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Academic Persistence of Hmong Americans Undergraduates: A Psychosociocultural Approach

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ABSTRACT

Given the paucity of research examining the educational experience of Hmong American undergraduate students in higher education, this study examined the psychosociocultural factors influencing academic persistence decisions among 85 Hmong American undergraduate students attending a predominantly White university. Differences in class standing revealed upper division students perceived a higher sense of confidence in academic related tasks than their lower division counterparts, yet upper division students also perceived a less welcoming university environment incongruent with their cultural values than lower division students. Peer support and cultural congruity of self and the academic environment appeared to be an important factor in relation to one's self-beliefs. Finally, college self-efficacy and experiencing feelings of being an imposter were the strongest predictors of academic persistence found in Hmong American undergraduates. Study limitations, future research directions, and implications for higher education administrators and faculty are discussed.

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ASIAN AMERICANS AND THEIR EDUCATION

- ☞ Fastest growing minority group, 11.9 million in US (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002)
- ☞ Over 25 ethnic origins (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002; Escueta & O'Brien 1991)
 - ◆ Including Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese
 - ◆ Groups aggregated under umbrella term of Asian American which masks specific needs of each ethnic group
- ☞ Complete higher levels of education than any other racial group in U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003)
 - ◆ Subjected to model minority stereotype due to educational achievement
- ☞ Bimodal educational distribution
 - ◆ Southeast Asians (refugees and immigrants) have lower academic achievement and higher rates of HS dropout than other Asian ethnic groups who have been in US longer (Fuentes, Sedlacek, & Liu, 1994; Hsia & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1996)
 - ◆ Hmong Americans with lowest percentage of educational attainment (7.5%) compared with other Asian ethnic groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004)

HMONG AMERICANS

- ☞ Tribal ethnic group from Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam
- ☞ Fled from homeland to US due to political, social and historical factors
 - ◆ Resettled in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin (Cerhan, 1999; Tatman, 2004)
- ☞ Half of current Hmong population under 18 years of age (Pfeifer, 2001)
- ☞ Factors affecting academic persistence (Lee, 2001; Su, Lee, & Vang, 2005; Swartz, Lee, & Mortimer, 2003)
- ☞ Hmong issues and concerns
 - ◆ Immigration history
 - ◆ Acculturative stress
 - ◆ Lack of financial resources
 - ◆ Low levels of parents' education
 - ◆ Conflicting cultural values with educational system
- ☞ Hmong youth issues and concerns
 - ◆ Truancy
 - ◆ Dropout
 - ◆ Delinquency

HMONG AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATES

- ☞ Discrepancy between previous and recent research findings regarding Hmong American educational success (Hutchinson, 1997)
 - ◆ Attributed to initial anecdotal reports based for first group of Hmong children entering education system who have since overcome early difficulties and barriers
- ☞ Higher achievement and academic success as compared to their non-Hmong classmates (Hutchinson, 1997; McNall, Dunnigan, & Mortimer, 1994; Swartz, et al., 2003)
 - ◆ Study and spend more time on homework
 - ◆ Higher GPAs
 - ◆ Higher educational attainment by earning a bachelor's degree
 - ◆ Higher college retention rate

PSYCHOSOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

- ☞ 3 dimensions of student educational success (Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004)
- ☞ Self-beliefs (Bandura, 1986)
 - ◆ Frequently associated with academic performance and persistence with Asian American students (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Fuertes, et al., 1994)
 - ◆ Especially academic tasks versus general college-related tasks (Gloria & Ho, 2003)
- ☞ Perceptions of social support
 - ◆ Buffer or protective factor especially from friends (versus family) for Asian American undergraduates (Gloria & Ho, 2003)
 - ◆ Hmong Americans
 - ◆ Family support - drives educational pursuits to provide economic security and social mobility (Hutchinson, 1997; Lee, 1997; Swartz, et al., 2003)
 - ◆ Peer support - older siblings as role models passing on knowledge (Hutchinson, 1997)
- ☞ Comfort in the university environment
 - ◆ Hostile campus environment affects social adjustment and resiliency (Gloria & Ho, 2003, Suzuki, 1994)

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- ☞ To examine the psychosociocultural factors influencing academic persistence in Hmong American undergraduates
 - ◆ Assess differences by gender and class standing
 - ◆ Investigate the relationships among the three variable sets of self-beliefs (individual and academic), social support, and cultural and environmental factors and the interrelationships between individual variables
 - ◆ Determine extent to which self-beliefs (individual and academic), social support, and cultural and environmental factors predict academic persistence

SETTING & PROCEDURE

- ☞ Conducted at large Midwestern Research I Institution
 - ◆ Asian Americans comprise ~5% of student population
 - ◆ Approximately 200 Hmong students at university
- ☞ Institution Review Board approved study
- ☞ Surveys distributed and completed at
 - ◆ Asian-affiliated student organization meetings
 - ◆ Student locales
 - ◆ Non parametric sampling methods
- ☞ Surveys collected
 - ◆ At time of administration
 - ◆ Via campus mail
- ☞ Incentive of prepaid movie ticket upon return of survey
- ☞ 30-45 minutes survey completion time

HMONG AMERICAN STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

☞ Completed surveys

- ◆ 172 Asian American students of whom 85 were Hmong undergraduates

☞ Gender

- ◆ 49 Females
- ◆ 36 Males

☞ Majority first generation

☞ Age = 19.33 ($SD = 1.25$)

- ◆ Range 17 to 23

☞ GPA = 2.95 ($SD = .46$)

- ◆ Range 1.6 to 4.0

☞ Class Standing

- ◆ 33 Freshmen
- ◆ 17 Sophomores
- ◆ 26 Juniors
- ◆ 9 Seniors

☞ Parents' Educational Level

- ◆ No formal schooling
- ◆ 52.9% mothers
- ◆ 28.2% fathers
- ◆ Highest degree of HS or GED
- ◆ 92.9% mothers
- ◆ 65.9% fathers

INSTRUMENTATION

☞ Counterbalanced scales with general demographic sheet first

☞ All internal consistencies are adequate with exception of one

☞ *Self-Beliefs (Individual and Academic) Variable Set*

- ◆ *Inventory of Anxiety of Decisions (IAD, 22 items, $\alpha = .85$)* - examined anxiety regarding an educational or vocational decision (Mendonca, 1972)
- ◆ *Perfectionism Scale (PS, 10 items, $\alpha = .69$)* - assessed dysfunctional attitudes reflecting perfectionism (Burns, 1983)
- ◆ *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES, 10 items, $\alpha = .86$)* - measured feelings of acceptance and self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965)
- ◆ *Fear of Success Scale (FOSS, 27 items, $\alpha = .62$)* - assessed perception of costs, benefits, and value of success (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976)
- ◆ *College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI, 14 items, $\alpha = .90$)* - examined students' confidence to complete specific college related tasks (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kenner, & Davis, 1993)
- ◆ *Educational Degree Behaviors Self-Efficacy Scale (EDBSES, 14 items, $\alpha = .95$)* - assessed students' confidence to complete academic tasks (Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999)
- ◆ *Imposter Syndrome Scale (ISS, 14 items, $\alpha = .77$)* - measured feelings of being an imposter (Harvey, 1982)

☞ *Social Support Variable Set*

- ◆ *Mentoring Scale (MS, 5 items, $\alpha = .79$)* - assessed perceived mentorship (Gloria, Robinson Kurpius, Hamilton, & Willson, 1999)
- ◆ *Parental Educational Encouragement Scale (PES, 12 items, $\alpha = .85$)* - examined parental educational encouragement (Gloria et al., 1999)
- ◆ *Perceived Social Support Inventory (PSS-Fr, 20 items, $\alpha = .92$)* - measured perceived support, information, and feedback from friends (Procidano & Heller, 1983)

☞ *Cultural and Environmental Factors Variable Set*

- ◆ *Multiethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, 20 items)* - assessed ethnic identity and other group orientation (Phinney, 1992)
 - ◆ *Ethnic Identity (EI, 14 items, $\alpha = .87$)* - assessed attitude and sense of belonging
 - ◆ *Other-group Orientation (OGO, 6 items, $\alpha = .55$)* - measured affiliation to other group
- ◆ *Multiethnic Identity Measure (MEIM, 20 items)* - assessed ethnic identity and other group orientation (Phinney, 1992)

- ◆ *Cultural Congruity Scale (CCS, 13 items, $\alpha = .77$)* - measured cultural congruity of self and university values (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1994)
- ◆ *University Environment Scale (UES, 14 items, $\alpha = .81$)* - examined perception of college environment (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1994)
- ◆ *College Environmental Stress Index-Modified (CESI-M, 16 items, $\alpha = .85$)* - assessed financial, academic, familial, and personal stress (Munoz, 1986)

☞ *Criterion Variable*

- ◆ *Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decisions Scale (P/VDDS, 30 items, $\alpha = .80$)* - assessed academic persistence decisions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980)

RESULTS

☞ 2 (gender) X 2 (class standing) MANOVA

☞ Significant main effect for class standing

- ◆ $\lambda = 2.38, p \leq .01, \eta^2 = .41$
- ◆ Lower division students had significantly higher UES and CCS than upper division students
- ◆ Upper division students had significantly higher CSEI, EDBSES, and PSS-Fr than lower division students

☞ Nonsignificant main effects for gender

- ◆ Approaching significance with females higher in PSS-Fr than males

☞ Nonsignificant interaction

☞ Relationships Between Variables

Variable Set	Root 1 β	Canonical Correlation	Root 2 β	Canonical Correlation
Self-beliefs	$p \leq .001$.71	$p \geq .05$.40
CSEI	.91			
ISS	-.83			
Social Support				
PSS-Fr	.96			
Self-beliefs	$p \leq .001$.74	$p \leq .05$.52
IAD	-.66		-.54	
RSES	.79			
CSEI	.66			
ISS	-.84			
Cultural Factors				
MEIM			-.65	
CCS	.84			
CESI-M			-.57	
Social Support	$p \leq .001$.65	$p \leq .01$.40
MS			.89	
PSS-Fr	-.94			
Cultural Factors				
MEIM	-.88			
MEIM-other	-.69			
UES			.72	
CCS	-.66			

☞ Interrelationships of the Study Variables

- ◆ All variables significantly ($p \leq .05$ and $p \leq .01$) and positively related to academic persistence with exception of PS

☞ Stepwise Regression

- ◆ Significant omnibus equation [$F(4, 68) = 23.74, p \leq .001$] accounting for 58% of variance in P/VDDS

Variable	R^2	ΔF	alpha
ISS	.37	$F(1, 71) = 41.79$	$p \leq .001$
CSEI	.10	$F(1, 70) = 12.47$	$p \leq .001$
CCS	.06	$F(1, 69) = 9.18$	$p \leq .01$
FOS	.05	$F(1, 68) = 8.85$	$p \leq .01$

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

☞ College self-efficacy strongest predictive weight of academic persistence for Hmong American undergraduates

☞ Increased perception of support from friends increased the level of confidence to complete specific college related tasks

- ◆ Rely more on peers since displaced from strong Hmong family and community along with parent's lack of formal education
- ◆ Consistent with literature
 - ◆ Asian American peers provide highest academic support of all racial groups (Steinberg, 1992)
 - ◆ Hmong Americans educational success due to academic oriented-friends (Swartz, et al., 2003)

☞ College self-efficacy and peer support increased over time spent at university for Hmong Americans

- ◆ Learn how to navigate the educational system with assistance from friends

☞ Higher college self-efficacy related to increased perception cultural congruity between self and university

- ◆ Study participants receive assistance and advice from program designed for underrepresented minorities and disadvantaged students
- ◆ Universities should continue supporting and promoting such culturally specific academic programming

☞ Imposter feelings accounted for the most variance of academic persistence

- ◆ Pressures from Hmong family and community for economic security and advancement
 - ◆ Feelings may drive undergraduates to persist academically to avoid being seen as unsuccessful
 - ◆ Need to delineate *pressure* versus *encouragement* from family

☞ Results indicated feelings of being an imposter lessened through increased support from friends

☞ Increased imposter feelings related to cultural incongruity between self and academic environment

- ◆ Question whether influenced by Model Minority Myth whereas Hmong American undergraduates encounter different barriers to academic success
- ◆ University should track Asian ethnic group status to better understand specific needs to academic concerns

- ☞ Upper division students perceived a less welcoming university environment and cultural incongruity between self and university than their lower division counterparts
 - ◆ Longer on campus the more aware of racial discrimination and cultural differences on campus
- ☞ Reported lower perception of support from friends relating to lower ethnic identity and cultural incongruity between self and university
 - ◆ Cultural incongruity influencing academic and personal self-beliefs
 - ◆ Participants recruited from Hmong American student organization events
 - ◆ Importance of Asian ethnic specific groups to create a community sharing similar cultural values and buffer against unwelcome university environment
 - ◆ University continue supporting and funding ethnic specific groups like Hmong American student organization
- ☞ Findings inconsistent with previous literature on importance of family support to academic persistence (Gloria & Ho, 2003)
 - ◆ Lack of knowledge and understanding on part of Hmong parents with university environment and children's college experiences
 - ◆ Administrators to create culture specific orientation programs inviting family to campus addressing and familiarizing them to children's college experience and education
- ☞ In contrast, family members were identified as mentors influencing children's educational pursuits and goals
 - ◆ Administrators increase Hmong representation by actively recruiting Hmong faculty and administration to assist Hmong American undergraduates while on campus
- ☞ Findings did not suggest gender differences in psychosociocultural influences and academic persistence
 - ◆ Literature points to highly motivated Hmong females challenging traditional cultural values (Lee, 1997)
 - ◆ Further research to delineate gender specific challenges to academic persistence

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- ☞ Small sample size - increased sample to detect expected gender differences
- ☞ Limited generalizability from non-randomized sample
- ☞ Majority of data collected during Hmong American student association events
 - ◆ University assisting researchers in identifying the Hmong American undergraduates to recruit for future studies
- ☞ Scales not specific to Hmong American undergraduate population
 - ◆ Develop and validate scales for Hmong students
 - ◆ Creation of scale measuring family support of educational pursuits extending beyond parents (i.e. siblings and grandparents)

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