

CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS, ETHNIC IDENTITY, OTHER-GROUP
ORIENTATION, AND COLLEGE PERSISTENCE ATTITUDES AMONG
LAOTIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

by

MARION PHOUMMARATH ZAHN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: Counseling Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Campus Connectedness, Ethnic Identity, Other-Group Orientation, and College Persistence Attitudes Among Laotian American College Students. (August 2009)

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Laotian American students attending universities across the U.S. are first-, second-, and third-generation American. This generation status, along with their families' unique immigration experiences, likely impacts their adjustment to college. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census indicates a very low representation of Laotian Americans (7.6%) in the cluster of Asian Americans who have attained at least a Bachelor's degree (42.7%). This low representation calls for further research on the Laotian American population to discover ways to increase these numbers. This study examines the mediating effect of campus connectedness on ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes and on other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. It also examines mean group differences on campus connectedness by cultural orientation, among 82 low-land Laotian American college students.

Results reveal that campus connectedness does not mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes. A mediation effect exists for campus connectedness on: 1) ethnic identity cognitive clarity (EI-clarity) and persistence

and 2) other-group orientation and persistence. Mean group differences on campus connectedness by cultural orientation appear in the results.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Khongsavay and Soukha Phoummarath,
and my brother, Jack Phoummarath

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my committee chair, Dr. Linda Castillo, and my committee members, Dr. Daniel Brossart, Dr. Lynn Burlbaw, and Dr. Gisela Lin, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research and my time at Texas A&M. I am grateful for the ways in which each of them has contributed to my personal and professional growth. With them as my role models, I hope to continue the legacy of mentorship.

Thanks also go to my friends, colleagues, and the educational psychology department faculty and staff for making my tenure at Texas A&M University a great experience. Many thanks to my colleagues at the Texas A&M University Department of Multicultural Services and the International Center for their support and friendship as well. I would also like to express my gratitude for the warm welcome, support, guidance, and camaraderie of my friends and colleagues at Appalachian State University Counseling Center, especially to my fellow interns, Chris Carden and Melissa Plaufcan. Thanks also to my elementary, middle, and high school teachers for their guidance and efforts towards helping shape me into the person I am today. And special thanks to my high school psychology teacher, Ms. Monica Rodriguear, for sparking my interest in psychology, and to my tennis coach, Mr. Erich Klopp, for his support and guidance, as well as for providing me with a healthy outlet.

My friends (sisters) Elizabeth Khoury, Marisela Peña, Monica Cervantes-Sitters, Stephanie Rendon, and Tiffany Laster, from my hometown of Houston, Texas, deserve special thanks for their love and support through the years. Thanks also to my friends

from my undergraduate years at Texas A&M University who helped me feel connected and at home in College Station.

Finally, thanks to my parents, sister, Samantha, and brothers, Ted, Inthira, and Jack, for their encouragement, to my husband, Bill, for his patience, support, friendship, and love, and to my dog, Bailey, for his companionship.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the 2000 census, Asian Americans are the second most rapidly growing ethnic minority population in the United States. Between 1991 and 2001, enrollment of Asian American students at four-year and two-year institutions increased 53.1 percent and 55 percent, respectively (American Council on Education, 2005). At the first-professional level, such as degree programs in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and law, Asian Americans accounted for the highest rate of growth with an increase of 74.8 percent (American Council on Education, 2005). In 2001, Asian Americans were the third largest percentage of students enrolled at undergraduate institutions among ethnic minority groups (American Council on Education, 2005). Although Asian Americans represent a significant proportion of the ethnic minority student population at universities across the United States, there are limited studies that focus on the social integration these students undergo while adjusting to life on campus.

While some similarities exist among Asian Americans, the unique refugee experiences of Laotian Americans set them apart from other Asian immigrant populations, especially those that emigrated to the U.S. voluntarily. Because refugee populations often endure pre-contact trauma (cf. Berry, 1986) and difficulties related to relocation, it is important to study their experiences separately from other Asian American groups (e.g., Japanese Americans). The pre-contact experiences of Laotian American refugees, as well as their experiences adjusting to a new society have

This dissertation follows the style of *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.

educational and psychological ramifications that are likely to affect the acculturation processes of later generations, including ethnic identity development and other-group orientation. For example, the 2000 U.S. Census indicates that 49.3% of Laotian Americans aged 25 and over have attained less than a high school education. Furthermore, only 7.6% of Laotian Americans attain a bachelor's degree. Given the growing number of Asian Americans across college campuses, as well as the unique refugee experiences of Laotian Americans, the purpose of this study is to examine college persistence attitudes among Laotian American college students. The findings of this study will likely serve as a foundation for developing ways to increase college persistence among the Laotian American population.

Studies have found that Asian American students at predominantly White universities experience struggles adjusting to college similar to those faced by African American and Latino students (Tan, 1994; Uba, 1994). A thorough review of the literature found very few studies on Asian American college persistence. Lee (1996) suggests that the paucity of research focused on the college adjustment of Asian Americans may be attributed to the myth of the model minority, which purports that Asian Americans do not experience as much distress as other minorities because of their cultural assimilation and success. "Lost in the Asian American success story is the diversity in the refugee waves and the recent migration of some Asian (particularly Southeast Asian) ethnic groups" (Ngo, 2006, p. 52), including Laotian immigrants. Of the studies that do focus on the adjustment of Asian American college students, few include Laotian Americans. Thus, the applicability of the findings of studies on the

general Asian American population to Laotian American students is questionable, due to limited inclusion in prior studies and the experience as a refugee population.

Laotian American History, Culture, and Values

Many Laotians, along with other Southeast Asians (including, Vietnamese and Cambodian ethnic groups) came to the U.S. during the last major wave of Asian immigration after 1975, as a result of the Vietnam War (Ngo, 2006). The Hmong and the low-land, or ethnic Lao, are the two main ethnic groups that fled from Laos as a result of the Vietnam War. This study focuses on the ethnic Lao (residing in the U.S.), who will be referred to henceforth as Laotian American. The values espoused by Laotian culture include: the family as a social unit, respect for parents and elders, public emotion suppression to preserve modesty and save face, and maintenance of harmony (Schapiro, 1988). In Laotian culture, the family is the primary social unit, extending far beyond the immediate family, to include relatives by marriage (Phommasouvanh, 1983). Family members are expected to look after one another and share their limited resources (Tungmala, 1998). It is not uncommon for children to reside with their parents even after marriage. Grandparents and grandchildren often share the same household (Tungmala, 1998). It is expected that family members “develop a sense of family obligation and primary loyalty to the family” (Tungmala, 1998, p. 22). As a unit, the family is of the utmost importance, with needs placed above one’s own (Tungmala, 1998). Children are often expected to contribute at least some of their wages to family finances, sometimes including “tuition for other siblings” (Tungmala, 1998, p. 22). Family is one of the more important social groups for all Laotian Americans.

Respect for parents and elders is also taken very seriously in the Laotian culture (Schapiro, 1988; Tungmala, 1998). Traditionally, fathers serve as the head of the household, making all of the important family decisions (Tungmala, 1998), while mothers are “expected to stay home raising their children and to pattern their lives around those of their husbands” (Schapiro, 1988, p. 159). Children are expected to obey their parents and act in ways that will bring pride to the family and avoid behaving in ways that will bring shame through losing face (Tungmala, 1998). The concept of face is a method for encouraging conformity and preserving the family’s honor by refraining from committing acts that would yield shame (Fong, 1994; Kitano & Daniels, 1988).

Parents take pride in the academic achievements of their children and in their children’s display of respect for elders. For sons in particular, becoming a “Buddhist novice” (Tungmala, 1998, p. 23), is also a point of pride for the family and respect for the parents. For daughters, domestic skills, such as cooking, are a source of pride (Tungmala, 1998). Shame is brought to the family through loss of face if children demonstrate behaviors opposite of those that bring pride (Tungmala, 1998). Acting in a manner consistent with expectations of the group, both through behaviors and emotional displays is paramount in the upbringing of Laotian Americans.

Public displays of emotions, such as anger, grief, and depression, are often avoided, since these are considered private, family matters (Tung, 1985). Positive and negative attributes of the self are also rarely shared, since modesty and saving face are highly valued. Often passed on to children are values of patience, honor, making charitable contributions, and paying attention to others’ needs over one’s own. Children

learn from a young age that self-control and the suppression of negative emotions is a family norm (Tungmala, 1998).

Finally, Laotian culture values the maintenance of harmony and pleasing others. Thus, responding in ways believed to be preferred by the other conversant is not uncommon (Schapiro, 1988). Maintaining harmony within the family often requires that children suppress the expression of their negative emotions (Tungmala, 1998). In summary, Laotian immigrants brought many cultural norms with them to the U.S. and have passed these values on to the later generations now in college.

Laotian American Views on Education

As previously mentioned, Laotian American parents take pride in the academic achievements of their children (Tungmala, 1998). Academic and occupational successes of their children are thought to contribute to the overall welfare of the family (Tungmala, 1998). Laotian parents recognize the importance of educational achievement for upward mobility and financial security. However, due to their recent immigration status in the U.S., many first-generation Laotian American parents are often ill-equipped to provide much more than encouragement. This inability to actively support their children in school has been attributed to a deficit in “the necessary cultural capital to understanding the mechanism of US educational institutions in order to help their children negotiate school and academics (Ngo, 2006, p. 56).”

Laotian Immigration to the U.S.

The manner of immigration to the U.S. has also impacted the wherewithal of Laotian parents' to support their children academically. Between 1975 and 1984,

approximately 83,000 low-land Laotians arrived in the United States (Schapiro, 1988; Van Esterik, 1985). According to Cerquone (1986), the Laotian supporters of the old government that remained in the country after the fall of Saigon in April 1975, including government officials and soldiers, were separated from their families and taken to reeducation camps in remote parts of the country, where they endured harsh labor and were provided little food and almost no medical care. Those that were able to flee, often escaped to refugee camps in the neighboring country of Thailand (Nong Khai and Ubon provinces), where many stayed for two-to-five years before arriving at their host countries (Van Esterik, 1985). Time spent at the refugee camps has been described as unproductive and provided little preparation for these families to thrive in more industrialized countries, where they would eventually land (Van Esterik, 1985). Thus, refugees from Laos fit under the “push-pressure-plunge” model of kinetic refugee flight described by Kunz (1973) (c.f. Schapiro, 1988). Laotian American refugees were *pushed* out of their native country to avoid “persecution or death” (Schapiro, 1988, p. 160) into refugee camps in Thailand, their country of temporary asylum, where they were *pressured* to vacate; and then *plunged* into the United States of America, one of the countries providing permanent asylum (Schapiro, 1988).

Having reached their country of asylum with hopes of a better future, Laotian Americans were met with many obstacles. Many Southeast Asian refugees who had to flee rapidly and abruptly experienced loss of family, community, country, and customs, contributing to a general sense of loss and frequently leading to depression, post-traumatic stress, as well as a sense of personal and cultural identity loss (Bemack, 1989).

Among the experiences encountered upon arrival to the United States were “unemployment, social isolation, alien cultural norms, language barriers, a decrease in vocational status, family separation and loss, racial tension, health problems, and educational deficits” (Bemack, 1989, p. 22).

In addition to entering a new country with different cultural norms, expectations, and language, their adjustment was further complicated by the change in social and class status (Bemack, 1989). Family roles also became complicated as children attended schools, developed greater command of the English language and often served as cultural translators for their parents (Bemack, 1989). This commonly fostered a dependency on children that traditional Laotian parents were not accustomed to and contributed to a change in the structure of the family (Bemack, 1989). This change in roles for the parent-child relationship is one outcome of the developmental acculturation of the family (Bemack, 1989). While these values were strongly held among immigrating Laotians, their transition into the American culture impacted these traditional values.

ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is a complex construct (Anderson, Moeschberger, Chen, Kunn, Mewers, & Guthrie, 1993) that was developed to understand how European colonization affected indigenous and colonial populations (Berry, 2003; Hallowell, 1945). It later became an area of interest for scholars studying changes in immigrants transitioning into host cultures (Beiser, 2000; Berry, 2003). Recent interest in acculturation has surrounded the changes in and relationships among intermingling cultural groups (Berry, 2003; Padilla, 1980).

The field of psychology has studied acculturation for two primary reasons: 1) to control for the impact of change (social and cultural) on psychological phenomena and 2) to understand the psychological implications occurring when two cultures intersect (Berry, 2003; Berry, Trimble, & Olmedo, 1986). Because of its complexity, many researchers have developed a variety of models and definitions of acculturation, including a shift in values and behaviors from one culture to another as a result of intermingling with members of a different culture (Mavreas, Bebbington, & Der, 1989). Other researchers describe the acculturation process as a bidirectional one, where an individual either takes, maintains, or abandons values and behaviors of both cultures (Sodowsky, Lai, & Plake, 1991; Sodowsky & Plake, 1991). What follows is a description of two acculturation processes. The first is Bemack's (1989) three-phase developmental acculturation process for families that discusses acculturation occurring

at the group level. The second discusses an acculturation model that describes the process at the individual, or psychological level.

Family Acculturation

Bemack (1989) describes a three-phase developmental family acculturation process. In the first phase, security and safety are the primary goals. Families begin to familiarize themselves with the new culture and make sense of their current skills and functioning in order to survive and feel psychologically safe in the new environment. The acquisition of certain skills are necessary in order to make this possible, including functional command of the English language, along with other verbal and non-verbal forms of communication espoused by the new culture, understanding and utilization of the transportation and monetary systems, as well as procedures for payment of rent and other bills. Before moving on to the next phase in this developmental family acculturation process, families must achieve a sense of security and safety within this new environment, so they may transition to becoming more adept at navigating their way through the foreign society outside of the confines of their homes (Bemack, 1989).

In the second phase of the developmental family acculturation process, family members move towards mastery of personal and family integration into the host society. To the extent that families achieved safety and security in the first phase, families will be better positioned to achieving the goals of this second phase (Bemack, 1989).

Bemack (1989) provided an example of mastery of this phase by an intact Cambodian family of four, where the father was working for a janitorial service and the mother was taking ESL night classes and acquired a driver's license, while their two

children performed well academically and were fast becoming better socially integrated, socializing with other Cambodian children, as well as American children. The father had been promoted at his job and received a raise. The mother was gaining greater command of the English language and the monetary systems, as well as adapting to such practical needs as grocery shopping for the family at American supermarkets and finding places to purchase food items for preparation of more traditional Cambodian meals. With the family matriarch becoming increasingly autonomous and attending night classes and the father having to assume non-traditional roles of contributing to household chores and ensuring that the children get to bed, family roles certainly shifted in order to accommodate their new culture. The success of the father at work contributed to personal integration, while the mother, through achievement in developing better English language skills and adapting in other ways to meet the practical needs of the family, and the children, through academic and social progress, contributed to the overall integration of the family into the American society (Bemack, 1989).

The final phase of the developmental acculturation process for families involves a focus on future identity. Having had their issues of safety and security resolved and becoming more integrated into the American society, focus on present struggles is shifted to future aspirations, including job/career, education, and other longer term goals. Parents in this phase begin to make inquiries to other community members and professionals regarding their children's continued education after high school. This phase of the acculturation process results in: 1) community acculturation, 2)

environmental mastery, 3) skill development, and 4) inversed roles. Community acculturation occurs when families are able to adapt to their new environment.

Environmental mastery takes place when families are able to be self-sufficient in this new environment. Skill development occurs when parents and children acquire the necessary skills to thrive in the new context. Finally, inversed roles result when traditional role responsibilities change in order for the family to adapt to the new culture. Children become seen as more capable than their parents with regard to adapting to the new culture as a result of greater exposure through school (Bemack, 1989).

Individual Acculturation

Cuellar, Arnold, and Maldonado (1995) suggest that acculturation elicits change at three levels of functioning: behavioral, cognitive, and affective. At the behavioral level, changes can occur in language development and use, cultural practices and food, music, and dance preferences (Cuellar et al., 1995). At the cognitive level, acculturation can bring about change in one's core values, beliefs about male and female social roles, as well as beliefs about illness (Cuellar et al., 1995). At the affective level, acculturation brings changes in culturally-connected emotions, including symbolism, life philosophies, and issues of identity (Cuellar et al. 1995). This study focuses on affective acculturation, specifically the meaning one attaches to and how one feels about his/her ethnic identity (Cuellar et al., 1995; Phinney, 2003), and one's attitude toward members of other ethnic groups (other-group orientation). As a result of continuous contact among members of different cultural groups, at the individual level of acculturation, individuals eventually adapt either psychologically/internally (e.g., feelings about ethnic identity) or

socioculturally, linking the individual to members of other groups (e.g., other-group orientation) (Berry, 2003). Both forms of adaptation are important in a college campus setting, in terms of psychological well-being and competently carrying out the responsibilities involved with one's role as a student—working with others and communicating with fellow students and professors.

In addition to functional levels of acculturation, the strategies individuals adopt may differ. The four acculturative strategies of adaptation described by Berry (2003) include: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. With the assimilation strategy, an individual adopts behaviors and values of the dominant culture and rejects those of the original culture. The integration strategy involves individuals combining aspects of both the original culture and the dominant culture. The separation strategy describes a phenomenon where individuals reject behaviors and attitudes associated with the host culture and adopts solely those of the original culture. Finally, the marginalization strategy is used when individuals choose to separate from the original culture and is also rejected by the host culture, only to be left with a feeling of not belonging to either culture. In sum, the strategy (or strategies) a student chooses to adopt will likely influence her/his ethnic identity. For example, a student using the marginalization strategy will probably have low ethnic identity as well as low other-group orientation, since he/she would feel a lack of belonging in both the original culture as well as the dominant culture.

As previously mentioned, most Laotian immigrants fled to the United States as political refugees of the Vietnam War. The acculturation experiences of refugees are

considered more challenging than other immigrating populations because of the involuntary nature of their experiences and the absence of support systems (Berry, 1986). In the U.S., they lacked pre-established territories to help in facilitating the maintenance of their heritage culture, language, and identity (Berry, 1986). Berry (1986) suggested that first generation refugees were less apt to *assimilate* (preserve positive intergroup relations without preserving original culture's identity and culture) or *integrate* (preserve both positive intergroup relations and original culture's identity and culture) into the host society than were voluntary immigrant populations. Yet, due to the absence of pre-established resources available to help refugees' transitions into host societies upon their arrival, avoiding *assimilation* would be difficult (Berry, 1986).

According to Berry (1986), among all refugees, exposure to some type of trauma prior to their contact with the host society is common, suggesting that "some social and psychological characteristics are brought to the contact arena that are unique to the refugee experience," (Berry, 1986, p. 27). The psychological impact that this pre-contact experience may have on refugees in the United States and second- and third-generation Asian American refugees warrants individual focus. In terms of ego identity development, Freyberg (1980) found that children of Holocaust survivors often experienced marked difficulty in attaining separation (Schapiro, 1988). "The children of these persons who suffered such tremendous hardship and losses seemed to acquire an unconscious feeling of insecurity and distrust which might be somewhat allayed by the child's remaining within the family unit" (Schapiro, 1988, p. 165). Among families who have survived such hardships, there is a shared belief that in an unsafe world, the family

must stay together to survive (Freyberg, 1980; Schapiro, 1988). College-aged Laotian Americans must weigh the desire of keeping the family intact against the potential personal and family benefits of a college education, which sometimes requires the individual to move away.

The decision to leave home for college creates inner turmoil for Laotian Americans, who have been influenced by their culture to remain with their parents, even sometimes forgoing possible personal benefits (e.g. a college education) in order to maintain strong family support (Schapiro, 1988). These conditions likely impact Laotian American ethnic identity development. Because Southeast Asian Americans, including Laotian Americans, as a group, were predominantly refugees, this population deserves to be studied separate from the general Asian American population, due to their inimitable pre- and post-contact experiences. As ethnic identity has been purported to be a dynamic process that can change “over time or across generations in a new culture, in different contexts, and with age or development” (Phinney, 2003, p. 63), relocation, adaptation, and acculturation among Laotian American immigrants likely contributed to shifts in their ethnic identity, as well as the ethnic identities adopted by later generations.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is a component of affective acculturation and is defined as one’s self-identification as part of an ethnic group, or subgroup claiming common ancestry and sharing a variety of cultural elements (Phinney 2003). According to social identity theory, group members develop a sense of pride and esteem from belonging to a group (Tajfel, 1981). A person has several selves or social identities based on his/her

membership in various groups (Tajfel, 1981). By identifying with a particular group at any moment, there are prescribed thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with that group the individual would take on (Tajfel, 1981). This study relates to the concept of common-bond groups, where members develop attachments to each other, as well as common-identity groups, where group members attach to the group as a whole (Hogg, 2006). The sense of belonging to the group is the force that will drive members to identify as part of the group and thus think, feel, and behave accordingly (Hogg, 2006).

Social Identity Theory also purports that the cognitive foundation for the process of social identity is social categorization (Hogg, 2006). Groups are conceptualized as social categories that individuals either consider themselves as part of or not. With each category, there is a prototype. This prototype has prescribed attributes that group members should adhere to. It allows for increased entitativity, the distinctiveness and cohesiveness of a group, and adherence to the metacontrast principle, which states that the ratio of between-group differences to within-group differences is maximized. When individuals are viewed as members of a group, their attributes are depersonalized. That is, the perception of their idiosyncratic human attributes are ignored and the focus is, instead, on the attributes that identify them as a group member. With social categorization, depersonalization occurs with both in-group and out-group members, and more positive perceptions are associated with in-group attributes (Hogg, 2006).

Behavior is affected by social categorization when it is psychologically salient, in terms of its situational fit and level of accessibility in memory (Hogg, 2006). Social categories are accessed by an individual to identify himself/herself in a given situation

based on the context of the situation and on the level of value or importance placed on those categories (Hogg, 2006). The more important or valued categories are the ones that are more readily accessible in one's memory (Hogg, 2006). This social categorization is used as a guide for how one conceptualizes oneself in a given situation and how one should behave (Hogg, 2006). The categorization with optimal fit "accentuates in-group similarities and intergroup differences, enhances perceived entitativity, and underpins context-relevant group and intergroup behaviors" (Hogg, 2006, p. 119).

Individuals are motivated to maintain their social identities for three reasons, self-enhancement and positive distinctiveness, reduction of uncertainty, and optimal distinctiveness (Hogg, 2006). Self-enhancement and positive distinctiveness describe an attitude that members hold greater positive regard for their own attributes as compared with out-group attributes. Uncertainty, in this context, relates to how one should feel or behave in various situations. As a group member, there are prescribed behaviors that make it easier and less risky for one to function in a given context. Optimal distinctiveness is described as one's balancing of feelings of inclusiveness and sameness in a group. For smaller groups, where distinctiveness is high, individuals would strive for more inclusiveness, or sameness. With larger groups, inclusiveness is high, and thus members strive for more distinctiveness, or feelings of being unique (Hogg, 2006).

For ethnic minorities, in the process of developing a sense of who they are, membership in an ethnic group also deserves exploration. An increase in awareness of dissimilarities among ethnic groups and a move toward understanding the significance of

one's own ethnicity within a larger society elicits the processes of construction and modification of ethnic identity (Phinney, 2003). Thus, for many, understanding one's own ethnic identity is an ongoing process (Phinney, 2003).

Phinney (2003) proposed that ethnic identity is comprised of three components. The first is the ethnic label one uses to name their ethnicity (e.g., Asian, Asian American, American, Laotian, Laotian American, etc.). First generation individuals often utilize national or ethnic labels to describe their ethnicity, while second generation individuals prefer compound terms, such as Asian American or Laotian American (Phinney, 2003). A second component of ethnic identity is the phenomenological sense that one has of belonging to a particular ethnic group and the strength of that feeling of belonging. A final component of ethnic identity is the level of ethnic identity development. This refers to the degree of conscious examination of one's ethnicity and the resolution of issues related to ethnicity that result in an achieved ethnic identity (Phinney, 2003).

Because past studies suggest that ethnic identity reaches a pinnacle "during late adolescence and early adulthood (Lee & Yoo, 2004, p. 264)," such as college-aged individuals (Lee & Yoo, 2004; Phinney, 1992), it seems appropriate to examine ethnic identity among college students. For many ethnic minority students, college is a time where there is an increase in independence from parents and exposure to ethnically similar students through student organizations and classes that may be ethnic-specific in focus (Lee & Yoo, 2004). It is a time for exploration and self-identification with less influence from parental figures (Lee & Yoo, 2004). Because Laotian American students

may not have strong levels of ethnic identity upon entering college and the minimal number of Laotian American students to interact with, finding the right group and adjusting to college life can be difficult.

Asian American ethnic identity. Various scholars have elaborated on Phinney's model of ethnic identity to focus on Asian American identity. In the nonlinear ethnic identity process proposed by Sodowsky, Kwan, and Pannu (1995), two dimensions are assessed. The first is the degree to which one adopts the White American culture; and the second is the degree to which an individual retains aspects of his/her Asian heritage. These authors proposed four ethnic identity orientations derived from answers to two questions: 1) "Is my ethnic identity of value and to be retained?" and 2) "Is the White identity of the U.S. dominant society to be sought (Sodowsky et al., 1995, p. 143)?" Individuals answering yes to both questions fall under the Bicultural identity, where both the ethnic identity as well as the White-American identity are valued. Individuals answering no to the first question and yes to the second question would more strongly identify with the White-American identity. Those who answer yes to the first question and no to the second question would identify more strongly to their ethnic identity. Finally, individuals who answer no to both questions would not identify with either their ethnic identity or the White identity and would be considered culturally marginalized. It is important to note that movement within this model is nonlinear and individuals may change their ethnic identity classifications over time and across different situations (Sodowsky et al., 1995).

Lee and Yoo (2004) expanded on the Asian ethnic identity model. Results of their study suggest a model of ethnic identity for Asian Americans that differs from Phinney's model. Their study examined the structure and measurement of Phinney's Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (1992) on a sample of 323 Asian American college students from Texas and California. Their diverse Asian American sample (Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, Hmong/Mien, Laotian, Cambodian, and Burmese) included first generation and U.S. born Asian Americans. For Asian American college students, ethnic identity consists of ethnic identity cognitive clarity (EI-Clarity), ethnic identity affective pride (EI-Pride), and ethnic identity behavioral engagement (EI-Engage). EI-Clarity describes an individual's sense of belonging, self-understanding, and clarity as related to ethnic identity. EI-Pride represents an individual's positive feelings towards her/his ethnic group. EI-Engage describes active involvement and interest in ethnic culture. EI-Clarity and EI-Pride were found to be significantly correlated with social connectedness (Lee & Yoo, 2004), while EI-Engage was not.

Cultural Orientation and Campus Connectedness

Lee, Draper, and Lee (2001) discuss social connectedness as it relates to the theory of self-psychology. They state that, according to self-psychology, one's sense of social connectedness develops in early childhood through parent-child attachments and during adolescence through associations with friends and other group involvement to coalesce into a general sense of connectedness in adulthood. This overall sense of social connectedness is said to be enduring and unmitigated by fluctuations in other

relationships (Lee et al., 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1998). “People with high connectedness tend to feel very close with other people, easily identify with others, perceive others as friendly and approachable, and participate in social groups and activities” (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001, p. 310). Individuals whose early life experiences led them to develop feelings of low connectedness in adulthood may increase their sense of belonging through corrective experiences involving acceptance by individuals with whom they share long-term relationships and feel similar to (Lee & Robbins, 1998). Campus connectedness involves an individual’s feelings of belongingness within a university environment (Lee & Davis, 2000). Lee and Davis (2000) describe belongingness “as a subjective feeling of interpersonal closeness within a given social context (p.110).”

As a Laotian American adolescent transitions into college, one important source of support is a peer group that shares similar cultural norms in order to provide the student with the type of support she/he was accustomed to receiving from her/his family (Schapiro, 1988). Whereas Western cultures often use guilt as a means to maintain control, Laotian American culture uses shame (Schapiro, 1988). The unconscious underlying fear related to shame is losing face and thus abandonment by one’s family (Piers, 1971; Schapiro, 1988). Important for individuals coming from a culture that uses shame or losing face as a means of control are clear guidelines or indicators for what is acceptable in any given social situation (Schapiro, 1988). Thus, a familiar peer group, with recognizable social expectations would be highly conducive to lessening insecurity and anxiety and for enabling emotional expression (Schapiro, 1988). For adolescent refugees, emotion expression among peers contributes to decreased emotional tension

and increased productive introspection (Schapiro, 1988; Zipstein, Hanegbi, & Taus, 1986).

Among ethnic minority first-generation college students, self-efficacy and an increased level of perceived social support (a component of campus connectedness) was significantly conducive to successful coping with the rigors of academic life (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Other researchers have discovered that, for ethnic minority students, greater adjustment to college was correlated with higher levels of perceived peer support and increased involvement in student organizations (Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995). Attachment to the institution among ethnic minority students has also been connected with social support (Watters, 1999). In their study on 160 Asian American undergraduate students, Gloria and Ho (2003) found that social support was a significant predictor of greater college persistence attitudes.

According to social identity theory, “social identification...confirms a sense of belonging” (Lee & Robbins, 1998, p. 339). Thus, if an individual identifying herself/himself as Laotian American is able to develop a sense of belonging at Texas A&M University, she/he would identify herself/himself as a Texas A&M student as well. Individuals who consider themselves to be part of a particular group would try to preserve the values and behaviors consistent with the norms associated with that group in order to maintain membership within the group and the group’s distinct identity (Tajfel, 1981). Therefore, a person who uses university membership as a social identity will likely persist as a student at the university to maintain this positive distinctiveness as a member of this group.

Ethnic identity has also been found to be related to campus connectedness. For example, studies on Latino college students have found mixed results regarding ethnic identity and college adjustment. Some (e.g., Ethier & Deaux, 1994) have found that students who highly identify with their ethnic group have an easier time adjusting to predominantly white campuses due to their willingness to partake in ethnic organizations as a means for support. Schneider and Ward (2003) found the opposite to be true. In their study of 35 Latino students at the State University of New York at Geneseo, they found that Latino students who identified more with their ethnic group had a more difficult time adjusting to college than did Latino students who identified less with their ethnic group (Schneider & Ward, 2003). Their study concluded that perceived support from family, peers, Latino peers, faculty, and the university served as a mediating variable between ethnic identification and adjustment and that highly identified Latinos perceived less support (Schneider & Ward, 2003). Other researchers (Saylor & Aries, 1999) found no difference in the levels of adjustment between Latino students who highly identify with their ethnic group and those who do not, by the end of the first year. A study conducted by Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath, and Van Landingham (2006), on 180 undergraduate Latino students examined the mediating effects of perceived university environment on ethnic identity and persistence attitudes among Latino students. It was found that there was no statistically significant relationship between ethnic identity and persistence attitudes in the absence of perceived university environment, providing evidence for mediation. The current study examines campus connectedness as a mediator between the dimensions of ethnic identity as

defined by Lee and Yoo (2004) (i.e., cognitive clarity, affective pride, and behavioral engagement) and persistence attitudes.

Other-group orientation is a second feature of affective acculturation involving two dimensions: 1) the extent to which an individual positively views other ethnic groups and 2) his/her eagerness to work with members of different ethnic groups (Lee, 2005). Lee and Davis (2000) found a significant positive correlation between other-group orientation and campus connectedness. They also found that regardless of the level of ethnic identity (high or low), Asian Americans with high other-group orientation had the greatest ability to develop a sense of belonging on campus, while those with low other-group orientation were the least able to adapt to campus. As refugees themselves, or family members of refugees, Laotian Americans are more likely to have developed a core belief that the world around them is unsafe (Freyberg, 1980; Schapiro, 1988), a belief that likely impacts their other-group orientation. The findings of these studies suggest that campus connectedness will mediate the relationship between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes among Laotian American college students such that, campus connectedness will serve as the mechanism by which the relationship between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes exists.

Lee (2005) suggests that the relationship between ethnic identity and other-group orientation is complementary and orthogonal. Due to its reported growing popularity among student affairs administrators searching for better approaches to study ethnic minority student experiences (Lee & Davis, 2000; Torres, 1999), Lee and Davis (2000) developed cultural orientation categories based on Berry and Sam's (1997) model of

acculturation strategies. Lee and Davis (2000) purport that ethnic identity and other-group orientation combine to form four categories of cultural orientation: marginal, traditional, bicultural, and assimilated. These categories were created by combining scores on ethnic identity and other-group orientation. Low ethnic identity and low other-group orientation make up the marginal cultural orientation. The traditional cultural orientation represents high ethnic identity and low other-group orientation. Assimilated cultural orientation category characterizes low ethnic identity and high other-group orientation. Bicultural cultural orientation is comprised of individuals with high ethnic identity and high other-group orientation. In their study on 104 college students (Asian American and White American), Lee and Davis (2000) found that Asian American students in the bicultural and assimilated cultural orientation categories had the highest campus connectedness scores. Results of their study also revealed statistically significant group differences on campus connectedness between marginal and assimilated cultural orientation categories as well as marginal and bicultural (Lee & Davis, 2000), for Asian American students.

COLLEGE PERSISTENCE

Among the academic attrition research literature, Tinto's model of college persistence is the most broadly referenced (Grosset, 1989). Tinto (1993) describes the character of this model as longitudinal and interactional. It attempts to provide a way to understand the longitudinal process which students undergo in deciding to voluntarily depart from a given academic institution (Tinto, 1993). The primary focus of the model is on interactions and events occurring within the university system after a student begins college, although external influences are not ignored (Tinto, 1993). An overview of this model will be provided in this section, and special focus will be given to social integration, as it subsumes campus connectedness (see Figure 1).

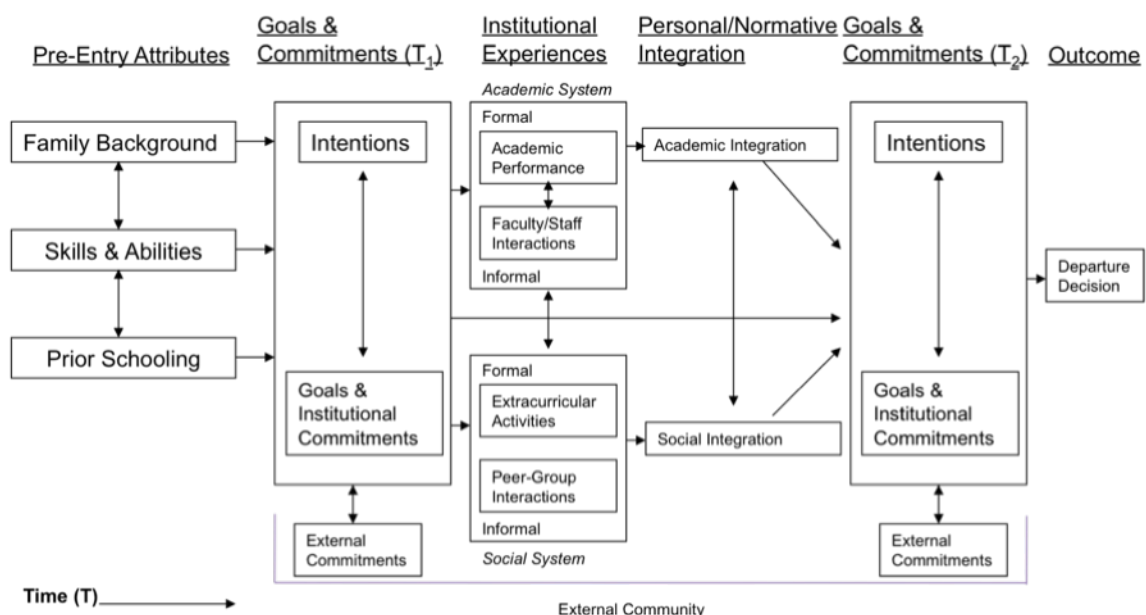


Figure 1. College Persistence: A Model of Institutional Departure.

Source: Derived from Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 114 and Grosset, J. (1989, January). A conceptual framework for describing the causes of student attrition. *Institutional Research Report #44* (pp. 2-44). Philadelphia Community College, PA. Office of Institutional Research, pp. 12-13.

According to Tinto (1993), decisions to depart from an institution are based on both personal characteristics and interactional experiences at the institution (Grosset, 1989). Personal characteristics are comprised of intentions (i.e., educational and occupational aspirations) and commitments (to the institution and achievement of educational goals) (Grosset, 1989; Tinto, 1993). Prior to entering college, students' intentions and commitments are influenced by pre-entry attributes including, family background, skills and abilities, and previous educational experiences (Tinto, 1993). Upon starting, students are exposed to institutional experiences and interactions within the academic system and the social system (Tinto, 1993). Levels of integration into one or both of these systems influence the students' intentions and commitments, which, in turn, influence one's decision to depart or persist at the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Because both the academic and social systems of an institution involve interactions among students, faculty, and staff, these two systems are thought to be "interdependent and reciprocal" (Tinto, 1993, p. 119), though still conceptualized as two distinctive processes. The academic system of an institution is primarily related to the formal education of its students (Tinto, 1993). Interactions within this academic system can take place among students, faculty, and staff members, as noted above, but the underlying theme of these interactions is academic education (Tinto, 1993). These educational interactions may take place in formal settings, such as the classroom or laboratories, as well as other informal settings. The social system of an institution is comprised of interactions of a more personal nature among students, faculty, and staff members in contexts outside of the classroom, such as the cafeteria, residence halls, etc.

(Tinto, 1993). These interactions may also be more formal in nature, such as those that take place in the context of extracurricular activities, as well as informal, interactions that extend beyond extracurricular activities. Adequate integration into the academic system is imperative, since students must meet minimum grade requirements to remain at institutions (Tinto, 1993). With social integration, although there is no minimum requirement, voluntary departure often results when adequate integration into this system is not met (Tinto, 1993).

A longitudinal study of 718 first-year undergraduate students (84% White, 3% African-American, 13% other) at a private residential university by Milem and Berger (1997) suggests that social integration plays a more integral role in predicting college persistence than academic integration. Their study found that academic integration did not predict institutional commitment. Social integration, on the other hand, was a significant positive predictor of commitment. The current study focuses on the social integration (i.e., campus connectedness) of Laotian American college students.

Mayo, Murguia, and Padilla (1995) found a strong predictive value of integration into the formal social system (e.g., student organizations) on the academic performance of ethnic minority students, as well as White American students, at a predominantly White public university in the Southwestern region of the U.S. Their study included 315 Black students, 344 Hispanic students, 292 Native American students, and 340 White American students. Their results revealed strong predictive ability of formal social integration on academic performance with differences in strength of predictability occurring in the following order from most to least: Whites, Hispanics, Native

Americans, and Blacks, although these differences were reportedly not large. Mayo et al. (1995) lend support to ethnic-based organizations as well as the promotion of faculty-student and staff-student interactions beyond the formal classroom setting, showing that integration into the formal social system improves academic performance. These findings demonstrate integration into both academic and social systems and their impact on each another.

Roadblocks to integration include incongruence and isolation. Incongruence describes a lack of fit between a student's skills and abilities and the academic and social systems offered by the institution. As the term suggests, isolation takes place when the student fails to have sufficient contact with members of either or both systems (Grosset, 1989; Tinto, 1993). For Laotian American students, especially those with high ethnic identity, it seems that isolation would be of greater concern, given the potential for family obligation to conflict with social and academic integration.

Influence from external communities (e.g., family, work) may also indirectly impact one's decision to either persist or depart from an institution, especially if those communities serve as strong influences in the student's life. This indirect impact occurs by directly affecting the student's level of integration into the social and/or academic systems of the institution, along with directly impacting the student's commitments (Tinto, 1993). Given that family cohesiveness and responsibility are valued in the Laotian culture (Phommasouvanh, 1983; Schapiro, 1988), familial influence will likely have more of an impact on levels of integration (and thus on persistence attitudes) of

Laotian American college students than of students from cultures where family cohesiveness is differentially valued.

Students choosing to persist need not completely integrate into both the academic and social systems at their institutions, as Tinto (1993) noted that complete integration into either (or both) system(s) is not a prerequisite for persistence. Likewise, students experiencing little integration into either system at their institution may continue their education. A significant level of integration within one system may compensate for a lack of integration within the other. For example, a student who is not as integrated into social settings may flourish in a rigorous academic environment, where interaction with faculty members is likely to take place and encourage attitudes of persistence (Grosset, 1989; Tinto, 1993).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to examine the mediating effect of campus connectedness on ethnic identity and college persistence and on other-group orientation and college persistence among Laotian American college students. Additionally, this study examines mean group differences on campus connectedness by cultural orientation. This paper will offer university administrators ideas to increase college persistence attitudes, and, ideally, graduation rates among Laotian American students, an Asian American population often neglected in the literature that deserves special attention because of their distinctive involuntary immigration experiences and challenges in resettlement.

REVIEW OF HYPOTHESES

1. Campus connectedness will mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes among Laotian American college students.
2. Campus connectedness will mediate the relationship between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes among Laotian American college students.
3. Mean group differences on campus connectedness by cultural orientation (marginal, traditional, bicultural, and assimilated) are hypothesized.
 - a. Significant mean group differences between marginal and bicultural and marginal and assimilated cultural orientations are expected.
 - b. The order of campus connectedness scores by cultural orientation from least to greatest is hypothesized to be marginal, traditional, assimilated and bicultural.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study included 82 Laotian American college students (37 women and 45 men) attending colleges and universities across the United States.

Participants ranged in age from 17 to 40 with an average age of the 21.99, and a standard deviation of 4.08. Twenty-three identified as first-generation Laotian-American, 57 as second-generation, one as third-generation, and one did not answer. The sample consisted of 21 freshmen, 22 sophomores, 20 juniors, and 17 seniors, with 17 from two-year institutions and 64 from four-year institutions. Two participants did not identify their class standing, and one did not indicate type of institution.

Procedures

Participants were recruited online through campus organization listservs, online networking services (e.g., Facebook, Lao Network), bloggings (e.g., xanga), word of mouth, and in person at Laotian American festivals. In recruiting online participants, an electronic message was sent to listserv administrators at universities across the United States known to have larger Laotian American populations. The administrators were asked to forward the message to Laotian American members of the list. The message asked recipients to participate in the study by completing an anonymous online questionnaire to which a link was provided. This message was also sent to members of Laotian-based online networking services and bloggings. Participants recruited by word of mouth were provided with an information sheet including a brief description of the

study, as well as risks and benefits, and instructions on how to access the online survey. Once online participants got to the website, the first web page contained information describing the study. A link to the actual survey questions was located at the bottom of the information web page and students were asked to continue to the survey by accessing the link only if they consented to the study. The first page of the online survey included the demographic questionnaire. After completing the first page, participants had to click on a button labeled “continue” at the bottom of each page to move on to the next section. The subsequent pages of the online survey consisted of the rest of the instruments, with instructions for completion located at the top of each page of the survey. Different instruments were located on separate pages, and subsections of instruments were also on separate pages. Once all items were complete, participants had to click on a button labeled “continue” to submit the responses and were met with a “thank you” page.

Participants who completed paper-and-pencil versions of the survey were recruited at Laotian Buddhist temple festivals in the Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth areas. They were given a booklet of the instruments with the information sheet located on the back of the title page, followed by items from the instruments. Each section was preceded by a set of instructions. Once finished, they handed the surveys back to the administrator. Fifty-four participants elected to complete paper-and-pencil versions of the survey and 53 participants completed the survey online. A total of 82 surveys were usable. Forty of which were collected online and 42 were collected in-person with paper-pencil versions. Surveys were excluded based on various reasons, including: an inadequate number of responses (10), class standing (graduate students and individuals

no longer enrolled in college--3), and/or ethnic identification other than Laotian American (12). Invalid surveys may be attributable to individuals failing to read the consent form before completing the survey to notice that the study focused on Laotian American college students. Additionally, listserv administrators were asked to distribute electronic messages for recruiting participants to their entire list of members.

Individuals not identifying as Laotian American might have mistakenly completed the survey.

Instrumentation

Demographic questionnaire. Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included questions related to, age, gender, ethnicity, generation status, age at time of immigration (if applicable), number of years resided in U.S. (since immigration, if applicable), year/classification at university, type of university (two-year or four-year) and the name of the university he/she is currently attending.

Ethnic identity. Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) was used to assess for participants' ethnic identity. The MEIM is a 14-item measure with a 4-point anchor, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with higher total scores indicating greater and increasingly positive degrees of ethnic identification (Phinney, 1992). The MEIM measures ethnic identity on three domains: ethnic behaviors, ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic identity belonging and affirmation. For this study, Lee and Yoo's (2004) subscales of ethnic identity cognitive clarity (EI-Clarity), ethnic identity affective pride (EI-Pride), and ethnic identity

behavioral engagement (EI-Engage), were used. These factors were detected in Lee and Yoo's (2004) MEIM validation study on a sample of 323 Asian American college students. EI-Clarity is comprised of five items (3, 8, 10, 11, and 12) and measures an individual's sense of belonging, self-understanding, and clarity as related to ethnic identity (Lee & Yoo, 2004). The EI-Pride subscale consists of three items (6, 14, and 20) that measure an individual's positive feelings towards her/his ethnic group (Lee & Yoo, 2004). EI-Engage is comprised of five items (1, 2, 5, 13 and 16) that measure active involvement and interest in ethnic culture (Lee & Yoo, 2004). With its use on a variety of Asian ethnic groups, including Laotian, the MEIM has been found to correlate with social connectedness, self-esteem, subjective well-being, and depression (Lee, 2003; Lee & Davis, 2000; Mack, Tucker, Archuleta, DeGroot, Hernandez, & Cha, 1997; Phinney, 1992; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Internal reliability estimates ranged from .72 to .81 (Lee & Yoo, 2004). Coefficient alpha's for the current study include: .77, .56, .68, and .64, for Ethnic Identity total score (13-item version), EI-Clarity, EI-Pride, and EI-Engage, respectively.

Other-group orientation. Other-group orientation was measured by six items on Phinney's (1992) MEIM-Other scale. It measures one's positive views toward other ethnic groups, as well as one's eagerness to participate with members of other ethnic groups. This measure also consists of items rated on a four-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with higher scores indicating greater other-group orientation. With its use on various Asian ethnic groups, including Laotian, the MEIM-Other is correlated with depression, self-esteem and social connectedness (Lee,

2003; Phinney, 1992; Worrell, 2000). Internal reliability scores ranging from .76 to .80 have been reported by Lee (2003) in two Asian American college student studies. The coefficient alpha for this study was .65.

Campus connectedness. The Social Connectedness Scale-Campus Version was used to assess for level of campus connectedness (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1995). The scale measures an individual's feelings of interpersonal connectedness in the context of a university campus (Lee & Davis, 2000). This measure consists of 14 items rated on a six-point, Likert-type scale that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Higher scores on the scale indicate higher levels of connectedness to the participant's campus. In a recent study on Asian American college students, Lee (2003) reported concurrent validity with depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and community well-being, along with internal reliability estimates ranging from .90 to .93. The coefficient alpha for this study was .92.

Persistence attitudes. College students' persistence attitudes were measured using the Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decisions Scale (P/VDD) (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The P/VDD consists of thirty items rated on a 5-point, Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating greater persistence attitudes. A validity study conducted by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) revealed that persisters and nonpersisters were accurately identified 79% and 75% of the time, respectively. Another study (Peart-Forbes, 2004) showed a significant distinction between persisters and nonpersisters and reported a coefficient alpha of .83. The coefficient alpha for this study was .82.

Design

In this study, campus connectedness was examined as a potential mediator for two relationships. Pictured in Figure 1 below, the mediating variable (Z) accounts for “the mechanism through which” (Frazier, Tix, & Barron, 2004, p. 116) the predictor variable (X) affects the outcome variable (Y). This study examined the mediating effect of campus connectedness on ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes and on other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes among Laotian American students.

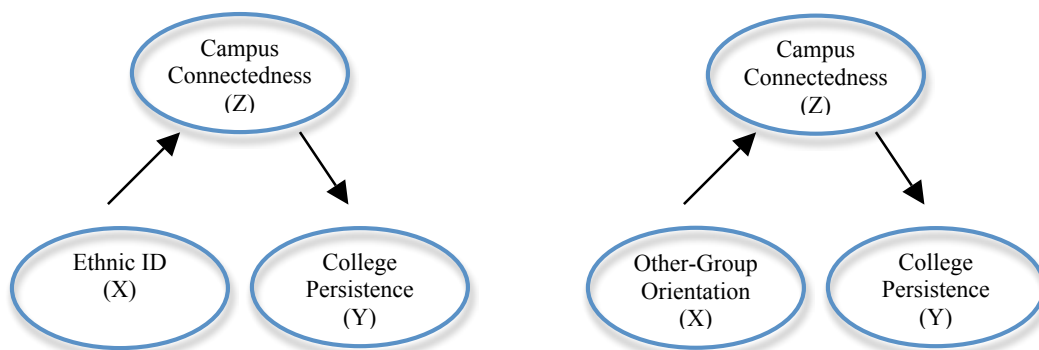


Figure 2. Illustration of Two Interactions. The Mediating Effect of Campus Connectedness on the Relationship between Ethnic Identity and College Persistence and on the Relationship between Other-Group Orientation and College Persistence.

The mediating relationships were tested via multiple regression with SPSS, as discussed by Baron and Kenny (1986). Analyses were run to ensure that Baron and Kenny’s (1986) four conditions were met before testing for the mediation effects of campus connectedness on ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes. A Sobel test for

significance of mediation was also conducted when appropriate (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2009) to determine if the influence of the independent variable was carried by the mediator to the dependent variable (i.e., college persistence).

A one-way independent analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test for significant mean differences between cultural orientation (independent variable) on campus connectedness (dependent variable). Using computing methods comparable to Torres (1999), cultural orientation categories were created with a median cut-off score of 3.14 (for high ethnic identity) from MEIM's ethnic identity scale and 3.50 (for high other-group orientation) from MEIM's other-group orientation scale (Lee & Davis, 2000). Scores greater than or equal to 3.14 for ethnic identity were considered high, while scores that fell below 3.14 were considered low. For other-group orientation, scores above or equal to 3.50 were deemed high and scores below 3.50 were considered to be low. The four cultural orientation categories include marginal (low ethnic identity and low other-group orientation), traditional (high ethnic identity and low other-group orientation), assimilated (low ethnic identity and high other-group orientation), and bicultural (high ethnic identity and high other-group orientation).

RESULTS

Based on an a priori power analysis using the G-Power computer program to compute a value for n , with a specified effect size of .15 and a power of .8 for a multiple regression analysis, the suggested sample size was 77 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

Descriptive Statistics

Independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant mean group differences on all study variables (i.e., EI-total, EI-clarity, EI-pride, EI-engage, other-group orientation, campus connectedness, and college persistence attitudes) by sex, generation status (only run for 1st generation versus 2nd generation, since only one participant identified as 3rd generation), and type of institution (2-year or 4-year). A significant mean group difference was found on other-group orientation by paper-pencil versus online versions of the survey ($t = 2.704$, $p = .008$). A one-way independent ANOVA revealed no significant mean group differences on all study variables by class standing (freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior). Means, standard deviations, and coefficient alpha's for each of 7 the variables measured in the study are depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Alpha Coefficients

Variable	M	SD	α
EI-Total	41.47	5.23	0.77
EI-Clarity	15.48	2.48	0.56
EI-Pride	10.55	1.53	0.68
EI-Engage	15.44	2.62	0.64
Other-Group Orientation (OGO)	21.11	2.62	0.65
Campus Connectedness	61.77	13.88	0.92
Persistence	110.36	12.45	0.82

Note. N = 85. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; EI-Total = Ethnic Identity-Total as measured by the MEIM and based on 13 items as proposed by Lee and Yoo (2004); EI-Clarity = Ethnic Identity-Clarity subscale of the MEIM; EI-Pride = Ethnic Identity-Pride subscale of the MEIM; EI-Engage = Ethnic Identity-Engage subscale of the MEIM; Persistence = College persistence Attitudes.

TABLE 2
Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. EI-Total	—	.80**	.73**	.81**	.37**	.43**	.49**
2. EI-Clarity		—	.45**	.38**	.28*	.37**	.33**
3. EI-Pride			—	.45**	.31**	.34**	.43**
4. EI-Engage				—	.30**	.31**	.41**
5. Other-Group Orientation					—	.39**	.41**
6. Campus Connectedness						—	.65**
7. Persistence							—

Note. N = 85. EI-Total = Ethnic Identity-Total as measured by the MEIM and based on 13 items as proposed by Lee and Yoo (2004); EI-Clarity = Ethnic Identity-Clarity subscale of the MEIM; EI-Pride = Ethnic Identity-Pride subscale of the MEIM; EI-Engage = Ethnic Identity-Engage subscale of the MEIM; Persistence = College persistence Attitudes.

*Significant at .05

**Significant at .01

Mediation Analysis

Campus connectedness was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes and between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. For a mediation effect to be established, Baron and Kenny (1986) indicate that four conditions need to be met. These four conditions include demonstration that, 1) a correlation exists between the predictor variable and the outcome variable, 2) a correlation exists between the predictor and the suggested mediator, 3) a correlation exists between the mediator and the outcome variable, and 4) after controlling for the suggested mediator's effects on the outcome variable, the predictor's influence on the outcome variable must be decreased. Table 2 demonstrates that a correlation exists between ethnic identity (predictor variable) and college persistence attitudes (outcome variable), meeting the first condition, $r = .49, p < .01$. Meeting the second condition, a correlation exists between ethnic identity (predictor variable) and campus connectedness (suggested mediator), $r = .43, p < .01$. Third, a correlation exists between the suggested mediator (campus connectedness) and the outcome variable (college persistence attitudes), $r = .65, p < .01$. After controlling for the suggested mediator's (campus connectedness) effects on the outcome variable (persistence), the predictor's (ethnic identity) influence on the outcome variable was decreased (partial $r = .26, p < .01$), but the relationship between ethnic identity and persistence was still statistically significant. Thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

Campus connectedness was also hypothesized to mediate the relationship between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. A second mediation

analysis was conducted using multiple regression as described by Baron and Kenny (1986). This analysis revealed that a correlation exists between other-group orientation (predictor variable) and college persistence attitudes (outcome variable), meeting the first condition for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), $r = .41$, $p < .01$ (Table 2). A correlation also exists between other-group orientation and campus connectedness, $r = .39$, $p < .01$, as well as between the suggested mediator (campus connectedness) and the outcome variable (college persistence attitudes), $r = .65$, $p < .01$. After controlling for campus connectedness's effects on persistence, other-group orientation's influence on the outcome variable was no longer significant at the .01 level (partial $r = .18$, $p = .047$). Thus, campus connectedness serves as a mediator between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes, demonstrating support for the second hypothesis. A Sobel (1982) test for statistical significance of the mediation effect was run by entering unstandardized beta coefficients and standard errors into an online calculator (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2009), resulting in a Z-statistic of 3.24, $p = .001$, indicating a statistically significant effect.

ANOVA for Testing for Mean Group Differences

Mean group differences on campus connectedness by cultural orientation (marginal, traditional, bicultural, and assimilated) were hypothesized. Significant mean group differences between marginal and bicultural and marginal and assimilated cultural orientations were also hypothesized. The following order of cultural orientation on campus connectedness scores was expected: marginal, traditional, assimilated, bicultural. A post-hoc Scheffe analysis was conducted to determine the source of the

mean differences after analysis of variance (ANOVA) results indicated mean group differences.

Cultural orientation categories (marginal, traditional, assimilated, and bicultural) were calculated using median cut-off scores of 3.14 for high ethnic identity and 3.50 for high other-group orientation, derived from a previous study that included Asian American college students (Lee & Davis, 2000). After establishing statistically significant between group differences using one-way ANOVA, a comparison of mean group differences was conducted and resulted in the following. With mean campus connectedness scores (in ascending order) of 49.14, 60.47, 63.03, and 67.80, for marginal, assimilated, traditional, and bicultural orientations, respectively, $F_{(3,78)} = 9.277$, $p < .001$, indicating that there were significant differences among the four cultural orientations. About 26% of the variation in the campus connectedness scores was accounted for by cultural orientation ($SS_b/SS_t = .263$). A post-hoc Scheffe analysis revealed significant group differences between the marginal group and traditional group and between the marginal group and the bicultural group at the .05 level. Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Although mean group differences on campus connectedness by cultural orientation were found, the hypothesized locations of those mean group differences, as well as the order of cultural orientation by campus connectedness scores from least to greatest was not as predicted. Table 3 shows a comparison of mean campus connectedness scores by cultural orientation from the current study and from a previous study conducted by Lee and Davis (2000), from which hypothesis 3 was based. Not

only were campus connectedness scores lower for the Laotian American sample used in this study, but the order of cultural orientation by campus connectedness, as well as significant mean group differences among cultural orientations, were also disparate.

TABLE 3
Mean Scores on the Campus Connectedness Scale by Acculturation Strategy for Laotian American Students and Asian American Students from Lee and Davis (2000) Study

Cultural Orientation	Laotian Americans	n	Asian Americans	n
Marginal	49.14 ^{ab}	17	53.45 ^{cd}	11
Traditional	63.03 ^a	11	65.13	10
Assimilated	60.47	17	69.9 ^c	12
Bicultural	67.8 ^b	37	73.83 ^d	8

Note. Matching superscripts represent significantly different at $p < .05$ level.

Secondary Analyses

As results of the mediation analysis demonstrated, campus connectedness does not mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes. However, a mediation analysis was not conducted to test campus connectedness as a mediator for the multiple dimensions of ethnic identity for Asian American college students as suggested by Lee and Yoo's study (EI-clarity, EI-pride, and EI-engage). EI-clarity measures an individual's sense of belonging, self-understanding, and clarity as related to ethnic identity (Lee et al., 2001). As previously mentioned, campus connectedness describes a feeling of belonging in the context of a university campus (Lee & Davis, 2000). Since the overall feeling of connectedness is pervasive and

enduring (Lee et al., 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1998), campus connectedness was postulated to serve as the vehicle by which EI-clarity impacts college persistence attitudes. A mediation analysis was conducted to test this possibility. This analysis revealed that a correlation exists between EI-clarity (predictor variable) and college persistence attitudes (outcome variable), meeting the first condition for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986), $r = .33, p < .01$ (Table 2). A correlation also exists between the EI-clarity and campus connectedness, $r = .37, p < .01$, as well as between the suggested mediator (campus connectedness) and the outcome variable (college persistence attitudes), $r = .65, p < .01$. After controlling for campus connectedness's effects on persistence, EI-clarity's influence on the outcome variable was no longer significant (partial $r = .109, p = .237$). Thus, campus connectedness serves as a mediator between EI-clarity and college persistence attitudes. A Sobel (1982) test for statistical significance of the mediation effect was run by entering unstandardized beta coefficients and standard errors into an online calculator (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2009), resulting in a Z-statistic of 2.66, $p = .008$, indicating a statistically significant effect.

Additional analyses were conducted to test campus connectedness as a mediator between EI-pride and persistence and EI-engage and persistence, although mediation effects were not expected based on the review of the literature. Results of multiple regression analyses to test for mediation using Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach revealed that although the first three criteria for mediation were met for both of these relationships (see Table 2), the fourth criterion was not, indicating no mediation effect

for campus connectedness on EI-pride and college persistence attitudes (partial $r = .24$, $p < .01$) and EI-engage and persistence attitudes (partial $r = .25$, $p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the potential mediating effects of campus connectedness on ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes and on other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. Mean group differences were also tested for cultural orientation (marginal, traditional, assimilated, and bicultural) on campus connectedness. With regard to its mediating effects, campus connectedness was not confirmed as a mediator for ethnic identity and persistence but did meet requirements for mediation on EI-Clarity and persistence and on other-group-orientation and persistence.

Lee and Yoo (2004) expanded on the Asian American ethnic identity model by suggesting that ethnic identity could be separated into three categories, including ethnic identity cognitive clarity (EI-clarity), ethnic identity affective pride (EI-pride), and ethnic identity behavioral engagement (EI-engage). Lee and Yoo (2004) found EI-clarity to be significantly correlated with social connectedness among Asian American college students. Gloria and Ho (2003) found that social support, a component of campus connectedness, is a significant predictor of persistence. Results of this current study replicated these findings and revealed campus connectedness as a mediator between EI-clarity and college persistence attitudes among Laotian American college students, suggesting that campus connectedness partially explains how EI-clarity positively influences persistence attitudes.

According to Lee et al.'s (2001) discussion of social connectedness as a pervasive and enduring experience, it is sensible that one's feelings of connectedness to

her/his ethnic identity (EI-clarity) would be subsumed under this overall sense of connectedness and positively related to persistence attitudes, particularly because social integration plays an integral role in predicting college persistence (Milem & Berger, 1997). Moreover, since this sense of social connectedness can be cultivated later in life through corrective experiences of acceptance by individuals perceived as similar (Lee & Robbins, 1998), college may serve as an opportunity for students with low social connectedness (upon entering college) to establish long-term relationships with similar others and engage in these corrective experiences.

Campus connectedness was also confirmed as a mediator for other-group orientation and persistence. This finding suggests that a significant relationship between other-group orientation and persistence is explained through the presence of campus connectedness (i.e., strong feelings of interpersonal closeness, more trusting attitudes and less vigilance towards others, and an increased willingness to engage in social interactions in the university context) (Lee et al., 2001). Given that other-group orientation is a measure of how open one is to working with ethnically different others and the degree to which one positively views others who are ethnically dissimilar (Phinney, 1992) and that “people with high connectedness tend to feel very close with other people, easily identify with others, perceive others as friendly and approachable, and participate in social groups and activities” (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001, p. 310), it seems logical that the feeling of interpersonal closeness that one experiences within the context of the university campus (campus connectedness) explains the relationship between other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. This finding

replicated Lee and Davis' (2000) finding of a significant positive correlation between other-group orientation and campus connectedness, and extended it to verify campus connectedness as a mediator for other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, since the relationship between other-group orientation (predictor variable) and persistence (outcome variable) was still significant at the .05 level, after controlling for the effects of campus connectedness, indicating moderate strength of this mediating relationship.

Significant mean group differences among cultural orientations (marginal, traditional, assimilated, and bicultural) were found, replicating Lee & Davis (2000) study which demonstrated that differences in campus connectedness can be explained, in part, by cultural orientation. They found significant group differences on campus connectedness for marginal and assimilated cultural orientations, as well as for marginal and bicultural orientations. This study replicated the finding that mean group differences on campus connectedness exist, but discrepant from Lee & Davis' (2000) findings, Scheffe analysis revealed that marginal cultural orientation is significantly different, in terms of campus connectedness, than the traditional and bicultural orientation groups. No other significant group differences were found. The differences here seem to be along ethnic identity, since for both of these two cultural orientations, individuals have high ethnic identity, while marginal and assimilated individuals have low ethnic identity. For this study, high ethnic identity is more strongly correlated with campus connectedness ($r = .43, p < .01$) than other-group orientation ($r = .39, p < .01$), replicating Ethier and Deaux's (1994) finding that students who highly identify with

their ethnic group have an easier time adjusting to predominantly white campuses. Data from the Demographic Questionnaire of the current study indicated that Laotian American students with traditional cultural orientation had more participation in ethnic/cultural organizations than the students with all other cultural orientations, except bicultural. This suggests that participating in such groups likely provide traditionally and biculturally oriented (both with high ethnic identity) Laotian American students with feelings of safety and familiarity needed to emotionally express themselves and develop a greater sense of belonging. This lends support for the importance of having ethnic/cultural groups available for students with traditional and bicultural orientations, a contention also supported by Ethier and Deaux (1994).

The findings indicated that students with marginal orientation (low Ethnic Identity/Low Other-Group Orientation) had the lowest campus connectedness mean score of 48.61, as compared to 60.00, 63.03, and 67.80, for assimilated (low ethnic identity/high other-group orientation), traditional (high ethnic identity/low other-group orientation), and bicultural (high ethnic identity/high other-group orientation) orientations, respectively. These scores all fell below the Asian American campus connectedness averages found in Lee & Davis (2000) study. This suggests that cultural differences between Laotian American students and Asian American students, as a whole, may exist and account for differences on campus connectedness. Lee & Davis' (2000) study also found that Asian American students with bicultural and assimilated orientations were able to develop the strongest feelings of belongingness on campus, while this study found that Laotian American students adopting bicultural and traditional

cultural orientations were most able to adapt and reported the highest campus connectedness scores. It was surprising to find that students in the traditional category had higher mean campus connectedness scores than students in the assimilated cultural orientation category, since students in the latter category had higher other-group orientation scores, and presumably more choices in terms of group membership (not limited to cultural groups).

The low campus connectedness scores for students with marginal cultural orientations is concerning. By definition, these students have low ethnic identity and other-group orientation, suggesting that they neither identify with their families' culture nor with the cultures of their peers. This is concerning not only in terms of college persistence attitudes, but also in terms of psychological well-being. Students that fit under the marginal orientation appear to be in the most danger in terms of mental health, adjustment, and development (Lee & Davis, 2000). Further research should aim to learn about these students' experiences and how to meet their needs.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study offer important insights into how to increase college persistence attitudes among Laotian American college students. As promising as the results may be, some limitations need to be addressed. One of which is the small sample size of 82. While minimum statistical requirements for sample size were met, the conservative size of the sample used for this study may have decreased the statistical power of this study, potentially only revealing significant relationships for the strongest effects. Additionally, with a small sample size, generalizability may also be limited.

Since a significant mean group difference was found on other-group orientation by paper-pencil versus online versions of the survey ($t = 2.704$, $p = .008$), this difference may have influenced the findings. One explanation for this difference might be related to the contexts in which paper-pencil version data was gathered-- Laotian cultural event celebrations at Buddhist temples. The cultural salience of the environments in which this data was collected might have served to influence the results. Future studies should aim to keep the cultural context of data collection consistent across the sample of participants. Perhaps, using just one method of data collection (e.g., online only) would be most appropriate. This will likely be a challenge, given the limited number of individuals in this population. Another possibility for future research might be to extend the population of interest to individuals with similar immigration experiences and cultural backgrounds, such as Cambodian Americans. Additionally, extending the target population to include Laotian students in other Western countries of asylum (e.g., Canada or France) is another possibility for future research.

While the criteria to demonstrate mediation (i.e., Baron & Kenny, 1986) was not met for the first hypothesis, the sample requirements to demonstrate mediating relationships under this method are quite stringent (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). Examining the reduction in the effect size between ethnic identity total and college persistence when controlling for effect of campus connectedness as the mediator, we see a reduction of 47.1%, suggesting that campus connectedness may serve as a partial mediator between ethnic identity total and college persistence.

In terms of differences in campus connectedness based on cultural orientation, individuals from the marginal category were found to be significantly different from individuals from traditional and bicultural categories. The order of cultural orientation from least to greatest campus connectedness scores was marginal, assimilated, traditional, and bicultural. Because Scheffe analysis did not reveal significant group differences between all categories, these results should also be interpreted with caution. Again, perhaps increasing the sample size would produce different findings.

One of the key reasons for the limited sample size of this study was due to the limited number of Laotian American students currently in college. Future research on Laotian American middle and high school students to learn what might be keeping them from continuing their education on to college also seems helpful and appropriate.

Finally, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) suggest that attrition is most likely to take place within the first year of college, although Tinto's model may explain attrition during any year of college. Based on this contention, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) conducted a longitudinal test of the predictive accuracy of the P/VDD on 773 freshman students. Their results revealed that persisters and nonpersisters were correctly identified 79% and 75% of the time, respectively, by the P/VDD. Since the P/VDD is a self-report measure that assesses college persistence attitudes and not actual retention and attrition, future research should provide longitudinal data to demonstrate actual retention or attrition for more accurate findings.

Implications for University Administrators

Due to their families' refugee backgrounds and cultural value of public emotion suppression to save face and avoid shame (Schapiro, 1988; Piers, 1971), Laotian American students may find it more challenging to develop a sense of belonging on campus (Lee et al., 2001). Developing a sense of belonging on campus, or campus connectedness, requires one to develop a feeling of interpersonal closeness among peers deemed to be similar (Lee & Davis, 2000; Lee et al., 2001), which cannot occur without the individual feeling safe enough to express emotions (Schapiro, 1988; Piers, 1971). A safe context to express emotions would be with a peer group perceived as familiar (in terms of knowing what is and is not socially appropriate in order to avoid shame) and similar to one's own family (Schapiro, 1988; Piers, 1971). Additionally, one's obligation to his/her family, another Laotian cultural value, makes it increasingly difficult to integrate into academic and social systems at the institution, decreasing campus connectedness and, as a result, college persistence attitudes, as well as increasing the likelihood of departure from the institution.

It is critical, then, for university administrators to know how to help Laotian American students feel safe at their institutions and provide additional resources for helping them meet academic and family demands. Doing so would help meet the needs of these students, increasing their sense of belonging on campus, and thus increase their persistence attitudes and likelihood of remaining enrolled at the institution.

As suggested by Lee et al. (2001), individuals with low campus connectedness may be able to develop stronger feelings of connectedness by experiencing acceptance in

long-term relationships with individuals regarded as similar. Universities can help promote the likelihood that Laotian American students will develop feelings of campus connectedness by creating more opportunities for these students to connect with people they feel similar to. Appropriate types of programs or organizations may be different, depending on the cultural orientation of the students. As suggested by Lee and Davis (2000), bicultural and assimilated students may benefit from programs developed for the general student body, but marginal and traditional students may benefit more from culture-specific programs or organizations. Lee and Davis (2000) also suggested having students complete questionnaires upon acceptance to the university and when seeking other services, such as counseling, to assess for cultural orientations. Outreach programming and counseling approaches best suited for students will likely differ, depending on cultural orientation (Lee & Davis, 2000). In sum, for university administrators, knowledge of a students' cultural orientation would be beneficial for providing more optimal ways to reach students and meet their individual needs.

Additionally, assessing for students' level of EI-clarity upon acceptance to a university would also be useful. For individuals low on EI-clarity, they will likely benefit from programs and experiences that address their cultural identity and promote their identity development in this regard. Chickering and Reisser (1993) discuss 7 major vectors of development for college students. Among these seven is the development of identity towards achieving a more solid sense of self. Within this identity development is growth towards a more solid sense of self in the cultural context, and this includes ethnic identity development. For students low on EI-clarity upon arrival at the

university, programs specifically targeted at helping students become clearer about their ethnic identity will increase feelings of connectedness in this realm, as well as in the context of the campus (campus connectedness), which would also increase college persistence attitudes.

To help students meet family demands, universities can offer educational workshops that address issues potentially faced by Laotian American students and their families, such as ways to navigate various government agencies and systems, financial aid, intergenerational conflict related to differences in levels of acculturation among family members, and functioning in an individualistic culture while respecting and/or maintaining collectivistic values at home. Because second-generation Laotian Americans may serve as cultural translators for their families (Bemack, 1989), which likely extends to working as a liaison between parents and social and medical agencies, workshops on the ins and outs of various programs (e.g., the U.S. Social Security Administration, Medicare, Medicaid, and other healthcare services, as well as retirement options) might also be appropriate, so that students can better help their families and feel more supported by the university in fulfilling this role.

Additionally, pre-college orientation for Laotian American students and parents will promote greater understanding of the university system and provide additional cultural capital for parents to help their children navigate the university system. A Lao translator, as well as materials that include tips for surviving college (e.g., time management, study skills, acquiring financial aid, student housing, adjusting to college life, supplemental academic assistance, student transportation, dining services, health

services, Laotian American student organization (if available), and general information about the college town) written in Lao and English would be helpful.

Finally, to build campus connectedness through common-bond groups among Laotian American students, establishing a peer mentorship program where upper-class Laotian American students are paired with first-year students to promote college adjustment, support, and increase feelings of connectedness, is suggested. Similar to the Institute for the Development and Education of Asian American Leaders (IDEAAL) offered at Texas A&M University, this peer mentorship program can include didactic components that focus on Laotian American history, acculturation, and ethnic identity, as well as social components to promote feelings of belongingness. Additionally, this program can include academic achievement components, similar to those offered by learning communities. Perhaps, first-year Laotian American students can have the option to enroll in a seminar class with other Laotian students that focuses on study skills, career planning, library resources, and other topics aimed at easing the transition to college (Andrade, 2007). A pseudo-learning community based on this common identity as Laotian American would provide these students with the opportunity to develop feelings of connectedness with similar others, increase academic achievement and EI-clarity, and college persistence attitudes (Andrade, 2007).

Implications for University Mental Healthcare Providers

As mentioned previously, assessing for students' cultural orientations would be helpful for treatment planning and approaches (Lee & Davis, 2000). This information could be gathered in an initial intake form. With this information provided at the time of

intake, clinicians would be better informed about possible cultural experiences that may be influencing the student's psychological adjustment and concerns. Lee and Davis (2000) suggested that students in the various cultural orientation categories would benefit from validation of their experiences. Similarly, assessing for EI-clarity would also be helpful in this regard. A student low on EI-clarity would likely benefit from work focused on helping him/her develop a greater sense of himself/herself with regard to ethnic identity. Conducting a power analysis (Worell & Remer, 2003) would likely bring to awareness the conscious or unconscious processes experienced by the student as an individual in seats of privilege and oppression based on his/her personal identities in various contexts. This analysis at the beginning stages of counseling, even if deemed by the student as unrelated to her/his presenting issues, would imply that discussion of such issues is welcomed in the therapeutic context. It could also engender further consideration of the impact that positions of privilege and oppression has on feelings about themselves in relation to others and deepen the identity exploration process.

Paniagua (1998) suggests behavioral approaches as a primary method for Asian American clients, since they are thought to prefer more concrete and direct strategies. For Laotian American college students, this may not apply to bicultural or assimilated students. Further assessment of ethnic identity and cultural orientation is suggested to determine the most appropriate method of treatment.

Based on Laotian American values previously described: the family as a social unit, respect for parents and elders, public emotion suppression to preserve modesty and save face, and maintenance of harmony (Schapiro, 1988), the following implications for

treatment of Laotian American college students in the university counseling center setting are suggested. As the primary social unit, the family can be a source of strength and support for the student. In a study on Cambodian American college students, Chhuon and Hudley (2008) found that family members and friends from the participants' hometowns served as sources for validation and encouragement. Thus, recommendations for ways to help students maintain regular contact with these outlets for support are suggested.

For Laotian American students assuming the role of cultural translator for their parents, especially one of the oldest children in the family, stress levels are likely to be higher, given the many responsibilities to be met by these students. They are not only faced with the demands of becoming academically and socially integrated on-campus, but also must juggle family obligations. For these students, family-of-origin issues likely impact them, even if not mentioned as a presenting issue. Clinicians are cautioned against probing too much about topics not mentioned by the client or sometimes at all (Paniagua, 1998). This author suggests establishing a strong therapeutic alliance before probing too much into family-related issues, especially if negative connotations could be ascertained. Probing too much too soon could lead to early termination. Validating the client's experience to help normalize his/her experience as well as to increase the therapeutic alliance is suggested. Clinicians should also keep in mind that, since problems are usually resolved within the immediate or extended family, the Laotian American student's first visit to the counseling center would likely be her/his first counseling experience. Thus, setting a frame for the client about how therapy will look

would also be helpful. Further, given that issues are normally worked through within the family, clients who do seek outside help at the counseling center may also be more desperate for symptom relief or may be experiencing a crisis (Paniagua, 1998). Client needs should be assessed on an individual basis. Depending on the student's cultural orientation, the difficulty of discussing family-related issues may be more or less likely to be a concern.

With respect for parents and elders as a value (Schapiro, 1988), recommendations hinting at undermining parents' authority should be avoided when possible (and client safety is not an issue) (Paniagua, 1998), especially for traditional clients. Suggestions incongruent with cultural values could increase anxiety in the client and lead to early termination.

Clinicians may experience hesitation from Laotian American clients to disclose too much about positive or negative attributes of themselves or their families, especially during the first few sessions of therapy, given the values of public emotion suppression to preserve modesty and save face, along with their and/or their family's experiences as refugees (Schapiro, 1988). Given the age of this cohort and the time frame of Laotian immigration to the U.S., it is more likely that they were either too young to remember their families' immigration experiences or that they are second-generation Laotian American. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, they probably received messages from parents or other relatives suggesting that the world is an unsafe place to be cautious of (Schapiro, 1988). To decrease anxiety around the possibility of losing face and

maintaining a sense of safety, reiterating confidentiality terms throughout the therapy process would be helpful (Sue & Sue, 2008).

Finally, with maintaining harmony as a cultural value for Laotian American students, there would likely be a tendency to agree with the clinician or to say things believed to be what the clinician wants to hear. It is suggested that clinicians bear in mind that students may be withholding pertinent information for the sake of maintaining harmony or saving face. Revisiting topics that would likely pose greater concern, if explored during a time when the therapeutic alliance is stronger, may be appropriate.

SUMMARY

In summary, of all Asian American populations, Southeast Asian American refugees, constitute the most underprivileged group (Paniagua, 1998). Under this subgroup are Laotian Americans. Their unique immigration experiences and backgrounds deem them appropriate for individual research focus. With the paucity of research on Laotian American college students, this study aims to add to and expand the literature, while providing much needed information to address college persistence among these students. This study examined three hypotheses. For the first two hypotheses, the mediating effects of campus connectedness on two relationships: 1) ethnic identity and college persistence attitudes and 2) other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes, were tested. Addressing the third hypothesis, this study investigated mean group differences among cultural orientations (marginal, traditional, assimilated, and bicultural) on campus connectedness.

Results revealed that campus connectedness does not mediate the relationship with ethnic identity and persistence. However, it does mediate the relationship between EI-clarity and persistence, suggesting that one's feelings of belonging on campus is the vehicle by which EI-clarity is positively correlated with persistence. Campus connectedness was also found to be a mediator for other-group orientation and college persistence attitudes. This finding should be interpreted with caution, since a significant mean group difference was found on other-group orientation by online versus paper-pencil versions of the survey. Finally, mean group differences on campus connectedness

between the four types of cultural orientation were found, and Scheffe analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the marginal orientation group and traditional and between the marginal and bicultural group. Findings suggest that university administrators assess for students' cultural orientation and EI-clarity upon acceptance into the university as well as upon requests for counseling center and other services at the university to better meet the needs of students from this population. To help ease the transition to college and cultivate campus connectedness, pre-college orientation for Laotian American students and parents, along with a peer mentorship program were suggested. Given the cultural values and experiences unique to Laotian Americans, treatment recommendations were also provided. Suggestions for further research include extending the target population to include individuals from other Southeast Asian Americans with refugee backgrounds and Southeast Asian refugee college student populations from other Western countries, such as Canada. Future research on middle and high school Laotian American students is also suggested to learn what might be keeping these students from pursuing higher education after high school.

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