

Hmong Students' Perceptions of Their Family Environment: A Consensual Qualitative Analysis of Family Photos¹

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Abstract

Although various studies have examined the home environment of low-income families and its impact on children's development, limited research has been done to investigate the impact of home environment on Hmong American families, especially those who live below the federal poverty line. The purpose of this study was to document from the students' perspective what it is like to live and grow up in a poor family. Fifteen Hmong students in 5th through 8th grades took part in the photovoice project. The consensual qualitative analyses of the photos and interviews revealed two domains (family physical home environment and family activities), seven themes (crowded space, unkempt space, equipped with media, generational and gender separation, parental involvement, organization of daily life, and social connections) and 38 core ideas. Some implications of the study are proposed for educators who work with Hmong families.

Keywords: Hmong K-12 students, home environments, poverty, education

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The United States is getting “brownier,” partly due to the post 1965 influx of immigrants. For example, between 1960 and 1993, about 18.6 million legal immigrants were admitted to the United States, and 79% of these immigrants were from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Glenn, 2008; Rumbaut, 1997). Most Asian immigrants arriving at America’s shores during this period were from Southeast Asia, especially from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Unlike immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean, Southeast Asians were refugees. As refugees, they possess few human resources (Rumbaut, 1991), and their prior work experiences in their native country are not transferable to the United States (McNall et al., 1994). As a result, many Southeast Asian families tend to be poor (Sakamoto & Woo, 2007; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Hmong, in particular, have the highest proportion of family income below the federal poverty line (25.3%) compared to the U.S. population (10.5%) and Asian Americans as a whole (8.7%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Being poor also limits where people live. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), about 70% of Southeast Asians live in major urban areas. For example, in Minnesota more than 50% of the Hmong are concentrated in the Twin Cities (the major metropolitan area of Minnesota) and many live in poor neighborhoods (Xiong, Yang, & Lee, 2008). Living in poor neighborhoods impacts children’s development. For example, studies indicate that poor families tend to live in overcrowded spaces (Bradley et al., 2001; Evans, 2004), and they dwell in homes that are exposed to higher levels of nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, and radon (Chi & Laquatra, 1990; Goldstein, Andrews, & Hartel, 1988). They also reside in spaces that have fewer resources such as age-appropriate toys and books, computers, and the Internet (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Larson & Verma, 1999). Parents that are low-income tend to be more

stressed and less cognitively stimulating for their children (Farah et al., 2008). Children living in poor homes are also more likely to develop asthma due to the high level of allergen exposures (Sarpong, Hamilton, Eggleston, & Adkinson, 1996) and are less likely to be ready for school (Xiong, Yang, & Lee, 2008).

Lareau (2002) observed and interviewed over 88 White and African American children, ages 8 through 10, who were from middle-class, working, and poor families to learn about the relationship between class and family home environment. She found that middle-class and poor families were significantly different from one another in several indicators. For example, in both African American and White middle-class families, children's lives were filled with structured activities, which were often scheduled by their parents. These parents wanted to foster the talents of the child by enrolling them into multiple after-school activities. As a result, children from middle-class families tended to be more involved in after-school activities (average = 4.9 activities) compared to children from working-class families (average = 2.5 activities) and poor families (average = 1.5 activities). Conversely, children from poor families compared to children from middle-class families were involved in more free play with cousins and friends without the supervision of adults. As a result, children from middle-class families were more likely to perform better in school because they had been cultivated to thrive in the school environment compared to children from poor families.

Lee (2005, 2007) conducted an ethnographic study with Hmong youths in Wisconsin and found that there were an increasing number of Hmong students who were academically marginalized. Specifically, Hmong students in the high school where the study was conducted experienced academic problems and social isolation from the mainstream school setting. She noted that Hmong students tended to face various family obligations (i.e., cooking, household

chores, taking care of younger siblings, helping to interpret for older family members including driving parents to their appointments, and working to financially support their family) and that these obligations often interfered with their homework and extracurricular activities at school.

Xiong, Yang, and Lee (2008) disaggregated data from ten St. Paul³ elementary schools and found that Hmong students scored the lowest on most of the tests as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test –III (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) and the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement III (Woodcock, McGrew & Mather, 2001). This similar achievement gap pattern was observed in a recent study commissioned by the Council for Asian Pacific Minnesotans (2012) that disaggregated MCA (Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment) data by ethnicity within the Asian American population. Specifically, the study found significant disparities among the various Asian American groups. For example, Hmong students scored the lowest among all of the Asian American groups on the MCA reading and math tests, except the Burmese (mostly Karen), students, who are new to Minnesota.

Although various studies have examined the family environment of poor families and its impact on children's development, limited research has been done to investigate the impact of home environment on Hmong American families, especially those who live below the federal poverty line (Lee, 2005, 2007; Xiong, Yang, & Lee, 2008). The current study attempts to address this gap by documenting from the students' perspective what it is like to live and grow up in poor Hmong families. Specifically, we wanted to address the following three research questions:

1. What does a typical home environment look like for poor families?
2. What activities do children in this type of home environment engage in and with whom?

³ St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) is home to the largest Hmong student body in the state, with approximately 10,590 students enrolled each year.

3. How does the home environment and children's activities help educators better understand Hmong students and enhance the ways in which they engage with Hmong parents and students?

METHODS

Sample Description

Fifteen students (3 males and 12 females) participated in the current study. These students were in fifth (n=7), sixth (n=6), seventh (n=1), and eighth (n=2) grades at the time of the study. Their ages ranged from 9 to 14 years old with a mean of 11.73 years old (SD = 1.67 years). The majority of the students (11 out of 15) were second-generation or born in the United States. Eight out of fifteen students reported living in rented homes or apartments and about five of the fifteen students shared their homes/apartments with 5 other children (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics

Characteristics	N	Mean	SD
Age	15	11.73	1.67
Gender			
Male	3		
Female	12		
Grade			
5 th	7		
6 th	4		
7 th	2		
8 th	2		
Generation Status*			
1.5	4		
2 nd	11		
Housing Status			
Rent	8		
Own	7		
Number of children in the home			
1	2		
2	1		

3	3
4	2
5	5
6	2

* 2nd-generation refers to anyone who immigrated to the United States younger than 7 years old or born in the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Sample Procedures

Participants were recruited from a Hmong charter school in Minnesota. The charter school serves over 400 students from pre-kindergarten to 8 grades, and most of the students (about 94%) were Hmong at the time of the study (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). The rest of the student body consisted of American Indians (0.4%), Hispanics (0.6%), African Americans (4.5%), and Whites (0.9%) (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). In addition to being racially segregated, the school also serves a large percentage of students from low socioeconomic statuses (SES) and recent immigrants from Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), 82% of the students attending the charter school received free and reduced price lunch. Most of these students resided in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city where the study was conducted (Xiong, Yang, & Lee, 2008). Due to the density of the Hmong population and the grade levels it served, the charter school was an ideal location for the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Photovoice. Rooted within the philosophy of community-based participatory research, the photovoice method combines a qualitative research methodology with a special emphasis on partnership between community members and researchers from higher educational institutions to conduct action research (Pesa, Cowdery, Westerfield, & Wang, 1997; Vaughn, Rojas-Guyler, & Howell, 2008). Based on this pragmatic philosophy, the photovoice method enables both researchers and community members to work together to influence community norms and

advocate for social change (Pesa, Cowdery, Westerfield, & Wang, 1997; Wang & Burris, 1992). Thus, the photovoice method requires participants to capture their “realities” and concerns through the use of cameras and storytelling. In other words, this approach allows participants to document and communicate their lived experiences in their own voice to others (Pesa, Cowdery, Westerfield, & Wang, 1997; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004). This is a reason why we chose to use photovoice in this study with Hmong students. We believe low-income Hmong students face unique circumstances at home and sometimes educators who work with these students do not understand their lives outside of the school context. Photovoice gives students a voice to tell others what their home environment is like in order to bring a deeper understanding to those who work with Hmong, especially low-income Hmong families in urban areas.

Recruiting. The recruiting procedures of this study were approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board and consisted of a few steps. First, the director of the charter school supported the project and designated a staff member to work with the researchers. The designated staff member spent several hours meeting with the researchers to plan a schedule and the methods that would be utilized for recruiting participants. Based on the staff's recommendation, a flier about the study was developed and posted throughout school hallways. In addition, the first author worked with the staff member to arrange for a time to announce the study in 2-3 different classrooms of different grade levels during the school year; a similar announcement was also made at the school's monthly family academy night, an event hosted by the school for parents to learn about parenting. A sign-up sheet was left with classroom teachers for interested students to sign up for the study, and parents of interested students were contacted to explain the purpose of the study. Parents who agreed to allow their child to participate in the

study were asked to sign consent and photo release forms, while the children were asked to sign an assent form in order to participate in the study.

Training. Prior to providing the students a camera to take home, the research team contracted with a professional photographer to train students on how to operate the camera and how to take quality pictures. Throughout the three sessions, participants were taught basic photography techniques (i.e., what it is appropriate and inappropriate to take photos of), photo storage, saving, and editing procedures. Furthermore, the research team engaged the participants in a discussion in regards to the ethics of photo taking, protection of photos, and sharing of photos with others. Additionally, the research team also walked participants through the process of identifying, documenting through writing, and reflecting upon the different aspects of their family photos. Finally, participants were engaged in the discussion of the photovoice method and how the method could be used to tell their stories.

Meeting sessions. Participants were required to meet with the research team once per month for two hours for three months to build leadership skills, continue dialogue about the photovoice method, learn about the ethics of photography, and discuss the photos. For example, each month participants were asked to take photos based on a specific question (i.e., what do you like about your family or what do you want to change about your family?). Therefore, during the monthly meeting each participant was asked to select 3-5 photos they took and write a brief narrative explaining the story behind each selected photo. Students were also contacted outside of the meetings for a brief phone interview to learn more about certain photos and other family activities captured. Additionally, toward the end of the project, students were asked to complete a short demographic survey (see Table 1).

Data Analysis

The current study utilized the consensual qualitative analysis approach to analyze the data. Developed by Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997), consensual qualitative research calls for “use of multiple researchers, the process of reaching consensus, and a systematic way of examining the representativeness of the results across cases” (p. 3). Thus, a team approach was needed to conduct this research. The research team⁴ was able to ask open-ended questions, provide multiple perspectives in the data analysis process, and then agree upon the meaning of the data.

The research team included four judges (one graduate student and three advanced undergraduate students and one auditor; the third author of this paper). Each judge was assigned to review the photos and transcripts from the brief phone interview independently. Judges were asked to generate a list of core ideas based on the photos and transcripts. They discussed the core ideas with the team and came to a consensus. Once the judges agreed on the core ideas, they then worked together to come up with the overarching themes and domains. The judges then classified the emerging themes, counted the core ideas across cases, and the auditor verified the analyses.

The final step involved determining the salience of the themes for reporting. Judges used the labels “rare,” “variant,” “typical,” and “general” to categorize the frequencies of the core ideas. In accordance with the consensual qualitative research method, a label of “rare” was given to core ideas that were mentioned by one case; “variant” was given to core ideas that were mentioned by less than half of the cases; a label of “typical” was given to core ideas that were mentioned in more than half to three-fourths of the cases; and finally, a label of “general” was given to core ideas that were mentioned by all cases (Hill et al., 2005). In this study, this

⁴ The research team included the authors of this paper and 2 undergraduate students.

translated to a labeling of “rare” for core ideas mentioned by 1 case, “variant” mentioned by 2-7 cases, “typical” mentioned by 8-14 cases, and “general” mentioned by all 15 cases. To protect the real identity of students, we used pseudonyms instead of their real names for all quotations throughout the paper.

Results

Our analyses revealed two domains; the family physical home environment and family activities, under these domains, there were seven themes and 38 core ideas (Table 2). These core ideas were categorized according to the labels advocated by consensual qualitative researchers (Hill et al., 2005).

Table 2.
Domains, themes, and core ideas

Domain	Theme	Core Ideas
Family physical home environment	Limited (crowded) space	Using different surfaces for table (beds, chairs, floor, radiators, etc.)*** ^P
		No space or desk for homework *** ^I
		Multiple people share a room * ^P
		Multipurpose room* ^P
	Unkempt space	Dirty walls & Windows** ^P
		Plastic on walls* ^P
		Messy yard* ^P
		Paper taped on walls* ^P
		Clothes and coat on couch * ^P
		Folding chairs* ^P
	Equipped with media	Old Couch* ^P
		Old utensils* ^P
Television*** ^{P&I}		
Video games*** ^{P&I}		
		Computer and laptops * ^P

Family activities	Generational and gender separation	Kinship interaction*** ^P
		Child focused *** ^P
		Older adults are together** ^P
	Parental involvement	Mom does most of the cooking** ^I
		Cooking together*** ^{P&I}
		Do not talk to parents about day*** ^I
		Family Eat meals together** ^I
		Hug parents ** ^I
	Organization of daily life	No homework help from parents ** ^I
		Watching TV*** ^{P&I}
		Playing video games *** ^{P&I}
		Playing with cousins and siblings*** ^P
		Education (homework)** ^P
		No Extra circular activities** ^I
		Chores** ^P
Social connections	Talking on the phone* ^P	
	Extra circular activities* ^I	
	Cooking* ^P	
	Celebrations*** ^P	
	Family gatherings*** ^P	
	Family eating together** ^P	
Outdoor** ^P		
Kin network** ^I		

Note: Note: * = Variant (2-5 cases), **=Typical (6-8 cases), ***=General (9-10 cases). ^P = Photo analysis, ^I = Interview analysis, ^{P&I} = Photo and Interview analyses.

Family Physical Home Environment

The domain family physical home environment was created to represent the physical structure of the homes based on the photos obtained from the participants. The analyses revealed three themes (crowded space, unkempt space, and equipped with media) that are important for understanding what a typical poor home environment looks like (Table 2).

Crowded space

Crowded space as a theme was selected to capture the living situation of these students. Crowded space includes both the internal space where the students lived, as well as the surrounding area outside of the home (i.e., yards). The analyses revealed 4 core ideas, with two general and two typical under this theme (Table 2). Specifically, several photos showed multiple people sharing a room, no space or desk for children to do homework, and rooms with multi-purposed utility. For example, we found several photos showing a tiny room where the mother was fixing her hair in front of a mirror, the older daughter in her teenage years watching television, and a pre-school child coloring on top of a folded metal chair.

Box 1: Lack of study space

"I study on the couch usually, sometimes the table in the kitchen. We have a computer area, but no space for homework. I don't mind doing homework on the couch" (Cho Lee, a 5th grader).

Unkempt Space

Unkempt space was used to represent cluttered and dirty living areas, both inside and outside of the home. Having many people live in a small space can lead to the home being disorganized and cluttered. In this theme, there were eight core ideas with one general and seven typical. For example, we found several photos showing clothes and coats hanging on the sofa, plastic with garbage hanging from the doorknob in the room where the children gathered and old couches and carpets where children eat and do their homework. Photos showing the outside of the homes were not that different; they also depicted tiny, messy yards, and old buildings where there was little room for children to play.



Figure 1: *Multipurpose room with a young child doing homework on a folding chair while his siblings watch TV and an adult gets dressed.*

Equipped with media

Equipped with media was the third theme under the domain family physical home environment (Table 2). This theme represents the many types of media captured on the students' photos. Many of the students took pictures of family members watching television, playing video games, and working on computers and laptops, as well as the recurrent theme of being on the phone from the interviews. Furthermore, the photos also showed some general patterns about Hmong families in this study and the media. Specifically, most photos showed teenage boys playing video games in the presence of other teenagers (Figure 2), while teenage girls tended to watch television or surf the Internet. Rarely did we see photos that showed parents and children doing something together with media.

Box 2: Girls and media

“When I get home I usually do chores left by my mother for me to do, sit on the couch and watch TV until mom gives me more chores (Mai Yang, a 5th grader).



Figure 2: Teenage girl watching television and eating a meal.

Family Activities

The domain of family activities was used to address our second research question: What activities do children in this type of home environment engage in and with whom? Our analyses revealed four themes (gender and generational separation, parental involvement, organization of daily life, and social connection) and 23 core ideas.

Generational and Gender Separation

The theme generational and gender separation was used to represent the lack of interactions between the older and younger generations and between males and females in the families captured through photovoice. There were four core ideas in this theme with two general and two typical categories (Table 2). Our analyses revealed that during family gatherings, children and adults were visually separated. Children tended to



Figure 3: *Three female elders eating food together.*

cluster together in the bedroom playing video games, sitting around watching television, eating together on the floor, and entertaining one another outside the home. Adults, on the other hand, sat in groups around the dining table or performed chores in the kitchen. Additionally, the analyses showed similar patterns between males and females. For example, girls were engaged with other female children or cousins watching television, surfing the Internet, or babysitting, while boys were in the presence of other male children playing games or engaging in recreational activities outside. Adult females clustered by themselves doing chores without the presence of the males. In general, the photos showed very few adult males in the family interacting with these students.

Parental Involvement

The concept of parental involvement was used to capture the parent-child interactions in the students' families. In this theme, there were five core ideas with three general and two typical categories (Table 2). In many of the pictures, there were scarce parent-child interactions; only a few photos showed the female students engaged with their mothers in conversation and cooking

meals. During the phone interview, we found that many of the parents, especially the fathers, were working in the evening and overnight. We also found that most of the parents were limited in their English abilities and were not able to help their children with homework.

Box 3: Parent-child interaction

"I sometimes talk to my mom about my day, but usually don't talk to either one of my parents about my day. Parents work during the day and evening. Yeah, I hug my parents sometimes...my parents don't usually help with my homework"(Kaosheng Vang, a 5th grader).

Organization of Daily Life

The theme of organization of daily life was borrowed from Lareau (2002) to represent the activities and tasks students were engaged in after their structured school day finished. In this theme, there were nine core ideas, three general, three typical, and three variant categories (Table 2). The photo analyses found only a few afterschool activities, especially sports related activities. The majority of the students engaged in informal activities after school. Most photos showed the male students watched television and playing video games in the presence of other siblings and cousins, while the female students worked on household chores and cared for younger siblings. Similarly, the interview data showed only a few cases where students stayed afterschool in order to complete their homework.

Box 4: Afterschool activities

"I play video games every day probably. I play video games with my cousins and brothers. I don't always play video games, but often do when I'm home"(Neng Xiong, an 8th grader).



Figure 4: Playing video games after school.

Social Connections

The theme of social connections was also borrowed from Lareau (2002) to capture how the students' families maintain and create new relationships in their lives. This theme consisted of five core ideas, with two general and three typical categories (Table 2). Many of the photographs centered on family gatherings, celebrations, and peer interactions. Family gathering and celebration photos usually showed large quantities of food and lots of family members gathered together, often sitting on folding chairs and tables. The photos showed no evidence to suggest that family placed a high value on the décor of the event or the utensils they used, nor did the families emphasize gift giving during birthday celebrations. More importantly, the photos consistently displayed the importance of family unity and togetherness with relatives and friends, and this interpretation was corroborated by the interviews where students stated that helping relatives and members of the community was the most important duty due to the reciprocal nature of the Hmong culture.

Box 5: Maintaining connections

"I see relatives at least each weekend for spiritual activities. Our extended families usually get together to celebrate birthdays and they almost always get a cake. It depends if the rest of the family knows about the birthday and the person wants to celebrate" (Da Thao, a 6th grader).



Figure 5: Family gathered to celebrate a birthday.

Discussion

The current study attempts to capture what a typical family environment looks like for low-income Hmong families and to document, from a students' perspective, what it is like to live and grow up in poor families. Our goal is to inform educators, especially non-Hmong American educators, about the challenges low-income Hmong families typically face, with the hope to empower educators to show more understanding and to be proactive rather than reactive to certain behavioral and academic signs (i.e., depression, falling behind in classwork, or a lack of involvement) when interacting with Hmong students and parents.

We found that most homes were overcrowded, unkempt, and disorganized; filled with limited age-appropriate resources, such as study desks, bookshelves, toys, and books; and were located in neighborhoods where there was an absence of adequate physical space (i.e., yards) for children to play. These findings were not unique to the Hmong families we observed in this study, however. They are consistent with other studies that have investigated poor families living in the United States (Bradley et al., 2001; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Evans, 2004; Larson & Verma, 1999). What was unique to Hmong families in this study, however, was their accessibility to and engagement with technologies, such as watching television, surfing the Internet, and playing video games. Although access to technologies have been found to positively relate to family socioeconomic status (Common Sense Media, 2011), this is not the case for Hmong families in this study. We speculate that because Hmong families value education highly they want to provide the necessary tools for their children to become successful citizens in the 21st Century (Moua & Lamborn, 2010; Supple et al., 2010; Xiong, Eliason, Detzner, & Cleveland, 2005). However, because of the lack of parental monitoring and involvement with children's screen times (mostly due to their nonstandard working hours) these

technologies tend to be used by the children for entertainment purposes (e.g. watching movies, playing video games, and surfing the Internet). The data rarely showed instances where children used technologies for school-related activities. This is a concern since research shows that screen time tend to interfere with children's school performance (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) and limit children from being active, which is associated with an increase risk for obesity and other chronic diseases (Gopinath et a., 2012).

We also found that Hmong children's organization of daily life was very similar to what has been found in the literature where poor children were less likely to participate in after-school activities and that their daily lives were less structured and monitored by adults compared to middle-class children regardless of race (Lareau, 2002; Weininger & Lareau, 2009). For example, we found that the Hmong children in this study spend most of their time after school playing with their siblings and cousins outdoors in the park or in front of a television and playing video games. Although free play or unstructured activities have been found to help children's development, little is known about the nature, type, and intensity of free play for Hmong children and how these various types of free play influence Hmong children's development. Earlier research shows that youth who are involved in free play activities with friends without adult supervision are at greater risk to be engaged in delinquent activities (Barnes, Hoffman, Welte, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2007; Xiong, Rettig, & Tuicomepee, 2008; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). More studies are needed in order to understand how free play, especially without the supervision and monitoring of parents, influences children's various domains of development.

The third major finding involves the segregation of generations and gender. That is, most photos show that Hmong children were usually together with other children without an adult presence, and the parents were with other adults without the presence of children. There were

rarely any pictures of parents and children interacting; only a few photos showed teenage girls engaging with their mothers in conversations and cooking meals in the kitchen. The fathers were absent from most of the pictures since most of them worked in the evening hours. When men were shown in the pictures, they were more likely to be teenage males without the presence of other adult males and females. We believe this phenomenon is more likely a response to the parents' work schedule coupled with the acculturation gaps between parents and children that has been documented in the literature (Lee, 2001; Lee et al., 2009; Supple et al., 2010; Supple & Small, 2006; Xiong et al., 2005; Xiong, Rettig, & Tuicomepee, 2008; Yang, 2003). Although we did not measure the child outcome for this study, lack of parental involvement, monitoring, and acculturation gaps have been found to predict deleterious outcomes in children (Farah et al., 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Therefore, it is imperative for educators to understand this context of low-income Hmong family life and be innovative when reaching out to Hmong children and their families to provide the necessary support needed to be successful in school instead of feeling ambivalent about their home environment (Lee, 2001; Supple et al., 2010).

The last theme we discovered through our photos and interview analyses involved children's social connections, or time spent with family members, relatives, and friends. We found significant evidence of the importance of kinship relations, family togetherness, and family celebrations. This suggests that, despite living the United States for several decades, Hmong families are still very close and cohesive (Xiong, Tuicomepee, LaBlanc, & Rainey, 2006). More importantly, it shows promise for the strength and continuity of the family system which is anchored by the network of *kuv tij* (relatives from the paternal side of the family) and *neej tsa* (relatives from the maternal side of the family). Conversely, this close-knit community coupled with economic constraints could also pose challenges for Hmong students. First, if

children are always in the presence of other cousins during the weekdays (i.e., playing video games or picnicking outdoors) and participating in family events during the weekend, then time devoted to academic work may suffer (Lareau, 2002). Second, if this is a typical weekly routine, then the chance for Hmong students to interact with people of other racial/ethnic groups will also suffer given that Hmong children are less likely to be placed in organized activities or activities that steer children away from their kinship network (Lareau, 2002; Weininger & Lareau, 2009). Third, Hmong are one of the few Asian American groups in Minnesota who have played an active role in the expansion of the charter school movement in Minnesota. Charter schools offer an alternative educational choice to Hmong families who are dissatisfied with the public school system. Since 2000, nine Hmong charter schools were opened in the Twin Cities and have attracted significant numbers of Hmong students. However, a recent report shows that charter schools tended to perform worse than traditional public schools on standardized tests and other student outcomes. Specifically, the report indicates that students in charter schools are twice as likely to be racially segregated compared to their counterparts in public schools and public schools continue to outperform charter schools after controlling for race, poverty, language, special education needs, student mobility rates, and school size (Institute on Race and Poverty, 2012).

Implications and Limitations

One of our goals for this study was to help educators better understand Hmong students and enhance the ways in which they engage with Hmong parents and students. First, this study shows that the home environment, especially among those who live in low-income families, plays a major role in Hmong students' routines and activities. Recognizing these complexities will allow educators to teach students about competing priorities and perhaps help monitor

students' daily work to keep them from falling behind. Secondly, since the home is an overcrowded place where each child does not have a space for himself or herself to study, educators need to work closely with parents to help them structure the home in a way to allow for study time where all children in the home can benefit. Studies have shown that children who do best in school tend to come from families where there is structure at home (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Whitmore, Trautmann, & Caplan, 1989). Third, the present study shows that although Hmong students have access to media at home, they are less likely to use it for educational purposes. Educators need to encourage Hmong parents to reduce and monitor their children's screen time since screen time is related to the school performance and physical activities of children (Gopinath et al., 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

Like other qualitative studies, this study is also imperfect. First, the sample for the current study was small and recruited based on a convenience sample. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all low-income Hmong families. Future studies should focus on larger, representative samples with longitudinal designs to tease out what exactly contributes to children's development in the context of an impoverished family environment. Second, although we enrolled fifteen participants in the project, the attendance was sporadic. Future studies need to find ways to retain students on a regular basis throughout a program to obtain more in-depth data.

Another limitation of the present study is the time the research team had with the participants. Although the photos captured by the students tell us much about the family environment, the amount of time we had with the students was limited to two hours per month. Thus, we did not have time to conduct a thorough face-to-face follow-up interview to go over certain family dynamics (i.e., parent-child interactions) that have been found to link to children's

development in this community (Lee, 2007; Xiong & Huang, 2011). Finally, the students' age also plays a role in the findings. Although the average age of the participants in the current study was 11.73 years old, 7 of the students were 10 years old. Thus, it was harder for younger students to follow directions and complete the tasks. Future studies might benefit from working with students older than 10 years old. Based on our experience, students who were older than 10 were able to better follow directions and complete assignments. They were also able to work with the technologies and had the writing abilities to complete the assignment.

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