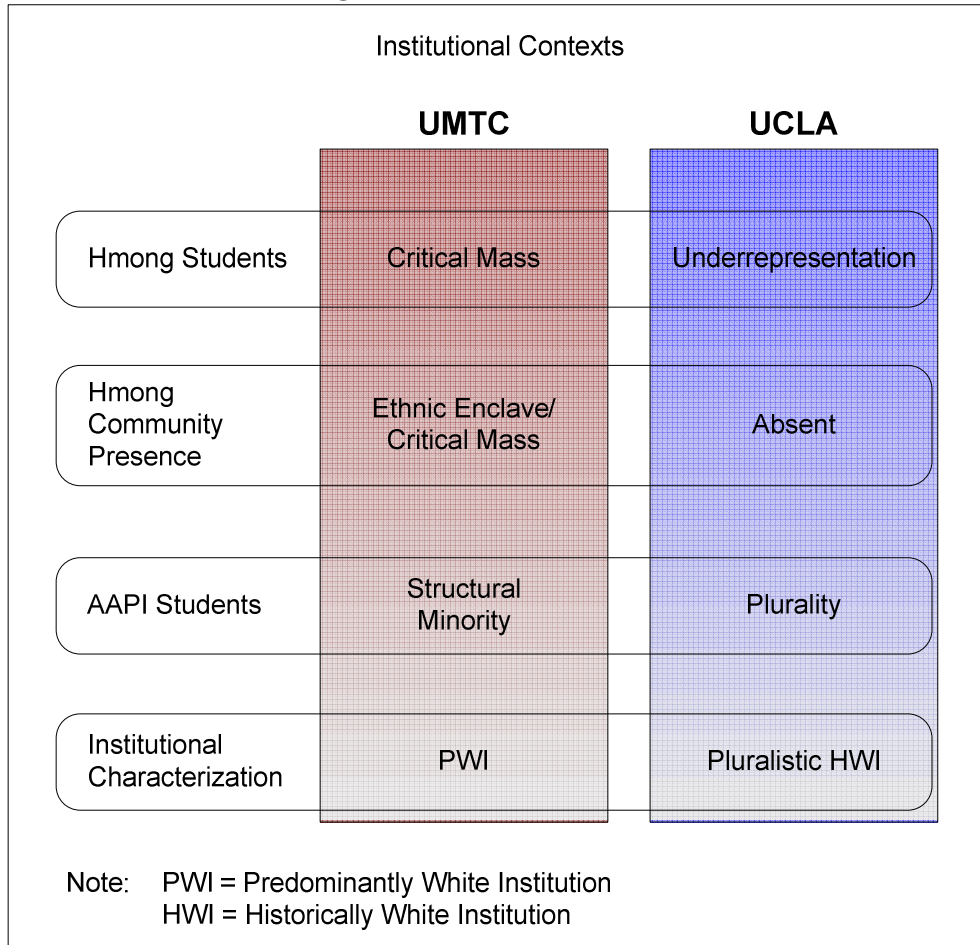


Table 4-1 State and County Demographics for Asian American and Hmong

State	Total Pop N	% AA	N AA	% Hmong	N Hmong
CA	37,253,956	15%	5,556,592	0.26%	95,120
MN	5,303,925	5%	247,132	1%	63,407

County	Total Pop N	% AA	N AA	% Hmong	N Hmong
LA	9,818,605	15%	1,497,960	>1%	760
Ramsey	508,640	13%	63,856	7%	35,647

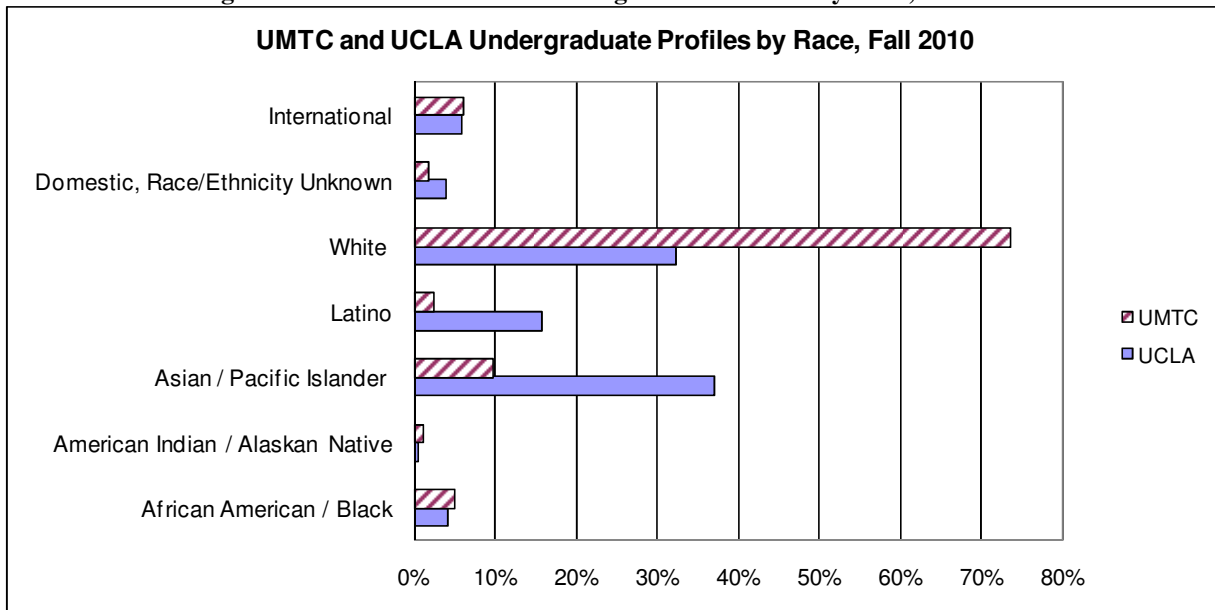
AA = Asian alone or in combination with one or more other races
Hmong = Hmong alone or in any combination

Source: 2010 US Census

Table 4-2 UMTC and UCLA AAPI and Hmong Demographics, Fall 2010

Institution	N Total UG	N AAPI	% AAPI	N Hmong (Estimate)
UCLA	26,162	9,712	37%	30
UMTC	30,519	2,879	10%	700

Figure 4-2 UMTC and UCLA Undergraduate Profiles by Race, Fall 2010



Participants

Participants of this study included a total of 40 undergraduate students: 15 from UCLA and 25 from UMTC. All identified themselves as Hmong/Hmoob, Hmong American, or having Hmong ancestry.⁷ Females comprised over half of the sample population with only 14 men.⁸ All participants were undergraduate students at various levels of study: 7 first years, 13 second years, 9 third years, 8 fourth years, and 3 fifth years and in their final year of school. The majority of the students enrolled as first-time freshmen; there were two transfer students. Forty-six majors

⁷ Responding to the email seeking interview participants who identify as Hmong, one participant indicated that she/he was interested and wanted to know if being Hmong-multiethnic would exclude participation.

⁸ This is in line with community perceptions that Hmong females are surpassing Hmong males in educational attainment (Vang, 2004).

were represented: 19 social sciences, 12 Arts and Humanities, 11 Science/Technology (no mathematics or engineer majors), and four undeclared or undecided (primarily first and second years). Six students have double majors. All but eight students indicated that their current institution was not their first choice institution.

In terms of generational status in this country, the majority of the students were second-generation (32), with eight who were 1.5 generation status, which is defined as one who was born in another country and came to the United States before adolescence. One student had permanent resident status; all others had citizenship status. For the 37 participants who provided incomes ranging from less than \$10,000 to over \$100,000, the median income is \$30,000-\$39,000; the most represented income is \$20,000-\$30,999 (11). In terms of father's education, 11 had less than a high school diploma, six had a high school diploma, six had some college, three had an associate's degree, six had a bachelor's degree or higher, six unknown, one other, and one missing. In terms of mother's education, 16 had less than a high school diploma, six had a high school diploma, two had some college, one had an associate's degree, four had a bachelor's degree or higher, 10 unknown, and one other. Finally, a total of eight participants (20 percent) were the first in their immediate families to attend college.

All the participants attended public schools. Nine (two thirds) of the 15 UCLA students were from the greater Fresno metropolitan area, three were from the greater Sacramento area, and three from Southern California. Of the UMTC students, four were from outside of Minnesota but also from the Midwest (states of Wisconsin and Michigan) while the rest called the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area home.

Data Collection

Data was collected during the 2010-2011 academic year. Data for UMTC were collected during a site visit that occurred in UMTC's 2010 fall semester, during which I spent approximately four weeks on campus. During that time, I spent nearly every weekday on campus interviewing participants; meeting with faculty, staff, and students; attending relevant events and observing cultural spaces; and acquainting myself with the institution. While my primary data are from interviews, my interactions and conversations with participants outside of the interview, off-the-record and candid conversations with several key staff and faculty, and observations on campus and within different ethnic and cultural spaces were collectively informative and crucial for my insights, analysis, and understanding. Additionally, my key informants (one of whom was also a study participant) were also critical in providing information about key people, programs, and events; providing access to cultural spaces; and were valuable for member checking as I was in the field. While my time at the institution was admittedly limited for appreciating the institutional culture as if it were my own alma mater, it was enough to leave with an impression for which I continually revisited and interrogated throughout my analysis.

In contrast to the novelty and relative brevity of my experience at UMTC, my familiarity with UCLA and the Hmong student community was quite intimate. During my tenure as a graduate student, I had some ongoing involvement in the Hmong student organization as I conceptualized and planned this project. In fact, some of my initial inquiries were inspired by organizational members' experiences as they developed narratives of race and ethnicity. For that reason, the Hmong student community at UCLA was more familiar with me and my research interests. Additionally, I believed that they considered me a participant in their community, at least as much as I could be within their undergraduate community. Therefore, while formal

interviews occurred in the 2011 winter quarter, my presence within the community and their organizational functions were ongoing. For example, during the year of the study, I attended several organization meetings and events. This familiarity with the people and space of UCLA provided me some depth into their contexts but it also required me to take a step back—as much as possible given my positionality—in my reflections in order to limit desensitization to new insights that might be relevant to the current investigation. Ultimately, I believe that my positionality served more of an assistance than hindrance to my access to information and analysis of the phenomenon of their collective experiences within this space.

Recruitment. To recruit participants, I sent emails to student leaders in cultural organizations (Hmong and Pan-Asian), who were asked to forward those email solicitations to their organizational list serve. I also made announcements at the Hmong cultural organization meetings and circulated signup sheets. Finally, I relied on snowball sampling (Babbie, 2007), which “refers to the process of accumulation as each located subject suggest other subjects” (p. 185). Although I was able to generate some interest through emails originally sent to student leaders and snowball sampling, the majority of my participants were acquired through the announcements made at cultural organizations. All participants were offered a small gratuity for participating in the study.

Instrumentation

Interviews. Semistructured interviews were the primary data source. Interviews lasted from one hour to 2.5 hours and were conducted in person on each campus. At UMTC, interviews took place in secured rooms at the Center for Multicultural Academic Excellence (MCAE) located at the Minneapolis campus; at UCLA they were conducted in the Math Sciences building. I coordinated interviews through email correspondence and accommodated students’

schedules. Interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim under pseudonyms, which are used in an attempt to protect participants' identities even though many indicated it unnecessary. For the same reasons, I selectively disclosed and concealed identifiers when presenting or discussing participant quotes. This method is particularly important when describing UCLA students, who are small in number on campus and may be easily identifiable.

The interview protocol covered two thematic periods: precollege educational experiences and college experiences. The protocol was also designed to address the following interrelated topics: stereotypes and experiences of race, experiences of ethnicity, and curricular and cocurricular engagement. Central to the protocol were questions that explored how students understood their identity (racial and ethnic). These questions explored how they saw themselves at the institution and whether or not ethnicity was salient in their experiences. The semistructured interviews allowed some level of flexibility to incorporate emerging themes without compromising the larger direction of the study. For example, I was able to probe or follow-up on salient themes that emerged during an individual interview or across multiple interviews.

An important change that I made to the interview protocol was moving the following optional questions to the primary protocol: "Please describe the single most positive experience you have had here. Please describe the single most negative experience you have had here." This change was made after the first two interviews at UMTC where students strategically avoided discussing race or racialized experiences when specifically asked about race. These more general questions sometimes elicited racial experiences that were not discussed in questions that signaled race. I discuss this phenomenon later under the section on researcher role.

Although I had originally planned to conduct focus groups, I was unable to coordinate a time when more than two students could meet. I attribute this to the timing of my trip to UMTC,

which was in the middle of midterms. As a result, I chose not to conduct focus groups. I incorporated some of the questions regarding climate to the interview while discarding the rest of the questions. For example, questions like “What are the pros and cons about this institution that you would present to Hmong students who have decided to come here to this campus?” were moved to the interview. To keep the interview protocol within reason, I primarily asked about campus climate for Hmong students rather than students of color more generally, as originally planned.

Demographic questionnaire. In addition to semistructured interviews, questionnaires were administered to the participants prior to the interview and were intended to capture demographic and key conceptual data: background characteristics (e.g., SES, generational status, legal status) and academic information (e.g., major, class standing, residence).

Document review. The final data collection method was document analysis. The data used for this examination include primarily public documents (Creswell, 2003), particularly those relating to the Hmong students found on the student organization and university websites in addition to those collected from the study participants. These documents included the “primary” and “secondary” material (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Primary documents included student cultural organization webpages and relevant documents collected from students themselves. These documents allowed for triangulation of data (Denzin, 1989).

Secondary documents included campus news articles relating to the Hmong and Asian student population, campus reports on diversity, diversity initiatives, and strategic plans for diversity. To find secondary documents, I performed a systematic search through the campus website, including searching through university media press and student organized press (main, liberal and conservative) by using variations of keywords such as race, Hmong, Asian, and

diversity. In addition to these general words as starting points for a systematic search for secondary material, I also followed up on and performed systematic searches on significant events or incidents that were identified in interviews and conversations with participants and key informants. An example of one such event was the controversy surrounding cultural spaces at UMTC that became a salient theme in a subgroup of participants' interviews. Finally, I included relevant documents obtained from key informants or participants such as flyers and brochures for events.

Limitations

This study is limited by the institutional selectivity and the small sample size, particularly at UMTC where there are an estimated 700 Hmong students. These limitations have implications for the generalizability not only for students of color generally but also for Hmong students. In particular, the experiences captured in this study may not be representative of those at other institutions. Likewise, it is difficult to declare that participants' experiences are representative for all Hmong students within these respective institutions. Thus, this study is an attempt to understand how racialization influences students' experiences in their respective institutions.

Data Analysis

Informed by the notion that analysis starts during data collection (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), I relied heavily on thick descriptive notes and personal, descriptive, and analytic memos from the inception of data collection. Thick description captures detail, context, emotion and social dynamics (Denzin, 1989). Denzin (1989) wrote, "In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (p. 83). I used notes during and after interviews, during my observations of institutional and community-specific spaces, and during and after candid conversations with key

informants and other key personnel. I relied on thick descriptive notes when appropriate, particularly to capture observations that were not or could not be captured in audio or video form. Therefore, this form of data added another invaluable layer of data that could be recalled during analysis.

In contrast to notes, which document the social and cultural happenings, memos record thinking. Specifically, memos capture analytical thinking as well as stimulate analytic insights (Maxwell, 2005). For example, Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that memos are primarily conceptual, tying together different pieces of data. As such, I used personal and analytic memos at different stages of my study, including directly after interviews, after interactions or discussions with key people and personal informants, and during the coding process in order to clarify concepts, seek out relationships among codes, and ultimately refine codes through an iterative process. While all memos became valuable sources of data in themselves, the most valuable ones were both analytic (Maxwell, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 1990) memos that occurred directly following the interview sessions and after the initial reading of the transcripts. From these memos, I was able to capture significant concepts and emerging themes, which ultimately informed a “provisional start list” of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

My provisional start list of codes started out broadly and included themes that were salient across the interviews as well as the literature. For example, broad categorical codes included stereotypes, stereotypes in high school, stereotypes in college, and stereotypes in media. These were first open-coded so that the data was more manageable. Second, they were then categorized into a smaller set of themes or constructs wherein the segments of content were summarized. After being reviewed, actual codes were generated from the segments of data. A final step was used in order to clarify data segments and to redefine a concept. Finally, because I

was interested in how students' experiences varied by context, I compared coding across the two groups of students. Throughout this process, I constantly revisited notes and memos and generated new analytic memos to explain how codes were interrelated.

To manage all of the data, I created within-case and cross-case data displays in the form of a matrix to assist with analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The displays are described by Miles and Huberman as documents that organize compressed data for the purpose of conclusion drawing and action. I used them primarily for systematically organizing my demographic questionnaire data.

Trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness, I engaged in data collection and analytical methods that allowed me to member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Maxwell, 2005) and triangulate (Maxwell, 2005; Denzin, 1989) information and insights. For example, I actively engaged in member checking while I was in the field. In fact, this method was critical when following up on emerging issues and insights with immediacy so that I could continue to interrogate the issues during my time in the field. Additionally, I used various data sources for a holistic understanding of student experiences. During the analysis, I identified and analyzed confirmatory and discrepant data (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Maxwell, 2005) and enlisted the assistance of colleagues, who provided insight on the preliminary findings and interpretations.

Additionally, this study allowed for member checks or respondent validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Maxwell, 2005) through transcript validation and clarification that were sent to a random sample of approximately one third (13) of the participants. This method aims to reduce the chances of misinterpretation by presenting participants with the opportunity to provide feedback or to clarify their original comments. No participants returned transcripts with edits.

Finally, I used reflective memos to locate my values in initial impressions and reactions during the course of the research. Maxwell (2005) argued that recognizing personal ties to research can provide valuable sources of insight, theory, and data; however, it is necessary to be aware of and to take account of how they shape the research. Reflective memos aided me in distinguishing my experiences, values, and judgments from those of my participants. Therefore, with the use of personal and reflective memos (Maxwell, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), I documented my negotiations of insider/outsider status (Chavez, 2008), allowing me to reflect and cope with both the advantages and complications of conducting this research as a scholar who identifies with my participants as a Hmong American. Such reflection and analytic method is necessary, particularly in qualitative research where it is understood that the researcher is a primary “tool” or “instrument” for gathering and analyzing data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, undergirding my methodological sensitivity to researcher role is the dual impression of the human quality on research: Such a quality can be used to collect and produce meaningful information, but it can also be limited by potential “validity threats” such as researcher bias and reactivity and reflexivity (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998).

Researcher Role

Chavez’s (2008) discussion of insider/outsider status of scholars was relevant for my research at multiple stages. In particular, Chavez documented both the advantages and complications that arise from insider status, acknowledging that the researcher role is complex: “Insiderness or outsiderness are not fixed or static positions, rather they are evershifting and permeable social locations that are differentially expressed by community members” (Naples, 1996, p. 40 as cited in Chavez, 2008, p. 476). The notion of insider/outsider was informative

from the onset of this project as I conceptualized this project, during data collection, interpretation, and representation of findings.

Ultimately, my interest in understanding experiences of Hmong students and other underrepresented groups stem from my own personal journey and experiences of involvement in college. As a Hmong American who has gone through similar experiences and can identify with my participants on multiple levels, I am aware of the theories that have implicitly shaped my understanding of my experiences. Realizing that it is not possible to remove oneself completely from one's inquiries, I allowed these experiences and theories to guide the research, but I was careful in ensuring that they did not dictate the findings. It was important for me to distinguish my experiences from my participants and to be conscious that their stories may not reflect my own. I was also careful to not break their trust in me as a scholar and community member. Therefore, I approached this study conscientiously and made attempts to be respectful and sensitive to their experiences.

In the field, my positionality as insider/outsider was salient in my interactions with participants and other key people who informed my study. It was clear that my insider status granted me immediate legitimacy in some instances.⁹ As a result, accessing participants proved to be less difficult than I had anticipated. As an insider, I was also provided privileged information. In addition, I was granted access to spaces on campus such as the student group space and was welcomed to attend various cultural functions. I was also able to build rapport easily with many of the participants. During interviews, many students responded fluidly in both Hmong and English.

⁹ One UMTC SEA staff member indicated often being approached for help with study recruitment for populations involving Hmong students. This staff member expressed that she/he had greater commitment to assisting Hmong researchers because she/he questioned other researchers' genuine interest in assisting Hmong Americans. From the examples this staff member provided, it was clear that her/his attitude was informed by previous experiences with researchers whose interests in Hmong Americans seemingly were limited to their participation as research subjects.

However, my insider status was tenuous at certain points. In particular, I noticed how interactions were sometimes slightly different inside and outside of the interviews for a small number of the participants. For example, some participants were more distant during the interviews; however, once the recorder was turned off, their demeanor and the conversation became more natural, livelier, and richer.¹⁰ These instances exhibit how researcher/participant relationships can change inside and outside of the interview setting, a dynamic influenced not only by the naturalness of the setting but also the power dynamics involved. Such moments made me realize that I was not completely an insider and that my positionality is unstable depending on context.

The distance I experienced with participants was also revealed in the narrative strategies I observed in participants between the two different contexts, providing analytic insights into the larger context of the study, which I discuss below. For me, this example represents points of researcher role and researcher reflexivity, method, and findings, specifically their dynamic relationship in inquiry and analysis. I believe that my positionality allowed me to detect when stereotype threat or racial battle fatigue was occurring (though I did not consciously think of it in that instance). However, it was my internal reflection and reflexivity and later analysis of the phenomena that allowed me to better understand and account for the contexts of the interview, institution, and study.

Discursive strategies in interviews. This section addresses narrative contents and discursive strategies of participants within the interviews. Before presenting my insights, which I find appropriate to address in first person, I discuss my role as researcher and my approach for understanding the larger narratives of participant interviews. While I examine their narrative

¹⁰ In these situations, I relied extensively on rich thick descriptive/detailed notes after the interview to capture the details of the conversation.

strategies, I am guided by the understanding that my interactions with participants during the interviews themselves created a form of text to analyze, particularly because they are part of the process that produces such narratives. As such, my analysis is part as a dynamic process in which I am constantly reflecting on my own actions as researcher as well as their actions as participant in our engagement during the interviews. Therefore, my analysis of their strategies during the interviews cannot discount my own role. In considering the narratives and discursive strategies as a product of both researcher and participant interactions, the interviews as data points, as well as the analysis and insights that result, become more than simply products of researcher gazes on participants. Ultimately, such analytic insights are issues of method as much as they are findings; however, they are presented here because they have important bearing on the understanding of context in this study. The first layer of context is that of the researcher (through researcher role). A second layer of context is that of the interview, which is informed by the interaction between researcher and participant. Both of these contexts dynamically inform an understanding and analysis of institutional context, which become salient in how students engage issues of race in their interviews. Therefore, such insights have explanatory significance for the narrative contents of Hmong (through interpersonal interactions and ethnic organizations) that are elicited in each context.

During the interviews, I observed a clear thematic difference between the two contexts—not so much in the content of racial narratives but rather in their discourses, articulation, and management strategy of race and racialized experiences. While I also observed these differences in the participants' recounting of incidences and in other moments during data collection, within this section, I focus on how they responded to me and my questioning. In particular, I observed that UMTC participants were more likely to circumvent issues of race when race was signaled,

yet comparatively they shared more overtly racialized incidents, scenarios, and experiences, particularly when not asked about race. Even when they shared racist stories, they were sometimes cautious about labeling the incidents as due to race. My understanding of their circumventions, rather than their being unconscious of racial signals, was informed by their acknowledgement of race before dismissing it as a possibility.

On the surface, it may appear that Hmong students at UMTC do not experience race, lack a developed sense of racial identity, or have a false sense of consciousness about the reality of race when compared to their UCLA peers whose articulations of race were more detailed, assured, and direct. However, my understanding of their articulation or strategic inarticulation of race is informed by notions of stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) and racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007), both of which were informed by the climate of race in the larger environmental contexts. Considering how people of color must manage stereotypes and racist incidents, the participants' strategies are not surprising. I argue that UMTC participants' general cautiousness of race talk is a way of strategically dealing with the colorblind culture of racism, which socially reprimands and further stigmatizes people of color for raising issues of race. For example, one colorblind racist argument is that "minorities make things seem racial when they are not" (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, pp. 44). As such, people of color are deemed not only as "complainers" and "whiners" when they discuss race, but also as purveyors of race because under colorblind racist logic seeing or acknowledging race maintains the significance of race in a post-race society.

In signaling race within my questions, I unintentionally and unfortunately, incited stereotype threat and racial battle fatigue in my participants. Participants may have been managing stereotypes (e.g., complainers or whiners) often attributed to people of color when

they discuss race, which they are particularly attuned to given their stigmatized status (Smith et al., 2007). For example, Hmong Americans in the Twin Cities are already viewed as entitled, taking more than their fair share of government resources, and viewed as self-segregating and divisive. Thus, within the UMTC context, there are more immediate constraints to “race talk” as others are less likely to participate and engage in these discussions. It could be understood that under such a context, the immediate consequences of race talk are much more instrumentally felt.

In addition, their cautiousness with “race talk” was related to the discussion of culture as a defining experience. In particular, UMTC participants’ discourses of difference were more centered on issues of culture rather than race compared to UCLA students, who tended to articulate difference in terms of ethnicity in relationship to race. My analysis of this difference focuses on the salience of culture in the experiences of UMTC students due to a) the instrumental role of culture in their daily experiences; and b) the heightened racialization of culture in a largely White context that attempts to practice colorblindness. The racialization of culture is underscored by Barker’s (1981) notion of cultural racism, which avoids race in favor of culture but ultimately reflects racialized meanings, thereby existing as a salient marker of difference. In other words, racialized experiences for UMTC participants were often coded under culture in their narratives. Such an understanding does not neglect the real constraints of Hmong culture for individual identity formation and negotiation within Hmong communities, which participants clearly expressed. Rather, cultural racism offers a lens to appreciate how such negotiations become even more complicated given race and racialization of ethnic culture. Such considerations were made during my analysis and understanding of racialization and racial formations in the two contexts. Therefore, while this specific analysis focuses on narrative in the

context of interviews, it highlights the different institutional contexts that become important for understanding identity negotiations within specific institutional spaces. Specifically, it underscores why negotiations of ethnicity and implicit and explicit responses to questions of difference may vary in different institutional contexts (see how Moua's response compares to UCLA students' responses in Chapter Eight)

Although UCLA participants experience cultural racism through notions of their distinctness, it is largely (but not exclusively) contained to their home communities where there exists a Hmong ethnic enclave. They existed as objects of cultural distinction on campus, but by comparison, Hmong culture was less instrumental in actively defining their everyday experiences on campus. They too expressed feeling different culturally; however, much of the time, their cultural difference was salient because it was ignored. UCLA participants' discussions of difference, which more clearly articulated distinctions between ethnic and racial identity categories can be understood as awareness generated through interethnic and cross-racial interactions at an institution where AAPIs are a racial plurality. Likewise, UCLA participants' candor of race in their interviews may be a reflection of the greater diversity within UCLA, which provides more opportunities for engaging in discussions concerning difference.

It is important to note that not all UMTC participants were cautious about race nor did all UCLA participants particularly have developed articulations of race in their narratives. In fact, some of the UMTC participants discussed race as a defining experience and even critiqued colorblindness, illustrating not only their comfort with race (that is, with me, because I hypothesize that discussions of race occur more openly in more natural settings with those whom they trust), but their acquisition of the language needed to express their experiences of race,

primarily through ethnic studies courses taken. Likewise, for two UCLA participants, I observed similar circumventions to those of UMTC.

Although I am an ethnic insider, as a researcher, I ultimately exist as an outsider. Understanding this dichotomy allows me to better understand participants in their interactions with me. Although they had agreed to share their stories with me, they also realized that their stories would not end with me and will be observed by others. As such, their strategies with me in the interviews, whether conscious or unconscious, may take on the same form as their strategies with others. I do not suggest that such responses and actions are inauthentic in any way, shape, or form (within and outside of the interviews), but I do recognize the dialectic nature of identity and representation in particular contexts, which inextricably involve multiple layers of power and privilege. While my analysis examines the context of race more generally, I recognize that in order to understand their responses, I am unable to exclude the power and privilege that come with my position during these intimate and unnatural moments, particularly since their collective narratives are ultimately filtered through me before reaching a broader audience.

Ultimately, the current study encompasses not only the individual and collective experiences of my participants, but also aspects of my own personal journey as a scholar of color. For example, the intimate details, painful stories, and laughs that participants have shared are now a part of me. Therefore, the iterative process of reflection and analysis for this inquiry involved engaging participants' stories as well as introspection regarding my role as a researcher. While I began the research process aware of this complexity of my insider/outsider status, this process has made me even more aware of how power and privilege can shape my dynamics with participants. However, this process has also made me more aware of my commitments as an

insider. They have entrusted me with telling their stories and communicating their lived experiences, a task I do not take lightly.

Case Sites

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

UMTC or simply “the U,” as it is affectionately called by its community (students and staff alike), is a public research university in Minnesota. Founded in 1851, UMTC combines two campuses, Saint Paul and Minneapolis, each existing in their respective cities but connected by a campus shuttle system. Between the two, Minneapolis is considered the main campus. In the fall of 2010 UMTC had an undergraduate student enrollment of approximately 30,000. As a unit, UMTC is the first of five institutions that make up the University of Minnesota (UM) system, comprising at least 75 percent of the entire University of Minnesota system enrollment. Due to its size relative to the rest of the UM institutions, UMTC is central to the system and houses several system-wide offices, although each institution is largely operated separately and has its own climate and culture. UMTC is also the most selective public institution in the state with less than half of first-time freshmen applicants being admitted. During the 2010-2011 academic year, the Twin Cities had an acceptance rate of 47.8 percent whereas all other UM institutions admitted over half of their applicants.

Like other public institutions, a majority (75 percent) of UMTC students come from Minnesota, with a vast majority coming from the Twin Cities metropolitan area. UMTC students are more likely than UCLA students to commute to campus as freshmen and undergraduates: 14 percent (vs. 6 percent) of first-time freshman and 49 percent (vs. 61 percent) of all undergraduates. The reasons are likely due to the more affordable housing and the fact that many students are originally from the Twin Cities area. Outside of Minnesota, students are drawn more

substantially from the neighboring states of Wisconsin, South Dakota, and North Dakota due to reciprocity agreements, which permit in-state tuition between public universities across these states. Specifically, students from these states comprise approximately half the 25 percent of domestic, non-Minnesota resident students. Therefore, the large majority of the students are from the Midwest. Of the faculty, 13 percent are people of color (84 percent full-time, 16 percent part-time), 40 percent are female (66 percent full-time, 44 percent part-time), and 3 percent are international (87 percent full-time, 13 percent part-time).

Asian American/Pacific Islander students comprise 9.7 percent of the overall undergraduate student body. While Asian and Pacific Islander students categorically are the largest minority group, they are structural minorities within the predominantly White institution: Caucasian (73.7 percent), African American/Black (5 percent), Latino (2.5 percent), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.2 percent), domestic unreported/unknown (1.8 percent), and international (6.1 percent). The institution has only recently, within the last several years, established Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) ethnic breakdowns for data collection, which disaggregate “Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander” from “Asian American.” Of the 2,879 AAPIs at the institution, 80 self-reported as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander. Further disaggregated data is unavailable. While the exact number of Hmong Americans is unknown, two staff members and several students report that there are approximately 700 students.

The informal count of approximately 700 students comes from the initiative of two Southeast Asian staff members, who conducted a last name search of students using information from the Registrar’s office. Many people of Hmong heritage/ancestry have one of the main 18 surnames common for Hmong ethnics; however, the method is imprecise because there is some

overlap between traditional Hmong ethnic surnames and other Asian subgroups. While they admitted their numbers are inexact, such a count was intended to provide a reference point for advocating for services. The two staff members also used similar methods to generate counts for other ethnic Southeast Asian American groups such as Lao students. Assuming the count of 700 is correct, Hmong American students would comprise approximately 24 percent of the 2,879 Asian Americans at the institution (exclusive of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders). Such a critical mass is reflected in the Hmong cultural group, the Hmong Minnesota Student Association (HMSA), which reports that there are approximately 150 students in their organization. Furthermore, HMSA exist as only one of several Hmong-centered student organizations that both officially and unofficially exist on campus, including Hmong Christian Club, Hmong Men's Circle, and Hmong Women's Group (not an officially registered group but facilitated by two Hmong female staff).

During fall 2010, the campus was in the process of applying for an exception as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI institution). With only nine percent AAPI undergraduate students, the institution was one percent short of the required 10 percent enrollment needed to meet eligibility. If it had been granted the exception (for percentage of AAPI students enrolled), it would qualify because unlike UCLA, which well exceeds the 10 percent requirement, UMTC also meets the 50 percent requirement of low-income students enrolled at the institution. This factor suggests another possible difference in compositional diversity of AAPI students between the two institutions. As an AANAPISI, the institution would be eligible to apply for and receive federal grants, which are intended to support AAPI students.

UMTC exists as the most diverse University of Minnesota institution. Additionally, it is situated in the heart of the Twin Cities, which is where much of the racial and cultural diversity of Minnesota exists. Much of the cultural programming is offered through the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence (MK), which many participants described as a particularly welcoming place. Participants' comfort and familiarity with the center is related to the numerous programming efforts of the center as well as the presence of Hmong staff, who are actively involved in the student community. Finally, the university offers majors in American Studies, American Indian Studies, African American Studies, Chicano Studies and Asian American Studies; however, Asian American Studies only offers a minor program.

The institution is uniquely positioned to capitalize on numerous community resources in order to provide a more inclusive environment for Hmong students. For example, there exist numerous community organizations, like the Hmong Cultural Center, that focus on Hmong Americans in the Twin Cities. Additionally, the university has its own resources, including the immigration research center, which originally was founded to understand the growing SEA population, but it has grown to incorporate newly arriving groups such as Somali refugees. Additionally, through various sponsoring programs and departments, the university often holds campus workshops and forums that focus on Hmong culture or issues.

The campus also has a number of Hmong-specific resources available, including curricular offerings and cultural programming. According to the UMTC Registrar's office, the Asian American Studies program and History department jointly offer one course centered on Hmong experiences, "AAS 3483/HIST 3485 Hmong History Across the Globe" (offered once an academic year). The History department offers "HIST 3960 Hmong Refugees from the Secret War – Life in America," and the Asian Languages and Literature program offers one course

twice per academic year, “ALL 3720 Topics in Hmong Culture,” that typically focuses on language and culture. Available to students are Southeast Asian staff members, including at least three Hmong student affairs officers, and one Hmong faculty member, who teaches the Hmong history course. Additionally, Hmong instructors from the community are brought in to teach Hmong language courses under ALL 3720. The University has Tsev Hmoob (Hmong House), which is located on one floor in a residence hall dedicated to “provide opportunities for students to explore the issues of ethnicity, identity and community development while receiving essential academic support and actively participating in and contributing to campus student life” (<https://diversity.umn.edu/multicultural/hmonghouse>). Collectively, these programmatic and curricular offerings exist as resources for Hmong students.

According to one participant, such resources made Hmong students at the institution “privileged” comparatively. In fact, the extent to which Hmong-specific programming exists at the institution is unlikely to be matched by many other institutions. This is because the programming is indicative of the sizeable Hmong American community that is concentrated within the Twin Cities. Given this concentration, it could be understood that Hmong Americans had a physical and cultural, although marginal (compared to that of White students), presence within the institution.

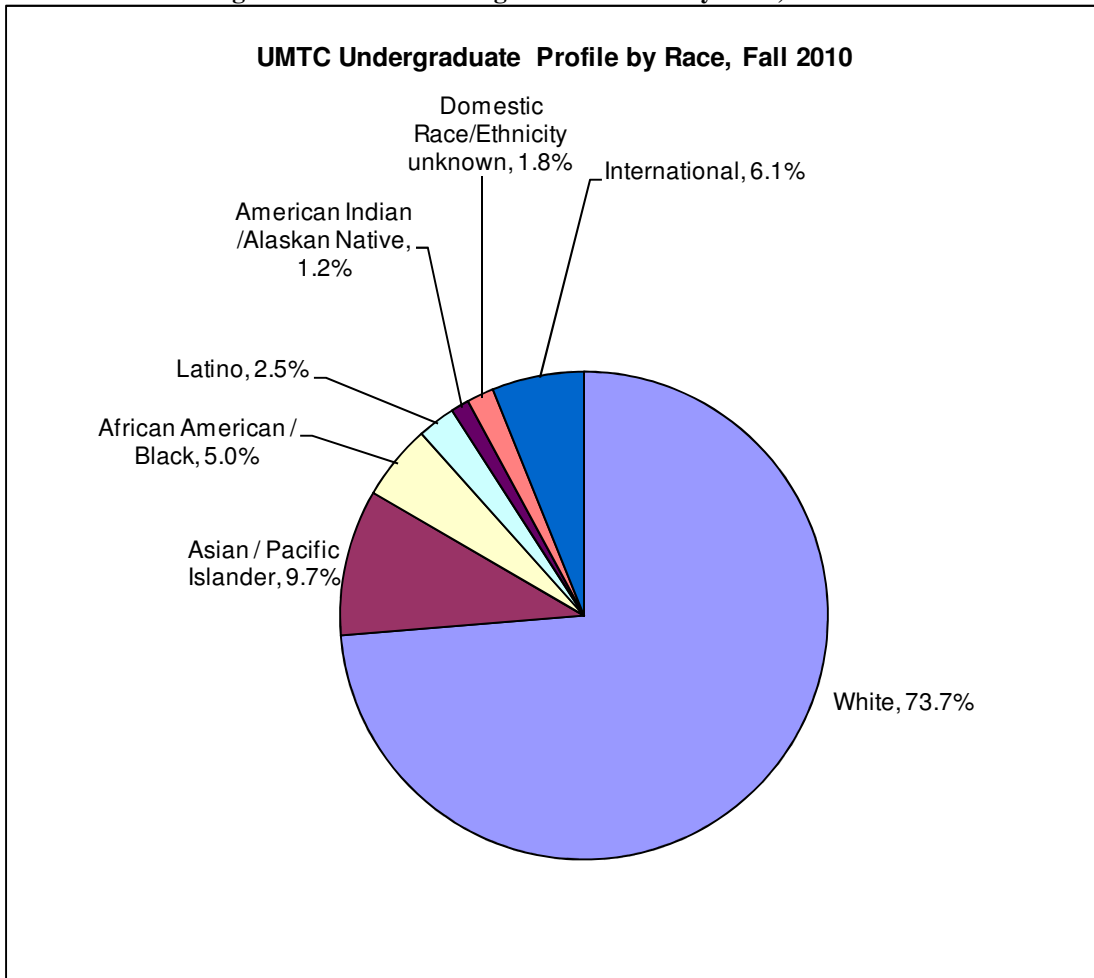
Generally, participants believed the institution was welcoming. In addition to MK, and cultural organizations, participants often discussed and pointed to their student union space as an example of diversity on campus. In particular, the Hmong student organization along with other student groups had office or student programming space on the second floor of the centrally located student union. Because of the various student interest organizations that were housed there, the second floor student union space was viewed a symbol of campus diversity and support

for nontraditional and historically underrepresented groups. However, the cultural spaces for Hmong Americans were eventually removed as a result of controversy that erupted over the allocations of spaces. At the time of data collection, negotiations regarding space allocation were taking place so the outcome of whether the spaces would remain was unclear to students. Some of the participants were aware of the controversy but did not want to believe that the criticism about the usage and allocation of space were racially motivated. They expressed the possibility that the critiques were racially motivated, but wanted to believe otherwise. This example is significant precisely because of the central role it had in the participants' experiences and interviews. For that reason, it is discussed to illustrate the issues of diversity, ethnicity, and resources at the institution that concern the experiences of Hmong American students.

For example, while Hmong students (through HMSA) were validated in their allocation of cultural programming space in the coveted student union, their use of the space was highly contested. In fact, under pressure and colorblind critiques regarding the fairness of allocation procedures, the administration made the difficult decision to keep cultural spaces for racial groups (e.g., Asian Student Union,) while Hmong programming space, along with other ethnic student groups' spaces (e.g., Somalian Student Group), were redistributed to a general or all-purpose space that could be accessed and utilized by all students. The decision to leave the spaces for race but not ethnicity could be understood as a compromise made to pacify critics while maintaining some level of recognition for marginalized groups. Such a decision, while well intentioned, compromised the progressive vision of diversity that the university had begun to foster—a vision of diversity that included both race and ethnicity, particularly for people of color, as valuable and necessary. This example illustrates that the resources Hmong students are provided are not guaranteed and may be stripped from them at any moment.

In sum, while the institution is supportive of advancing understanding of Hmong history and culture through cultural and curricular offerings, it can also make decisions that contradict their commitment to Hmong American students. Additionally, the institution remains limited by not being able to account precisely for and effectively evaluate Hmong and other disaggregated Asian student group experiences. As a result, it is clear that the many supports of the institution for Hmong students are limited by not being able to account for specific data for Hmong students. In light of this limitation, the presence of SEA staff members is a critical resource for the advancement of the Hmong student community at the institution given their self-initiated efforts concentrated towards a more holistic climate for their institution.

Figure 4-3 UMTC Undergraduate Profile by Race, Fall 2010



Minnesota and Hmong. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Minnesota is home to the second largest population of Hmong Americans (Pfeifer & Lee, 2004). Asian Americans make up 3.31 percent of the state and Hmong Americans are the largest Asian ethnic group. Additionally, 92 percent (approximately 40,707) of Hmong reside in two counties where the Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis) are located, indicating that there exists a relatively large Hmong community surrounding the university. This context contrasts with that of UCLA in two ways: a) centrality of university within the Hmong community; and b) the concentration of Hmong in one metropolitan area, making it by far the largest concentration of Hmong in the

nation. Being at the center of an ethnic enclave creates a dynamic context for the experiences of Hmong university students, especially as they make up a considerable number of the Asian population in the state. In fact, Census data report that they are the largest disaggregated AAPI group in the state. Their visibility, which the findings will show, can have negative consequences for the racialization of Hmong Americans. Nonetheless, the large concentration in Twin Cities has positively shaped Hmong Americans' political representation. Their ability to rally for political support is by the election of the first and only Hmong state senator, Mee Moua, who served two term services for a district in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Hmong settlement in Minnesota resulted from the work of involvement of Minnesota based voluntary agencies, which were contracted with the federal government to assist in the resettlement of refugees. The presence of voluntary agencies is reflected by the recent settlement of Somali refugees. In fact, the state as a whole has more immigrants who are refugees from Southeast Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. Of all refugees currently in the State, Hmong are the largest group followed by Vietnamese and Laotian.

University of California, Los Angeles

The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), is a public research university founded in 1919 as the second of ten campuses in the University of California, one of three public higher education institutions in California. UCLA is located in the Westwood neighborhood of Los Angeles and, during the fall of 2010, had a student enrollment of approximately 39,000 students, with approximately 26,000 undergraduates. UCLA often alternates with the state's public flagship, Berkeley, as the most selective in public institutions in the state. During the fall of 2010, the UCLA admissions rate for first-time freshmen was 22.7 percent, following closely behind Berkeley's admissions rate of 21.5 percent. UCLA serves

primarily in-state residents; only 7 percent of students are from out of state. Due to high costs of living, UCLA provides guaranteed housing for many of its students. As a result, 94 percent of first-time freshmen and 39 percent of all undergraduates live in college-owned, operated, or affiliated housing. In terms of faculty diversity, 24 percent are people of color (79 percent full-time, 20 percent part-time), 35 percent are female (78 full-time, 22 part-time), and less than 1 percent are international (62.5 percent full-time, 37.5 part-time).

At UCLA, Asian American and Pacific Islander as a category is the largest undergraduate student group at 37.1 percent compared to Caucasian (32.4 percent), Latino (15.8 percent), African American (4.1 percent), American Indian (.5 percent), domestic unreported/unknown (4.3 percent), and international (5.8 percent). While AAPIs as a racial group are a plurality of the student population (and therefore not structural minorities), Hmong students remain a small minority. The number of Hmong students is largely unknown or unconfirmed due to prior limitations in data gathering and disaggregating. According to the Hmong student organization's website and a 2007 campus news article featuring this population, the estimated number is 30 (Hou, April 23, 2007). However, estimates provided by personal informants and participants range from approximately 20 to 25 students.

Despite small numbers, the Hmong students managed to register a Hmong student association with the university in 1996, starting with only four students in its organization. Of the hundreds of student organizations registered on campus, the Association of Hmong Students (AHS) is the only one that centered on Hmong identity. Although the organization membership is small in numbers, it has arguably made a sizeable impact on the social and cultural well-being of Hmong students on campus by providing support for both members and nonmembers and by working to make the university more inclusive of Hmong Americans and responsive to their

needs. As early as 2005, students advocated for and eventually were able to establish a Hmong course, which was taught spring of both 2009 and 2010 through the Department of Asian Americans Studies. The instructor, an Anthropology/Women Studies lecturer, also once served as the advisor of the Hmong student organization. While students were allied by faculty and other AAPI student groups, securing a course was an uphill battle. The primary rationales for initially not instituting the course after student requests were “lack of interests” and “lack of material.” For several years, the organization directed its energies and efforts to compiling relevant literature in order to illustrate that there existed sufficient Hmong-related works to establish a course focusing on Hmong history and experiences. The organization also generated visibility and interests on campus. The single course has yet to be instituted as part of the annual offerings. However, since its establishment, the course has been received with both critique and praise by Hmong American students who have taken it.

UCLA is viewed as uniquely diverse (e.g., language, nationality, ethnicity), and as a historically White institution, students of color collectively make up over half of the undergraduate population, with no single race representing a majority. Additionally, it has been determined that as a public institution, race and diversity are particularly salient issues on campus; exhibiting more cross-racial interaction, and whose faculty and students are more likely than those at other institutions to perceive a strong emphasis on diversity (Astin, Trevino, & Wingard, 1991).

The rich institutional diversity can be seen in its long history offering ethnic studies. In 2009-2010, the university celebrated the 40th year anniversary of Ethnic Studies, one of the first of its kind in the nation. In celebration, UCLA boasted that it was the only university in the nation to house four such enterprises that are dedicated to American Indian studies, Asian

American studies, Chicano studies, and African American studies, offering undergraduate majors in each one.

The University of California (UC) is unique and can be considered progressive regarding AAPI issues. In particular, it is among the first institutions to provide disaggregated data collection on AAPIs that include Hmong and other AAPI subgroups on the admissions application. In 2007, the UC Office of the President announced a revision to the admissions application, which expanded AAPI categories from 8 to 23 in order to better capture complexities among AAPI students. This decision was made after a three-year student-initiated and student-led “count me in” campaign, which was a UC system-wide cooperative effort originally conceived at UCLA through pan-ethnic student organizing.¹¹ Although student activism was vital for building momentum for such a change, other instrumental factors that led to adopting the policy included faculty support and legislative interests (Vasquez, Nov, 16, 2007). Changes on the application have only recently taken effect (fall 2010).

Beyond the Association of Hmong Students and institutional structures in place to collect disaggregated data there exists another support structure for Hmong students. UCLA also houses two student-initiated, student-run, and student-funded centers focused on providing retention and outreach services to underrepresented communities. Founded in 1998, these centers are believed to be the first of its kind in the nation. In addition, the Community Programs Office (CPO), which was founded in 1970, houses 23 student-initiated community service projects. Together these programs target underrepresented communities, including but not limited to Southeast Asians and address issues of education, health, and other social justice concerns. One of the programs established through the CPO in 2010 is Southeast Asian Admittance weekend (SEA

¹¹ This effort was primarily led under the direction of Asian Pacific Coalition, a registered organization that bridges the interests of AAPI students and acts as a voice for AAPI student issues on campus.

Admit weekend), which is one of a number of targeted programs that make concerted attempts to encourage admitted students to enroll. The addition of such a program is representative of the kinds of support that have been instituted for underrepresented AAPI populations.

Despite system-wide policy and practices that illustrate an awareness of AAPI issues, as well as institution-specific efforts directed at diversity, UCLA is far from being an oasis for AAPIs as it is not impervious to issues of race and specifically to racial intolerance directed towards AAPIs. For example, in Spring of 2011, UCLA was thrust into the center of unwanted attention, garnering national and international headlines, for the racial tirade of a White female student, who ranted about inappropriate “Asian” behavior in libraries. The incongruity of such a visible act of intolerance directed towards Asians exists not only in where it occurred given the campus compositional diversity but also in the student’s insensitive references to the recent natural disaster in Japan. As such, this act signaled contradictions in campus climate for diversity and inclusion for AAPIs. Additionally, it was damaging for the public image of the university internationally as it is an institution that attracts international students and scholars.¹² While the incident was relegated as an isolated act of an individual, AAPI students¹³ at the university declared that the act represented the atmospheric climate of racism that they experience on a daily basis both on and off campus.

California and Hmong. As a predominant research university in California, UCLA serves as a relevant site for observing Hmong student experiences. The 2000 U.S. Census indicates California’s Asian population was 12.3 percent. California also had by far the largest Hmong population of any state in the country with 42 percent of the total Hmong population

¹² At a campus community event, one UCLA professor described being confronted with images of UCLA that were cemented in the incident during her travels abroad, illustrating how it became a reference point for the institution.

¹³ Some may argue that the student’s tirade specifically targeted international students; however, AAPI students felt that it represented their experiences based on phenotype.

reported across the country. Among U.S. metropolitan areas, Fresno has the second largest concentration of Hmong (22,456) only after Minneapolis-St. Paul (40,707). Of the next four largest concentrations, three are within California, specifically in and near the central valley: Sacramento-Yolo represents the third largest (16,621); Merced, the fifth (6,148); and Stockton-Lodi , sixth (Pfeifer & Lee, 2004). A large majority of the Hmong population is concentrated in or near the central valley, which is at least 200 miles away from Los Angeles. Southern California and the greater Los Angeles area have small communities of Hmong; however, their presence is absent in the institutional context. As a result, Hmong students on campus remain relatively distanced from their respective ethnic community. Therefore, UCLA exists as a very different context from UMTC because of the limited community presence.

Figure 4-4 UCLA Undergraduate Profile by Race, Fall 2010

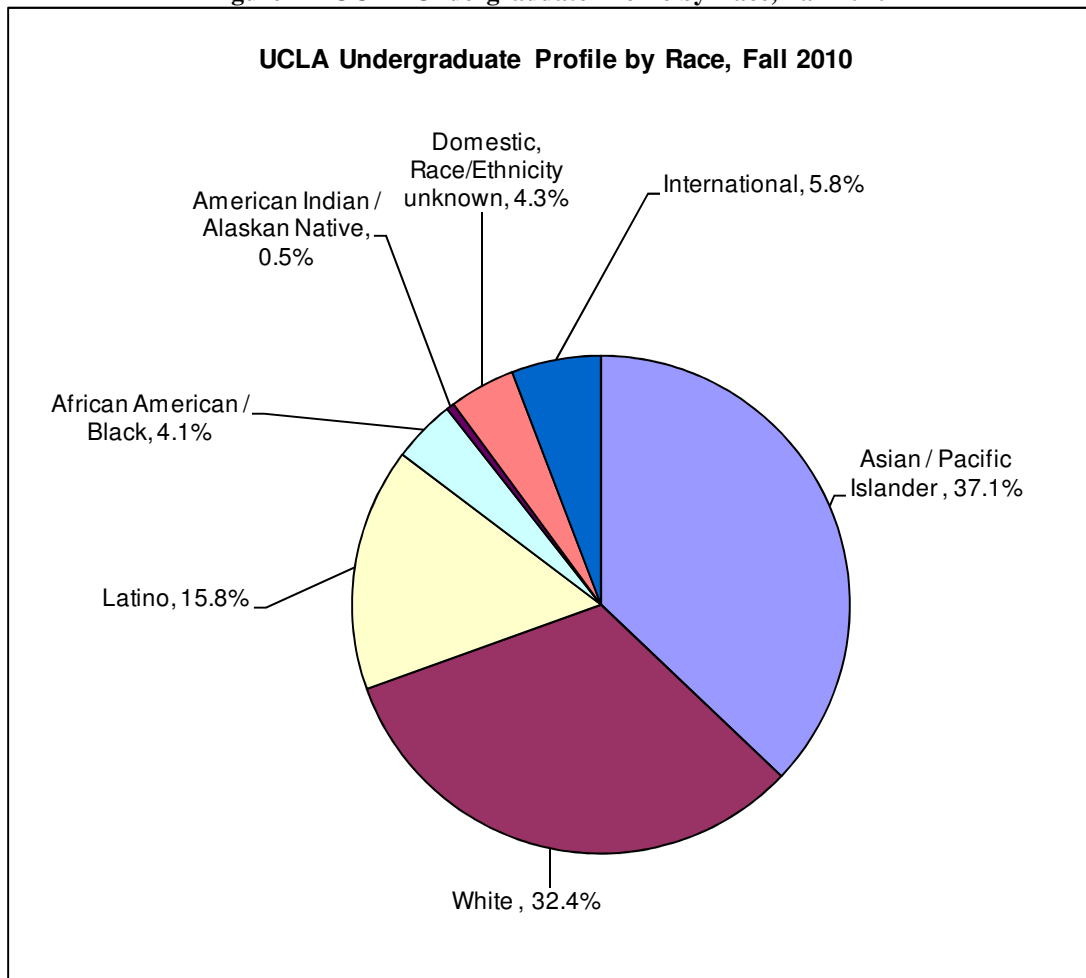
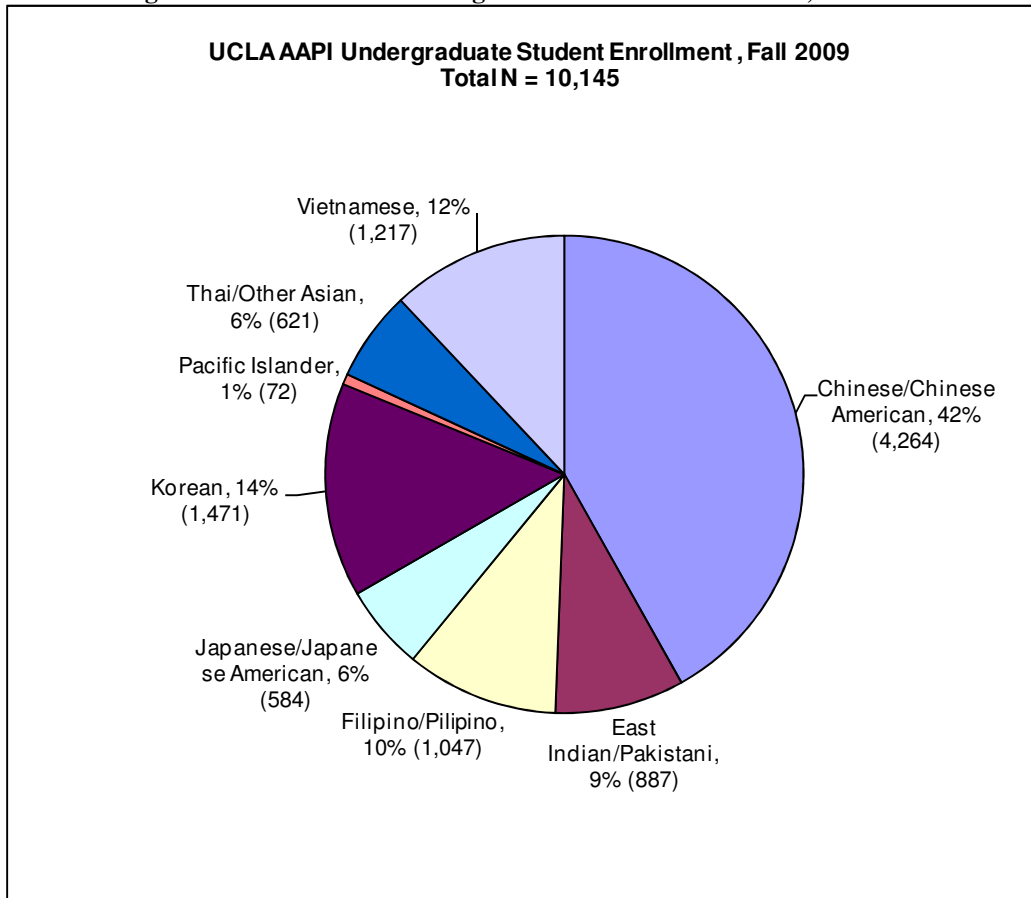


Figure 4-5 UCLA AAPI Undergraduate Student Enrollment, Fall 2009



Summary

This study uses a case study approach, offering a range of data collection methods (i.e., interview, observation, document review) to gain a holistic description and understanding of Hmong American students' negotiations of identity. While all of these methods are employed, the primary data are drawn from semistructured interviews with 40 participants (25 UMTC and 15 UCLA), who were all undergraduate students. The sample is skewed in favor of females and second-generation status. Data were collected during site visits in the 2010-2011 academic year. Recruitment was conducted through email solicitations sent to student organizations and snowball sampling. Analysis was conducted using inductive and deductive coding. Attempts to ensure trustworthiness include triangulation of data, member checking, and searching for

confirmatory and discrepant data. Reflective, descriptive analytic memos were used throughout the research process. Finally, discursive strategies within the interviews are discussed as points of role and researcher reflexivity, method, and findings.

The sites of study were purposely selected based on selectivity (i.e., selective public) and structural diversity (i.e., ethnic—Hmong; racial—AAPI). Another institutional context taken into consideration was proximity of ethnic community. Each institution has unique features of support for Hmong American students but is also limited in specific ways.

Specifically, Hmong Americans at UMTC exhibit a critical mass (700) inside and outside (ethnic enclave) of the predominantly White campus. Specific aspects of the institution that are inclusive or supportive of Hmong students are multiple ethnic-specific student organizations, presence of Hmong staff and faculty, department-sponsored cultural programming, and curricular programming. At the same time, UMTC is limited in their ability to capture disaggregated data for AAPIs. Furthermore, the redistributed cultural spaces highlight that such resources, which inherently reflect a commitment to Hmong students, is subject to larger forces..

At UCLA, there exists a plurality of AAPIs, although Hmong Americans are underrepresented (25-30) on campus and absent in the larger institutional context. Key aspects of support for Hmong include disaggregated AAPI data collection, the only Hmong student organization (AHS), a single Hmong course that has yet to be instituted as an annual offering, and student-initiated peer support for Southeast Asian Americans. Therefore, while Hmong Americans are acknowledged through disaggregation policies, there exist limited curricular resources. Additionally, despite being a plurality, AAPIs still experience hostile climates represented by acts of intolerance directed to people of Asian ancestry that occur on campus.

CHAPTER FIVE – Shades of Yellow: Race, Stereotypes and Threat

Even if I did not consciously see him [Johnny Soto]—or myself—as Asian, they saw it clearly. To my surprise, I learned I was not white. By birth, I was yellow. My aliases included Chinaman, chink, jap, gook, or even wog . . . I was repeatedly recognized as one of many. Alongside Johnny, I could turn around and find myself transformed into Genghis Khan, Tojo, Charlie Chan, Fu Manchu, Hop Sing, Mr. Sulu, Kato, Bruce Lee, Arnold on *Happy Days*, Sam on *Quincy, M.E.* (Wu, 2002, pp. 4-5)

As described by scholar and public intellectual Frank Wu (2002), phenotype is a foremost method of attaching meaning to people of color who are forced to contend with the ways it defines them and shapes their everyday lives. This reality is inescapable for Hmong American college students at both institutions who, like Wu, are “recognized as one of many” (p. 5) because of their “yellow” skin. This chapter details how Hmong students are viewed and racially constructed. Specifically, the chapter illustrates the contents of race that define Hmong students in their particular educational contexts, including precollege and college, as well as in places with different concentrations of Hmong Americans. To examine the phenomenon of race or racialization, this chapter focuses on stereotypes because they reflect racial meanings and content, which are ascribed to groups and subject to larger forces (Omi & Winant, 1994).

A goal of this chapter is to privilege the voices and lived experiences of Hmong students. Participants’ narratives reveal that Hmong Americans experience race through varied stereotypes, which mirror the racial images of AAPI groups but take on new meaning in their current contexts. Specifically, Hmong Americans are constructed as educationally successful, educationally lacking, inassimilable, and culturally static and distinct. These varied images

demonstrate how race is never static and ever evolving, which is a process underscored by racial formation theorists (Omi & Winant, 1994). Furthermore, such racial images have little coherence except to define people of color as Other. In particular, the images have influence in their ability to inform one another and work in conjunction, despite being varied and contradictory. I argue that racial stereotypes work to shape the campus racial climate experiences of Hmong students, particularly through behavioral and psychological dimensions (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999).

On the whole, Hmong students are seen as Asian American or Asian among their instructors and peers. When recounting experiences of race, being viewed as simply Asian is most common and familiar for participants of this study. As Hanna (UMTC) described, “They [people on campus] don’t know much about Hmoob people. . . . they know we’re Asian, but some would think that we’re Chinese.” This perception was not necessarily unique to their college experiences, but it was also common during participants’ precollege school years; even where there existed more of an awareness of Hmong students. For example, Mathew, who attended high school with a critical mass of Hmong students explained how, even though his peers knew his ethnic identity, “all that mattered was that we were Asian. ’Cause like, whenever I mention that I’m Hmong, it didn’t matter a lot.” Through their interactions, it was clear to the participants that their teachers and peers saw them largely as Asian, a given identifier of their yellow skin. For that reason, it is necessary to address invisibility as a principal experience of Hmong Americans prior to detailing the varied contents of race that Hmong American students negotiate.

Invisibility

Although some students specifically articulated feeling invisible, participants spoke more about not being seen, heard, nor understood as both Hmong Americans and Asian Americans.

Invisibility for Hmong Americans stems from their visibility as racial Other, a construct that maintains and manages their differential status largely through the categorization of Asian American groups. Consequently, the most apparent form of invisibility for Hmong Americans is ethnic invisibility, primarily due to phenotype but also compounded by an absence of nation of ethnic origin, which is often understood as a basis of ethnicity or shared group identity. Because they are a diasporic community, Mongolia is often the assumed place of heritage or nation of ethnic origin, a typical and reoccurring assumption that must be corrected in participants' interactions with individuals who are meeting a Hmong person for the first time. Ethnic invisibility is particularly salient in participants' educational experiences because there are vast historical, social, and cultural differences among AAPIs. Common perceptions such as all Asians are alike or are essentially the same (S. S. Lee, 2006) largely invalidate these differences and how they might shape the experiences and identity of Hmong individuals. Additionally, the meanings that have been ascribed to AAPIs render invisible issues within Hmong communities and the ethnic-specific racialization, which are described in the sections that follow.

At UCLA, Hmong Americans are invisible not only to others but also to one another due to their direly underrepresented status at the institution. Many participants recounted stories of how they discovered the presence of other Hmong students by serendipity and with surprise. Because of their small numbers as well as their own previous lack of awareness, the participants also feel concealed to their larger ethnic community. Participants' recognition of this problem is evident in their ongoing attempts to remedy their invisibility as UCLA students among the greater Hmong American community. For example, activities pursued by the Hmong student organization included a high school conference aimed to create visibility and sustainability of a Hmong community on campus. Such a goal was informed by the participants' collective

understanding that beyond constrained opportunities, underrepresentation is perpetuated by invisibility of a Hmong community at UCLA among the larger Hmong community. In particular, this perspective suggests that the absence of a Hmong community on a campus may dissuade prospective applicants from applying and accepted applicants from enrolling.

Experiences of invisibility for Hmong American students at both institutions are multidimensional and beyond that of ethnic invisibility. The participants in this study illustrate that they are largely ignored and unacknowledged because of their race, which ultimately poses consequences for their educational experiences. At UMTC, Amy described how, as an Asian American student on campus, she is “overlooked” by peers:

Generally, if I meet people, then I meet them again, they won't realize that they've met me before. So that's usually what I mean when I'm overlooked. 'Cause, to a lot of people I'm just another Asian student walking around campus.

Amy added, “Sometimes I, depending on how often I've met the person, I do get annoyed. Like, I've met you so many times already.” Such experiences are not unique to Hmong students and are familiar among Asian Americans, who have largely been described as an invisible population in the United States. (Chou & Feagin, 2008). As invisible or illegitimate citizens, they are largely disregarded and neglected in national debates and education (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Inkelas, 2006).

Although all participants are dominantly viewed as simply Asian or Asian American regardless of institutional context, those at UMTC are more likely to meet individuals who are familiar with Hmong Americans. However, familiarity sometimes was limited to knowing that Hmong people existed or what was seen on the nightly news. For example, Candice from UMTC explained, “Well from like the people I met, they know who Hmong people are, like they have

an idea, but they don't exactly know the details." Nevertheless, some participants admitted that they felt that Hmong Americans were more recognizable at UMTC than any other institution, particularly given the concentration in the Twin Cities. This visibility also had consequences for their representation. For example, participants were able to cite a range of negative images in the local media, which included news accounts featuring the Hmong community as criminally inclined or psychopathic. Although participants made the observation that the news is inherently biased in their coverage of people of color, they also acknowledged that these public perceptions bear significance for their own lives. When asked by non-Hmong individuals about news reports involving Hmong Americans, Anna from UMTC explained:

I always try to clarify the fact that just 'cause I'm Hmong doesn't mean that I know about all that stuff you know. Not that I'm not affected because you know it still affects me because I'm a Hmong person But yeah, I actually can say that's something I've experienced, people who ask me about cases that they hear on the news, or even the Fong Lee¹⁴ case. Yeah I've had people talk to me about that. And I mean I don't think it's always in a negative way, more so their asking, but . . . it does bother me in the sense that they assume I should know.

As Anna indicated, such inquiries are more likely to stem from curiosity than be motivated by ill intentions. The expectation that Hmong Americans should be familiar with and have explanations for these incidents cement the reality that such images are significant in students' lives both off and on campus. These types of inquiries are not uncommon for participants, who have become keenly aware of and sensitive to how they were largely represented in the mainstream news and media. Such portrayals, as it will be illustrated in the later sections, inform

¹⁴ Fong Lee was a 19-year-old man who was shot eight times by a Minnesota police officer. Lee reportedly had a gun; however, the gun that was recovered had no fingerprints or DNA.

understandings of them as students on campus. While UCLA students accounted for the same types of images in their hometowns, such images did not follow them to campus to the same extent.

Despite being particularly sensitive to these images, Tou from UMTC described Hmong students at the institution as somewhat “privileged” because of the comparative greater recognition received at the institution and the Twin Cities area. However, wider recognition did not remedy the larger sentiment toward Hmong Americans and their perceived insignificance to the majority of Americans. Specifically, when Hmong Americans are recognized, their invisibility is deemed relatively acceptable because of their smaller and supposed insignificant numbers in the United States. For example, Yang, a UMTC participant, recounted a candid conversation with an older White female coworker at her on campus job:

She was saying how she thinks it’s funny how depending on where you are in the United States people have no idea who the Hmong are. And her opinion was that if you live in a community where there are Hmong people then you should know about the Hmong, and that anywhere else it’s okay that you don’t know about the Hmong. And I understand her reasoning, but I didn’t agree with that. I think that if you live in the United States you should know who Hmong are and there really is no excuse. We, Hmong, were a part of the Vietnam War, and so if you’re in a history class and you learn about the Vietnam War how can you not learn about Hmong people, so.

Yang’s conversation with her coworker demonstrated to her that Hmong people and history are largely considered irrelevant unless they become materially significant to the lives of others. Her critique of this attitude suggested that this invisibility is in part due to the ways history is conveyed and taught in schools, which marginalizes the experiences and voices of ethnic

minorities such as Hmong Americans. As it will be demonstrated later, this is particularly problematic when visibility comes solely through culture or what other scholars have observed in the elementary setting as “food fairs” (Adler, 2004). Finally, comparative awareness at UMTC did not negate the fact that it was a typical experience for participants to be identified as Asian American and associated with the more widely known Asian ethnic groups—Chinese or Japanese, or an international student.

Educationally Successful

Because phenotype remains a distinguishing marker of groups and individuals in a racialized society, many of the meanings or stereotypes that Hmong students encounter stem from assumptions that they are Asian, but not always American. Included among these stereotypes is the model minority image that is ascribed to AAPIs, which largely characterizes them as smart, good at math, and excelling in school (Suzuki, 2002). Beyond the schoolyard, these presumptions suggest that AAPIs have achieved social and economic success in mainstream society (Chun, 1995; Suzuki, 2002). Also implicit is the belief that AAPIs collectively share the same forms of capital and have the same opportunities as White Americans. The stereotype of being educationally successful and its implicit assumptions become significant in the nuanced ways in which they shape participants’ educational experiences and are used to explain their educational success. This stereotype is ascribed to participants in college as both “Asian American students” and “Hmong American students” attending the university. The latter is a result of an exceptionalized view of their presence in higher education, which is laced with negative assumptions about the educational potential of Hmong students rather than a normative view wherein higher education is an expected standard for AAs.

The lack of awareness about Hmong Americans in higher education increases the tendency to ascribe Asian and AAPI stereotypes to all ethnic Asians. According to Amy, a student from UMTC, “A lot of people that I’ve met, they perceive me as being really smart; not so much because I’m Hmong, but because I’m Asian.” She continued:

In general I think that Asian students are perceived as being smart and very dedicated, so I think that falls in how the U[niversity] perceives Hmong students as well . . . that’s my assumption, that their perception of Hmong students is the same as other Asian students: that they’re dedicated to schooling, and that they’re smart.

The stereotype that all Asian students are educationally successful neglects both AAPI students who are academically struggling (Suzuki, 2002) and ethnic subgroups like Hmong Americans, who collectively are more likely to encounter challenges and experience different opportunities given their different social and economic conditions (CARE, 2008; Teranishi, 2004, 2010; Yeh, 2002). At the same time, such simplistic explanations of success (i.e., “smarts” and dedication) become problematic because they carry the inherent assumption that those who do not matriculate to college either cannot or choose not to, without accounting for the various ways that opportunities become diminished for Hmong Americans. Therefore, while smarts and dedication are important, a view that only takes those factors into account overlooks other critical factors, such as specific forms of social, cultural, and economic capital that garner opportunities that facilitate higher education participation and success.

When identified as Hmong American, the latter attribution of being viewed as an exception is more prevalent. This paradox was a familiar concept to participants given that many of them were ascribed the high-achieving stereotypes in high school by virtue of being in college preparatory or advanced courses. However, more often than not, Hmong students were numerical

minorities in these courses even at predominantly minority schools. They were expected to excel as Asians, yet at the same time, the largely negative ethnic-specific stereotypes associated with Hmong students made their individual success exceptional rather than the community norm. It is clear that the image of the exceptional Hmong American student, like that of the model minority, is grounded in deficit thinking, thereby reducing the academic struggles of Hmong Americans to the individual or community while neglecting the social and structural barriers that reduce educational success. Sadie from UCLA illustrated the distinction made between her and the general population of Hmong students at her predominantly White high school where there was a critical mass of Hmong students:

Well I think, for me, 'cause I was always in a lot of classes with White people, they were all just like, "Oh you're really smart for like a Hmong person." So I don't know if that means they usually think Hmong people are dumb. I don't know, but a lot of the students in a lot of my classes are just like, "Oh you're smart, and you're Hmong." And I don't know what that's supposed to really mean, but, for me, that's how they saw me.

Thus, while students often described "positive" model minority stereotypes that were attributed to their personal academic success, they were keenly aware of the negative stereotypes associated with Hmong people who were viewed as having less academic potential and, in extreme cases, delinquent. This tenuous positioning, as Hanna later illustrated, can be difficult to negotiate and can create self-doubt, particularly when neither image is adopted as part of identity.

Participants might be thought of as receiving benefits of a positive stereotype; however, being viewed as high-achieving carries unique consequences that are little known and understood. In particular, peers held participants to high expectations but had little understanding

of their challenges, which participants described as including socioeconomic conditions and tenuous cultural expectations as second-generation immigrant students. Therefore, peers had little sympathy for them when they were unable to meet these expectations. As a result, participants described feeling inadequate when unable to meet these expectations, many of which were provided limited assistance to achieve. Additionally, Tony from UCLA observed that the “quiet Asian” image that was positively viewed by precollege teachers often resulted in the neglect of Hmong Americans, who were struggling academically. Previous research also documents how Hmong students fail to receive needed assistance because they are overlooked for being culturally reserved (S. J. Lee, 2001).

In college, students continued to experience being overlooked based on the view that they were high-achieving—an image, as described earlier, that was loaded with assumptions about having similar types of capital and opportunities held by the White, middle and upper class college students. For example, some students felt as though their primarily underresourced high schools had underprepared them for the rigorous university setting. Additionally, once on campus, some students realized that they did not share the same types of resources nor privileged capital as their college peers. Although participants’ presence on campus illustrates that such limitations are not deterministic, they hold continued significance in the college experiences of Hmong students such that they present substantial obstacles for students once on campus. However, because of their race (i.e., Asian American), these obstacles remain unrecognized by the institution and large majority.

A phenomenon of concern and under speculation by Hmong community members was the attrition of Hmong students at UMTC. During an informal conversation, one UMTC student affairs officer expressed concern that there was no way to account for Hmong American

retention and persistence because of the campus practice of aggregating all Asian Americans in campus statistics. Over half (15) of the UMTC participants discussed Hmong attrition as an issue on campus, pointing to Hmong peers who were unable to complete their studies. Perhaps the dire reality of Hmong student attrition observed by participants may explain why some UMTC participants (10), three of whom were in their final undergraduate year, cited not completing college as a fear they held. They only had to turn to one of countless personal examples to see and substantiate this as a possible reality for themselves. Such issues remain largely unrecognized beyond Hmong Americans at the institution because as Asian Americans, Hmong Americans are believed to be well adjusted. Unfortunately, for those who are unable to complete their studies, their voices, stories, and struggles often fade with their departure from the institution, although clearly, not from the collective memory of Hmong Americans who remain.

Educationally Lacking

Participants, particularly those at the UMTC, continue to encounter negative stereotypes about their educational potential, although less frequently in college than in high school. These images highlight alternative trajectories, which suggest that Hmong Americans are delinquent (S. J. Lee, 2002, 2005) or an antithesis to the model minority in terms of educational achievement. Neng, who is intimidating only in his physique, is used to being stereotyped¹⁵ or otherwise be the object of curiosity because of the Hmong American community's purported overrepresentation in criminal activity. Referring to the frequency of encountering the delinquent stereotype on campus, he explained with a gentle smile on his face, "I've encountered it many times. Many times." In his response to others when confronted with the stereotype, Neng often clarified, "I just be like, "Dude, that's not always true,""

¹⁵ Neng is aware that stereotypes of being gang-affiliated are often made of him. Many individuals who had initially stereotyped him have confirmed this for him once they became better acquainted.

Neng's experiences at UMTC of repeatedly being mistaken as having, at one time or another, been gang-affiliated demonstrate the pervasiveness of the delinquent stereotype, which continues to be ascribed to Hmong Americans in the college setting. While his "urban" apparel and vernacular likely contributed to his being stereotyped, such stereotyping nonetheless was informed by an understanding of Hmong Americans that was shaped by delinquent images. All of the participants, whether from UCLA or UMTC, were cognizant of this perception of Hmong people, partially due to how these images were informed and reaffirmed by local and popular media. Overall, delinquent images were encountered much more in the precollege educational setting where Hmong students were more widely recognized given that many of the participants attended schools with critical mass of Hmong students.

In the higher education setting, it was more common for participants to experience less extreme stereotypes about their educational potential, but they were no less damaging. The majority of UMTC participants described being viewed as academically incapable or incompetent as college students, particularly when considering participants' awareness of western notions about class participation that often dictate the characteristics of a "good" student. For example, a good student might be one who is the converse of how Hmong students are viewed, which Kyle described as

Quiet, not as interactive, um yeah probably the not so good students. You know 'cause we're, we tend to be a lot more quiet, and *peb tsis tshua hais lus ntau* [we don't really speak much]. You know, we don't really raise our hands, we don't answer questions or really ask questions, we just go to class, do our work, and turn it in.

As described earlier, while some participants noted that being quiet in class might have been viewed more positively in their precollege education, it had the opposite effect on how they were

constructed in college. According to Kyle, because Hmong American students are quiet, their learning style made them appear as “not so good” students.

Although some participants made the observation that Hmong students, including themselves, do tend to be quieter in the classroom, they often attributed that characteristic to Hmong cultural norms. These participants also critiqued the labeling of such norms as problematic simply because they did not subscribe to White western forms of engagement. Rather than cultural explanations, other participants provided insight into a different explanation all together—one that implicitly spoke to the fear of confirming the pervasive stereotype that Hmong students have lower ability and educational potential. For example, Candice offered her own experiences to elucidate the seemingly lower classroom participation of Hmong students, which indicate the awareness of such stereotypes:

I think *Hmoob* [Hmong] people are quieter because they might think they're wrong or if they say something it might make them look stupid. I kind of like, I was in that position before just being in class I don't want to say anything stupid or just anything stupid that will make me look like I'm wrong or anything.

The significance of negative stereotypes regarding educational potential of Hmong Americans is further detailed as Candice described when and how ethnicity becomes salient for her:

I think about it [ethnic identity or being Hmong] a lot I guess. I just think about I'm different, like I'm not capable. I guess I'm just not capable of like getting the correct or getting things right I guess. And I'm like afraid that if I say something it might be wrong, yeah. So I think about my ethnicity a lot.

Candice revealed that stereotypes of being educationally lacking that are attached to her ethnic identity are at work in defining her on campus and in classrooms. The residual effect of this stereotype, as Candice illustrated, is self-doubt in educational potential.

Another participant expressed similar feelings while discussing her status as an underrepresented student of color at a PWI. Hanna confided her insecurities about being viewed as somehow academically deficient and openly shared how it shapes her education and behaviors in the classroom:

I feel like being a minority we have a lot of challenges. Like for example, we don't think we're smart enough and . . . our thoughts or ideas are not that important, or not smart enough, not intelligent enough for the majority of our classmates. . . . I was a part of this one group work and we had to do a little exercise together so being the minority in the group I chose to do the part that was the easiest because my part, I didn't want to make myself or put the group down. But I let them pick the parts that were a little more complicated and yeah.

Hanna's anxiety regarding how her peers will evaluate her academic performance was informed by the dual expectations placed on her as an Asian American and a Hmong American. In particular, she feels that she is unable to live up to the stereotype of having high educational ability but does not want to confirm the alternative stereotype of lacking ability. She is aware that evaluations of performance often discount the host of challenges students of color often face. In this particular situation, picking the easiest part could be understood as minimizing the risks of reinforcing stereotypes about Hmong Americans.

Both Candice's and Hanna's awareness of negative images, as revealed in their discussions of media and schooling experiences during their interviews, suggested that the

stereotypes are externally imposed and reinforced rather than internally maintained. In other words, it was clear these participants did not hold the view that Hmong students or students of color are less intelligent or capable; however, they were greatly affected by others' negative perceptions of them. Images of less intelligence were salient precisely because they countered and juxtaposed the stereotype of being exceedingly academically successful to which they were often ascribed. Neither image was an accurate characterization of how they saw themselves. Unfortunately, in these two scenarios,¹⁶ participants' actions, as Candice regrettably noted later, left such stereotypes unchallenged. While these accounts exemplify the real and substantial negative effects of stereotypes for the Hmong American education, a more normative response from study participants, as it will be illustrated later, was to utilize negative stereotypes as motivation to perform well academically while also resisting the racialized assumptions inherent in positive stereotypes.

Self-Segregating and Inassimilable

In addition to constructions that they were somehow limited in their academic potential or abilities, Hmong students were also viewed as excluding themselves from the larger campus community. Specifically, they were viewed as self-segregating, which became a recurring narrative in participants' descriptions of how Hmong students are viewed as tending to only socialize within their own "bubble." Implicit within the self-segregating image is the perception that Hmong students elect to not socialize with non-Hmong students and only join Hmong student groups, therefore remaining unintegrated to the larger institution. For example, Yang's comment illustrated her awareness of this stereotype and its immediate effect on her own behaviors:

¹⁶ It is important to note that both Candice and Hanna did not consistently engage in what might be described as confirmatory actions.

I think it affects how I interact with other Hmong students. I noticed that I do tend to avoid other Hmong students in classes just because I don't want to give people, I don't want to let people think that Hmong students only become friends with other Hmong students. And I think that's what a lot of people think; at least that was how it was in high school. And I don't want it to be that way in college either, so I tend to avoid other Hmong students, um, yeah.

While all participants negotiated the image of Hmong students as self-segregating in high school, in the college context, this particular narrative was more salient and central for UMTC participants because the Hmong population is larger and more visible in both the university and Twin Cities communities. The same critique would be impractical at UCLA given the smaller numbers of Hmong students.

The student-specific image of being self-segregating mirrors larger perceptions of Hmong Americans within the greater Twin Cities. Participants' awareness could be credited to their regular exposure to nativist rhetoric encountered in the media and through their interactions with Whites. Such images were more salient for Hmong students at UMTC and were evident in how they described portrayals of Hmong Americans. They cited the multitude of images in the news that depict Hmong ethnics as a criminally inclined and a troubled community. Such images included highly profiled incidences involving Hmong individuals.¹⁷ Gao from UMTC indicated that such images portray Hmong Americans as "bad immigrants," a message participants are sent not only through media images but their implicit comparison to other groups. Valery from

¹⁷ Examples include Chai Vang, Fong Lee, Vang, and Vang Pao. Vang was involved in a shooting during a hunting trip that resulted in the deaths of six people and two injured. All of the victims were White, and race was reported to be a factor. Vang claimed self-defense, reporting that he felt threatened. Vang was found guilty of six charges of first-degree intentional homicide and two charges of attempted homicide. Lee was a 19-year-old man who was shot eight times by a Minnesota police officer. Lee reportedly had a gun; however, the gun that was recovered had no fingerprints or DNA. Pao was a respected leader in the Hmong community, who allegedly plotted to overthrow the government of Laos.

UCLA stated that Hmong Americans are likely viewed as the “crazy Asians,” providing insight on the inherent comparison to Asians who are largely constructed as being good immigrants or model minorities. As Betty from UMTC plainly stated, “They kind of view us [Hmong Americans] as a community that’s not really going anywhere,” indicating that Hmong Americans are viewed as being unable to follow the same assimilation trajectory as their European and East Asian counterparts. Like the educational framing of educational potential that positions high-achieving Hmong Americans as exceptions to their community, such a comparison evokes cultural deficits to identify Hmong Americans as exceptions to model Asian groups.

Other participants further detailed the notion of bad immigrant, capturing anti-immigrant or nativist sentiments towards Hmong Americans, particularly the dominant perceptions of them as a socially stagnant and opportunistic community with little to contribute to the larger society. Yang explained,

A lot of people see the Hmong people negatively because of how they are portrayed in the media. And I think with local news it’s no different. Because there are gangs here in St. Paul and Minneapolis and there’s crime here that’s committed by Hmong people, it gives people a very narrow perspective of who Hmong people are. And, I think a lot of people just have a negative perspective of Hmong people because of the whole refugee situation. And I think a lot of people will feel like the Hmong people are just like leeches trying to, you know, get as much resources out of the government as possible for doing nothing, you know. And I think a lot of people feel that way.

Yang captured how poverty and welfare have been racialized to include Hmong Americans. It is apparent that social and economic difficulties in the Hmong American community, including the

arrival of more recent Hmong refugees who come with a host of social needs, amplify the nativist perceptions of Hmong Americans' ability to assimilate as productive members.

Participants feel compelled to disprove images of Hmong as bad immigrants and bad students through their education and social interactions. Hlee, another UMTC participant, felt that because of the negative media attention, which stubbornly focuses on the social and cultural adjustment issues of Hmong Americans, "they [the world or society] don't really know that Hmong people can be successful." Addressing images and discourses of Hmong Americans as inassimilable and a detriment to society, she passionately asserted, "Hmong people aren't just taking up space in America, you know what I mean. We're actually people with our own capabilities. And we can give something back to the country and we do have things to offer." Success for Hlee not only encompasses school success but also includes working to diminish barriers that Hmong Americans face. For Hlee, included in this work requires demonstrating their belongingness as active citizens and students within a larger community of peers.

I feel like I've been involving myself in a lot of Hmong organizations, but I think part of me feels, being a Hmong person it's almost my responsibility to step outside of the Hmong community, and show the rest of the world that I am Hmong and I do have these capabilities.

The awareness of stereotypes motivates Hlee and other participants to disconfirm these images through working within and outside of their communities. At the same time, this awareness also causes some students, like Yang, to avoid their own ethnic community on campus. Considering how ethnic subcultures and communities help students to negotiate race, racial images, and stereotypes (Museus, 2008; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), actions like Yang's illustrate a

consequence of being singled out as self-segregating, a common accusation made of students of color (Tatum, 1997).

Culturally Static and Distinct

As students on campus, participants continually experienced being viewed as foreign in multiple ways. They were often mistaken for international students or innocently asked, “Where are you from?” implicitly questioning their citizenship and belonging both on and off campus. Such scenarios are familiar and tiresome for AAPIs who, because of their physical markers of difference, are continually viewed as perpetual foreigners within their own country of citizenship (Tuan, 1998). When seen as Hmong, participants were viewed as a culturally distinct group that, as previously illustrated through news and media images, was inassimilable. Even positive images, primarily the reporting of cultural celebrations and community activities, are somewhat essentializing: They often solely feature cultural difference. Cultural difference also exists in popular media and in educational texts, which students often critiqued in their interviews, particularly because such mediums directly inform how others view them on and off campus. Participants were made aware of this fact in their conversations with individuals who often referred to popular images. In some instances, inquiries about cultural accuracy were asked in an innocent and curious manner, while in other moments, they took on a more sinister or insensitive tone, crudely joking about its cultural contents.

Among the popular images was the portrayal of Hmong culture in the Hollywood film *Gran Torino*, which one student believed “went too far along the lines of trying to like, you know, be different.” According to scholars (Ngo, 2006), this cultural lens dominates how Hmong Americans are often viewed. Pierson from UMTC illustrated how understandings of Hmong American culture are limited:

They only know that we make eggrolls, we are smart, or do karate or whatever. . . . They only know the stereotyped issues with us, but they don't know our responsibilities, our culture, our religion. They just know the stereotypes that people often convey or twist or are embedded.

Pierson's specific critique is that forms of culture that are recognized are often selective and superficial. For example, eggrolls and smart might be considered cultural elements; however, they do not reflect the real constraints, expectations, and demands that culture can pose for Hmong Americans. When responsibilities and other instrumental forces are viewed as immaterial to Hmong Americans, the quality of culture in Hmong American lives is underappreciated. At the same time, however, Lori and Valery later showed how the overreliance of these more instrumental community forces in constructions of Hmong Americans relegates Hmong culture as negative, detrimental, and ultimately, deterministic

Although all participants agreed that recognition of culture is positive, they illustrated how culture is too often singled out to position Hmong Americans as a distinct and therefore inferior group. For example, Amy from UMTC described how Hmong culture is caste outside of normalcy and conveyed the negative implications on how Hmong people are viewed:

They probably think Hmong people are still like quote unquote savages, because in America there's like, a certain way you're supposed to act, or how you're supposed to eat, in terms of like fitting into the social norms. So I think that being Hmong kind of doesn't play into the social norms of what Caucasians probably think.

The significance of the culturally different and distinct image becomes clearer when examining explanations for educational outcomes. For example, in the case of Hmong Americans, culture has been largely viewed as inhibiting social advancement and acculturation in this country. More

specifically to education, culture has often been framed as detrimental for the educational potential or success of Hmong students. Therefore, culturally distinct images become the basis for understandings of school failure and the consequential outcomes such as early marriage and delinquency that might ensue.

A consequence of the “culturally different” image exists in the positioning of Hmong Americans issues as being culturally situated and bounded. As such, problems are relegated outside the purview of society and instead believed to be the sole responsibility of Hmong communities. Demonstrating her awareness of how Hmong American issues are explained, Lori from UCLA pointed to *Gran Torino* in describing the dominant images of Hmong females as either housewives or falling “victim to their own race.” The victim image Lori refers to is the character of Sue,¹⁸ a studious, well adjusted and assimilated Hmong female, who is eventually a victim of rape perpetrated by Hmong gang members. Implicit in Lori’s example of Hmong females is the image of Hmong males who are deemed as culturally oppressive to Hmong women and whose experiences are largely defined by criminality and delinquency, an observation also noted by Neng earlier (Lei, 2003).

While this particular portrayal of victimization is somewhat extreme, such an image underscores a gendered narrative of cultural deficit that exists in explanations of Hmong females’ educational difficulties. Under such a framing, Hmong females are constrained by their culture. Scholars document this issue for Hmong Americans and specifically explained how early marriage is often viewed from the lens of cultural clashes (Ngo, 2006). Participants were particularly sensitive to how these representations operate to constrain both Hmong females and males through multiple axes of power and privilege (Mohanty, 1984, 2002). In the

¹⁸ In the film, Sue is quoted saying: “Hmong girls over here fit in better. The girls go to college and the boys go to jail.” This quote captures some of the gendered images of Hmong Americans that are raised by participants themselves.

characterization of Sue, axes of marginalization include issues of gender, class, and race. Like the character of Sue, Hmong students on campus were often gazed upon and understood to be constrained by their culture.

Perhaps because they were particularly underrepresented on campus, UCLA students were sometimes viewed as culturally and socially static as well as determined by their circumstances. For example, Hmong Americans were seen as continually existing in a cultural, social, or psychological state of the past. Valery, a UCLA participant, described her visit to the Hmong course that was offered and provided insights on how Hmong American students were unintentionally constructed on campus. Below her narrative is presented in detail to preserve the integrity of her voice and richness of her own words.

There wasn't a Hmong person in the Hmong course right, so the professor, asked me to come to just like answer anybody's questions or anything like that. So I went in there and I think, 'cause . . . they read about the Hmong refugee experience, coming here for the first time, and watching videos of Hmong families going to the store for the first time, or you know, seeing what a heater was, and how do you turn on the faucet, and all that stuff. So they kind of watched it and, sort of like, they see the Hmong people as a different sort of species I guess. So when I got in there and I told them, "Yeah I'm Hmong," and they're like, "Woah, you exist. Like I thought I was just reading it." So, I think to actually see a Hmong person I think that [for them it was] kind of like, "I didn't think that was possible." Because they've been reading all these sort of, sob stories about Hmong people and you know, I think they got into the mental illness of the PTSD and the War and stuff. Um, a lot of the stories [were about] farming in [the central valley] I guess, so they just assumed Hmong people still farmed and they wouldn't go into higher institutions. So I

think that was the only downfall of what I thought like people perceive Hmong people as. When they finally saw me, like, “Oh yeah you did get through.” I think that was kind of like, “Woah” they didn’t think Hmong people exist in higher institutions.

Valery also recounted some of the questions they asked her during her visit:

I think a lot of them asked about Shamans: “Are they real?” I was like, “Yeah.” “Do you believe it?” So it was more of those, just a lot of those questions of like, the superstitions about this, we read about that. . . . I think they said, “Do you know of any Shamans?” and “Do you think what they do really like works?”

Valery’s experience depicts how Hmong Americans were considered exotic because of their rarity on campus, their cultural differences, and their foreign ways. In particular, the images of Hmong people going to the store for the first time or seeing how a faucet works constructed Hmong as culturally static. Although these images convey the real adjustment issues and experiences of Hmong Americans over 30 years ago when the initial groups arrived to the United States from their agrarian background, it was clear to participants that these images continued to define them. Later interactions with a student who interviewed Valery for a course paper further confirmed her impressions about how the students perceived Hmong Americans.

She even told me, “I didn’t think you guys went to,” she’s like, “I don’t want to be mean, but I just didn’t think that, you know, I didn’t know Hmong people were here, or even in the UC system or anything like that, you know.” And I kind of asked her why, but she kind of said, just by reading the stories or something and it’s just sort of like, these people seem so, for lack of a better word, oppressed or something like that in the system that you wouldn’t think they would make it out this far. And I was like, “Oh okay.” You know, I’m not hurt by that. I’m like, okay that’s just a perception and I’m glad that you’re

interviewing me so I could give you a different perspective, so you could write about it and think about it. And hopefully that'll change your view and help others too so.

As a student at selective public institution, Valery was considered as an exception to the rest of her community, who was constructed as culturally static and socially determined. It appeared that whether due to their culture, social location, or experiences in history, Hmong were largely constructed as static, oppressed, or objects to be determined. Such a view negates the agency that Hmong Americans have exhibited throughout history, which also continues to be exhibited in their ongoing negotiations of culture and race. Furthermore, such a view leaves little room for participants' own experiences of academic achievement, which under the current limited framing is understood as exceptional.

Although Valery's experience was objectifying, Valery remained committed to the belief that the course is instructive and necessary for raising awareness of Hmong Americans. She also enjoyed and valued her interactions with the students as a teachable moment by showing them that she was just like them in many ways despite some differing social circumstances and having different cultural knowledge. Similarly, Hmong students engage in many teachable moments, particularly when it concerns their identity. The next chapters focus on how Hmong American students exhibit agency in these ongoing negotiations within their particular contexts.

Summary

Participants' experiences illustrated that the "coloring" of yellow involves many shades and hues—at times definitively distinct and vaguely obscured but nevertheless significant in shaping their educational experiences and learning of race. Hmong American students are ascribed many stereotypes, including being viewed educationally successful, educationally lacking, self-segregating, and culturally different and distinct. These particular images of Hmong

students were not simply experienced on their respective university campuses, but off campus, primarily in their precollege educational environments and larger hometown community where there existed a critical mass of Hmong Americans. Because these student-specific images are popularized in the media, they can be understood as mirroring larger perceptions of Hmong Americans and AAPIs.

Institutional context. While all participants experienced stereotypes and were aware of how it defined them, the extent to which each image was in effect varied based on the institutional context, which included both the campus and its broader community.

Participants at UCLA described invisibility as a particularly salient experience, primarily because on campus and in the surrounding community, Hmong Americans are virtually absent and there is little knowledge of them. On campus, UCLA participants are largely viewed like all other Asians, being stereotyped as smart and having experienced unparalleled success while overlooking the community struggles of the larger population. As a result, negative stereotypes of Hmong Americans as educationally lacking, self-segregating, and culturally distinct were less pervasive in the UCLA university setting compared to their high school experiences and the college experiences of UMTC participants. However, it would be overly optimistic to suggest that these negative images were not constraining for UCLA participants, as they still shaped constructions of Hmong people. When identified as Hmong students, they were viewed as individually exceptional in comparison to the larger Hmong community who were viewed as determined by their culture and social location. In particular, the underrepresentation and rarity of Hmong bodies at UCLA unintentionally made them exotic objects of diversity.

Despite attending UMTC, which is in the heart of one of the nation's largest concentrations of Hmong Americans, participants continually encounter people who do not know

of Hmong or view them simply as Asian. Comparatively, however, it is more likely for Hmong Americans to be recognized at UMTC, though the recognition comes at a cost. Primarily, the residual effects of constant racialization in the local news shape the ways that Hmong students are understood on campus. Consequently, UMTC participants' experiences of race or racialization largely include negotiating the effects of those negative images, which portray Hmong Americans as an inassimilable and culturally distinct immigrant group and, more generally, as a thriving but also troubled community that is determined by their social and cultural location or conditions. On campus culturally distinct images translated to understandings about how Hmong Americans "subtracted" or "added" to the university. For example, Hmong students were viewed as self-segregating and not contributing to educational spaces and processes. Therefore, when examining how institutional context shapes the contours of race for Hmong Americans, it appears that the demographics of the institution and the wider community are important to shaping the extent to which images are ascribed.

Stereotype threat and racial battle fatigue. The racialized images that construct Hmong Americans have real and substantial costs for participants' college experiences, including being underserved, overlooked or misunderstood. These images shape the dynamics of their interactions and their own beliefs about their abilities. Positive stereotypes neglect the struggles of Hmong students, ignore their absence of specific forms of capital (e.g., social, economic, privileged culture) that construct opportunities, and result in a lack of academic support. In addition to material consequences of positive stereotypes, Hmong students, like other AAPIs, experience psychological distress when they are unable to meet these expectations.

A result of their awareness to stereotypes about Hmong students' lack of educational potential, some participants experienced anxiety about confirming negative beliefs about their

abilities. Steele's (1997) notion of "stereotype threat" provides insight into their experiences. The Hmong students' fear of confirming negative stereotypes unintentionally resulted in what could be considered confirmatory actions despite their individual and collective critique of such stereotypes and rejection of the stereotypes for their own sense of identity.

While the majority of the participants utilized these negative stereotypes as motivation to succeed, it was clear that all participants, whether or not they *directly* verbalized it in their narratives, were psychologically and socially burdened by their experiences of race, which are not limited to racial stereotypes. Smith et al. (2007) illustrated how Black students' racial encounters produce "racial battle fatigue" or "painful psychological stress responses" that must be managed in a racialized environmental context. Similarly, Hmong participants in the current study experience adverse effects from their encounters with race. In particular, participants communicated their experiences of race as emotionally occupying and tiring. In addition, when they spoke of race or racial incidents in their interviews, it was clear that these incidents incited pain, anger, frustration, fear, sadness, shame, and even avoidance. Such emotions illustrate that racial images and incidents become ingrained into the consciousness and collective memory of Hmong Americans. Although such experiences exist as reference points for success (Kiang, 1996), the cumulative effect of such experiences can be particularly damaging for the body and spirit (Smith et al., 2007; Hwang, & Goto, 2009; Tatum, 1997; Truong & Museus, 2012). Such images represent the atmospheric nature of racism that Hmong students concretely experience and must negotiate within their educational contexts.

Ultimately, the collective narrative of Hmong students in this study is one of resilience given their ability to persist despite these socially, psychologically, and culturally demanding episodes of race. The resiliency of participants is evident in how they utilize experiences of race

and awareness of their marginality as motivation to succeed. The following chapters examine expressions of ethnicity, which illustrate that actively claiming experiences of race, despite the pain they cause, can be healing, affirming, and liberating because these expressions demand that others recognize such experiences.

Prelude to Ethnicity Section

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Negotiating Visibility and the Contours of Ethnicity

The publicity of the Hmong community [in the Twin Cities], it's so much larger than what I had back in [my old home town]. Because in [my old hometown] we had such a small community. . . . But then just like the lack of publicity, nobody really knows about our culture, so it was always hard to explain it to our classmates, our teachers, and about what our families went through, and even trying to understand ourselves, what our family went through, why we're here. The publicity over here [Twin Cities], it's larger, but then sometimes I get kind of scared about it because there are gang problems, there are always relationship problems within our community on the news. (Betty, UMTC)

Having moved to the Twin Cities from an out-of-state community where Hmong people were virtually absent, Betty's contrasting experiences in each setting captures that of participants at both institutions. More importantly, her astute comparison illustrates the terms of visibility and captures the dynamic project of representation, which can be constraining and deterministic. As demonstrated in Chapter five, ethnic invisibility is a primary experience of Hmong American students, however visibility must also be negotiated because of the ways in which ethnicity is vulnerable to the contents and constraints of race. In other words, even when not held to Asian stereotypes, Hmong Americans remain subject to ethnic-specific racialized understandings, which take the form of Hmong stereotypes. Therefore, constituting ethnicity involves negotiating both invisibility and visibility, a process examined in this section.

Hmong American college students engage in complex processes of identity involving the negotiation of race with ethnicity. Like race, ethnicity is fluid, ever evolving in content, and constantly negotiated with changing social conditions that inform meaning and representation

(Nagel, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994). However, where race refers to external ascription, ethnicity reflects internal assertions (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007), a conceptually distinct concept that provides credence to the role of agency in racial formations despite the constraining force of race.

As participants' experiences will illustrate, ethnicity is negotiated through multiple mediums, situations, and in various contexts. The next three chapters capture how ethnicity is negotiated in interpersonal interactions (i.e., narratives of identity), cocurricular affiliation and involvement (i.e., ethnic organizations at UMTC) and collective projects (i.e., culture show performance at UCLA). By examining these different forms of engagement, I detail the role and contents of ethnicity as enacted and expressed by Hmong American university students in order to negotiate race.

Throughout my analysis, I aim to illustrate that the process of negotiating individual and collective identity is one that necessitates engaging, complicating, and embracing the varied dimensions—"the good, the bad, and the ugly"—of both race and ethnicity. The *good* refers specifically to instructive value of collective memory and the positive and affirming role of community in times of individual and collective adversity. The *bad* refers to the constraints of outsider and insider communities. For example, race can be potentially deterministic in its constraints, particularly when it encroaches on ethnicity, which leads to the final dimension. The *ugly* refers to the intercommunity—that is, within race and within ethnicity—tensions that require constant renegotiation, particularly given the copious ever evolving nature of race under dynamic racial formations. Although this ugliness exists in society more generally, marginalized communities experience intercommunity tensions both symbolically and concretely given their Othered status. Therefore, people of color are particularly shielding of insider issues, a concept

that is ultimately problematized by UCLA participants. By engaging these varied dimensions, Hmong Americans are able to move beyond the limits of race as well as ethnicity, which are ultimately informed by race and racial formations. Addressing these various dimensions enable participants to work towards a more holistic and affirming identity on campus and society.

CHAPTER SIX – Organizing Community: Collective Memory, Commitments, and Constraints

Organizational participation or affiliation is a form of identity expression (Espiritu, 1993; Harper & Quaye, 2007). For students of color on predominantly White institutions, they serve an added function; they are understood as providing a safe space (Guiffrida, 2003, Montelongo, 2002; Museus, 2008). This safe space becomes necessary because students of color often experience PWIs as unwelcoming or hostile environments. In particular, students of color often occupy a differential status within institutions (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). Such conditions create the necessity for counterspaces (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) that enable students to negotiate experiences of race and to critique their social location within institutions. Specifically, cultural organizations enable students to work towards an affirming sense of identity (Allen, 1985) while engaging in collective action and social justice projects (Rhoads et al., 2002). As such, cultural organizations can provide important spaces for students to express, affirm, and negotiate identity within institutional contexts.

This chapter largely examines the ways in which ethnic or cultural organizations become meaningful for Hmong students at UMTC, a rich environment for examining their expressions of ethnicity given the unique demographics of the institution and greater context. To explore fully the institution's richness and account for the presence of Hmong Americans in the Twin Cities, this chapter also discusses the presence of community organizations, an important and distinguishing experience that emerged among the UMTC participants.

The UMTC context might be considered a unique environment for examining organizational affiliation because of the various ethnic (i.e., Hmong) specific choices available to students. At UMTC, there are several organizations on campus with a focus on Hmong identity

wherein students can choose to participate and become involved. Among the ethnic-specific organizations represented in participants' involvement are: Hmong Minnesota Student Association (HMSA); Hmong Women's Group (HWG); Hmong Men's Circle (HMC); Hmong Alumni Association; and Epic Movement, an Asian American Christian group, which originally began as two separate organizations that included a Hmong Christian organization. Collectively, the types of ethnic-specific organizations are representative of the diversity of Hmong students on campus while the number reflects the critical mass necessary to sustain multiple organizational goals. In addition to these student groups, nine students discussed their involvement in community organizations or service activities within the Hmong community. Their involvement is enabled by the institution's close proximity to a critical mass of co-ethnics. As a result, Hmong students at UMTC have the opportunity to involve themselves in community organizations that focus on the social, cultural, and political well-being of Hmong Americans beyond the campus grounds. This chapter illustrates that experiences in community organizations have implications for students' ability to maintain community connections as a buffer from the salient experience of Othering on campus.

Participant experiences within the organizations illustrate that negotiating identity is a complex process involving pressures from outside and inside the ethnic community. Participation in ethnic-specific organizations is meaningful for participants because it enables them to negotiate and express ethnicity to both ethnic outsiders and co-ethnic insiders. In terms of expressing ethnicity to outsiders in this particular context, organization affiliation and participation are acts that endeavor to decenter the institution's environment of colorblind exclusion, which signifies difference of racial minorities but largely ignores the material and instrumental significance of difference.

In addition to expressing ethnicity to ethnic outsiders, the organizations enable participants to enact and affirm insider status among their own communities. Such negotiations are necessary given the instrumental and symbolic force of the community, which provides supports and imposes expectations. This chapter begins to reveal how processes of ethnicity also involve negotiating both the advantages and the pressures of having a co-ethnic community within close proximity. The chapter also shows how co-ethnic community pressures can be compounded by racialization. In the context of these dual constraints, ethnic organizations (e.g., HMSA, HWG, HMC, community organizations) collectively offer participants some degree of flexibility in exploring, negotiating, and expressing their ethnicity. Given their significance in the participants' narratives, this chapter focuses on experiences within the following organizations: Hmong Minnesota Student Association, Hmong Women's Group, Hmong Men's Circle, and community organizations collectively that serve Hmong Americans.

I argue that these organizations facilitate new traditions, a sense of identity, and vision of community, which are culturally appropriate. In particular, ethnic organization participation enable participants to reconstitute their collective memory of the institution; affirmingly manage, negotiate, and remake role and expectations imposed by their ethnic community; and foster an ethos of collective responsibility in which participants are secure and actively committed members of their community.

Cultural and Collective Memory

The Hmong Minnesota Student Association (HMSA) is the largest and most established student organization with a focus on Hmong identity at UMTC, wherein 17 of the 25 participants were involved. HMSA is widely recognized by the larger community as a face and voice for Hmong Americans, a sentiment shared by many of the participants regardless of their

membership status. In particular, participants felt that Hmong students were viewed more positively on campus because of the existence of such a large organization indicating that HMSA functioned as a symbol of Hmong identity. As the primary Hmong-centered organization, HMSA was actively at work shaping the cultural memory of the institution through the individual and collective memories of Hmong Americans in the institution and around the Twin Cities. This was evident in the multiple ways that the organization endeavored to “promote, preserve, and maintain the Hmong culture and heritage” as a primary organizational goal (“HMSA Constitution,” n.d.).

Through HMSA’s social and cultural activities on campus, the visibility and experience of Hmong Americans were in constant negotiation. As such, the organization served as an avenue for activism and Hmong awareness for participants, who described engaging in activities like Hmong Awareness Day, which centered on educating the public on the experiences of Hmong peoples. However, the largest event for the organization and the most prominent HMSA activity among participant narratives was Heritage Day, the annual culture show performance. The 2010-2011 show, themed “Hmongmoir: Khoom Plig Los Ntawn Lub Kua Muag” like its predecessors, is a display of Hmong identity and culture. In this particular year, the culture show was specifically intended to emphasize “the importance of finding one’s heritage through the eyes of mothers and fathers.” Cindy explained,

This year, actually we’re, our message is towards our parents. It’s important because we want to show our parents that you know we still have that Hmoobness in us, we still know our history, we still know that our culture is very important. And we just want to let them know that, um, yeah we still have it, and that we still want it to keep on going.

According to Cindy and other participants who were involved in the planning process, the primary objective of the culture show was to demonstrate to the Hmong community that culture and heritage remain significant in the lives of Hmong American students at the university. Another goal was to inspire in other young Hmong Americans the importance of collective memory and cultural preservation. This value was also evident in the organization's monthly educational workshops for its members, which facilitated discussion around social and cultural issues of Hmong Americans. Cindy's explanation for why such a message was important provides insight on the qualitative meaning of difference as experienced by Hmong Americans:

Some of us are so Americanized that we don't know our, I don't know, what our parents know anymore; like, the traditional stuff, the ceremonies, our language even. And so that's just something that I, I don't know, that worries me about our future generations: that were going to lose our culture, that we're going to lose our native tongue or language . . . that's something to worry about, that's what makes us different from everyone else.

Although Cindy's concern of losing the cultural contents of being Hmong could easily be reduced to an essentialist longing for "authenticity," it is better appreciated as a response within the larger racialized context in and beyond the institution. Such a context marginalizes and depreciates Hmong culture while simultaneously constructing Hmong Americans as culturally different, as demarcated by phenotype. Pierson explained it plainly:

You still have to go back to your roots someday because when someone asks, "What's your nationality?" you know, you'll be, "Hmoob." You know what I mean. They're going to be like, "Can you read and write in Hmong?" And you'll be like, "No I can't." And they'll be like, "And you consider Hmong?" You know what I mean.

This contradiction outlines the dual experience of being identified as different due to phenotype and then having that same difference challenged and questioned by standards of cultural authenticity. It also details why cultural maintenance and preservation become salient and significant among the participants. However, participants' understandings of difference are not strictly defined by outsiders' expectations of them; their understanding incorporates a legacy of resistance to their differential status and treatment, positioning cultural preservation as an affirming mechanism. Therefore, cultural preservation is a critique of the hegemonic normalization of whiteness that these students experience on a daily basis, which both signifies and ignores difference. Such an incongruity exists in expectations for students to assimilate yet maintain distinct cultural elements for the observation and benefit of White Americans. Displays of culture and identity on a predominantly White campus are affirming of students' reality. They allow Hmong students to participate in the institution without compromising their cultural identity or neglecting the reality that the larger university does not fully recognize the issues and concerns of the Hmong American community. Therefore, affiliation with HMSA and participation in activities like the culture show are visible acts of ethnicity on campus where race and colorblind racism are omnipresent and serve as an erasure of ethnic identity and history.

The culture show and other HMSA activities were important not only for cultivating, affirming, and acting out Hmong history and culture but also for representing an ongoing process of recreating the collective memory of Hmong American students and their relationship to the institution. In articulating the importance of HMSA's culture show for the Hmong community on campus, Tou described the process as equally significant to the end result:

I think its [Heritage Day] just to showcase Hmong culture and heritage, well that is the formal reason why. Yeah, but I just I think it's just a way for Hmong students to come

together and just know that they're here . . . it is an actual physical way of bringing them together. And a lot of people that have met each other here on campus is through that. Actually some people aren't as active, but for the event come to all the rehearsals. . . . Just things like that make you feel closer to each other, even though through all the anger and hard work in the end just pulling off a great show that's really what makes it for students. And that goes for the community members, parents.

Through its activities, HMSA enabled students to engage meaningfully with one another and the campus community. Specifically, such an experience was meaningful, desirable, and productive for students because it provided a sense of community at the institution that was grounded in a collective act of identity and resistance, which had become instilled as a university tradition for Hmong American students and their respective communities. As Tou articulated, this experience was transformative not only for students at the university but also for their family members and co-ethnic community members, who often are in attendance at organizational events. The significance of such events is captured by one participant who credited the organization and its visibility for the continuing enrollment of Hmong students.

Such events were important for demonstrating that Hmong Americans the range of possibilities for campus involvement beyond the typical university forms of engagement. When explaining why the Hmong organization was important to her, one participant shared that typical university rituals often do not resonate with her: "Like Homecoming stuff, I believe that's more for like American people and stuff like that, so I don't participate in that much." While these traditions are not explicitly exclusive, they carry the assumption of a shared values and activities that foster institutional identity. Inherent in this students' observation, regarding activities like Homecoming and who they are for at the institution, is an understanding about society's racial

dynamics, which is highlighted by her use of American to refer to Whites. Like other second generation immigrants of color (S. J., Lee, 2005; Zhou & Bankston, 1998), she has learned that people of color are positioned as inferior citizens. In particular, the reality of racial inequity and cultural hegemony that informs racial dynamics relegates people of color as outsiders. This participant and others are attuned to this dynamic at their university, primarily in the demographic and cultural normalization of Whites of the institutional space. In this context the culture show and the organization allowed Hmong American individuals to experience the institution in an affirming way and to envision themselves as part of the university community. Therefore, the culture show and other HMSA activities also set in motion a process of imbedding Hmong culture and identity into Hmong Americans' collective memory of the institution.

Roles and Expectations

While HMSA was collectively identified as a fixture of Hmong American presence on campus representing both their institutional marginalization and efficacy, the space was not easily accessible to all Hmong students. According to some participants, the sheer size of the organization, its primary strength, not only attracted them to the institution but also limited its ability to welcome new members into the organization once they arrived on campus. Among Hmong Americans students at UMTC, the organization was perceived as "cliquey," particularly by nonmembers, who shared that they experienced difficulty connecting with other students at HMSA meetings. Members of the organization were well aware of the cliquey perception since they too initially shared the same sentiment prior to becoming more involved. As a result, some participants preferred or also joined smaller organizations such as Hmong Women's Group or Hmong Men's Circle.

Within these more intimate settings, students were able to make connections, which some participants reported was more difficult to find within the larger university as well as in HMSA.¹⁹ Even HMSA members noted a qualitative difference between the organizations, indicating that the more intimate setting and the specific focus on both gender and ethnic identity offered a valuable space that was not found elsewhere.

Anytime we have issues we just open up and we just talk about it, and we hear everyone's perspective and advice. But there's definitely camaraderie and a sense of brotherhood there that I don't get from HMSA. I mean, all my closest friends are in HMSA and that's where I met everyone on campus, but in Hmong Men's Circle it's a different feeling. (Kyle)

The specialized focus provided a safe and protective space to discuss and address issues relevant to their specific positionalities. For Kyle, participation in HMC reflects his motivation to resist and overcome Hmong male underrepresentation:

Us Hmoob men, we're very underrepresented in higher education, and it's [HMC's] a good way for me to get together with other Hmoob men like myself who want to see more Hmoob men in college. . . . we're also reaching out to high school students, and middle school students."

In supporting one another, members were working towards their pursuit of higher education as a reality for Hmong Americans collectively. By coalescing as a visible group, members were signaling their identities as important. In particular, the presence of the group brought attention to the unique experience of Hmong American males while the participants' active involvement resisted intersectional forms of marginalization.

¹⁹ One student found it difficult to find a niche even within the Hmong community but still emphasized that it was more welcoming than what he had experienced with Whites.

HWG also allowed participants to organize along gender and ethnic identity to address and discuss issues such as teenage marriage, bride price, and community expectations of Hmong women. However, as Chong noted, HWG also provided a shield from the glare of outsiders in dealing with complicated insider negotiations of culture that became involved:

I can talk to them about my troubles, and you know, get good feedback, or like not have to be scared what they might think because they . . . understand what I'm going through being a Hmoob women and being in college.

As a result, these organizations functioned as an instrumental source of social and emotional support on campus that not only addressed their experiences as Hmong students, but dynamically validated and addressed intersections of multiple identities. In particular, these organizations were instrumental in helping participants manage and renegotiate roles and expectations from inside the community as well as resist negative raced and gendered expectancies from outsiders.

Within the walls of these organizations, participants discussed relevant issues and explored their experiences relating to their intersectional identities. Anna, a member of HWG, expressed the meaning and value of shared experiences within the institutional context:

It's actually probably one of the student groups that I love most. Just because it's an opportunity for us to come together as Hmoob women and really really dive deep into issues that concern Hmoob women. And it's just crazy how a lot of us have these similar experiences you know as Hmoob women at the U[niversity] or Hmoob women in college.

While similarities among the personal stories shared within the group resonated for Anna, the differences were more salient in Amy's reflection of Hmong women's experiences: "It [discussions within the HWG] gives me a comparison . . . what they're going through, what I'm going through, like, just makes you think about how different each can be." Perhaps Amy was

considering the experiences of a fellow member and participant in this study, who found herself as a wife and expectant mother before graduating high school— a vastly different experience from her own, yet here they all are in the same space discussing issues of education, culture, and identity. Anna’s and Amy’s reflections capture how participants’ experiences were simultaneously both different and similar. Although each individual’s pathways may have differed, they share similar social and cultural constraints as Hmong women in higher education. As such, these organizations validated and represented the dynamic experiences of Hmong Americans. Furthermore, the organizations existed as avenues to express their identities and simultaneously functioned as a space for students to work through the subjective meaning of their respective positionalities as Hmong females and males in higher education.

Sharing stories and reflecting on one another’s experiences were essential in their individual and collective negotiations of culture and community expectations. For example, Anna discussed exploring the meaning of a “successful Hmong woman,” a meaning inextricably informed by both individual and community commitments.

Like what we would consider a successful Hmong woman, I mean the idea of that and maybe what the community considers . . . we also just talk about like our roles as Hmoob women within the context of our family, of our community, of ourselves, stuff like that. So a lot of it are issues that, you know, a lot of Hmoob women go through. But actually, when I say Hmoob women I’d probably say Hmoob women in college, because that’s where our focus is, because we always try to relate it back to our experience as college students.

Anna also indicated that these discussions provided her the knowledge to be confident about her belonging and role in the Hmong community as an educated Hmong female. In other words,

having an education did not require her to abandon her place as a member of the Hmong community, which holds values and expectations that are sometimes invalidated by schooling norms. This implicit demand of separation is often placed on students of color who are expected to assimilate to the dominant norms and values of schools (Tierney, 1999). Unfortunately, for students of color, meeting this demand yields little reward and can leave them feeling more conflicted and alienated.

Within Hmong Men's Circle, participants also discussed the roles and expectations for Hmong men. Through his involvement, Kim shared, "I learned a lot about how the Hmong community views Hmong males and what they expect from us." Kyle, another member of HMC, specifically described "learning how to be a proper Hmoob man" from "*cov laus* [the elders]" who were invited to meetings, as Kyle explained, to "just teach us basic things that you need to know as a Hmoob man." Being a proper Hmoob man entails understanding and being able to meet expectations imparted by the larger community. Kyle offered a number of reasons for the importance of cultural maintenance, which illustrated a combination of his own desires as well as community expectations:

One, I want to learn so I can just keep them for myself and one day pass it on to my own kids. . . . Another one is just so that you're better respected by the community, 'cause when they see *ib tus txiv neeg paub paub txog kev cai* [a Hmong man who is very culturally knowledgeable], definitely, they treat you differently then someone who doesn't.

As illustrated by both Anna and Kyle, HWG and HMC had instructive value for understanding Hmong culture and for providing a safe space to renegotiate and remake the meaning of Hmong in an affirming way that took into account the real pressures faced by students. Such pressures

were experienced on a daily basis given their close proximity and constant interaction with the Hmong communities of the Twin Cities. As a result of their participation, these students felt a sense of cultural congruence or affirmed identity, not merely in the immediate institutional context but always within the context of family and community, which was a constant source of strength and constraint. Community existed as a source of strength that provided a buffer to the experience of cultural denigration on campus. However, community also existed as a constraint to some extent in terms of allowing for an individually defined sense of ethnic identity. Therefore, these organizations allowed them to experience their education affirmingly.

In addition to having the support of peers, members benefited from the mentorship and guidance of Hmong staff who served as advisors for the group and facilitators of discussions. Having regular and structured access to mentors in these intimate settings was critical for participants' involvement and experience. Honey explained, "The facilitators, they are Hmoob Women as well and they've been through college, they've gone through the whole experience, and I see that they're really big role models." The Hmong staff, who fulfilled these roles, not only served as figures of success that the students could look up to in times of adversity, but their experiential knowledge and understanding provided strategies to both maintain and negotiate insider/outsider pressures faced by participants in their pursuit of a higher education. Therefore, the Hmong staff provided an immense amount of guidance and support. It was clear from participants' interviews that these individuals were entrusted with their academic and cultural learning; both of which were significant given the institutional context.

Community Commitment

Finally, participation in community organizations enabled students to find a sense of purpose for their education within their own communities and provided them the opportunity to

engage with community members. In total, nine participants discussed their involvement with the greater Twin Cities Hmong community. Several students worked as tutors for Hmong Americans who were primarily recent refugee students while another student also tutored Hmong American adult learners. The rest of the students found themselves involved in arts and cultural programs that catered to Hmong American youth. Some of these participants became involved in community organizations through happenstance while others sought out these opportunities or had become involved prior to entering college. These experiences supported students in their development and expression of community commitment (Inkelas, 2004), which was transformed from an external pressure to an act of agency.

In these organizations, some participants encountered challenges that made them question their cultural competency and consequently their ability to serve their own communities. For example, in tutoring Hmong Americans, participants were made aware of their limited heritage, language proficiency, and cultural knowledge. Duke, who was self-described as being neither proficient in Hmong nor English, explained:

It was terrible because like I was so afraid of speaking Hmong when I was there, because they [new refugee students] knew so much more than me and I just didn't want to look like a fool or sound like a fool.

In other words, interacting with the recent refugees as well as older Hmong Americans made participants like Duke realize that they did not meet the cultural standards of being Hmong. These cultural standards were somewhat self-imposed but were nonetheless made salient through constant and everyday interactions with the Hmong community. Although they understood that there was more than one conception of Hmongness, their interactions with recent refugees and Hmong adult learners reaffirmed the significance of cultural competency and, to some extent,

idealized notions of Hmongness. While they did not necessarily or fully adopt this view of ethnicity for themselves, they realized this view of ethnicity existed, which made them well aware of how they differed or diverged from these notions. More important, this view taught them the instrumental value of cultural preservation, which allowed them to be practically connected to their community.

At the same time, these experiences reaffirmed their belonging and commitment to their community as they became more active in community issues and took on new roles within their communities. Duke, who earlier described his experiences as “terrible” due to his limited Hmong competency, also described his experience as personally rewarding because it enabled him to give back to his own community. In particular, it exemplified how he could put his education to use.

I learned that my Hmong was so bad. And I also learned that a lot of the words I’ve been saying, pronouncing have been pronounced wrong. And I also learned that I like to help people out and it feels good to be able to give back. . . . And I’m pretty proud of some of them. Like a few of them have made it to college. Just like, “Yay, congratulations I’m so proud.

Similarly, Kim noted how working with Hmong adult learners could be challenging, but he reinscribed his appreciation for the types of struggles that Hmong Americans continue to encounter.

It’s always interesting to be very young and I guess teaching adults or older adults. And it’s interesting to see how hard they are trying to learn with so much stress on them. They need money for rent, to pay for food, to pay for childcare, to pay for a lot of things. You know, with that they are still trying to get their education, their GED.

The spirit of these older adults inspired and reminded Kim of the meaning and value of his education within a larger community context. Ultimately, such experiences reaffirmed participants' ability to participate as active and productive community members, which they had initially questioned during the onset of their involvement.

By seeing them and by interacting with them, they look up to me as a student in college . . . who wants a better life, who can contribute to the Hmong community. So that really helped motivate me to continue on with my education and continue on with my support of the Hmong community.

Through his interactions, Kim was reminded of the collective hopes and dreams that his education represented for his community. This awareness gave him strength and purpose to persist in education. Despite any doubts that participants had about their own abilities, their experiences in community organizations affirmed their sense of community commitment as well as their confidence to be able to participate meaningfully in their community. Through these organizations, participants witnessed both the misfortunes and triumphs of Hmong individuals, which served as a constant reminder of the ongoing struggles and persevering spirit of Hmong Americans. Therefore, these experiences grounded their own educational aspirations and pursuit into a larger context where education and its virtues had both individual and collective meaning.

Summary

The critical mass of Hmong students at UMTC created a unique opportunity to examine participation in ethnic organizations. Given the range of organizational types, students were able to organize along different dimensions of their Hmong identity. Likewise, the collective capacity of the critical mass of students enabled them to pursue different goals.

Organization participation enabled students to strengthen ties within their community both on and off campus. A theme intricately woven throughout UMTC participants' narratives is that of community and ethnic culture, particularly the issue of maintenance in spite of tensions it created for the students' lives. Experiences of Hmong culture are particularly salient given the institutional context where ethnic culture is a lived reality (through proximity and daily interaction with Hmong community), which becomes further ingrained when it becomes a symbol and signal of difference (critical mass at a PWD). Negotiating the meaning of difference within (among Hmong folk, illustrating authenticity and commitment) while also validating that difference outwardly (so that non-Hmong can appreciate the educational value and instrumental significance of Hmong culture) become a complicated task endeavored by Hmong participants in their organizational participation.

HMSA is the primary and largest Hmong-centered organization serving as the primary voice for Hmong American students on campus. A primary goal of the organization was to cultivate collective memory in both Hmong individuals and the larger institution in order to challenge the exclusion of Hmong culture from normalization of whiteness existing in the institution and the implicit expectations of assimilation. Through cultural preservation and displays of ethnicity, the organization allowed its members to disrupt the legacy of inclusion in predominantly White institutions. Such actions altered the course of, but did not eliminate, the instructive value of Hmong Americans' collective memory of the institution. This memory included a history of Hmong American struggles prior to achieving a critical mass. While all the ethnic organizations functioned to centralize Hmong American culture and identity, HMSA had a primary role. Even nonmembers took comfort in knowing of its existence. As the oldest Hmong organization on campus, HMSA was instrumental in shaping Hmong Americans' lived

experiences. Specifically, it had instituted a tradition of cultural preservation and resisted cultural assimilation on campus. As a result of its activities, Hmong Americans on and off campus were able to envision themselves as part of the institution despite the larger culture of exclusion.

Within smaller organizations such as Hmong Women's Group or Hmong Men's Circle, students were able to express or claim the visibility of their dynamic experiences as Hmong Americans. In particular, they were able to address issues at the intersections of multiple identities (e.g., underrepresentation of Hmong men in higher education and education and Hmong females' role). At the same they participants were able to present an alternative discourse to negative gender expectancies regarding the role of culture in educational outcomes. In joining these organizations, participants challenged negative expectations through their physical presence and actions within these organizations. At the same time, these organizations enabled them to maintain, manage, and negotiate their experiences of Hmong culture, specifically their sometimes onerous roles and expectations as Hmong women and men. Such lessons were important given their real implications for students who, for the most part, left campus to attend to family and community. Interactions with peers, members, and older Hmong mentors validated intersectional identities, and participants saw community as not only a source of constraint but also a source of support that needed to be cultivated and maintained even as it was renegotiated. Therefore, these organizations offered a critical space to interrogate and resolve the constraints of culture, without demonizing culture or exposing culture to objectification of outsiders' lenses.

Within community organizations, participants found an outlet to remain instrumentally involved in their ethnic communities beyond campus. Interactions with recent Hmong refugees and particularly with Hmong adult learners raised questions of belonging and reinforced authentic notions of Hmongness. These interactions also reinforced the intrinsic value of cultural

preservation. However, despite participants' own divergences from "authenticity," such interactions ultimately reinforced their connection and commitment to their ethnic community. As a result, their commitment, while nonetheless challenging, was transformed from being externally imposed to internally recognized and embraced.

Collectively, these organizations operated as a stage to perform their ethnicity, to both outsiders and, more important, to insiders of their ethnic community given the close proximity and pressures of the Twin Cities Hmong communities. As a result, the organizations allowed participants to insert themselves visibly to the campus community so that the Twin Cities Hmong community could see them. They could also demand to be recognized by the institution more generally. The organizations allowed participants to negotiate the cultural tensions within their own community. Such tensions were complicated by their education which largely served as an erasure of ethnic and cultural identity. Therefore, participants' experiences in ethnic organizations and community organizations signify their ongoing resistance to the racialized institutional context. Finally, their experiences in these organizations represent sources of support and pressures that students received from their community ties, which required negotiating given their proximity and immediacy to the students and their everyday lives. As noted in the earlier chapter, the pressures associated with community can be externally imposed. For example, the community is a source of constraint because of the persistent racialization that is ascribed to it.

CHAPTER SEVEN – Narrating Identity from Inside-Out

College campuses might be viewed as opportune spaces to learn about both self and others, provided they are environments that enable persons from diverse backgrounds to come into contact. Such interactions may affect a plethora of developmental outcomes as well as shape the psychological climate of the institution (P. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, G. Gurin, 2002; Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999; Milem, 2003). The qualitative nature of these interactions and the content of information that are exchanged are somewhat elusive, particularly as it concerns how identity is engaged and narrated in the first moments of meeting and later as relationships develop. Because race is endemic in the fabric of society, identity negotiations for people of color involve a complex process of both internal and external identity work that seeks to make sense of and resolve tensions experienced as a result of racialized status. This chapter examines the use of ethnicity in narratives of identity, particularly documenting how participants negotiate racialization and the extent to which the contours of ethnicity varied by context within their respective narratives.

Narrative as a process of identity. Narrative is an art, a technique, a process of narrating that takes place within multiple mediums or cultural texts and exists on varying levels both symbolically and instrumentally. Like racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994), grand narratives of race exist in popular culture and can be seen in the stereotypes and caricatures of people of color in the media and literature. Narratives of race can be observed in policy and practices. Narratives also exist within communities as collective memories and within individuals through personal narratives. In this chapter, narrative accounts of identity, herein ethnicity, for Hmong Americans are ways of verbally discussing, describing, and explaining Hmong identity, primarily, to non-Hmong ethnics.

The narrative understanding of identity involves storytelling whereby stories become reified as identity (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Sfard and Prusak (2005) explained the dynamic nature of narrating identity:

As stories, identities are human-made . . . they have authors and recipients, they are collectively shaped even if individually told, and they can change according to the authors' and recipients' perceptions and needs. As discursive constructs, they are also reasonably accessible and investigable. (p. 17)

As identity is the product of social interactions, the stories shared and exchanged within these interactions are examined. The chapter focuses primarily on Hmong students' narratives of identity to outsiders, examining them within the larger context of multiple authors and recipients, as well as in the context of grand narratives of race. For example, stories about Hmong Americans are passed down from generation to generation in the form of oral tradition within Hmong communities. Additionally, stories are also told by outsiders. Both variants inform and become embodied in stories that participants tell themselves.

While descriptions or explanations of Hmong identity may be both consciously and unconsciously narrated, they can be viewed as a form of agency that strategically deals with racialized contents of being Hmong. Narratives can exhibit ethnicity because it reflects how Hmong American students see themselves and project themselves to others. Additionally, narratives are a reconstitutive act, which the process of narrating particular contents become affirmed as a part of identity in their repeated telling.

Finally, while this chapter captures some of the contents that become significant in telling identity, it does not suggest an essentialist or reductionist view of identity that is simply defined by the contents specified by participants. Sfard and Prusak (2005) propositioned, "It is the act of

identifying rather than its end product”—that is, actual stories or narrative content—that guides the current analysis. In clarifying their use of narrative of identity, Sford and Prusak stated, “The focus is not on identities as such [the end product] but rather on the complex dialectic between identity-building and other human activities” (p. 17). As such, this section illustrates where narrative contents become meaningful as identity, which is a product of social interactions within a larger context of forces that include race.

Additionally, although my current analysis focuses on the contents or actual stories of ethnicity narrated through words, not all ethnicity acts can be easily observed. In fact, the most powerful, telling, and influential forms of ethnicity are communicated through actions, both unconscious and conscious. For example, ethnicity has been examined through the performances of language use—that is, forms of language (heritage language use or culturally specific vernacular)—rather than the content of words communicated. Moreover, as I illustrate in other chapters, ethnicity can be understood through organization affiliation (Espiritu, 1992) (Chapter Six) and theatrical or cultural performances (Chapter Eight). Despite multiple forms of ethnicity acts, such verbalized narratives of selves are important and communicate how people work both to develop and project an individual and collective sense of identity to others, and they may also yield insight into how they make sense of identity in context.

Because Hmong students are largely unknown and unseen, these narratives take on special significance because they convey the identity of students where it might not otherwise be visible. In interpersonal conversations and interactions where narratives of ethnicity largely take place, I argue that students were able to negotiate the invisibility and visibility of ethnic identity, complicating and disrupting the dominant stereotypes and racially informed thinking and understanding of cultural knowledge as they related to both AAPIs and Hmong Americans.

An Arduous But Necessary Task

For many participants, the college environment required students to reflect on ethnicity because in contrast to their home communities, it brought them into contact with more individuals who were unfamiliar with or had no prior knowledge of Hmong Americans. Such experiences demanded that students be equipped to articulate a coherent narrative of identity adequately. Narratives of identity often occurred when meeting someone for the first time and often flowed from conversations that naturally occurred. These conversations were generally pleasant but tended to follow one of two ritualized traditions wherein Hmong students were either curiously asked what ethnicity/nationality they were or became the racialized object of a guessing game. Both traditions typically ensued with narratives of ethnicity.

Such experiences not only stimulated self-reflection about the contents of ethnicity but also allowed them to articulate verbally, some for the first time, Hmong history, culture, and identity. Tony explained how prior to attending UCLA, he had never really had to verbalize or explain what Hmong was because he was raised around and attended school with a large Hmong community:

It was a really huge shocker to me. I have never really had to explain what Hmong was, because I assumed people knew who Hmong were. It's kind of a new thing, but it's really interesting too. I was really happy. It was actually the first time in life where I got to explain and express who I was, without any negative preconceived notions about my culture. It's one thing I was really happy about.

Preconceived notions of Hmong people were often the negative images and understandings of Hmong people (see Chapter Five) that existed. For Tony, this experience was somewhat liberating because the invisibility of Hmong Americans in the UCLA institutional context meant

that he would not be automatically stereotyped. Being racially stereotyped was an experience that had become very familiar for him growing up in an ethnic enclave and attending a school with a large critical mass of Hmong students.

While some participants, particularly those at UCLA, found the experience to be somewhat liberating, participants also admitted that at times explaining or describing ethnicity was “annoying,” “tiresome,” and “difficult.” Nonetheless, they saw it as a critical task that needed to be undertaken given the invisibility and obscurity of Hmong Americans on each campus. For example, Anna from UMTC explained:

It’s hard and I guess I’m gonna say sometimes it can be a little annoying, but then again I think it’s important and I would rather explain than have them just assume you know.

Yeah coming to the U[niversity] I’ve definitely I’ve had to explain to them who we were, to a lot of people from like that aren’t around from the twin cities. So it’s not always annoying, because like I said it’s important; but it’s a different experience for me coming from St. Paul.

Like UCLA was for Tony, UMTC could also be viewed as a different environment for Hmong American students coming from the Twin Cities. Despite the concentration of Hmong Americans in the Twin Cities, the phenomenon of being obligated to articulate a Hmong identity was necessary because, as Anna explained, UMTC attracts students from beyond the Twin Cities area. Therefore, participants saw themselves as necessary change agents who engaged in the larger learning community on campus.

Some participants enjoyed these interactions, particularly because they were able to educate others. For example, Jue from UCLA explained,

I get excited 'cause I mean I like, I probably had to explain to like 500 people what Hmong is, but I don't get tired of it because I like it. It's nice because you get to talk about your culture and teach someone about your culture, who you are. And it's just, it's good because it's kind of refreshing, like it reminds me of who I am.

For Jue, such interactions were important to her because it allowed her to express her ethnicity by talking about her culture and sharing it with others. While Jue indicated that she frequently engages in discourses of culture and identity, it is clear that the institutional context does not regularly permit her to engage in these types of discussions within her own ethnic community. In contrast to those at UMTC, the absence of community was a defining experience for UCLA participants. While my interactions with these participants and their larger narratives indicate that these students are well adjusted on the whole, their experiences on campus can still be isolating. In this context, it is understandable that discussing identity and culture would be “refreshing” for some participants as it was for Jue. Although Jue's positive framing of the situation is shared by other participants like Tony, it nonetheless illustrates that being reminded of who one is involves being reminded of one's difference and the differential status resulting from the social, cultural, and structural invisibility for Hmong Americans.

Nonetheless, participants noted that these types of interactions stimulated an awareness or salience of ethnic identity, particularly among those at UCLA, which required self-reflection about the meaning and contents of being Hmong. Participants described self-reflection as eventually evolving to their own pursuit of knowledge in order to acquire an answer not only for others but also for themselves. This process of generating identity as *inside-out* could then be translated, reaffirmed, and expressed through a coherent narrative of ethnicity. Participants' search for knowledge on campus often came from ethnic studies courses and participation in

ethnic organizations. Interactions with non-Hmong Americans also reaffirmed the desire to have that knowledge for oneself, particularly given how salient such interactions were for them as a largely misunderstood and unseen group. Therefore, explaining Hmong history, culture, and identity was a challenging and burdensome task for participants; however, it was also a task all of the participants embraced and many celebrated.

Narrative Contents

On the whole, the contents within the narratives of ethnicity were similar across participants from both institutions. Because these narratives often occurred during initial meetings, they were often somewhat brief but contained information that often distinguished participants from other AAPI groups. Common details within these narratives included history as an ethnic minority and diasporic community, migration history with references to the Secret War or Vietnam War and their refugee status as the reason for migration to the United States and, to a lesser extent, cultural aspects and diversity within Hmong, particularly when the conversation was more involved. These aspects are briefly covered in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Ethnic minority and diasporic community. Locating a point of origin is a common expectation of people of color, but particularly so for AAPI groups (and Latino groups), who are largely viewed as perpetual foreigners (Tuan, 1998). However, for Hmong Americans, accounting for origins or nation of ethnic heritage is a more involved and nuanced process of explaining their ethnic minority status throughout history, which is central for conveying an understanding of their diasporic community. Duke from UMTC recounts what a typical conversation might look like:

When I say I'm Hmong, they usually they ask for like, "where are Hmong people from?" and some of them don't quite understand when I try to explain to them where Hmong

people are from because they think that if we're from Laos, or if we're from Thailand, then we're Laotian or we're Thai. But I try to explain to them that we're kind of like a minority there.

As participants illustrate, it can be a difficult task to explain that a country of heritage does not necessarily equate to a nation of ethnic origin for Hmong Americans. It is also one of the more difficult aspects to communicate, ironically making the process of explaining a central experience of being Hmong American. Given their extensive experiences, some participants, like Kyle, have become adept at summarizing for others the ethnic origins of Hmong people. Kyle simply told people, "Hmong is an ethnicity, an ethnic group without a country, a land to call our own, but most of us are from Southeast Asia and southern China." Although the reference to China may elicit misunderstanding, some participants include this specific ethnic history of Hmong peoples due to its salience in their cultural memory given a legacy of ethnic oppression and resistance. Therefore, China is used to emphasize that Hmong people are different from Americans of Chinese ancestry.

To bolster the point, one participant offered the example of Jews, a better known ethnic diaspora as a community that has survived and overcome being historically persecuted. Another participant offered a lesser known group to convey the experience of Hmong people, only to learn that what the two ethnicities also had in common was their shared unrecognizability: "I throw out Armenian people, they're just like, 'What?'" As conveyed in Beverly's quote, a diasporic community can be a difficult to explain to others. Regardless, conveying Hmong people's legacy of ethnic minority status became important in order to account for the process of continual migration and to illustrate the development of a distinct ethnic identity.

The narrative component of being a diasporic community was particularly significant in students' own collective memory and understanding of being Hmong American. In particular, it reflects a legacy of ethnic marginalization, but it is also a legacy of ethnic resilience that has become significant to the experience and identity formation of Hmong peoples.

Secret War/Vietnam War and refugee status. As part of their narratives, participants shared the history of the Secret War or the Vietnam War as essential for understanding Hmong Americans' refuge to the United States. Although Hmong people fought in Laos under the direction of the U.S. military, their involvement is largely unknown to the larger public. While these global events serve as an important context for immigration, Hmong Americans' presence remains questioned or criticized by many Americans, which was particularly salient in the UMTC context where Hmong Americans are viewed through a nativist lens. Amy explained how her encounters with people have made her less naïve in terms of understanding the invisible and marginalized status of Hmong Americans in this country:

Um, I guess my experiences are always like kind of colored . . . my friend uses this term, “rose colored glasses” because he’s so naïve, but mine is kind of like, my glasses are a little more bitter I guess. Just ’cause, um, when I meet like a lot of new people and they’re like, “Oh are you Chinese?” I’m like, “No I’m Hmong,” and there like, “What’s that?” and then I would explain to them about the Secret War and why there are so many Hmong people here. And then, I guess, then I would get kind of bitter like, why don’t you know, this is part of history right.

Amy, who described her experiences as “colored” illustrates her awareness of Hmong Americans' marginalized and outsider status. Many students express this sentiment when it pertains to the ignorance of the historical circumstances that resulted in Hmong Americans

migration to the United States because this lack of knowledge is reflective of their delegitimized position in this country. However, participants' frustrations are not simply a response to the ignorance of others to this history; they include a distinct awareness about how Hmong Americans are viewed as illegitimate and unwanted immigrants. For example, Amy's explaining of "why there are so many Hmong people [are] here" also illustrates that raising, whether conscious or not in all participants, the content of the Secret War or the Vietnam War is an implicit response to the larger critique that Hmong Americans are somehow undeserving of being in the United States. Therefore, raising this fact served to legitimize their place in U.S. history and belonging to the U.S. While both groups of students discussed this history in their narratives of identity, UMTC students raised this issue more strategically in response to their awareness of Hmong people's illegitimate status as Americans, a status made more salient with the recent influx of new refugees.

Culture and diversity. Culture and diversity within Hmong was a topic less attended to in initial meetings. However, these concepts were often raised in more involved conversations that occurred at later interactions as relations developed. Nonetheless, culture came up as a point of identity, often as an implicit response to the experience that Hmong people's cultural differences in their concrete constraints are often neglected even as culture is pointed to in order to signify distinctions about human difference. Valery from UCLA described how, during one interaction and attempt to explain what Hmong was, she was asked to perform and authenticate her Hmong identity by spelling or saying something in the Hmong language.

"Yeah, we speak this language." They would ask the normal things too: "Do you guys write in different language?" "No, it's kind of Romanized you know...." They would be satisfied if you spell something or if you could say something. "Oh okay," you know

“Like thanks,” so um, I think that’s just solidified to them “Okay you are something else then,” you know.

When Valery recounted this incident, she did it nonchalantly and seemed not to be bothered by this cultural demand of authenticity. For her, such encounters had become somewhat familiar. Nonetheless, given that those who asked for an example of authenticity neither spoke nor were literate in the Hmong language, such a request existed as a mechanism to locate her as different, distinct, and essentially an Other. These racial episodes, where cultural demands are made, were also experienced by other participants of this study (Pierson in Chapter Seven) making them weary of how culture is essential in outsiders definitions of them.

Discussions of culture often occurred more informally and materialized in the form of personal experiences. For Nicole, it was more manageable to personalize culture as much as possible to avoid essentialist constructions of Hmong culture that neglected intradiversity among Hmong diasporic communities and Hmong Americans:

So I think it is, it makes a lot harder when it comes down to like cultural stuff. We’re talking about like myself personally, I explain you know this is the way my parents raised me, this is why because we were Hmong, and this is what Hmong is.

Perhaps because of their nuance, such topics required more explanation and therefore were better suited or came more naturally in later interactions with close friends or in more normal or natural settings with roommates of a different ethnicity. As the contents of Hmong culture and diversity were being explained to non-Hmong Americans, they were also being continually negotiated by Hmong participants in Hmong peer group settings (Chapters Six and Eight). This is because participants recognize the complexity of culture, which include a diversity of perspectives from within the Hmong community about what constitutes Hmong culture. Additionally, participants

realize that expectations of cultural authenticity are imposed not only from outsiders, but also from members of other ethnic community members, which participants complicate in their performances (Chapter Eight). As such, their discussions of culture for identity embody this complexity.

Gran Torino and the “ghetto.” The primary difference between participants from each institutional context is that UCLA participants would occasionally reference *Gran Torino* in their account of Hmong Americans. While only five participants indicated that they would raise this image as a reference point, it was a key difference between the two groups of students that none of the UMTC students mentioned the film in their narratives. Directed and produced by Clint Eastwood, the feature film *Gran Torino* largely revolves around the lives and experiences of Hmong Americans. Their portrayal has been criticized as both culturally inaccurate and overly negative by community activists as well as the participants in this study. In fact, some UMTC participants avoided watching it, as they did not want to subject themselves to the negative and controversial nature of the movie. As one of the students who did not refer to the film in their explanations of Hmong, Aaron from UCLA explained:

I thought at first when I first saw it that it would be good for Hmong awareness, but then after talking to those few in my organization who saw it, or other people in general who saw it, it’s pretty obvious, or it’s clear to me at least that it negatively, like it was negative awareness I guess. Because everyone has this perception of like “Oh, do you rape your cousin?” Or stuff that’s in the movie, like, “Oh, you guys are hella gangster.” Very, very negative. . . . But even as a joke, it’s kind of like a little disturbing that that’s what they got from the movie.

For Aaron, it was clear from his interactions with peers that the film's primary effect on the image of Hmong Americans was that they were "really ghetto, or really dangerous kind of people." Even participants who indicated that they would occasionally reference the film in their narratives of identity admitted that they thought the portrayal of Hmong was problematic and narrowly focused on the negative aspects of the community.

There's nothing about the kids doing good, getting a higher education. Like, I didn't see any positive things in the movie, that I can remember, yeah so. I think it was really, the movie was just a partial portrayal, a small part of the Hmong community. 'Cause it is true . . . there are Hmong gangs, so I can't say it's not true; I'm just saying it's not the best portrayal of Hmong people as a whole." (Faith, UCLA)

Despite the "negative awareness" and consequential risk of negative perceptions being cemented as normative among Hmong Americans, participants' decisions to mention the film were rationalized by the idea that any reference point was better than none. The film at least provided some background on the types of issues encountered by Hmong Americans, which participants hoped could be a point of discussion rather than conclude one's impression. Lucy often told people who had seen the movie, "I don't like that movie; I hate it." She explained how the relative invisibility of Hmong Americans leaves her little choice but to call attention to the few images that do exist.

Because that's like the closest I feel for people who don't know what Hmong is to understand even if it's a little bit incorrect, there's still some stuff that's correct about it. And like some of the situations in the movie that they deal with is kind of correct and there's like little bit wrong with it, but there's also a little bit that's true.

When asked to elaborate on which parts she believed to be true, Lucy explained:

Well I guess overall moving from Asia to America and having to live in such like a terrible location, definitely relatable so that part, prior to just like I guess dealing with like the gangsters, it's kind of correct. I feel like the situation is correct like it happens a lot with young Hmong adults, but it's just like because it was portrayed in the movie that way, we are tied automatically with gangsters. Even though it is a problem, I don't like how it's the immediate thought of how, when you think of Hmong and *Gran Torino*, yeah.

For Lucy, some of the images conveyed her reality. They reflect struggles that she and her family experience, for example, "the terrible location," which to her was "definitely relatable," and the issue of gangs in the community, which existed in her high school. The film's version of a terrible location was a dilapidated neighborhood that experienced White flight, capturing a type of ghetto neighborhood where many Hmong Americans were concentrated upon arrival to the United States due to their lower income and occupation levels (CARE, 2008). Additionally, as Aaron had already stated, the image of gangs might be thought of as the problems of ghettos and the communities of people who live there. While this experience does not reflect the reality of all Hmong individuals, both Faith and Lucy pointed out that such issues do exist within the community. Therefore, their goal was not to illustrate categorically Hmong Americans as ghetto but rather direct attention to issues or marginality that existed within AAPI communities, which were largely ignored and unrecognized. Specifically, according to participants who referenced *Gran Torino*, the movie was not an ideal portrayal of Hmong Americans, but it conveyed struggles of Hmong Americans who are largely invisible to their peers. It was a reality their own presence on campus effectively discounted, disconfirmed, or invalidated given the positive generalizations made about AAPIs collectively.

Summary

Narratives of ethnicity become necessitated under racialization and invisibility. Hmong American students' ethnicity becomes salient in interpersonal conversations and interactions with peers, particularly when explaining their ethnic identity. These situations, which are both challenging and rewarding, require students to self-reflect and to generate a narrative of ethnicity that strategically deals with overcoming invisibility and managing visibility.

Within interpersonal interactions, participants narrated ethnicity for Hmong Americans as a diasporic community that endures a legacy of ethnic minority status; as a refugee group whose presence in the United States is a result of U.S. international military efforts; and as a culture that is different, both individually and collectively, and is constantly being negotiated. These particular contents of ethnicity are often missing, absent, or unrecognized. Their assertions could be seen as a response to the ways that participants were collectively racialized and the specific effects of that racialization within each context. For all participants, inserting the narrative contents of diasporic community was necessitated by the invisibility of Hmong Americans and the limited notions of ethnicity that was often equated to nationality or, more appropriately, nation of heritage. Such content represented their collective struggle as an ethnic minority group in history and within their current situation. Narrating the refuge experience not only conveyed their historically lived experience as a community that is often invisible in U.S. history, but it also legitimated the visible and continually growing presence of Hmong Americans, which was constantly in question and often critiqued given the negative attention and nativist framing that portrayed them as bad citizens. Finally, culture was asserted primarily to assert their identity and difference from other Asian American ethnic groups because the homogenous image continues to render their experiences invisible.

By and large, the contents of ethnicity were similar in both contexts. However, several students from UCLA exhibited a slight difference in their narratives, which was not found in any of those at UMTC. Specifically, these five participants cited *Gran Torino* to illicit what some might describe as “ghettoized” images of Hmong Americans.

Perhaps their UMTC counterparts were less inclined to raise such images because negative illustrations were more readily accessible within the greater Twin Cities’ communities. It could be understood that their concerns were directed instead at trying to counter the overly negative representation or at least their own awareness that negative images were pervasive within that environment. While referencing *Gran Torino* exhibits a departure, it could also be understood that the intentions of the larger group of participants were in unison where it concerned attempting to account for a more holistic and balanced portrayal of Hmong Americans. All strategies could be viewed as an attempt to remedy the larger narrative of race within each institutional context.

Another factor that may account for the presence of *Gran Torino* in select UCLA participants’ narratives is the larger context of Los Angeles as the nation’s film capital. Additionally, when the film was casting in 2007, the UCLA Hmong Student Association received an email from an Asian American actor requesting assistance with translating audition lines (see Introduction). This larger culture and historical memory of the film are likely to shape participants’ discourses of identity.

The presence of *Gran Torino* in narrative contents highlights a common dilemma faced people of color concerning the role of dominant racial images in identity formation. Ultimately, dominant narratives such as ghettoized images or nativist constructions of Hmong Americans (e.g., opportunist) have dominance because they have power to define. Consequently, the

tendency to engage dominant racial narratives is not surprising and necessary for people of color who adopt, revise, or reject cultural images. While students' own accounts of ethnicity were not entirely determined by larger images and narratives, their strategies illustrate that students are attuned to racial narratives. Additionally, their strategies indicate that racial narratives are significant, even if unconsciously, in students' understanding and acts of ethnicity. Managing visibility suggests that students are aware of racialized contents of Hmong Americans and AAPIs; an awareness that was demonstrated in the chapter five. Such an awareness of racial formations can also indirectly influence narrative strategies employed with researchers (see Chapter Four).

Finally, participants' individual projects of identity, which are facilitated in interethnic and interracial settings, garner transformative potential. It has been theorized and empirically established that diverse interactions occurring both inside and outside the classroom have important bearing for students and institutions (Chang, Witt, Jones, & Hakuta, 2003; P. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, G. Gurin, 2002; Jayakumar, 2008; Milem, 2003). One desired outcome of positive intergroup processes that relates to both student development and campus climate is a reduction in stereotypes and bias (Allport, 1954). A reduction in stereotypes and bias is a project that participants implicitly and explicitly engage in with their narratives of ethnicity. This is evident in how participants critically engaged issues of race such as dominant stereotypes and dominant racial narratives in their expressions of ethnicity.

In this study it is unclear to what extent these projects have a transformative role for the individuals on the other end of participants' interactions. However, what is clear is that such engagements have a transformative role for participants. Specifically, they become inspired by their experiences and, consequently, see themselves as cultural workers on campus and in

society. In particular, narratives of ethnicity become a process of identity continuously revisited, reflected on, and negotiated within interactions. As such, narratives of ethnicity serve as opportunities to affirm identity from the inside-out. Therefore, participants' narratives of ethnicity, which aim to transform the culture of the institution on individual basis, are important for increasing visibility and claiming space within institutions.

CHAPTER EIGHT – Performing Race and Ethnicity: Intersections of Diversity and Difference

I don't think there is much of a difference between Hmong women and Caucasian women. I think we all have the same sorts of goals. We all have the same kind of love for our children and our families. I think the only difference is just the timing: I think because a lot of Hmong women have come to the United States in the seventies, eighties, and nineties, we're just kind of picking up at the nineties. I think before long, everybody will be at the same level. (Mai Kao Moua, excerpt from Aleckson's *Hmong in the Modern World*, 2005)

In preparation for the annual Association of Hmong Students culture show, one of the members read Moua's response to the question, How do Hmong women differ from Caucasian women?, to stimulate dialogue about the meaning of difference for Hmong Americans and the politics of communicating such differences. The dialogue that ensued from the reading of this passage reflects students' understanding and critique about community representation in a racialized context, which became central in their framing of their culture show. In this chapter, I use their critiques of Moua's response to the question of difference to frame my analysis of their experiences of race and ethnicity on campus while examining how the culture show enables these students to bring attention to and complicate such an experience.

Upon reading the final word, Janice, another member, asked, "How do you guys feel about that response?" Met by a moment of dense silence by the rest of the students, who were still deep in thought and battling the fatigue of another long week on this Thursday evening, Janice probed again, "How do you feel or how would you have responded to that differently, to

that question? Anyone, not just the girls.” Slowly, one by one, students began sharing, speaking, and developing their thoughts into what became a dialogue about the quote’s meaning. What became apparent to me was their primary concern: the potential implications of that meaning for shaping racial formations or discourses of race. Although Moua’s quote becomes the center of their dialogue, their critiques are not specifically of Moua herself. Instead, their critiques of her response to the question of difference reflect their critique of colorblind racism and distortions of identity, which people of color are burdened with remedying. Such negotiations become salient in issues representation for people of color.

While the students agreed that Moua is well intentioned, they believed that her response to be too “simple” and therefore limiting: simple because it failed to articulate the nuanced intersection of forces that complicate, constrain, and define the lives of Hmong Americans; and limiting in its ability to resist, disrupt, and overcome such static, deterministic constructions of Hmong as culturally different and consequently socially different. Guided by visions of ethnicity that resulted from their dialogue, the students positioned their culture show, which was only three months away, to perform a collective narrative of identity. Such a narrative reflected their lived experiences as racial minorities as well as their more invisible and culturally conflicted experiences as Hmong Americans. Through their enactment of ethnicity, students move constructively towards self-determination—that is, beyond their given narratives as both Asian American and Hmong. As such, their performances work to reshape race and disrupt racial formations, as used in higher education discourses, to marginalize AAPI groups collectively. These racial formations position Hmong Americans as model minorities and therefore part of the larger homogeneous construction of AAPIs, who are believed to be free of racial barriers. Moreover, these racial formations construct Hmong Americans as culturally static and distinct,

which position them as determined by their cultural and social location, and offer valuable lessons of diversity through their cultural distinction.

This chapter features the voices of 13 UCLA participants who were involved in the production of the annual culture show in the spring of 2011. Specifically, this chapter illustrates how the culture show is a process and method of critiquing their *exclusion* and *selective inclusion* on campus. In an effort to maintain as much anonymity as possible for the participants of this study, all participants are identified as female and I provide only pseudonyms while omitting other descriptors (e.g., major, year in school).

Production of representation. Ultimately, struggles over the production of representation exist because of the gripping power race that images hold, which make them privy to being used as an instrument of social and material control (Omi & Winant, 1994). Especially when such representations materialize as diverted resources and limited opportunities (Chun, 1995; Suzuki, 2002), the struggles over representation prove more than simple acts of identity politics but also as a process of negotiating their socially and culturally different status. As such, identity exists as a site of individual and collective contestation, negotiation, and reproduction of representations.

Performance. Performance can be understood as intentional, embodied social critique (Houston & Pulido, 2005; Smith, 2007), this chapter explores how Hmong university students use culture shows, an institutional icon for student diversity, to perform identity (race and ethnicity). I argue that campus culture shows embody struggles for legitimacy and negotiations of contradictions found both in and beyond the university, namely, the racial images of AAPIs as both model minorities and perpetual foreigners as well as their exclusion from and selective inclusion in conceptions of diversity and minority students.

My analyses indicate that the culture show disrupts essentializations of Hmongness and Asianness in order to critique the university's limited conception of diversity—a definition of diversity that invalidated their lived experiences within and beyond the university. To illustrate how the culture show is a method and process of self-construction and self-determination in the context of racializing discourses about Asian Americans and Hmong, I make use of participants' own words during their dialogue and position them in relationship to the contents of the culture show. I begin with analysis of the primary critiques raised by students during the organization meeting. I then demonstrate how their culture show is a performative mechanism for raising those critiques to a wider audience in order to transform themselves before the gaze of others. Through performances that claim race, heterogeneity, and resilience, students perform ethnicity while seeking to move beyond the limits of race.

During the discussion Jane offered her perspective, which synthesized the critiques that emerged from the dialogue on Moua's quote, thus capturing the students' shared understanding:

I don't feel she's [Moua's] ashamed . . . because I'm pretty sure she knows it you know. I'm not doubting her expertise for a lack of a better word. But I just feel like she should've said it instead of, I think she just wanted to present it, as everyone else said, as a positive thing because it's going in a book so why would you want to read about the bads about folks you know, why would you say that? Because you know it's real. I think she just kind of stuck herself in the status quo and you know we're trying to change the status quo, to defend yourself . . . stand up, say what you need to say, especially when this question is addressed to her. That's the thing that probably hurts me the most, is that she didn't embrace and take *it* on fully.”

Jane's "it" refers to the subject of difference, specifically how it manifests in the experience of Hmong Americans through complicated intersections of race, class, culture, sex/gender, and language. Such differences are meaningful because they have real implications. The differences that Moua fails to embrace, according to Jane and the rest of the students, concerns the interrelated issues of difference between Whites and groups who are racialized as "other," and differences among people of color, herein specifically the Hmong community. While the former critique addresses the racialized status of Hmong Americans and consequently AAPIs in the United States, the latter critique addresses the essentialist notion that intracommunity consensus exists regarding the nature of culture for people of Hmong ancestry. In other words, the first addresses Asianness while the latter critique is a struggle over what constitutes Hmongness. Thus, in order to gain self-definition, the students use their culture show to move beyond the deterministic discourses ascribed to them, as such discourses ultimately limit their possibility to recreate themselves as more than objects of race and culture.

Embracing the format of an anthology, the culture show exhibited a compilation of monologues (narratives told in first-person or third-person perspective), skits (illustrating a particular story), and performances (e.g., song, dance, improvisation) in order to highlight both the individual and collective visions of Hmongness. Specifically, the students were able to address the diversity of lived experiences while still achieving a larger narrative—one that emphasizes race, heterogeneity and intracommunity tensions, and resilience as a critical and central part of their coherent account of Hmong culture and identity. The closing skit, in which the ensemble of cast members individually introduced themselves, encapsulated the purpose of culture show and the process of individual and collective expression that it enabled students to

achieve. Each student/cast member took turns saying their name, year, major and then offered a brief final comment that speaks to their identity. Examples include:

- There are many ways to define who you are but I choose to let my Christian identity and Hmongness define me.
- We're not Mongolian and I'm not from Mongolia.
- When writing the story of your life, don't let anyone else hold the pen.
- Home is where the Hmongs are at; and I might have taken the long way home, but now that I'm here, I'm not going back.
- *Kuv yoj Hmoob* [I am Hmong] and my voice will be heard and my presence will be felt.

The examples, which speak to numerous issues that engages projects of self-definition (e.g., expanding the boundaries of Hmongness, disrupting stereotypes and multiple forms of racialization, affirming identity and community, claiming visibility and voice), capture the larger show's iterative analysis of Hmongness through the varied vignettes performed. The next sections illustrate performances that claim race, heterogeneity, and resilience, which become central to the culture show and the students' acts of ethnicity.

Claiming Race

Adrian: you will never be as equal [as a White woman], so that level and that thought process kind of like, in a way it's like, it's kind of –

May: I think it's just idealistic.

For AAPIs, being constructed as racially distinct is ingrained into their collective memory and consciousness. While formalized exclusions and egregious acts targeted towards

Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander ancestry are largely relegated as either mistakes of a previous era or isolated incidents, AAPIs are constantly reminded in their daily lives of their racial status—one that is inferior and permanently outside the imagination of White America. Such a collective memory and consciousness have instructive value for Hmong students as they work towards a holistic and affirming performance of identity and campus critique. Students' critiques of Moua's response, as well as the content of the culture show, belie the belief that claiming experiences of race and racialization is necessary for destabilizing the colorblind illusion that racial indifference and accordingly equal opportunity exist. Therefore, students' critiques and performances embody race to illustrate and explicate racial differences in cultural and social location.

In regards to Moua's response, students felt that it failed to acknowledge fully (or, more precisely, does not explicitly challenge) how Hmong people are constrained by race. One student suggested that perhaps Moua's response, which focused on humanistic qualities and emphasizes sameness, strategically refuted constructions of difference that are saturated with vulgar distinctions based on primordial views of race and culture. For example, Mary offered insight that might account for Moua's intentions: "I think maybe her [Moua's] point is to just point out to other people that we're not a different species from these White Caucasian women." Mary concluded that Moua could not overcome racialization without naming that difference, stating, "But the way she said it was not, it was yeah, it was not right." The meaning of "not right" in this instance is a critique elucidated by race-conscious critics of humanism who expose it as an "ideological tool to derail our understanding of the specificity, the particularity, or the historical nature of relations such as race" (Leonardo, 2005, p. 404). While such an approach indeed addresses the real ways that people of color have been historically imagined, such a strategy is

not enough to overcome their differential status; it merely replaces one essentialization for another by essentializing the human experience to that of Whites. Such a process denies the conditions of people of color and how such conditions are historically and particularly related to the maintenance of White racial hegemony. In participants' view, Moua, while well intentioned, implicitly stopped short of achieving the ability for self-construction as she missed an opportunity to interrogate explicitly social differences that continue to materialize between people of color and Whites.

Although the students acknowledge their racialized experience in the production of their culture show, they did not see nor accept themselves as simply racialized. Instead, students actively claimed their racialized experiences by demonstrating how the contours of race are actively at work and identifying how race informs their lives. Highlighted most poignantly by Sally's monologue, race works in multiple ways to undermine identity and belonging on and off campus. Specifically, Sally described how her status as an outsider and foreigner remains consistent across her multiple identities as Asian and Hmong. She explained to the audience how, among her non-Hmong and non-Asian peers, she will be continually seen as different:

I will forever be racialized apart from them, racialized as an Asian individual. Even when someone understood the many subgroups of the Asian population they labeled me as a Hmong person and disregarded my American identity. Thus, I feel that in their eyes, I will never be an American, viewed only as one of their inferiors. How do I know that they view me as a foreigner? Well, people always ask and will continue to ask, "Where are you from?"

Whether viewed simply as Asian or more specifically as Hmong, the students illustrated the enduring quality of race and its tenacity in co-opting both racial and ethnic identity for exclusion

or selective inclusion, particularly when it is convenient or fitting of a preconceived narrative of race.

The multiple, complicated, and dynamic ways in which racialization works to undermine identity are made more explicit as Sally continued to recount the all-too-familiar and tiresome scenario that results from such a question: The original question, “Where are you from?” is rearticulated to “Where were you born?” and once again to “Where were your parents born?” in order to gain precision on how specifically to locate her as an outsider as she is already identified as such. Such questioning, she illustrated, presents a limited and distorted framework for her identity. Such a framework aims to place her racially beyond U.S. boundaries and comfortably within a given or recognizable ethnic origin (i.e., nation state), as if honing in on a specific ethnic origin might glean insight into her even if only to confirm her outsider status. Sally observed, “Unfortunately I disappoint them once again. Why? Because my parents are born in Laos, yet we are not Laotian. We are Hmong and my people do not possess any land or country.”

Because ethnicity for Hmong exists in part as a product of negotiating identity as a nationless peoples—that is, not having a nation of ethnic origin (Cohen, 1996)—as Sally indicated, her Hmong identity is delegitimized in the confines of translating her refugee parents’ national origin. Meanwhile, her status as American is seized in the expectation that she provide a nation of origin beyond that of the United States, a racialized expectation placed on Asians of any decent or status. By acknowledging this specific history in the context of race or racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1994), she was able to reconstruct her identity as inclusive but not exclusively of race while illustrating the confines of race or racial formations. Therefore, Sally highlighted that self-construction is at the center of intersections based on race and ethnicity due to the dynamic racialization that occurs between both identity constructs. More precisely, as I

will explain in detail within the next section, the expectation of ethnicity can be just as constraining as race, for this expectation often comes through the lens of race and often manifests itself as White gazes (Yancy, 2008) of people of color.

Throughout their culture show, students like Sally, shared personal experiences that illustrate the stability of racialization as a constraining force, whether it is their Asian bodies or their more invisible Hmong identity that is a point of reference. As such, within the culture show, students made claims to racial and ethnic identifiers as an important basis of collective identity and mobilization in order to both acknowledge and move beyond how they have been deterministically coded for cultural and political consumption.

Claiming Heterogeneity

Mary: No but I think what she [Moua] said is just a way to, kind of like you said, to defend herself, but I think she's trying to make us look better, the Hmong culture better, ... I feel like she's trying to hide away our struggles and the bad things that we went through and the bad things about it-

Sally: try to turn it to a positive, huh?

....

Adrian: . . . you can sugar coat it as much as you can but at the same time, bottom line is that it is, being like Hmong, it isn't always going to be positive. . . . "It's ["the Hmong stuff"] not something you should be ashamed of because by being ashamed of it and not expressing it, you're doing your people wrong 'cause our life isn't as dandy and pretty as everyone sees.

This section presents the performance of ethnicity as a critical dialogue that took place during the culture show where it concerns differences among Hmong Americans about what constitutes Hmongness. I demonstrate how the performance serves to disrupt the image of Hmong as homogeneous and culturally static and as either entirely positive or negative.

Participants complicate monolithic and static notions of Hmong identity and recreate the meaning of Hmong through presenting a collection of their multiple lived experiences as Hmong individuals. In doing so they disrupt and resist cultural standards imposed from outside and within the community. The cultural standard concerns both the interrelated notions of a) authenticity through “objective culture,” and b) disguising intercommunity tensions in order to illustrate a united idyllic façade of community. The former notion is both an assumption and expectation that reduces the cultures of people of color to fixed cultural objects or practices. In particular, Yancy’s (2008) analysis that “Whiteness is a relationally lived phenomenon” through imaginations of Other’s (e.g., Black) bodies as distinct and inferior (Yancy, 2008, p. 34) is useful for understanding the notions of culture that become expected of culture show performances. Such an analysis illustrates that codifying ethnicity to distinct objects and practices comfortably situates Hmong culture as static, foreign, and therefore at a safe observational and consumable distance, which cannot threaten the hegemonic normalization of Whiteness.

Meanwhile, the latter notion (i.e., disguising intercommunity tensions) is a response generated from *within* to counter the hegemonic interrogation of the cultures of people of color (see Barker, 1981, and Mohanty, 1984, 2002 for examples), a burden most often shouldered by female and other marginalized identities within communities of color (Collins, 2005). The imposition of both dimensions of cultural standards leaves the role of race and historically specific racial formations, which work in copious ways to contain Hmongness, to specific,

acceptable forms of identity that support racial hegemony and its calculated versions of diversity critically unchallenged. In particular, such cultural standards leave in place notions of cultural distinction, which are grounded in worn-out yet persisting notions of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Therefore, the form and the content of the performances, which advance heterogeneity and hybridity (Lowe, 1996), enable students to move beyond the limits of identity formations that are within the confines of the aforementioned cultural standards.

Like a critical dialogue that might occur behind closed doors about its cultural contents (much like the one that ensued from the reading of Moua's quote), the culture show positions the varied, and sometimes discordant, voices in conversation with one another. In doing so, they unabashedly expose the more vulnerable moments of discord that spotlight community challenges to the gaze of others. Such examples include lived experiences of Hmong Americans that become invisible and invalidated on campus where Hmong are monolithically constructed (as another problem-free AAPI or as sharing the same experiences and perspectives) as well as issues of culture that often become the subject of closed conversations due to their distortions by outsiders. Specifically, encompassed within the monologues and skits are cultural expressions in the form of Hmong folk beliefs and practices; roles and responsibilities as they existed in the social organization of Hmong hamlets in Laos (and later the refugee camps of Thailand); and current day negotiations of those beliefs, practices, and roles in the United States. All forms of heterogeneous expressions become apparent in issues of delinquency, gender, interethnic and interracial dating, and heritage language competency. By addressing and embracing heterogeneity amongst them as well as intercommunity tensions, the culture show becomes a process and method of reconstructing themselves beyond the conformist cultural standard brought on by the gaze of others.

To address how Hmong American students are viewed homogenously as model minorities, students use the culture show to raise issues that are invisible on campus. An example is a monologue highlighting the issue of gangs in the community. As a university student who lives away from her community, Sheng's daily reality is not defined by the presence of gangs in her community. However "the enduring impact of Hmong gangs on Hmong youth" is brought back to her attention during Hmong New Year's celebrations where it "end[s] up on the nightly [local] news." The irony that comes with this annual tradition serves as a reminder that the significance of this community issue lies in part due to the racialized imagery that becomes attached to cultural celebrations. By narrating issues of gangs and racialization, Sheng contradicted the presence of Hmong on campus as model minorities. However, while she illustrated how Hmong are constrained by the racialization experienced in their impoverished home communities, The physical presence of her body and voice implicitly disrupts the belief that Hmong Americans are simply determined by their culture or class, a view Valery (Chapter Five) and others described encountering on campus. Directing her performance more specifically to Hmong Americans in the final part of her narrative, Sheng concluded, "To move towards change in the Hmong community requires unity." Such unity, described by the larger narrative of the play, advances understanding Hmong heterogeneity and the changing, conflicted views of identity and culture that might be experienced. In emphasizing unity, she emphasized recognition within the community that these different experiences exist as a means to overcome the totalizing and deterministic images that define Hmong Americans. Specifically, such a narrative is a critique of how communities of "difference" negotiate their difference by masking the issues that are often born out of or made more complicated by their differential status.

Among the heterogeneity of experiences exist the intersectional critique, reassessment, and remaking of culture and identity, which highlight the nexus between gender and generation amidst the larger and looming force of race. In particular, the performances illustrated the tenuously negotiated and changing interconnected roles, responsibilities, and expectations of Hmong daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives as well as Hmong sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands in the United States. Speaking as her mother, Mai described life lessons as a Hmong daughter, and later a wife, in prewar Laos:

I was like my mother's shadow; I went where she went and I did what she did. . . . It was essential that I learn the ins and outs of domestic life so I could become a good wife.

While female performers narrated similar lessons of culture they continued to receive, they also disrupted the notion of culture as simply being inherited and offered a conception of culture that includes constant negotiation within and across generations (Lowe, 1996). For example, student performers highlighted the more contested, tenuous, and constraining features of gender as well as their resistances to definitions of Hmongness that strictly adhere to traditional gendered roles and expectations:

My parents' idea of a good daughter is one that cooks every day, studies and cleans and doesn't hang out with friends outside of school. I on the other hand was almost the complete opposite. (Mary)

Many female performers, when performing their own narratives, constructed themselves outside of the traditional or dutiful Hmong female roles that are illustrated by their performances of their mothers' narratives; these roles were nonetheless Hmong. Specifically, by recounting and figuratively embodying the lived experiences of mothers, fathers, and grandparents in their performances as well as acting out their own specific lived experiences and visions of

Hmongness, the performers were able to narrate culture as inclusive of generational differences and an ever emerging product of the tensions between them. Meanwhile, the repetition of gender narratives among the performers is a generative process of negotiating roles and expectations of gender within those in the group.

As such, monologues and skits present beliefs, values, and practices that are contentious, unresolved, or more appropriately, being negotiated within Hmong American communities. One example is interethnic and interracial dating/marriages²⁰ and their role in boundary maintenance or expansion. As one of two performers who addressed interethnic and interracial partnering directly, Faye believed, “My marriage will be more than a sanctioned bond between my husband and I. It will be a marriage with the entire Hmong community to make an example.” She further explained,

They disapprove of it because they fear the loss of our culture, traditions, and religion.

And maybe this might be the case, but it doesn't have to be. . . . Whether I choose to live my life with someone who is Hmong or with someone who is not Hmong, it doesn't make me more or less Hmong.

Despite describing community as a constraint for individual choices, herein interethnic and interracial partnering, Faye asserted her maintenance of ethnic identity with conviction. In doing so, she expanded the meaning of a Hmong identity to include the tensions and the varied outcomes that might emerge from negotiations of community and identity.

Collectively, the varied narratives that express ethnicity as heterogeneous and hybridity indicate that the cultural contents of being Hmong are unstable, constantly negotiated, and under redefinition. By exposing instances of discordance, the students are able to create new

²⁰ Participants from both institutions spoke to this issue in their interviews, whereby some positioned it as a matter of practicality related to the issue to the underrepresentation of Hmong males in higher education.

possibilities for self-construction by destabilizing culture as static and totalizing generalizations of Hmongness. Lowe (1996) elucidated that the making of culture “includes practices that are partly inherited, partly modified, as well as partly invented; Asian American culture also includes the practices that emerge in relation to the dominant representations that deny or subordinate Asian and Asian American cultures as ‘other’” (p, 65). Therefore, students are able to reclaim culture from the power and norm of White gazes, which can drown out the voices and historical significance of a group of people and how they experience ethnicity individually and collectively in specific social contexts.

Claiming Resilience

Collectively, the stories that are shared through the vignettes perform ethnicity as resilience, which counters notions of individual and collective apathy that often dominate discourses of racial minorities and their responses to racialization. The students performed skits and monologues that stage personal and collective loss, which resulted from the historic events that brought them to their current location, and their many ongoing struggles as individuals and as a community. It is clear that their story is one of survival. Among their performances, they narrated multiple instances of resistance and collectively constructed themselves as a people with hopes and dreams for their future. The titles of subsections within the larger play roadmap their varied monologues into a larger narrative of resilience: “Homeland: Once upon a time”; “Their land: The start of something new”; and “Our land: The sky is our limit.” Such subtitles communicate the legacy of the negotiations that they have come to inherit as Hmong and AAPI, which not only defines them but also illustrates the possibilities for self-determinism. In particular, this narrative trajectory sets the precedent for moving forward while in constant reflection of how they came to be in a particular context and time.

Resilience is understood in the multiple and ongoing negotiations of ethnicity through experiences of race and heterogeneity that produces “hybridity,” which “does not suggest the assimilation of Asian or immigrant practices to dominant forms but instead marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination” (Lowe, 1996, p. 67). For example, tensions and negotiations are experienced not just as perceived issues of boundary maintenance but as vexed in racially hierarchical power structures and struggles. This is particularly discernible in issues of heritage language fluency and literacy as the student performers shared the cost of their educational success. Sally explained, “My many years of schooling have caused me to lose my native tongue to speak Hmong, hence, hindering my abilities to learn the Hmong ways . . . my parents and elders find me illiterate in the Hmong culture.” The juxtaposition that English language and western norms pose to Hmong language and cultural literacy is a salient experience for Sally and other students, who recognize the power and privilege of white cultural norms in schools. These norms actively work to discount the value of Hmong cultural literacy.

Sally’s sense of loss is also shared by Suzy who struggles to reconcile her achievements with her limited heritage language fluency. In particular, Suzy recounted a painful and shameful moment when she had to describe her internship to her relatives. I share parts of her vignette in greater detail to capture her voice, maintain the integrity of her vulnerability in this moment, and convey in her own words how the inability to maintain heritage language fluency creates internal tensions of ethnic identity. Suzy shared her sense of purposelessness in the greater context of community despite personal and educational accolades.

One night during our usual informal relative gathering, my grandmother asked me in Hmong about what I had been doing and learning at [my internship]. All of a sudden all

eyes were on me. My relatives who were gathered at the event turned in to listen to what I had to say. I was totally caught off guard, I paused a moment and took a deep breath. My brain was scrambling to translate what I wanted to say to her in English to Hmong. What's the word for? And how do I put it? Oh lord, I thought, this wasn't going to be pretty. And when I opened my mouth to speak, all that came out was, undecipherable Hmong. I tried again to explain to her what I was doing at [my internship], but failed again. So I conclusively stated, '*Kuv tsis paub hais lus Hmoob.*' 'I don't know how to speak Hmong.' Idiot! Did I just say that in Hmong? I looked around and saw a disappointed look on my uncle's face. . . . I sat there submerged in ultimate embarrassment and shame. This all transpired right in front of my relatives. And I felt as though I had disappointed and poorly represented my parents. I was supposed to be the smart daughter who was doing amazing things in and out of school. And yet, I wasn't capable of conversing in my own language and communicating with the elders and representing myself as Hmong and my parents.

Although part of both Sally's and Suzy's tension was a result of their inability to demonstrate Hmongness to insiders, their sense of loss is situated in the context of their education, and consequently in their experiences of race, othering, and invalidation. By reliving their experiences in the culture show before a larger audience, the performers were able to demand that others see their personal and collective struggles and recognize that such experiences reflect a society that has yet to realize the ideal of racial equity.

As painful as these moments are for students, their narratives resist deterministic constructions of Hmongness. Diana asserted in her monologue that articles of culture, such as heritage language competency, do not determine whether she is authentically Hmong.

Just to be clear I'm not fluent in Hmong anymore and I'm not fluent in all aspects of English, but I am fluent in Hmonglish. . . . See if you're examining me in how Hmong I am, I probably wouldn't pass. But you see reading, writing and owning Hmong clothes are mere assets and contributions to being Hmong, not requirements or qualifications of a Hmong person. . . . There isn't a clear definition of what being Hmong is. I can't sit here and tell you what Hmong could be 'because it can be so many different things.

Diana's adoption of "Hmonglish" exemplifies hybridity. Specifically, self-construction emerges through performances that exhibit culture as changing rather than within the strict binary of either being maintained in a specific form or disappearing altogether. This hybridity or resilience is also evident in Sally's and Suzy's performances, which emphasize loss of Hmong cultural literacy and heritage language competency. Despite the sacrifices and sense of loss experienced by these two participants, they continue to persist in education precisely because they are motivated by their understanding of their racialized status as Hmong American. In their interviews, both students confidently stated that they will continue their education after completing their undergraduate degrees. Like all participants in this study, they have not given up on the value of education for themselves and their communities. Some participants also recognize that through their education, they are remaking rather than losing Hmong culture and identity, despite how real such a sense of loss can be. Therefore, the performance of race, heterogeneity, and hybridity collectively illustrates the enduring quality of resilience as a significant dimension of ethnicity.

Summary

In their performances, UCLA participants were able to assert their legitimacy for their Hmong identity even as it was situated within a larger AAPI identity. In doing so, student

performers brought visibility to the struggles of Hmong Americans and illuminated the intradiversity of Hmong Americans as well as within the larger AAPI category in order to counter the imagery of AAPI homogeneity on campus and the inclusion of Hmong Americans as exceptional and culturally situated. Thus, the culture show was a critique of the university's notions of diversity and minority student status—the selective inclusivity of the former and the often exclusiveness of the later.

Through expressions of ethnicity, which advance claiming race, heterogeneity, and resilience (or hybridity), the culture show allowed Hmong students to claim space within the university on their own terms. Their collective narratives of exclusion and difference challenge widely held beliefs of Americans of Asian ancestry as completely assimilated and sharing the societal benefits of Whites. As a result, students' narratives challenge dominant notions of who is a racial minority student on campus, which excludes AAPIs because of their presence as a structural plurality among the undergraduate student population. Meanwhile, their narratives of intercommunity tensions reveal the changing nature of ethnicity, which challenge dominant ways in which Hmong students are viewed as adding to the diversity of the university—that is, through their rarity on campus since they are largely viewed as determined by intersections of race, culture, and class. In doing so, they articulate a reality that complicates and informs the climate of diversity. In this way, they position themselves as insiders, rather than outsiders, in the university's discourse of race, voicing their experiences in order to both disrupt the vision of AAPIs as silent in racial debates and be complicit of how racial formations have positioned them in such debates. Therefore, by engaging in discourses of race, students stake a claim in racial formations processes.

Finally, their utilization of the culture show as a stage for their lived realities exemplifies how culture show performances can be avenues of agency and productive projects of self-construction. This notion is in contrast to the more familiar critique of culture shows as superficial appreciations of culture through performances that effectively erase the historicized, hybrid, and dynamic nature of difference as both marginalizing and empowering. In other words, the students' culture show is crafted such that it addresses the historical processes that garner the need for their presence. Their intentional use of culture shows illustrates that such performances can serve a critical and transformative function in education spaces. For the student performers, the culture show allowed them to raise critiques and deepen discourses of diversity. Finally, the culture show also enabled participants to find an affirming identity on campus, at least in that moment, by actively contesting contradictory or static representations often ascribed to them by outsiders.

CHAPTER NINE – Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I have several goals. The first goal is to summarize and discuss the study findings in terms of racial formations. I first examine racial formations that occur at the institutional level. To do this, I compare processes of race and ethnicity at each institution and discuss how institutional context informs campus climate. I also discuss racial formations in the context of identity negotiations for Hmong Americans. Specifically, I draw on Du Bois' notion of double consciousness to explicate the complicated identity negotiations which occur at the intersections of race and ethnicity.

A second goal is to provide implications for practice and future research. My primary audiences for implications regarding a campus climate for diversity are institutional agents, however I also address to student leaders due to the promise they garner in holding institutions accountable. Finally, I discuss directions for research, which are followed by concluding remarks.

Summary and Discussion

Racial Formations in Higher Education

The racialization of Hmong Americans is dynamic and subject to social and historical processes. Racialization involves processes of race and ethnicity, both of which share similar qualities but offer distinct analytical significance to the current study. Ultimately, each works in conjunction to redefine the other, so it is difficult to discuss each process distinctly. However, to capture and appreciate their distinct significance in the experiences of Hmong Americans, I attempt to summarize each process separately as they occurred within their respective institutional contexts. Throughout my summarization, I will discuss how these processes are

informed by institutional context, including issues of structural diversity, legacy of inclusion or exclusion, and proximity to ethnic enclave.

Specific dimensions of structural diversity that emerged as significant involved a dynamic interaction among critical mass of Hmong students, population size of AAPIs, and whether the institution was a PWI in student demographics. In terms of legacy of inclusion or exclusion, the extent to which ethnic identity was reflected in student programming and policy became significant in experiences of identity and climate. Finally, the institution's proximity to a co-ethnic (i.e., Hmong) community was instrumental in shaping the nature of negotiations. My aim is to illustrate how Hmong American students' experiences of campus climate are a product of negotiations of race and ethnicity, which are informed by these structural dimensions. Specifically, these interconnected dimensions worked in complex ways to shape the experiences of Hmong students, by either creating conditions that exacerbated images on campuses or worked to disrupt them.

Race at UMTC. Existing as a critical mass at UMTC, Hmong American students were recognized as a distinct and culturally different group, yet their social circumstances and struggles were invalidated by specific institutional policies and practices. Illustrated through the multitude of resources for the campus community to gain more knowledge of Hmong Americans, it was evident that the institution saw its Hmong student population as an important part of the campus' multicultural student community. Such resources included courses on Hmong language and history and campus- and department-sponsored workshops focused on Hmong Americans. These efforts, which were primarily in the form of academic and cultural programming, represented distinguished moments of visibility and inclusion for Hmong

Americans that were seldom found elsewhere on university campuses across the nation, at least within the same capacity.

Moreover, Hmong students' identity and sense belonging were affirmed through distinct spaces on campus, which they described as welcoming and providing a sense of community. These spaces included MCAE, ethnic studies courses, student organizations, and, until recently, the Hmong cultural space in the student union. However, outside of these particular spaces participants often found themselves as one of the few people of color. On the predominantly White institution, Hmong Americans experienced negative stereotypes about their culture and educational potential, which were already salient in their precollege education. Additionally, while participants experienced challenging circumstances and even racism, such experiences were not acknowledged. Instead, students' separation and lack of participation were attributed to *their* own issues of comfort and their socially and academically stifling cultural norms. Conceivably illustrated by the presence and unique function of such spaces, the institution exhibited a larger colorblind culture of racism and exclusion within which participants were seen as different but whose imposed differences were not recognized as having an instrumental influence in their lives and college experiences.

Participants' experiences on campus and larger environmental context could be considered as "Othered." In fact, their visibility as racialized Other was largely informed by the Twin Cities mainstream media, which often attended to criminality or cultural dissonance. Such negative attention often overshadowed community media outlets and the more positive representations of community such as successful images of Hmong Americans (e.g., politicians) and New Year celebrations. The centrality of racialized ethnic images may have been due to the fact that Hmong Americans are the largest ethnic Asian group in the state, many of which were

concentrated in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. It is also likely that the recent influx of refugees maintains the persistence of their racialization. These images were salient in participants' precollege contexts, but they were also carried over to their interactions with college peers, faculty, and staff, influencing how they engaged in their courses and on campus. Thus, while Hmong students' critical mass enabled them to garner select resources on campus, they also remained both stigmatized and marginalized on the predominantly White campus.

Critical examples of exclusion persisted throughout the campus. A primary example existed in the limitations of institutional data collection, which were not equipped to capture, identify, and address the diversity within AAPIs and possible differences in patterns of enrollment, retention, and persistence. The underrepresentation and attrition of Hmong students was a concern understood within the community and cited by personal informants and participants. However, such a concern, which participants personally witnessed occurring on campus, remained unconfirmed and unrecognized by the larger institution due to its current method of aggregating all Asian Americans.

In addition to the inability to account for Hmong student enrollment and persistence, the status of Hmong students was unstable and dependent on external forces beyond their control. For example, their cultural space in the student union was redistributed for use by all students. The examples of data collection and cultural spaces show how institutions remain loyal (especially under pressure) to the status quo in their conceptions and implementation of diversity as demonstrated in the traditional demographic building blocks of diversity—that is, race at the expense of ethnicity. Though a deeper analysis of the situations are required to appreciate fully the dynamics involved, the examples nonetheless remain instructive for understanding how the intersections of race and ethnicity are never fixed and are constantly being negotiated under

various social, cultural, and institutional constraints. More specifically to understanding how they inform Hmong students' experiences, the two examples illustrate how Hmong students' status is continually changing and must constantly be renegotiated.

Ethnicity at UMTC. To counter their experience of race within their institutional context, UMTC participants asserted an affirming sense of identity. However, asserting difference was a complicated task that not only concerned managing their differential status in representation but also involved negotiating the constraints and pressures of the larger Hmong community within the racialized context. As such, co-ethnic community and critical mass were instrumental in providing supportive mechanisms and shaping the constraints of UMTC participants, a force that was largely absent in the experiences of UCLA students by comparison.

UMTC participants were firmly grounded in a larger Hmong community that existed as a critical mass within the institution as well as within the larger Twin Cities area. As a result of their proximity and everyday interactions with the larger ethnic community, they did not necessarily question how they belonged in the larger Hmong community. Rather, participants found themselves having to manage commitments to and expectations from their community. In other words, their belonging in the community was a given reality that was reinforced by outsiders, who saw a critical mass of Hmong Americans against a backdrop of whiteness, and their own daily and ongoing interactions and ties within the Hmong community. Just as the sizeable Hmong community made them visibly identifiable as outsiders, the larger co-ethnic community also provided a form of buffer from isolation experiences on campus. Such support came in the form of positive images in ethnic media and a community of family, Hmong role models, and Hmong leaders.

On campus, the critical mass of Hmong students enabled participants to have and project a positive sense of ethnic identity, at least within specific spaces. For example, although not all participants were members of HMSA, the institution's primary Hmong student organization, they all recognized it as a symbol of Hmong American presence on campus. Additionally, with a critical mass at their disposal, Hmong American students were able to contest visibly the colorblind culture of exclusion that marginalized Hmong Americans on campus. In doing so, they demanded to be seen on campus. They also worked to revise the Hmong community's collective memory of the institution where inclusion was a possibility rather than being continually determined by exclusion. On the other hand, the critical mass of Hmong students provided a difficult task for the organization in terms of intimately welcoming all potential members within the organization and meeting their diverse interests and needs.

At the same time, a critical mass enabled students to organize effectively along different dimensions and to focus on their respective issues of interest without compromising their ethnic identity. In other words, students were able to affirm and address their dynamic experiences as Hmong Americans within organizations such as the Hmong Men's Circle and Hmong Women's Group, which offered a venue to negotiate and express diversity among Hmong Americans. These organizations also provided a safe space—that is, from the gaze of outsiders—to negotiate tensions created in the context of education and culture, particularly as they related to gendered roles and expectations within the Hmong community. Such negotiations were necessary given that ethnic community constraints and expectations had an instrumental force in their daily experiences as college students living within their ethnic community. Within the salient racialized context, intercommunity negotiations were somewhat more internally negotiated and managed.

As a result of living within close proximity to a large co-ethnic community, participants were able to participate in community organizations serving the Hmong American community. Such experiences initially challenged how they saw themselves fitting in, but ultimately their involvement reinforced community commitment and affirmed their belonging to the larger Hmong community. Collectively, organization participation affirmed cultural maintenance and preservation. Such a practice was necessary to resist the demoralizing effect of exclusion and cultural denigration that participants experienced both on and off campus. Cultural maintenance also enabled them to have a positively affirmed and productive place as a member within their dynamic co-ethnic community. Additionally, such organizations provided access to campus staff of Hmong American heritage and to community leaders/elders who served as role models and mentors. Ultimately, their physical presence in higher education and their ongoing negotiations illustrate acts of ethnicity, which indicate cultural maintenance in the remaking of culture within their own lives, their community, and arguably the institution—or at least, their memory of the institution.

Race at UCLA. At UCLA, Hmong American students were recognized as a distinct group that experienced a different social and cultural location. However, their rarity on campus constructed them as exotic and therefore exceptionalized symbols of diversity. In terms of institutional supports that exist to acknowledge heterogeneity within AAPI student experiences, it is evident that UCLA and the larger UC system are uniquely progressive regarding AAPI issues. Such supports included the newly implemented disaggregation of data collection within the UC system as well as student-initiated and student-run programming, which specifically sought to increase representation and persistence of underrepresented AAPI subgroups like Hmong Americans. The institution even instituted a Hmong course, which was offered through

the Department of Asian American Studies and Women's Studies. Although not formalized within the university's annual offerings, the Hmong course affirmed Hmong students' identity and need for cultural inclusion. Collectively, these policy implementations and programmatic efforts illustrate the university's intent to meet the needs of its diverse student demographic. It is worth noting, however, that the collection of progressive efforts presented culminated as a result of the insistent initiatives of Hmong students and collective action of AAPIs students (and other students of color), who rallied in support of many of these measures and whose bodied and ideological support remains critical for ensuring its ongoing maintenance.

Despite the gains of Hmong students and their allied peers, Hmong students were still largely invisible on campus and within the larger institutional context, which starkly contrasted with the highly visible and negative attention that largely colored their experiences in their respective home communities. Participants remained reduced to another high-achieving Asian American body on campus, thereby dismissing the identity and collective struggles of Hmong Americans. Additionally, Hmong students, like all Asians on campus, were understood as one of many, capturing the foreignness that stifled a genuine and complete sense of belonging to the institution. These messages were often transmitted innocently and subtly in students' interpersonal interactions (see Chapter Seven) at both campuses. However, even within a uniquely diverse institution such as UCLA, racial intolerance towards AAPIs surfaced in full force (e.g., Asians in the Library incident), revealing the larger endemic and historically relived experiences of Asians in the United States. More important, such an incident contradicted the idyllic façade and popularly imagined notion that AAPIs were fully, unquestioningly integrated and included at the university where Caucasians were believed to be lost among Asians.

By comparison, the everyday racialization of Hmong Americans at the institution is understated but nonetheless significant. Despite systemic changes in data collection, participants were largely constructed as exceptions, as Hmong Americans more generally were considered “victims of their own race or ethnicity.” In other words, they were romanticized as both culturally and socially static and therefore viewed as ultimately determined by their social and cultural location. These patronizing constructions disregarded the historic, dynamic resistances of Hmong people collectively as reflected in the complex and always changing social and cultural characteristics of Hmong Americans. Views of the socially and culturally determined Hmong American were ultimately informed by the racialized understandings of Asians on campus and affirmed by the structural and demographic absence of Hmong students. Consequently, these understandings unintentionally became a lens to gaze upon Hmong Americans in limited Hmong courses on campus.

Ethnicity at UCLA. To address the invisibility of Hmong Americans on campus, students engaged in dynamic narratives and performances of Hmong Americans. Unlike the narratives of those at UMTC, participants at UCLA were more likely to raise negative attention or ghettoized images of Hmong Americans. Such images were a response to the pervasive view of Asian American success at the institution, which invalidated the socioeconomic struggles of Hmong Americans. Such a reality, though not lived by all Hmong Americans, captured a significant and defining collective experience. In addition, Hmong students’ performances of ethnicity staged the experiences of race, as well as diversity and cultural tensions, within the Hmong American community.

Compared to their UMTC counterparts, UCLA participants experienced more physical separation from their ethnic communities and encountered more ethnic isolation and

incongruence between their current and previous educational contexts. As a result of their physical separation, their identity work required developing an affirmed sense of inclusion within their ethnic community. Affirming their co-ethnic community belonging was necessary given how they were constructed outside of Hmongness as either model minorities like all Asians or the “exceptional” to the more “delinquent” image of Hmong Americans, images limiting them racially and ethnically.

The constraints of UCLA participants existed in the lack of a critical mass to make a substantial impact on the visibility of Hmong Americans at the institution. In particular, UCLA participants have neither the same capacity nor types of resources—that is, through different organizations—to explore and express their intersectional identities within Hmong Americans. With only one Hmong student organization and limited bodies, their options for organizing around a Hmong identity as well as organizational goals were limited. In particular, their collective tasks within the organization were largely determined by the institutional context, which required increasing visibility and negotiating their difference from the larger AAPI student population. In doing so, it became obligatory to reckon with culture (i.e., cultural contents of being Hmong American) as a primary defining feature of differentiation.

The underrepresentation of Hmong students and the absence of a co-ethnic community made UCLA participants’ negotiations of identity considerate but less accommodating of co-ethnic community expectations and less constrained by community forces. Nevertheless, as the few Hmong students on campus, they still carried the weight of representation for their entire community, which included the largely invisible academic, social, and cultural struggles of Hmong Americans. As a result, they were more inclined to raise issues of diversity and

difference among Hmong Americans and addressed intercommunity tensions openly and unabashedly.

By revealing intercommunity tensions, UCLA participants critiqued romanticizing and marginalizing notions of Hmongness. As such, they elucidated and relieved internalized pressures from the objectifying gazes and critiques of outsiders. Raising such issues enabled participants to incorporate a diversity of academic experiences, ranging from their own achievements to the academic struggles of other Hmong Americans into a more comprehensive articulation and embodiment of Hmong American experiences, thereby challenging a static and determined image of Hmongness. Additionally, by bringing attention to the culturally conflicted experiences of Hmong Americans, they were able to portray how culture continued to be instrumental in the lives of Hmong Americans. More important, culture was a product of historical and social context. At the same time, they problematized these issues as simply insider or private community issues, and asserted these issues as existing in a larger social order that maintained multiple forms of oppression and marginalization. As a result, their performances of ethnicity complicated how others gazed upon them and their culture in explanations of their limited presences on campus. Their performances also elucidated how these complicated constructions privileged them as Hmong Americans in select discourses of diversity while also marginalizing them as AAPIs in select practices of diversity.

Individual and collective struggles were significant in redefining participants' connection with the institution by providing a means of engagement that affirmed ethnicity. Still, Hmong students remained somewhat limited in their ability to influence significantly the larger culture of the institution (as it existed for Whites). While some aspects of the institutional context acted as resources for students and were affirming, other aspects and practices stifled ethnicity and

instead reaffirmed race and racial stereotypes. Such moments illustrate that campuses too must constantly reevaluate policies in order to address racial formations, thereby ensuring that students are recognized.

Across both institutions, participants' experiences indicate that, while race is not contained to higher education institutions, institutions are a critical site of struggle in which racial formations are reproduced and re-imagined. The findings of this study illustrate that Hmong Americans experience racial formations in higher education in fluid ways. In particular, they operated as copious and contradictory stereotypes that worked to constrain Hmong students' sense of an affirming identity on campus. Such experiences of identity, which occur as negotiations of race and ethnicity, take place as products of the racialized spaces of higher education institutions. Specifically, the contours of race and ethnicity were shaped by structural diversity, historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, and the proximity of co-ethnic community, illustrating how these dimensions inform racial formation processes. Therefore, participants' experiences are illustrative of the ways in which Hmong students experience the campus climate.

Climate and achievement. It is understood that a negative climate can have detrimental implications for students of color's sense of belonging and ability to persist. The accounts of Hmong students shed light into how the dynamic of personal interaction and institutional climate can affect achievement. Specifically, racial episodes and stereotypes have negative implications for the social and psychological well being of Hmong students on college campuses, which include stereotype threat (Steele, 1995) and racial battle fatigue (Allen et al., 2007). For select participants the fear of confirming negative stereotypes ascribed to Hmong Americans led them to engage in actions that were unable to disrupt stereotypes. Experiences of race were also

emotionally occupying and tiring in their interactions on campus reflecting the negative effects of climate. However, while all students were burdened by their experiences of race, a more normative response for participants was that these experiences motivated participants to succeed. In particular, they gave personal and collective meaning to educational success. This positive response—the ability to endeavor for success despite challenging circumstances of race—is elucidated in Hmong students’ negotiations of identity which occur at the intersections of race and ethnicity.

Identity at the Intersections of Race and Ethnicity

This double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Du Bois, 1999)

W. E. B. Du Bois (1999) described Black Americans as having a double consciousness, which is the experience of being Black and American as “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” that are unable to become fully integrated due to societal constraints of race. The two-ness represents the tension of being neither completely African due to the role of slavery, which has striped Black people from their ancestral lands nor wholly American due to their constant dehumanization in American society that permanently excludes Black Americans as genuine citizens. Du Bois’ double consciousness,

while capturing the Black American experience, has instructive value for understanding Hmong American students' negotiations of identity.

Negotiations of identity for Hmong students involve a complex process of race and ethnicity; a double consciousness that is both constraining and empowering. As Hmong Americans, participants experience tenuous negotiations of identity that involve both insider expectations and outsider constraints, the latter always constraining the former. The notion of a double consciousness highlights the power of dominant racial images, which people of color find themselves engaging, even if to contest, disrupt and disconfirm, in their own self-definitions. Hmong students' negotiations therefore are always considerate of the outsider who gazes upon Hmongness when they negotiate identity for themselves. Racialization creates a complicated process for Hmong Americans who, like Black Americans, simply want to integrate their two identities—being both Hmong and American—“without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face” (Du Bois, 1999). This double consciousness is very real in the lives and higher education of Hmong Americans, who struggle to define the contents of being Hmong in America and aspire for an American ideal but are constantly relegated as Others.

The othering process is underscored by how Hmong American students experience race, which is dynamic in terms of both content and their status within the institution. Despite nuances in how race differs for Hmong Americans, ultimately, the historical experience of AAPIs (Chun, 1995; Osajima, 2005; Takaki, 2000; Tuan, 1998; Wollenberg, 1995) is valuable and informative for understanding Hmong Americans because of how meanings are imposed based on phenotype. Like AAPI groups collectively, Hmong Americans needs are largely unrecognized and invisible despite being seen as essentially different. Hmong Americans are also positively

stereotyped as smart and academically excelling; however, their educational success is also viewed as exceptional. Therefore, while Hmong students share the positive stereotypes ascribed to all Asian Americans, which often position them as “outwhiting” Whites, they also experience negative stereotypes more often ascribed to other racial groups such as Black and Latino Americans, particularly in terms of negative social expectancies and educational potential. Both stereotypes are grounded in deficit understandings of culture, which inherently include intersecting dimensions of race, ethnicity, and class.

Hmong Americans not only are positioned along a Black-White binary but are also constructed through nativist imagery. Hmong students encountered being stereotyped as inassimilable and culturally distinct; both images underscore their inferior and illegitimate position as “forever foreigners” (Tuan, 1998) in educational institutions and in the United States more generally. Such imagery becomes salient in the numerous ways in which participants described Hmong Americans being constructed: bad students lacking the potential to contribute in classrooms, bad citizens incapable of contributing to society, and foreign opportunists taking more than their fair share of social resources. While the latter image has a distinct class dimension for Hmong Americans given the ways welfare use has been racialized, it is reminiscent of the image of AAPIs as hoards in higher education institutions (Kidder, 2006; Nakanashi, 1995). Not surprisingly, the image of the bad student reflects larger sentiments of the bad citizen. Beyond phenotype, the persistence of such images is explained by the recent influx of Hmong refugees, which was an instrumental force in the contours of race for UMTC participants.

Despite nativist imagery that constructed Hmong Americans as somewhat divisive, they added to the campus in specific ways. Constructions of Hmong Americans as stubbornly

adhering to ethnic culture were both romanticized and demonized but could be said to hold a position of distinction within each institution. In particular, their cultural distinction became an important signal of difference and diversity. The analysis of Said (1978) and Barker (1981) are relevant, particularly when concerning how Hmong people are essentialized as culturally static and whose experiences of cultural conflict have become a hallmark in popular and scholarly works. Both mediums were central in informing how participants were racialized. Notions of racial Other or Orientalism are particularly salient in how Hmong Americans were gazed upon—that is, the cultural expectations placed on them by others and the cultural and material determinism that defined them as victims of their own race. Explanations that focus on the perils of race for people of color are further elucidated by Barker's (1981) analysis of the "new racism." The new racism is articulated in terms of culture rather than race or biology, which has become politically unpopular. In particular, cultural racism evokes cultural difference from the standards of White cultural norms as an explanatory mechanism for the disparate social outcomes, such as academic achievement/attainment, of non-White immigrant groups and people of color. As a result, cultural racism constructs the problems of minoritized groups as products of their behaviors, dispositions, and ways of knowing and by default, beyond the purview of the larger society.

Orientalism and cultural racism have intersectional salience in constructions of Hmong women and men, which are informed by race, ethnicity, sex/gender and class. For example, Hmong male delinquency is an image steeped in deficit notions of lower class urban culture. Likewise, deficit understandings of culture place Hmong female victimization solely in the hands and cultural hegemony of Hmong males. As such, the disparate educational outcomes of Hmong females are largely understood as consequences of being culturally static. As a result, Hmong

American females often must negotiate impositions to separate their experiences of gender from those of race when in fact they are inextricably connected (Collins, 2005). While culture does indeed present real constraints for Hmong females in their negotiations of identity and education (Ngo, 2006), their negotiations of ethnicity are complicated by the constraints of race. Specifically, racialized constructions of Hmong females and Hmong males are continually “under western eyes” (Mohanty, 1984, 2002), which, like Orientalism, is an understanding of the Other grounded in power, privilege, and legacy of colonialism. Under this problematic framing, culture becomes the sole cause of educational failure.

Aware of outsider gazes, Hmong females sometimes bear the burden of masking their culturally conflicted experiences in their expressions of ethnicity. However, for UCLA participants, resolving the dilemma involved affirming their multiple identities. In particular, they were intentional in making visible and embracing intracommunity tensions to advance a more holistic understanding of Hmong Americans as socially and historically informed. Given the greater constraints of community as an instrumental force in their daily lives as students, UMTC participants engaged in negotiations of ethnicity from inside the community within safe spaces. Still, their organization within these distinct spaces signaled the cultural and social significance of their multiple identities, which they collectively worked to address.

Participants’ acts of ethnicity can be understood as a process enabled by a double consciousness. While a double consciousness describes a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Du Bois, 1999), its salience is maintained by a sense of self that becomes tenuous and complicated. Therefore, a double consciousness speaks to an awareness of oppression that creates “strivings” to be seen, heard, and recognized. Such strivings are underscored when considering AAPI groups and their experiences of race as invisible. Chou and

Feagin (2008) indicated that “The Asian American experience with White-imposed racism has been *invisible* in most popular and social science analysis” (p. IX). Calling on Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952), Fegain, Vera, & Imani (1996) explicated “Black invisibility,” which they described as “the experience of White professors, students, and staff members, and administrators refusing to see, and to recognize, African American students as full human beings with distinctive talents, virtues, interests, and problems” (p. 14). Like Black invisibility, the Hmong American invisibility is conditioned by a lack of recognition, even despite being acknowledged as culturally different. In other words, they are seen, but not recognized.

The strivings of Hmong American students are exhibited in the individual and collective projects of identity on their respective campuses. A consciousness of the outsider looking in is always present in the education experiences of Hmong American students whose racial experiences instruct them of their outsider status. Despite being relegated as outsiders of institutions, Hmong American students firmly hold on to the belief that the university can be transformed to include them, and by extension, society holds a place for them. This belief is demonstrated in participants’ affirming projects of ethnicity, which reflect resilience and the ability to maintain hope in the pursuit of reconciling two warring ideals that they tenuously embody. Through projects of ethnicity they implicitly and explicitly engage in identity work that aims to transform the institutional culture so that Hmong Americans are recognized. More important, their acts of ethnicity illustrates that they continue to hold a sense of self, although it is informed but not completely defined by others. This understanding marks a double consciousness employed by Hmong American students, who are always engaged in complex processes of self-affirmation through the contours of race and ethnicity. As such, a double consciousness is not simply constraining, but empowering, and is necessary for tenuous insider

outside negotiations that are continually imposed in a society where the legacy of race continues to be significant in changing racial formations.

In sum, participants engaged in identity negotiations through individual (narratives) and collective (organization affiliation and culture show performances) projects of ethnicity that were transformative. Beyond themselves, their engagements had transformative potential in the education of others who they came into contact with in terms of issues of identity and diversity. At the institutional level their collective projects set precedence for institutional belonging, which could either be supported or ignored. Most significant, participants' projects of ethnicity enabled participants to move beyond the limitations imposed on them. While participants recognized their outsider status on campus, their actions illustrate that they refused to accept their marginal status. Instead, they worked to center Hmong culture and identity into the institution. At the same time, they refused to accept "static" "authentic" notions of being Hmong, which privileged and marginalized them on campus. Therefore, ethnicity projects enabled student to envision the possibility of transformative change and participate on campus in meaningful ways to nurture a climate for diversity. These negotiations underscore a double consciousness that is imposed and necessitated in a society where race continues to be significant.

Implications

Practicing Diversity, Affirming Difference

The higher education experiences of Hmong students are often isolating given that they are an underrepresented student group. In this study, Hmong students often were either invisible or misunderstood while their collective experiences remained unrecognized or undervalued. Although student agency and identity negotiation contributed to how they experienced campus

climates, the racialization and ethnicity negotiation process was also affected by a commitment from their institutional leaders. There are a number of actions that campus leaders can take to ensure that students are successful. My focus in this section is to urge and guide campus leaders to take an active and thoughtful role in diversifying institutions. However, I also offer guidance for AAPI student organizations and student leaders who are often at the forefront of diversifying institutions through their individual and collective projects of social justice, which encompasses the project of identity in a racialized society.

Administrators, faculty and student support personnel. While all students must negotiate transitioning to college life, students of color face must also negotiate their differential status (Nagasawa & Wong, 1999). This burden can be discouraging and make degree attainment much more difficult, especially if such burdens are viewed simply as products of students' own psychologies rather than products of institutional context. For that reason, the implications for this section will primarily address different institutional actions that can be taken to better support Hmong students. Rather than being guided by implications that simply help individual students adjust to college environments, my goal is to offer implications that guide institutions to better practice diversity and affirm Hmong student identities through a view of diversity that recognizes the varied dimensions (Hurtado et al., 1998; 1999, Milem et al., 2005) of institutions as having an essential role in shaping intergroup processes and educational outcomes. In particular, I focus on affirming diversity and difference.

Embracing diversity and affirming difference are two sides to the same coin; both are required to centralize the experiences of people of color in educational institutions. Ultimately, to reap the benefits of diversity requires institutions to recognize difference (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, sex/gender) as relational rather than distinctions that separate people of color as Other.

Claiming and embodying difference offers institutions a process to critique and decenter the institutionalization of whiteness as the norm. Therefore, meaningful inclusion requires respect and appreciation for the instructive value of differences, not simply to provide cultural lessons about the Other. The ability for institutions to impart and affirm how differences shape the experiences of all groups disrupts the tendency to privilege some groups while marginalizing and oppressing others. In other words, institutions must engage in intentional interventions in order to overcome unintentional racism (Ridley, 2005) and cultivate diverse educational spaces and learning (Chang, Chang, & Ledesma, 2005). Such a notion guides the implications offered in this section with the goal of acknowledging the vestiges of racism, and overcoming the barriers presented by this legacy of exclusion. Only then will people of color be holistically affirmed, removed from marginalizing and objectifying gazes and genuinely included within institutions of learning.

Therefore, affirming diversity and difference for Hmong students involves intersecting issues of recognition and representation. Representation refers to the physical presence of Hmong American students on campus as well as their symbolic and material representation within institutional policy and practices. Recognition, on the other hand, refers to acknowledgment of how their lived experiences present contradictions for the ideals of democracy and racial equity that require, demand, and necessitate social and cultural institutional inclusion. For institutions to cultivate genuinely a climate of diversity and inclusion for Hmong students, recognition and representation must be actively and continually addressed. Finally, while my discussion of implications is directed towards institutional practices that affirm Hmong students in higher educational institutions, these implications have bearing for underrepresented groups more generally.

Efforts directed at ensuring a critical mass of Hmong students is an important initial step to addressing campus climate for Hmong American students. The concept of a critical mass is the idea that numerical representation is sufficient in constituting social significance, specifically as it deals with negotiating institutional power (A. W. Astin, H. S. Astin, Bayer, & Bisconti, 1975, as cited in Hurtado, 1994, p. 23; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002). Conceptualizations of critical mass vary from actual percentage (Smith et al., 2002) to absolute numbers (Astin et al., 1975, as cited in Hurtado, 1994, p.23). However, the current implication of critical mass regards cultivating, affirming, and sustaining subjective definitions from students about what is meaningful for their respective institutional context.

A critical mass is vital for establishing Hmong students' presence on campus, which may reduce their chances of becoming essentialized in interactions and, more generally, being reduced to individual and static objects of diversity or difference. Underrepresentation has been linked to being reduced to racialized objects (Chang, 2005; Smith et al., 2007). A critical mass may also increase their own visibility among one another as Hmong students, so they are able to identify with one another or take comfort in knowing that there is a Hmong student community available on campus. Beyond campus grounds, the experiences of UMTC participants illustrate that a critical mass can signal to the larger Hmong community an attainable, accessible and welcoming campus for prospective students. An implicit understanding of having a critical mass is not being a foreign outlier. As such, critical mass may take on added significance for underrepresented groups—for example, Southeast Asians, who are significantly less likely than their East Asian peers to attend selective universities (Teranishi et al., 2004).

Efforts directed at increasing and sustaining a critical mass include continuing and active support of access, yield, and retention programs, which are vital in ensuring Hmong student

matriculation *and* success once they enter the institution. Access programming is necessary given the multiple barriers that Hmong students continue to face prior to entering higher education institutions (S. J. Lee, 2001; Teranishi, 2004). Concerted efforts directed at increasing yield are necessary for communicating and demonstrating a commitment to diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998; Milem et al., 2005). These efforts become necessary given the tendency for students of color to have limited access to precollege preparation, which can exclude them from gaining admittance to selective higher education institutions. Therefore, if institutions are genuinely interested in cultivating diverse spaces, it is imperative they embrace a vision of diversity that takes into account structural disadvantages, which perpetuate inopportunity for people of color (Change, et al., 2005).

Finally, programming aimed at retaining and graduating Hmong students is obligatory to ensure that students receive the continuing support that is needed to remain successful. Even college Hmong students are at risk (Yeh, 2002). This task is increasingly important when degree attainment is a goal of college access (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). This point is even more compelling in light of participants' own accounts of peer attrition, which they viewed as a disparaging reality that could potentially become their own. Collectively, such programming reflects a commitment to diversity in recognizing the specific social and cultural issues that continue to serve as barriers for Hmong student participation and success in higher education.

In terms of developing support services, one implication includes making services more affirming of intrarace diversity when marketing and constructing programs and activities, especially for services intended to meet the needs of AAPIs. Hmong and other AAPI students may be more likely to respond to support programs and services that demonstrate an awareness and appreciation of ethnic differences within the AAPI category. While ethnicity is an important

consideration when advertising services, it is imperative that such methods reflect cultural sensitivity rather than direct solicitation, which can incite stereotype threat or avoidance of services.

In addition to signaling an awareness of intrarace diversity, it is important for practitioners to be aware of how their own race might be significant in their constructions and interactions with students (Ridley, 2005; Sue, et al., 2007). Literature indicates shortages of available, culturally sensitive personnel on campus (Kim, 2007; Kim & Omizo, 2003; L. Li & Kim, 2004). Reassessing and examining institutional services and practices are important for ensuring that students who seek help are not implicitly Othered (DePouw, 2006) or denied services based on presumptions of academic preparedness (Liang & Sedlacek, 2003). Such methods are important given the fact that AAPIs tend to underutilize social services despite their increasing need for such support (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Hsu et al., 2004; Okazaki, 1997). Providing student service personnel the resources to meet the needs of a diverse student demographic increases the likelihood for positive and affirming experiences. As many participants mentioned, positive interactions with Hmong staff (and other staff of color), many of whom worked in multicultural offices and ethnic studies departments, can be replicated and experienced across the institution. In addition to ensuring student access to culturally competent services across campus, such steps also serve to support faculty and staff of color who often take on extra responsibilities to support students of color.

Given the importance of ethnic organizations in students' affirmation of identity, it is critical that institutions continue to support and develop these groups, particularly because they often remain marginalized compared to more established and historically White student organizations (Hurtado et al., 1999). Support of organizations include providing resources such

as facilities and funding so that ethnic-specific student organizations can adequately function similarly to historically White organizations. Often historically White organizations benefit from the legacy of exclusion at historically White campuses (e.g., central location) (Feagin, 1996; Hurtado et al., 1999). Ultimately, while fostering and cultivating cultural spaces is central to remedying campus climate experiences, other institutional efforts must also be made to address a legacy of cultural inclusion. However, such efforts should not remain under the purview of cultural organizations. As such, cultural organizations serve a critical function; however, their presence should reflect a larger culture of inclusion rather than epitomize the extent to which people of color are integrated.

It is important that institutions be intentional in their programmatic efforts. Campus-administered forums on identity, diversity, and leadership should be encouraged and offered through cocurricular activities, community program offices that work with student organizations, and orientation for new admits. These programmatic offerings may serve as venues for campus-wide dialogue about different identity issues, raising awareness and promoting healthy climate for student learning (Nagda, Gurin, & Johnson, 2005). Programmatic efforts that structure positive intergroup actions are essential because cross-racial interactions cannot be expected to occur organically (Chang, et al., 2005). It is the work of campus leaders and educators to cultivate and normalize diversity within and beyond the classroom.

Forums on diversity and leadership would ideally encourage not only discussions of identity but would also facilitate discussion of White, male, heteronormativity as a lived experience that is interrelated to the experiences of people of color and other identity groups. Such a process is necessary for the recognition and affirmation of people of color; it can also be liberating and educationally transformative for those who occupy positions of power and

privilege (Tatum, 1997). Engaging in discourses of race is important not only for engaging in anti-racist and social justice projects, but it is also necessary for grappling with how they shape lives collectively. While racism creates real and substantial psychological, social, and physical costs for people of color (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Hwang, & Goto, 2009; Smith et al., 2007; Truong & Museus, 2012), race or racial silence has hidden costs for Whites (Tatum, 1997).

Tatum (1997) explained the individual and collective injuries of racism:

Unchallenged personal, cultural, and institutional racism results in the loss of human potential, lowered productivity, and a rising tide of fear and violence in our society.

Individually, racism stifles our own growth and development. It clouds our vision and distorts our perceptions. It alienates us not only from others but also from ourselves and our own experiences. (p. 200)

Because faculty often have normalized contact with students, it is important for them to consider how their own curriculum and pedagogy might be used to generate dialogues and critical thinking about diversity and race and to disrupt racial stereotypes. A goal of such practices would be to undo the tendency to avoid discussions of race while normalizing discussions of diversity. In addition to these student-centered programmatic efforts, campuses leaders should actively seek out, attend to, and incorporate the perspectives, experiences, and voices of marginalized communities in decision making.

When implementing student programming, it is imperative that the institution accounts for, evaluates, and assesses the extent of services needed, which include having the appropriate data collection methods to identify issues of access, underrepresentation, and attrition. While the UC system recently has begun data collection on disaggregated groups of AAPIs, it is unclear whether there are disparities in the educational outcomes of groups. If census data disaggregation

is any indicator, it is likely that Hmong Americans, along with other SEAA and Pacific Islander groups, remain underrepresented and continue to face challenges in their pursuit of a higher education degree once they come to college (CARE, 2008). This dispiriting experience is expressed in the voices of participants, some of whom are negatively affected by witnessing peer attrition. However, to date, many institutions lack the infrastructure to account for these types of disparities.

While the numbers of Hmong Americans remain small and arguably insignificant, their experiences are nonetheless important for assessing and understanding how institutions that serve this population are faring in terms of meeting the needs of their entire student body (Chang, 2000). The experiences of Hmong students, as a highly underrepresented and invisible population, can be particularly revealing of an institution's climate of inclusion and exclusion, exemplifying whether institutional attempts are inclusive. Additionally, whether their experiences are captured in institutional data and policies may reflect how institutions have shifted their practices to accommodate the changing demographics of college and university students and consequently the racial formations in the United States. Moreover, while the disaggregated experiences and voices of students are central in uncovering the climate experiences of groups, disaggregated numbers also communicate a powerful story. When voices and numbers work together, it can provide campus leaders, educators, and researchers the tools to begin to address racial and ethnic disparities.

AAPI student groups and other student leaders. While campus administrators, faculty, and student service personnel hold considerable power in shaping an institution's climate of diversity, this study underscores the individual and collective significance of student agency. Specifically, it is clear that students are powerful cultural workers, whose experiences embody

contradictions that have instructive value for how institutions must change to realize ideals of democracy and racial equity. Furthermore, student engagements, which are inspired by these contradictions, are crucial in garnering the attention of institutional agents and often necessary for advancing institutional change. Often this process involves problematizing “how things are done around here” (Kuh & Whitt, 1988, p. 106), which often exclude the varied knowledge and lived experiences of people of color. For this reason, the implications for practice conclude with words of encouragement and guidance to student leaders and AAPI student groups who are often intimately involved in processes and efforts to diversify institutions. The experiences and knowledge of students from UCLA and UMTC foreground points of recommendation, which I view as complementary to rather than a substitute for the critical and necessary work of campus leaders. Therefore, I offer this guidance bearing in mind that students are often burdened by institutions that are ill equipped to meet their needs.

The experiences of participants indicate that identity involves negotiations and cultural work within and outside of ethnic community. I begin by addressing work within ethnic community, which involves critically engaging ethnic community as a source of support. Actions that nurture and sustain community presence on campus are beneficial for negotiating the institutional environment. Participants at both institutions offer guidance through their own activities, which include education outreach, involving the larger Hmong community in campus projects of identity, and turning to one another for support under difficult personal, social, and academic circumstances. Additionally, given the tendency for peers to turn to one another, it is advised that students encourage institutionalized support seeking when situations or circumstances merit such attention. These activities have implications for visibility, yield, and an

affirmed sense of belonging on and off campus. Therefore, this work not only has positive effects on community but is also personally rewarding.

Work within communities also requires cultivating a space for constructive conversations of intercommunity tensions. Acknowledging such tensions is necessitated by the reality that the differences that create tensions between groups are also inherent within groups. However, racialization processes make it even more imperative to grapple with intercommunity tensions and embrace the diversity of experiences and perspectives that inform an evolving notion of ethnicity for Hmong Americans. Participants at both institutions frequently engaged in and benefited from conversations regarding communities of difference and diversity within Hmong Americans. Although these discussions often occurred within cultural organizations, participants should capitalize on other invaluable resources on campus such as Asian American studies courses and AAPI faculty and staff. Therefore, it is productive to engage ethnic community critically as a source of support as well as address intercommunity tensions in individual and collective projects of identity.

Ultimately, identity projects that are aimed at remedying a campus climate require engaging other individuals. Participants in this study illustrate that engagement can begin at the individual level through interpersonal interactions. Such informal interactions are important in creating allies in anti-racist and social equity projects. Allies exist in peers, staff, and faculty who can offer instrumental support. For example, the culture show of UCLA students was supported by various groups, who assisted in securing key resources such as facilities. Furthermore, the Count Me In campaign, which led to the policy implementation for the disaggregation of data for AAPIs at UCLA, is exemplary of student agency and intergroup mobilization that was able to garner the support of faculty, staff, and administrators. At UMTC, similar initiatives led by

student groups and community members have been responsible for the institutionalization of cultural programs focusing on Hmong Americans. Inherent in such initiatives is a tradition exhibited by coalitions comprised of students of color and their allies, which include White student, faculty, and staff, who employed their collectivity to mobilize change. Therefore, informational interactions can be viewed as opportunities for projects of identity and engaging others in institutional change.

At the very least, the value of participants' experiences in this study can be appreciated by student leaders and groups as an affirmation of people of color's experiences. Furthermore, the voices of participants demonstrate the resilience of Hmong students and their ongoing engagement in the pursuit of racial equity through education. As such, participants' stories are hopeful reminders of the challenges with schooling and the power of education, demonstrating both the work that needs to be done and what has been achieved. Therefore, I encourage students to embrace the notion that higher education settings are opportune environments to explore identity, engage in learning communities, and become involved in transformative resistance.

Directions for Future Research

The racialization of Hmong Americans, like that of AAPIs, is a dynamic and constantly evolving process that demands researchers to continue to uncover the ways in which students experience and negotiate race in education. This study illustrates the contours of race for Hmong Americans, which often mirror those of AAPIs; however, there are substantial differences which can partially be explained by institutional contexts. While this study examined Hmong student experiences in selective public institutions in two states with the largest concentrations of Hmong Americans, a question that remains to be answered is: How do Hmong students experience race and negotiate ethnicity in other contexts? In California, a critical mass of Hmong

Americans are dispersed throughout the central valley, including Fresno and Sacramento counties, whereas in Minnesota, a large majority of Hmong Americans live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area and spread out across smaller communities throughout state. Outside of these states, there are communities of Hmong in Wisconsin, North Carolina, Michigan, and Colorado. Such contexts offer other possibilities to examine Hmong student experiences.

In terms of institutional selectivity, it is likely that Hmong students tend to be concentrated in state colleges and community colleges. Future research should also investigate how Hmong students in these institutional contexts experience racialization and negotiate ethnicity. Students in these settings also might yield different dynamics in terms of both institutional and community forces given the different population of students attending these types of institutions. One UCLA student hypothesized that had he attended the local state college (near critical mass of Hmong Americans), he would have been treated and stereotyped negatively by faculty and peers. Although his hypothesis was attributed to critical mass, it is unclear what role selectivity has in racial formations and identity negotiations.

Hmong American students' experiences of race and racism can be psychologically demanding for participants in the study. While cultural organizations were important for students in terms of negotiating their differential social status on campus, it is unclear where, if at all, Hmong students turn for support? Furthermore, what is the nature of this support? Future directions may consider examining these questions.

It is clear that participants' negotiations of identity take on these complex issues. Given the salience of gender and class in experiences of race, this study underscores the necessity of work that addresses the intersections of multiple identities. Future research should attempt to broaden and deepen this area of inquiry.

Also, this study raises questions about the higher education experiences of other groups. How do other underrepresented AAPIs, such as other Southeast Asian American groups and Pacific Islanders, experience and negotiate racial formations in higher education? Likewise, how are they similar and different to those of Hmong Americans and, more important, how do they intersect?

Finally, racial formations are constantly being negotiated through multiple mediums and processes. Awareness of racial formations can influence how students engage in narratives of identity. Such an awareness of racial formations can also indirectly influence narrative strategies employed by researchers and must be carefully considered in research methodology. In particular, such considerations should be made in instrumentation, reflexivity, and analytic strategy to generate data that are trustworthy. Doing so can garner a more holistic understanding of the phenomena of study.

Conclusion

Hmong American students and their struggles are largely invisible yet are grossly misunderstood when they are seen. This study addresses this lack of recognition as well as how Hmong students endeavor to be acknowledged, respected, and understood. In particular, this study explores how Hmong Americans negotiate the contours of race and ethnicity to construct an affirming identity on their respective university campuses. Guided by a framework of campus racial climate, this study examines how institutional context shapes student experiences of race and ethnicity and consequently processes of racial formation. Drawing from qualitative case study methodology and semistructured interviews with 40 Hmong American students, this study examines Hmong American students in two different institutional contexts. At one institution, Hmong Americans exhibit a critical mass inside and outside of the predominantly White campus.

In the other institution, there exists a plurality of Asian American and Pacific Islander Americans; however, Hmong Americans are underrepresented on campus and absent in the larger institutional context.

First, this study explores how Hmong students negotiate identity through negotiations of race and ethnicity. This investigation is important because, although race images profoundly shape lives and circumstances, they neither define nor reveal the complicated realities of how people view themselves, make sense of racial ascriptions, and engage in projects of self-definition and self-determinism, a process underscored by ethnicity.

For example, popular characterizations of Hmong Americans as culturally situated (e.g., Fadiman's 1997 widely acclaimed book) and as having specific class-based identities (e.g., the feature film *Gran Torino*) essentialize and portray Hmong Americans as culturally distinct. Reminiscent of racialized images ascribed to earlier Asian immigrants of East Asian ancestry (Takaki, 2000; Wollenberg, 1995) and other minoritized groups (e.g., Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans) (Ong, 2003; Takaki, 2000), these popularized characterizations lend themselves to maintain depictions of Hmong Americans on binary extremes in education as both model minorities and delinquents (S. J. Lee, 2001; Ngo & Lee, 2007). Despite specific racialized ethnic images of Hmong Americans, on the whole, a majority of Americans remain ignorant to their existence or possess limited knowledge about the diversity within AAPI groups. As a result, Hmong Americans must navigate not only racialized discourses about Hmongness but also reconcile this with reductions in the essential Asian body. Therefore, the struggle for visibility and self-construction is a tenuous process at the intersection of categorizations based on race and ethnicity.

The findings of this study illuminate the complex negotiations of identity for Hmong students. First, negotiations of identity involve constraints from both ethnic community outsiders and insiders; however, constraints from the inside are complicated by racialization (or racial understandings, expectations, and impositions). Race and racism operate through various stereotypes to constrain the identity and experiences of Hmong American students as both Asian and Hmong. These racial stereotypes mirror larger racial understandings and reflect how students experience the campus racial climate. They have detrimental effects for participants' identity and sense of belonging on campus but also evoke personal and shared significance of educational success. Second, individual and collective acts of ethnicity benefit from community but require addressing intercommunity tensions and commitments.

The participants in this study exhibit many forms of resistances. For example, participants engaged in performances of race and ethnicity that challenged the static and determined image of Hmong Americans. Participants also organized around identity and worked to affirm their identities on campus and within their communities. Finally, despite their experiences of race in education, they were not discouraged; they still believed in the value and power of education for their personal and collective lives. Nonetheless, such experiences of race are painful reminders for Hmong Americans that they somehow do not belong.

Guided by a framework of campus racial climate, this study also examines the role of institutional context in shaping students' experiences of race and ethnicity and consequently processes of racial formation. Campus racial climate theory indicates that the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, including policy, programmatic offerings, and practices, are implicated in the operation of race within institutions. The study's findings indicate that the contours of race and ethnicity for Hmong Americans are shaped by structural diversity, historical legacy of

inclusion and exclusion, and the proximity of co-ethnic community. The final dimension adds another layer of institutional context not previously considered in the campus climate experiences. This particular dimension intersects with the historical legacy of inclusion and exclusion, which can be observed in the structural diversity of institutions.

The findings of this study are significant not only for understanding Hmong student experiences but also for understanding how race operates in higher education institutions. Hmong students' everyday experiences of race include subtle and sometimes not so subtle cues that communicate to them that they are different. In particular, racial stereotypes that positioned Hmong students as both a racial and ethnic Other denied participants the possibility to be genuinely included on campus. Such messages are often transmitted during interpersonal interactions but also through institutional practices despite institutional efforts to include all students.

In addition, Hmong student experiences indicate that racial formations are always at work. The status of Hmong students within the institution is tenuous and unstable illustrated by their inclusion and exclusion in particular moments and spaces. In particular, despite being a critical mass of Hmong students or a plurality of Asian Americans within their respective institutions, they still were not impervious to racial experiences. Additionally, they are included in selected discourses of diversity yet excluded or ignored in certain practices. Finally, the construction of cultural distinction that privileged them ultimately served to marginalize Hmong students. The experiences at UMTC and UCLA suggest that the status of Hmong Americans as insiders and outsiders within institutions is constantly being negotiated through processes of race and ethnicity, which are informed by the institutional dimensions. Therefore, the dynamics of institutional dimensions inform negotiations regarding the status of Hmong students within

educational spaces and illustrate that status is never fixed and subject to agency and structure. Thus, centralizing the dynamic experience of Hmong Americans in policy, practice, and programming are important for ensuring that Hmong Americans are affirmatively included. In particular, affirming their belonging requires recognition of how diversity and difference inform the lives of all, not just students of color.

APPENDIX A

Survey Information Sheet University of California, Los Angeles Experiences with Race, Identity and Campus Climate Student Survey Information Sheet

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to understand college experiences with race, identity and campus climate. It is designed to explore your overall college experience with particular attention on participation in ethnic organizations. Because the study is designed to understand your experiences with race, identity and campus climate it will also ask you to recall upon some precollege information (such as type of high school and community) and experiences such extracurricular involvement in high school. Your participation in this research study (or decision not to participate) will not affect your relationship with your with (insert institution).

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to complete the attached survey in which we expect will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

As you complete the survey, you may have the opportunity to reflect on your experience which may enhance self-understanding. Your responses to the survey will also help us understand the college experience of Asian American students and may have larger implications curricular and cocurricular change in higher education.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There could be survey items that you are uncomfortable answering or to which you simply prefer not to respond. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you will be under no obligation whatsoever to answer any questions that you are not inclined to answer. You may choose not to answer any specific question you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Please note that your responses will be used for research purposes only and will be strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. We will not release individual identifiers to your undergraduate institution, to other researchers, or to other agencies.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you volunteer to complete this survey, you may decide not to complete the survey for any reason at any time without consequence of any kind. Your completion and submission of this survey questionnaire indicates your consent to participate.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Rican Vue at this address: UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, Box 951521, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521 or email at Rican.vue@gmail.com. You may also call (916) 832-1809.

You may also contact the faculty sponsor, Walter Allen at the following address: ULCA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, Box 951521, 3101A Moore Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521 or via email and phone at allen@gseis.ucla.edu, (310) 206-7107.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects, UCLA, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, UCLA, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694, (310) 825-8714.

Please keep this copy of the information sheet for your reference.

APPENDIX B

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following survey by marking your most appropriate responses on each question

Name: _____

Email: _____

1. Sex: Female Male

2. Please tell us how you ethnically identify _____,

Your religious affiliation _____ and your parents if different _____

3. What year did you graduate in high school? _____

4. What year are you at your institution?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior 5+ Alumni

5. Did you transfer to your institution from another college? Yes No

6. What is your area of study:

Major _____ Minor(s) _____

7. **Generation/Citizen Status** (Please select one)

- Your grandparents, parents, and you were born in the U.S.
- Either or both your parents and you were born in the U.S.
- You were born in the U.S., but neither of your parents were
- You are a foreign born, naturalized citizen
- You are a foreign born, resident alien/permanent resident
- None of the above apply to you

8. **What was the approximate combined income of your parents before taxes last year? Include taxable and nontaxable income from all sources. *Mark one.***

Less than \$10,000	<input type="radio"/>	\$90,000 to \$99,999	<input type="radio"/>
\$10,000 to \$19,999	<input type="radio"/>	\$100,000 to \$124,999	<input type="radio"/>
\$20,000 to \$29,999	<input type="radio"/>	\$125,000 to \$149,999	<input type="radio"/>
\$30,000 to \$39,999	<input type="radio"/>	\$150,000 to \$199,000	<input type="radio"/>
\$40,000 to \$49,999	<input type="radio"/>	\$200,000 or more	<input type="radio"/>
\$50,000 to \$59,999	<input type="radio"/>		
\$60,000 to \$69,999	<input type="radio"/>		
\$70,000 to \$79,999	<input type="radio"/>		
\$80,000 to \$89,000	<input type="radio"/>		

9. **Indicate the highest level of education completed by your mother/guardian and father/guardian. *Mark one in each column.***

	Mother/Guardian	Father/Guardian
Grammar school or less	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Some high school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High school diploma	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Some college or postsecondary education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Some graduate or professional
- Graduate or professional degree (e.g., MA, PhD, MD, JD)
- Other
- Unknown

10. Are you the first in your immediate family to attend college? Yes No
Are you the first in your extended family to attend college? Yes No

11. What is your hometown? _____

12. Is this your first choice university? Yes No
If *no*, which school? _____

13. Prior to attending this school did you know of anyone who attended here? Yes No
If yes, please indicate the relationship of the person to you.

14. Prior to attending this school, were you aware of the existence of a Hmong Student Organization on this campus? Yes No
If *Yes*, How? _____

If *Yes* (you were aware that a Hmong student organization was on this campus), did that affect your decision to come? Yes No

16. In high school were you ever outreached to by a Hmong student Organization from any College campus? Yes No

If *yes*, which college(s)? _____

17. What organizations were you a part of in high school? Please list each one.

18. What organizations have you been a part of since entering college?

20. If applicable, do you consider yourself an active member of the Hmong Club? Yes No

22. What are your plans for after you graduate? (i.e. graduate school or work in a particular field, etc)

23. IF you are a (insert institution) alum, what are you currently doing (i.e. graduate school or work in a particular field etc)?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

To both “break the ice” and get some background information, we’ll start with introductions. I will start. As I said earlier, my name is _____ and I am a (insert educational level) at (institution name), majoring in (academic field). I am (racial/ ethnic background) and originally from (hometown).

Background Questions

Tell me about how you came to choose your major?

When you think about members of your ethnic community, how would you describe their perceptions of education?

Probing question

- How has this view affected your experiences in school?

How does your ethnicity and gender influence your educational experiences? How do you see your experiences in relation to those among your ethnic community?

Why did you decide to attend (insert institution)?

Probing questions

- What things did you consider before deciding to attend (insert institution)?
- What are the 3 biggest reasons for choosing to attend (insert institution)?

Identity and climate

In what ways do you identify yourself? How is this reflected in the way you interact with people? How this is reflected in the activities you’re involved in?

How do you feel as a Hmong/Hmong American student at (insert institution)?

Probing questions:

- How often do you find yourself thinking about your ethnic identity while in college?
- In what instances do you find yourself thinking about your ethnic identity? Provide an example of a moment in which you thought about your ethnic identity?
- How would much do you think your ethnic identity shapes your experiences?

How do you think Hmong/Hmong Americans are perceived at this in institution?

- How is that similar or different to what you have experienced in the past? Is that what you would have expected given how Hmong Americans are perceived where you went to high school or where you came from?
- How do you respond to these instances?
- How often do you encounter situations in which you feel like people misunderstand your identity?

How do you feel as an Asian American at this institution?

- How often do you find yourself thinking about being AA while in college?
- In what instances do you find yourself thinking about being AA? Provide an example of a moment in which you thought about being AA?
- [How important is your being AA?]

What fears do you have, if any about being successful or not successful academically here?

Cocurricular involvement and cross-racial interaction

Since coming to college how often have you interacted with someone who was different than you in terms of background, interests and or other things?

- Interracial dating?

What organizations have you participated in since entering college? Please share why you joined and what your involvement in each one.

Since entering college have you participated in any organizations specifically focused on race, ethnicity, and or gender? Please share why you joined and what your involvement in each one.

Probing questions:

- As a student at (insert institution) how do you think that the cultural/ethnic student organization contributes to the ethnic community/(insert institution) community?
- How does your involvement in the cultural/ethnic student organization compare to your involvement in other student organizations?

Can you tell me how if at all your education at [institution] has shaped or influenced your world view? Please explain and provide examples.

How do you define diversity?

- How do you think the university defines diversity? Do you think the university is supportive, responsive to your view of diversity?

Optional Questions:

When you get upset, where do you go for support?

Please describe the single most positive experience you have had here?

Please describe the single most negative experience you have had here?

How has your involvement affected your feelings about the institution?

What hopes, fears or expectations did you have when you entered? Have they changed? How?

Concluding Question

Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you would like to add?

Do you give me permission to contact you for clarification or questions later?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Protocol

How do you think Hmong/Hmong Americans are perceived at this institution?

- Can you tell me what it means to be Hmong at this institution?

How do you think Asian Americans are perceived at this institution?

In what specific way does the institution demonstrate an appreciation of your racial/ethnic background? Faculty? Other students?

How would you describe the Hmong community at this institution?

How would you describe the AA community at this institution?

How would you describe the community of color at this institution?

What function do ethnic/cultural organizations function, if at all at your institution? In your experiences? Provide examples.

Do you feel that the university supports students of color, Asian Americans, Hmong American students?

Probing questions:

- If yes, how so?
- If no, how can they provide better support?

Do you believe that this institution is committed to issues of diversity and multiculturalism?

- How do you think the university defines diversity?
- How is that similar or different to how you define it?

To what extent do teachers incorporate race and or gender into teaching?

What are the pros and cons about this institution that you would present to students of color who have decided to come here to this campus?

What is the one thing that you would take from here that would improve life for students of color on other campuses?

What advice would you give to students of color who have decided to come here, in terms of how to cope effectively?

In what specific way does the institution demonstrate an appreciation of your racial/ethnic background? Faculty? Other students?

APPENDIX E

Interview/Focus Group Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Experiences with Race, Identity, and Campus Climate

You were invited to participate in a study examining experiences of race, identity and campus climate. This study is being conducted by Rican Vue, a Ph.D. student at UCLA's Department of Education under the faculty sponsorship of Professor Walter Allen. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The intent of this study is to explore the how participation in ethnic student organizations effect students overall college experience.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire and participate in a 60 minute interview. During the session, we will be asking you questions about your own educational experiences which may include recalling on experiences relating to your education before college. The interview will be audio taped and later transcribed.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

The study poses minimal risks. This study seeks to understand your overall experiences in college and participation in ethnic organizations. In reflecting on your experiences it is possible that you might become uncomfortable with difficult or challenging experiences you have had. This may be somewhat emotionally distressing. You may elect to not answer any of the questions with which you feel uncomfortable and still remain a participant in the study.

You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, this research addresses issues important to Asian American students, specific but not limited to [enter ethnicity] students' development and experiences, which may help inform institutional and classroom practices. Furthermore, you may derive benefit in reflecting on your own experiences.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

[If funding is available insert the following: As a token of appreciation for your participation in this study you will receive a gift certificate with the value of *AMOUNT* to *VENDOR*]. [If no funding available insert the following: You will *not* receive payment for your participation in this study.] You may choose to participate in the focus group at whatever level is comfortable for you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In any report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. We will use pseudonyms for students, organizations and the institution in all transcripts and reports. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records. Tapes will be erased or destroyed once the interviews have been transcribed and proofed by the researchers.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and will not affect your current or future relations with your institution. You are under no obligation whatsoever to answer any questions or discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. If you choose not to answer specific questions, you may still remain in the study. You are free to withdraw at any time.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher conducting this study is Rican Vue. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you may contact the PI at rican.vue@gmail.com or the faculty sponsor at allen@gseis.ucla.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Office for Protection of Research Subjects, 11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 102, Box 951694, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694, (310) 825-8714.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR OR DESIGNEE

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Name of Investigator or Designee

Signature of Investigator or Designee

Date

APPENDIX F

Audio Tape Release Form

I voluntarily agree to be audio taped during the interview being conducted by a researcher from the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. I understand that the tapes will be used to gather information about student views and experiences on race. The tapes will be kept for approximately ten years and will be securely stored at CHOICES on the University of California, Los Angeles campus. After the data is collected and transcriptions are made, the tapes will be destroyed.

Signature of the Participant

Date

Signature of the Investigator

Date

Refusal to be Taped

I do not agree to be audio taped during the interview conducted by a researcher from the Graduate School of Education & Information Studies and the University of California, Los Angeles. By refusing to be audio taped, I understand that I may not continue to participate in the study.

Signature of the Participant

Date

Signature of the Investigator

Date

APPENDIX G

Recruitment Email

A study on race, identity and campus climate is currently taking place. Its purpose is to explore the how Asian American students, particularly [insert ethnicity] experience college, since they are generally underrepresented in educational research and policy. Rican Vue, a Ph.D. student in the UCLA Department of Education's Higher Education and Organizational Change Division will be conducting the study under the supervision of Dr. Walter R. Allen, Professor of Education at UCLA. They are currently seeking individuals who would like to participate in their study which include a brief questionnaire (approximately 5 minutes) and participate in a 60 minute interview and/or focus group. Participants may choose to only participate in the interview or focus group at their own convenience. Participants will be asked questions about their overall educational experience, which may provide insight to [insert ethnicity] and Asian American students' development and experiences. Be assured that the information that is shared will be kept confidential and names or other personally identifying information will not be associated with comments or perceptions. Also, please be assured that participation is completely voluntary.

[If funding is available insert the following: As a token of appreciation for your participation in this study you will receive a gift certificate with the value of *AMOUNT* to *VENDOR*].

To be eligible for the study you must meet the following criteria
Identify as a student of [insert Asian American ethnicity] decent

If this sounds like something you are interested in please contact the principal investigator, Rican Vue at rican.vue@gmail.com RSVP for an interview or focus group.

You may also contact Rican and Dr. Walter R. Allen for any questions regarding the study. Complete contact information for both are as follows:

Rican Vue
UCLA
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rican.vue@gmail.com

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