

**Self-Construal: Perceptions of Work and School in Two Generations of  
Hmong Immigrants**

by

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**Abstract**

This paper describes a research project in which 40 Hmong participants were interviewed comparing two generations of Hmong immigrants. Self-construal served as an operating framework in understanding respondent satisfaction with work and school; two very salient features in individual functioning and worldview. Self-construal is the manner in which the client views themselves in relation to others and is influenced by culture. The researcher compared perceptions of work and school among first and generation immigrants in terms of work in relation to self-construal. The study of self-construal is important for social workers and other service providers who work with immigrants and refugees as it informs cross cultural practice. Understanding culturally informed views on client satisfaction and perceptions will help social workers gain a stronger understanding of the client experience and work cross culturally with clients.

**Keywords:** self-construal, Hmong immigrants

**Introduction**

The concept of self-construal was first introduced by Markus and Kitayama (1991) in their seminal article titled “Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation.” The concept of self-construal offers researchers an operating framework from which to understand dimensions and variations in acculturation among new immigrants, as well as individual differences and similarities that shape interpersonal relationships, satisfaction, and social experiences. Self-construal refers to the manner in which an individual views themselves

in relation to others within the social environment. Self-construal ranges from independent self-construal (IND) to interdependent self-construal (INT). The self-construal exerts great influence on how a person makes sense of social interactions, roles, obligations, and satisfaction within the social context. It also influences how one perceives well-being and sense of satisfaction in the social and interpersonal environment. The concept of independent self-construal, in which self is the main referent, is often found in individualistic cultures, while the concept of interdependent self-construal, in which others are the main referent, may be more common in collectivist or holistic cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Immigrants to the U.S. from collectivist cultures, who show high acculturation to the individualistic culture of the U.S., may exhibit independent self-construal as a dominant feature, which then may often create conflict with their family or community if the social and family group upholds values consistent with an interdependent self-construal. The negative evaluation by family or community members often results in psychological distress and alienation for the person. In addition, individuals who arrived in the U.S as younger children, or who were born in the U.S. may exhibit biculturalism in which they may understand and subscribe to many characteristics of both cultures. This requires the individual to engage in code switching almost daily and frequently depending on the context and situation. Code switching may, on the outset, appear as a trait of resilience, however, it may also cause psychological distress due to ambivalence, feelings of one's values being compromised when having to mute a set of values and beliefs in favor of another, and when there exists external forces that value a specific type of self-construal. Individuals may experience cognitive dissonance when values and beliefs differ drastically. Further study in this area is warranted in light of intergenerational conflict, high levels of stress among immigrant communities, bicultural stress among second generation individuals, and mental health concerns among immigrant

groups which require service from providers such as social workers. This qualitative study examines self-construal and the perceptions of motivations and satisfaction with school and work experiences in the United States among 40 Hmong immigrants from two generations. The question posited in this study is “How does self-construal differ among Hmong immigrants depending on generational status?” The construct of self-construal is captured in this study via self-reports of perceptions related to work and school in the United States surrounding satisfaction and motivation.

The concept of self-construal is not mutually exclusive to one or the other, in which an individual may exhibit only self-construal; either independent or interdependent qualities. Individuals move between both forms of self-construals depending on the situation and may possess characteristics of both self-construals at one time. Individuals with interdependent self-construals (INT) tend to place higher value on the needs of the social group in place of individual needs such as feelings, values, and motivations. Individuals with independent self-construals (IND) tend to place higher value on individual needs in lieu of the needs of the group. For example, INT tend to mute personal goals and feelings in order to maintain social harmony while IND lean towards prioritizing personal goals above the goals of the group. A simple and classic example of this phenomenon in western culture is when a young adult IND chooses his or her personal goals over goals imposed by the parents (i.e. Although the parents might wish the child to become a doctor, the college age child chooses to be an artist instead—thereby following his own goal and muting his or her parents’ imposed goal). On the other hand, a child with INT would exhibit preference to carry out the parent’s desired goals and mute his or her desired personal goals in order to fulfill his or her social obligation, to maintain family harmony, and to preserve the relationships within the family system (i.e. This child would aim to become a doctor

in order to maintain his or her relationship with the parents.). Although this example may be simplistic since the concept of self-construal is actually more complex with individuals often exhibiting elements of both self-construals with varying gradation, the example sheds light on the difference in the two types of self-construals (Cheng et al., 2011). This example also highlights the notion that the process of navigating between the two types of self-construals may create psychological distress for individuals, warranting further study and understanding by human service providers such as social workers.

While seen as two opposite poles, individuals may lie somewhere on the continuum, and self-construal may change depending on social context and individual needs at the time. In addition, while there is the assumption that Western culture predominantly places higher value on independence and wholistic cultures may place higher value on interdependence, variations can be seen among individuals from both cultures depending on family culture, individual factors, and contextual factors (Yamashiro & Matsuoka, 1997). The self-construal has a strong influence on motivation, perceptions regarding satisfaction, and perceptions of outcomes derived from the social context. Understanding self-construal is useful in work with all individuals, reduces misunderstanding about motivation, and assists providers in the engagement, assessment, and intervention phases of the social work helping process.

### **Background of Hmong**

Hmong are an ethnic tribe from Asia. Their origins can be traced to China and currently, millions of Hmong live in the Yellow River Basin region of China. Many Hmong can be found throughout Southeast Asia due to centuries of immigration and movement due to conflict over economic sovereignty. Hmong in Laos were involved in the Secret War from 1953 to 1975 during the Vietnam War. Hmong fought on the American side in an attempt to stop arms

transport through Laos by the Vietnamese communist faction. At the end of the Vietnam War, Hmong in Laos were considered traitors and hunted for persecution by communist factions. Immediately after the fall of Saigon, over 2,500 Hmong were transported by air to a refugee camp in Thailand, while over 30,000 fled on foot towards the Thai border. Many spent almost two decades in Thai refugee camps. Soon after the Fall of Saigon, many Hmong were relocated to many Western nations, including the U.S. By 1982, over 50,000 Hmong had been resettled to the U.S., by 1990, almost 50,000 more were relocated to the U.S. The Hmong population went from almost over 94,000 in 1990 to 186,000 by 2000, according to the U.S. Census (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2012). This increase is due to immigration as well as births of second-generation children. The final relocation of Hmong refugees occurred in 2004 when the final refuge for Hmong, Wat Thamkrambok, was closed by the Thai government and the remaining 15,000 were relocated to the United States (Vang, 2010). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, there were over 260,000 Hmong residing in the United States, an increase of 175% from 1990 when the total Hmong population in the U.S. was just over 94,000 (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2012). Twenty-six percent of Hmong Americans are under age 18, and the median age of Hmong Americans is 33 years, making it one of the youngest ethnic groups in the United States (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2012). Thirteen percent of Hmong are over the age of 44, meaning that those born outside of the U.S. are a smaller group, with those over the age of 65 comprising only 3% of the total Hmong American population. Middle age adults (between the ages of 45 and 64 years of age) comprise 14% of the U.S. Hmong population. These data suggest that Hmong are a fairly young population in the U.S. (87% under the age of 44), while older Hmong continue to decline in population size. The U.S. census does not match up respondents with generational status, however, one may surmise that younger Hmong, those under age 44

may have been either born in the United States or came to the United States as children or young adults. Being that the time frame of the relocation process (1975-2004) is almost 20 years, it is difficult to determine the individual generational status of the current U.S. Hmong population. Small studies measuring generational status are able to detect that 85% of 195 randomly selected respondents were first generation (Vang, 2013).

The term “first-generation immigrant” refers to immigrants born outside the United States while second generation immigrants were born to first generation immigrants. The term “1 ½ generation” refers to immigrants who arrived in the United States as children, resulting in a higher level of biculturalism in which the individual becomes fluent both in their culture of origin and the culture of their new home country. These individuals often exhibit higher levels of assimilation than first-generation immigrants, yet still maintain many values of their traditional culture; thus, exhibiting biculturalism. Differences in acculturation status, and thus self-construals, among individuals within immigrant communities often create intergenerational conflict as first-generation immigrants attempt to maintain the values and practices of their culture of origin while second generation immigrants may quickly adopt the values of the new home country.

To examine these differences in self-construals, the researcher selected two areas of life that are salient to most Americans and considered major areas of functioning for individuals in the DSM-5; work and school. This paper describes differences in perception and experiences with work and school in the United States among two generations of Hmong immigrants. Using the self-construal as an operating framework, differences in satisfaction and perceptions around success and goal attainment with daily experiences with work and school are examined.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In the past, assimilation was seen as a path towards successful integration into the host society, but fledgling research has proven otherwise (McCabe, 2007). Assimilation results in loss of culture of origin and cognitive dissonance due to loss of identity and sense of community. Assimilation does not lead to total acceptance by the host society, leading to alienation and marginalization especially among visible minorities who may attempt assimilation but may ultimately be prevented full assimilation into American society.

Acculturation by itself does not lead to psychological distress, but distress can result during the acculturation process (Valdez, 2000; Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Schwartz & Unger, 2010). For example, psychological distress can occur when immigrants compromise aspects of their worldview in order to adopt to the dominant social environment. The shedding of one's culture can result in cognitive dissonance, while attempts to adapt to new cultural, previously foreign, practices can also result in cognitive dissonance or anomie. In some circumstances, acculturation may cause more harm than good for those immigrants who continue to have strong ties to their cultures of origin and whose sense of well-being is derived from their abilities to retain their culture. In light of this, attempts have been made to understand the complexities that exist when immigrants attempt to adjust to new cultural environments. Current social work practices have included the adaptation of best practice models by translating models into clients' languages of origin and by integrating culturally specific elements into mainstream models. Translating is necessary but not sufficient to capture cultural nuances. Culturally-specific elements should also be integrated and reinforced as needed elements in social work practice with immigrants. A culturally-specific element that is typically not given sufficient attention is the notion of self. The self-construal refers to the notion of self in relation to others

within the social context. The notion of self in relation to others is an influential force in the day to day lived experiences of human beings. Researchers have supported the premise that the provider must have a basic understanding of the client's notion of self in relation to others, the notion of self-serving as a basic foundation in practice, and a major principle in cultural competency (Sue, Ivey, & Pederson; 1996; Hwang, 2006).

The self-construal has distinct characteristics that are uniquely defined by specific cultural ideologies. Two main cultural ideologies that have been uncovered in extant literature are the collectivist and individualistic societal ideologies (Singelis, 1994; Kitayama, Markus, & Matsumoto, 1995; Singelis & Triandis, 1995; Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004). Research highlighting the differences between collectivist and individualistic ideology and the influence of these ideologies on mental health has overwhelmingly discussed the client's view of self in the social environment. For example, Mui and Kang's (2006) research regarding the psychological impact of acculturative stress among Asian older adults suggests that therapists gauge the client's view of self in relation to others, specifically the family, to determine the level of acculturation among Asian immigrants. Futterman Collier and colleagues (2012) study of Hmong mental health emphasized that commonly, within Hmong culture, individual primary identity is not as an individual, but as a member of a family and/or clan. Yamashiro and Matsuoka (1997) used a human ecology framework to examine the behaviors of Asians and the psychological impact of social processes on individuals from Asian cultures. They observed that Asians perceive their social environment differently from Western individuals. A social environment that may seem normal to Westerners is often perceived as oppressive or deviant in the eyes of Asians whose values differ markedly from Western values in regard to social obligation, especially to work groups, family, or community. Markus and Kitayama's (1991)

seminal work on self-construals provide a foundation for the discussion of the self in relation to others, in the current research.

Markus and Kitayama's (1991) work on independent and interdependent self-construals provide a deep examination of this concept of self. Markus and Kitayama's (1991) work encourages the provider to look at the impact of worldviews such as collectivism and individualism on the self and the impact of concepts such as mental health, and perceptions of satisfaction with outcomes related to the social environment. Self-construals are derived from cultural values and beliefs that exist within either a collectivist society or an individualistic society (Singelis, 1994; Singelis, Triandis, & Bhawuk, 1995).

The definition of self exists within a cultural context. Markus and Kitayama (1991) use the terms independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal to describe the framework under which individuals view themselves in relation to others. In Western cultures, predominantly, the self is viewed as independent. This independent view of self embodies individual autonomy and separation from others (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Individuality is a fundamental principal in Western cultures. Under the independent self-construal, individual behaviors are understood as stemming from one's own thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values which uniquely define the individual from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Kim & Sherman, 2007). Kim and Sherman (2007) propose that this notion of individuality stems from the Cartesian idea that the ability to think is the core of human existence. Like interdependent individuals (INT), independent individuals (IND) are expected to be responsive to their social environment; however, this responsiveness is usually carried out in order to maintain the freedom and individuality of the self and others in the social environment (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, in holistic cultures, such as Asian, Native American, and Hispanic cultures,

the self is socially imbedded. The self is considered to be at one with its social surroundings, similar to a paint stroke that is imbedded within a painting. The single paint stroke gives meaning to the whole, while in return, the painting as a whole gives meaning to the single paint stroke. The interdependent self is motivated to fit in with those in the social environment by weaving relationships and obligations with those around them. The goal is to maintain harmonious and symbiotic relationships. The interdependent self possesses individual attributes, but those attributes are invoked by the relationships within the context of the painting. The individual characteristics are secondary to the whole picture depicted in the painting.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) posit that these two views of self can have a systematic influence on various aspects of psychological wellbeing. For example, persons with interdependent self-construals (INT) will exhibit more concern over the impact of the self on social relationships. Individual needs are muted, and social connection is prioritized. For example, Baker and McNulty (2013) found that interdependent individuals are more likely to risk rejection, such as taking a stand against a wrong, or express intimate feelings to another, in order to increase their interdependence with their group, or to maintain harmony. Whereas, this behavior is less likely seen in individuals with independent self-construals (IND) due to efforts to maintain the individual (Baker & McNulty, 2013). Persons with independent self-construals are less likely to take a stand against injustice if it means that they may lose their independence, even if that action leads to higher interdependence with their group. Individuals with INT were *more* likely to disclose personal flaws, feelings of intimacy towards the other individual, engage in behaviors such as sacrificing for the other individual and seeking support from the other individual whereas individuals with IND were less likely to engage in these behaviors. Individuals with a tendency to define themselves by their social relationships (INT) were more

likely to engage in behaviors that increased social connection despite the risk for rejection (Baker & McNulty, 2013). Similarly, Oeberst and Wu (2015) found that individuals with INT were more likely to engage in interrogative compliance than IND, which often resulted in false confessions.

## **Methods**

This qualitative study was approved by the IRB of a small private college in the Midwest region of the United States. Flyers were distributed via email, and at different Hmong venues in a large Midwest metropolitan area in the United States. Respondents were asked to email or call the researcher if they were interested in participating in this study. One aspect of the inclusion criteria required that participants have experience in work such as employment and/or education such as university studies or high school due to the nature of the research question “What are your experiences in work and school in the United States?” The researcher scheduled a time to interview respondents in their home or in a quiet public setting. 40 Hmong individuals were interviewed individually, in person. Interviewees received a \$20 grocery gift card for participating. The sample included 20 first generation Hmong and 20 second generation Hmong. Participants were selected for each group until the n size of 20 was reached for each group. First-generation subjects were born in either Laos or Thailand and arrived in the United States as either young children or young adults. Having two sample groups, from the two generations would later allow the researcher to compare and contrast responses across the two generations. Additional inclusion criteria were that subjects were Hmong and age 18 or over. All subjects resided in a large Midwest urban area of the United States. All interviews were transcribed into English except those which were conducted in Hmong. Transcripts conducted in Hmong were not translated as the researcher is Hmong and bilingual, however, in writing the results, the

Hmong statements were translated to English by the researcher. Using a semi-structured interview tool, the subjects were asked for demographic information including place of birth, age, gender, profession, and school status. Interviewees were then asked the following questions: “What was/is your experience with work in the United States?” “What did you find challenging?” “What did you find rewarding?” “What was/is your experience with schooling in the United States?” “What did you find challenging?” “What did you find rewarding?”

The constant comparative method is a method for analyzing data in order to develop a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using constant comparison as a data analysis methodology, interviews were coded, then, working with a research assistant, data was grouped into initial categories, and regrouped further as more thoughtful and descriptive categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105). During this process of continuous comparison of the data, final themes surfaced from the categories, which allowed the researcher to group the final themes into two thematic groups by generation. Below the data are presented.

## **Results**

A total of 40 subjects participated in this study. Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the participants. The first- and second-generation participant groups had equal numbers of participants. The first-generation group (n=20), those born outside of the United States, consisted of 9 males (45%) and 11 females (55%), while the second-generation group (n=20), those born in the United States to first generation parents, consisted of eight males (40%) and twelve females (60%). 24 participants had four-year college degrees and seven individuals had completed master’s degrees. The remaining nine participants had either completed two-year degrees or were still in college.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

	1 <sup>st</sup> Gen.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Gen.
N=40	n = 20	n = 20
	%	%
Male	45	40
Female	55	60
4 Year College Degree	60	55
Advanced Degree	20	15

Using constant comparisons as a data analysis methodology, each transcript was analyzed and coded to fit into the a priori categories of “independent self-construal” and “interdependent self-construal” as they pertained to satisfaction with work and school between two groups, first generation respondents and second-generation respondents. Below are the themes that surfaced within each category.

### **Experiences with Work and School and their Relationship with Self-Construal**

#### **First-Generation Responses**

How satisfaction was perceived appeared to have a close relationship with the identified generation of the respondent. Responses from subjects who identified as first-generation often reflected interdependent self-construals. For example, the following statements were common among first generation respondents: “Education is important because employability is based on knowledge”, “At the time, I had a lot of language and cultural barriers which made it fairly difficult for me in school because I didn’t understand much,” “My success is really influenced by

how hard I work or how much effort I'm willing to put forth," and "If you don't get an education, you end up working in labor jobs." These types of responses were consistent with values considered to be found among individuals with interdependent self-construals where one is more likely to consider internal factors and how these influence the external environment. Outcomes are related to one's individual actions or beliefs, rather than attributing outcomes to factors in the external environment. Internal factors included attitude, amount of training or education, industriousness, or lack of knowledge of the English language or culture. These can be seen in the following responses: "Yog yus nquag thiab muaj siab ua hauj lwm luag thiaj txais yus," (If you are industrious and you are dedicated to your work, you are more likely to be hired.), "Yus yuav tsum rau siab ua hauj lwm thiab saib txoj hauj lwm muaj nqis luag thiaj li qhuas thiab cia yus nrog luag ua hauj lwm," (You have to work hard, find worth in your work, then your boss will praise you and keep you employed with them), "Yus yuav tsum ntaus phooj ywg nrog yus tej phooj ywg nram hauj lwm, yus mus nrhiav laj kaj tshiab luag tiaj recommend yus" (You have to make friends with the people at work, that way if you ever look for work in the future, they will give you recommendations), and "Thaum yus tau ib txoj hauj lwm mas yus txhob ua li yus mus ua yuav nyiaj xwb nawb, yus ua li yus yog tus tswv es yus ua rau yus no ces txawm yus ua txog qhov twg los luag yeej xaiv yus" (When you get a job, you can't act like you're only there for money, you have to act like a leader, and you're there for you, then no matter where you go, you will always get hired).

### **Second-Generation Responses**

Most often, second-generation respondents evaluated their experiences with work and school through a lens of independent self-construal, in which the satisfaction of the experience tended to be in reference to factors outside of the respondent. For example, in regards to

satisfaction with work, second-generation respondents cited a lack of connections or networks made it difficult to find work, employers were looking for diversity which led to more job opportunities, one respondent stated “eventually someone will give you an opportunity.” Similarly, when asked about experiences with school, a second-generation respondent expressed the following “There was lack of diversity and lack of role models in the school setting. If there were people who looked like me and teachers who could relate to me, I think I would have had an easier time. There was a lot of discrimination at the time.” “There was a lack of guidance for students of color and we faced a lot of stereotyping,” “A struggle is that there aren’t the right people to help you, you need to find the right people to answer the questions.”

The findings were also consistent with the current understanding of self-construal; that people lie on a continuum whereby, individuals possess values from both self-construal, with characteristics of one self-construal being more prominent than the other self-construal, depending on context and individual factors such as personality or personal values. For example, two respondents from the second-generation group stated, “You really have to put yourself out there if you want the kind of job you’re looking for”, “You have to work hard to get a job that you like.” “You have to work hard for what you want/take a chance” and “You have to take advantage of opportunities.” These statements are consistent with an interdependent self-construal in which an individual’s personal characteristics or factors related to the self have an impact on one’s environment or experience.

Respondents who identified as second-generation appeared to reflect on their experiences, most often, through an independent self-construal whereby their responses attributed outcomes to external environmental factors such as role models, guidance from teachers, presence or lack of a network or professional connections, and discrimination. For

example, the following statements reflected the impact of race and discrimination on second-generation respondents: “I grew up in a white neighborhood so I felt like I was given every opportunity,” “My parents wanted me to have a better education so they put me in an all-white school,” “A challenge was stereotyping by others, being called chink and other racial names, and umm, in a way that strengthened me and it taught me that you can change your own mind set and think differently and love yourself because there comes a time you don’t care what they have to say,” “You’re different, people will notice that and people do ask you questions like oh, is this blah blah true about you and do you really do this, all that stereotypes that get aimed at you, um yeah,” “The struggles are the stereotypes as Asian.” Second-generation respondents also attributed opportunity settings in which diversity was important for example when employers were looking for diverse candidates there were more opportunities for them. For example, the following respondents from second-generation respondents reflected diversity as opportunity: “Yeah, I felt like if I found job announcements where they said they were looking for diversity I was more likely to apply to that job because the chances of me getting that job was a lot higher,” “My school had this program for students of color. I think if those weren’t around, I don’t think I would have made it to college. I always knew I had to look for those types of programs and talk to the people who worked in those programs because those were the people who would be more willing to help me. That’s what I tell my kids nowadays too.”

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Table 2. Experiences in Work

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1<sup>st</sup> Gen.

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Work is based on knowledge/education

Lack of education leads to labor-based work

Language and cultural barriers lead to difficulties in employment

2<sup>nd</sup> Gen.

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Lack of connections/network make it difficult to find work

Employers are looking for diversity lead to more job opportunities

Eventually someone will give you an opportunity

You have to put yourself out there

You have to work hard to get a job that you like

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Table 3. Experiences in School

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1<sup>st</sup> Gen.

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Education is important because employability is based on knowledge

Language and cultural barriers lead to difficulties in education

Individual factors related to success or lack of

2<sup>nd</sup> Gen.

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Concerns with lack of diversity and lack of role models in the school setting

Lack of guidance and stereotyping lead to challenges in education and work

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## **Code Switching**

The research found, in some respondents, a tendency to grapple with being bicultural, in which the respondent reported statements that reflected characteristics of both self-construals. These individuals are bicultural and this was often seen in second generation respondents. Some examples are, “When your parents expectations conflict with your own, I feel like some of the struggles wouldn’t have been there if I wasn’t Hmong,” “Umm, the struggles that some people doubted me on my long terms goals, and sometimes expectations felt more like pressure rather than support and encouragement.” These statements reflect stress and dissonance as reported in the literature on biculturalism (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012). A very poignant statement shared by a second-generation respondent highlighted the struggles faced by bicultural individuals:

I think the biggest thing was I think our parents always told us to let it go, no matter what anybody said to us, they say don’t, uh, just let it go. If someone was to call you a name or someone tried to tease you, or stuff like that because you’re Hmong, they tell you to let it go because they don’t want to deal with that stuff, but uh, for me, it was like that for a while, it was hard to stand up and speak up for me, or Hmong people especially when you’re young. But the teachers, even though they put up with a lot of crap, they always care and taught me that it was ok to stand up.

This individual appeared to grapple with values from both cultures, and practiced behaviors from both self-construals to make sense of their situation. For example, this respondent sought help from an individual outside of their culture to stand up against racism and to help them acknowledge that it was outside of their control. Yet they were able to reflect on the interdependent values shared by their parents about how best to handle racism.

## **Discussion**

The concept of self-construal is another dimension in cultural competence for providers and professionals of all disciplines. How one perceives satisfaction is influenced by self-construal, or how one refers to self in reference to others. Independent self-construal uses an external locus of control that takes into account the influence of environmental factors outside of the self, often times the self is not in control of these factors. However, an interdependent self-construal utilizes an internal locus of control where the individual takes a higher ownership of individual factors and behavior that may contribute to one's experience or perceived satisfaction. There is no value assigned to each self-construal; one is neither good nor bad. The exploration of self-construal provides a deeper dimension of understanding when analyzing human behavior, especially across cultures. As seen in the above examples, individuals are on a continuum when it comes to self-construals. Often times, bicultural individuals may find themselves switching between one self-construal to the other or may even use a blending of both self-construals as they seek to understand their environment and perceptions.

As seen in the study, a few factors affect perceptions of satisfaction among facets of life, namely work and school in this paper. Factors include generational status which may have a role in levels of acculturation to Western culture or independent self-construal among immigrants, as well as differences in cultural world views and individual factors such as biculturalism. In the matter of work and school in the United States, both heavily influenced by white values, Hmong individuals with differing lengths of residency in the U.S. reported different perceptions or experiences with work and school. The first-generation immigrants tend to perceive their experiences through an interdependent worldview in which they attributed their experiences to internal factors, whereas individuals who were second-generation immigrants tended to attribute

their experiences to external factors. This was not wholly consistent, as we saw that some second-generation immigrants also aligned with the interdependent self-construal in which they perceive their experiences as having to do with internal factors as well. Self-construal is only one dimension of biculturalism, among many factors such as worldview, language, values around family and gender, power and oppression, self-awareness, and self-esteem among others. Self-construal cannot fully explain satisfaction with work and school; however, it offers one dimension of self that influences satisfaction as was observed in the relationship between the data and the subjects. More research is necessary to further explore the role of self-construal and any additional factors that may confound self-construal in perceptions of satisfaction in work and school among immigrants.

### **Conclusion**

This study found a relationship between self-construal and satisfaction with work and school among first- and second-generation Hmong immigrants. Interviews were conducted and the data was coded and placed into themes. The data revealed that first-generation immigrants tend to view their perception of satisfaction with work in school through an interdependent self-construal, whereby the perception is attributed to internal factors. On the other hand, second-generation immigrants tend to view their experiences through an independent worldview, whereby perceptions are attributed to factors in the environment. This indicates that the more acculturated the individual is to western culture, the higher level of independent self-construal the person will exhibit.

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